

HORWICH AND MILLER ON DISPOSITIONALIST THEORIES OF MEANING

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ABSTRACT

In the rule-following considerations Kripke's Wittgenstein raises the objection that dispositions cannot be the appropriate base for a reduction of meaning properties since they are finite, while meanings have an infinitary character. The objection charges any dispositionalist theory of meaning with indeterminacy. Paul Horwich (1995) has attempted a defence of dispositionalism pointing out that the argument for indeterminacy presupposes an inflationary conception of truth-theoretic notions. In his view a deflationary approach to truth-theoretic notions helps elude the sceptical conclusion. Alexander Miller (2000) has reacted to Horwich's attempt and maintained that the distinction between inflationism and deflationism does not play any substantial role in the anti-dispositionalism argument. I agree with Miller on this point, nevertheless I argue that Miller's criticism of Horwich's defence of dispositionalism is question begging against the conception of meaning that Horwich espouses.

Keywords: meaning, dispositionalism, scepticism

1.

Some dispositionalist theories of meaning hold that facts about meanings supervene on facts about speakers' dispositions to use linguistic expressions. This version of dispositionalism gives rise to two main objections regarding the normative character of meaning. The first concerns the problem of indeterminacy and the second the problem of error¹. These are the problems posed by Kripke's Wittgenstein (henceforth KW) in rule-following considerations. The indeterminacy objection concerns the finiteness of

¹ I follow Boghossian 1989 and Hale 1997 in distinguishing the indeterminacy objection from the error objection in KW's rule-following considerations. The distinction is justified because the indeterminacy objection stands even though a principled distinction between patterns of use that are meaning constitutive and those that are not is accepted. Suppose we can justify the claim that speakers are disposed to make mistakes in computing numbers that are too large. We can single out those computations as the effects of dispositions to make mistakes. The patterns of use caused by those dispositions are not meaning constitutive. However, the challenge posed by the indeterminacy objection remains unanswered. For, no matter how we select the computations that are meaning constitutive, they still are finite and consequently instantiate indefinitely many functions.

speakers' dispositions. Meanings have an infinitary character, for they lay down normative constraints over indefinitely many cases of application of expressions. Sense must be made of the notion of *how speakers ought to apply expressions in previously unencountered cases*, were they to use the expressions in accord with their meanings. However, speakers' dispositions are finite. Then the difficulty arises that we cannot reconstruct anything that has an infinitary character out of something that has a finitary character. The conclusion follows that dispositions cannot be the appropriate base for a reduction of meaning properties. On the other hand, according to the error objection, dispositionalist theories fail to capture the normative character of meaning since speakers might be disposed to make mistakes. So, if meaning properties supervene on the manner speakers are disposed to use expressions, no room is left for telling correct uses apart from incorrect ones. For if dispositions are constitutive of meaning properties, then whatever uses speakers are disposed to do with words, they always speak in accord with their meanings. In what follows, I will deal only with the indeterminacy objection.

Paul Horwich (1995) has attempted to resist the indeterminacy objection. Alexander Miller (2000) has criticised Horwich's attempt to rescue dispositionalist theories. I will side with Horwich and argue that Miller's reply begs the question against the conception of meaning that Horwich espouses. However, I recognise that Miller is right on one point: the divide between inflationism and deflationism does not play any substantial role in the anti-dispositionalism argument. More precisely, I agree that deflationism is relevant to elude the sceptical conclusion of the anti-dispositionalism argument, but the reason it is so is not that it avoids any demand for conceptual or reductive analysis of truth-theoretic notions. The reason is that deflationism requires a non truth-conditional conception of meaning and the explanatory priority of meaning in respect of truth-theoretic notions, according to which truth-conditions are derived with the help of a theory of meaning but are not constitutive of meaning.

Horwich has reconstructed the indeterminacy objection with the following argument²:

- (1) Whatever constitutes the meaning of an expression must determine its extension.
- (2) The facts about how speakers are disposed to use an expression do not determine its extension.

Therefore:

- (3) The meaning of an expression is not constituted by the facts about speakers' dispositions to use it.

² Cf. Horwich 1995, p. 360. Horwich's original version of the anti-dispositionalism argument is phrased in terms of use, not of dispositions to use. However, Horwich's theory of meaning is clearly a dispositionalist theory. Horwich 1998, p. 45 holds that meaning properties are constituted by speakers' "disposition", "tendency", "inclination" to accept sentences.

Horwich maintains that the anti-dispositionalism argument is fallacious because of an equivocation with the notion of determination. He distinguishes two notions of determination, a weak one and a strong one – call them respectively “determination_w” and “determination_s”.

According to determination_w, to say that the meaning of an expression determines_w its extension amounts to holding that the extension of the expression is a function of its meaning: if two expressions are synonymous then they must be co-extensional. Therefore, there cannot be two expressions diverging in extension without diverging in meaning as well. This captures the functional aspect of the notion of determination.

Determination_s requires an inflationary conception of truth-theoretic notions, according to which such notions are susceptible of conceptual or reductive analysis. From the inflationary perspective, that an expression has a certain entity as its extension means that it bears a certain relation R to it and that such a relation is to be defined through conceptual or reductive analysis. The meaning of an expression determines_s its extension in the sense that we can infer from the patterns of use of the expression that it bears the relation R to a certain entity and conclude that that entity is its extension. Thus, according to determination_s, it must be possible to read off the extension of an expression from the regularities that govern its use.

Horwich agrees that KW’s considerations on rule-following prove that we cannot extract from the patterns of use of an expression its bearing a non-semantic relation R to a certain entity, which supposedly would constitute the semantic relation of having that entity as its own extension. However, Horwich says, this result threatens only the inflationary view. According to him, deflationists might grant premise (1) in the weak sense of determination and premise (2) in the strong sense; but since from (1) the meaning of an expression determines_w its extension, and (2) the facts about speakers’ dispositions do not determine_s its extension, nothing can be deduced about whether meaning properties are constituted by speakers’ dispositions or not.

2.

Horwich maintains that the only way to run the anti-dispositionalism argument against those who endorse the notion of determination_w is to replace (2) with

(2’) the facts about speakers’ dispositions to use an expression do not determine_w its extension.

Horwich points out that the argument KW provides to support (2’) is question begging. The argument aims to prove that two expressions with the same meaning constitutive patterns of use might have different extensions. KW aims to show this by the thought experiment in which a linguistic community is imagined whose members use the ex-

pression “quus” in the same way we use the expression “plus”. The only difference is that “quus” is true of different triples of numbers, though the difference concerns numbers so large that nobody, either in our community or in the foreign community, has the capacity to compute. The alleged conclusion is that “quus” and “plus”, while having the same meaning constitutive patterns of use, have different extensions.

According to Horwich, KW’s thought experiment relies on the following three conditions³:

(1*) “quus” is primitive;

(2*) It has the same extension as a complex expression of ours – call it “plus*” – which we define in terms of “plus” and whose extension diverges from that of “plus” in the envisaged way.

(3*) Its use is identical to our use of “plus”, given the absence of dispositions to apply the two expressions to ungraspable numbers in our community and in the foreign community.

As far as I understand it, Horwich’s point appears to be that to assume, without justification, that condition (2*) is satisfied is to beg the question against his notion of determination_w.

I will discuss the reason why assuming that (2*) is true begs the question against Horwich’s notion of determination_w in section 7. The discussion will reveal why Miller’s attack is also question begging. Before that, it is worth presenting Horwich’s defence of dispositionalism in more detail.

Horwich urges that there are only two ways for providing a justification of condition (2*) and both of them are bound to fail⁴. Horwich argues that it would be correct to claim that “quus” and “plus” diverge in extension only if either “quus” were a complex expression defined in terms of an expression meaning the same as “plus”, or it were applied in a deviant way by the foreign speakers to some triples of numbers that are beyond our capacity to compute. The first case contradicts condition (1*). And condition (1*) is crucial, since if “quus” were complex and defined in terms of an expression meaning the same as “plus” then it would be impossible for it to have the same use of “plus”. For, Horwich says, no complex expressions can have the same use as their primitive constituents. The second case contradicts premise (3*). Premise (3*) is also crucial. For, if we concede that the speakers of the foreign community have the disposition to compute numbers that we cannot compute and to apply “quus” to them in the deviant way, then no charge of ontological indeterminacy could follow, but at most a charge of

³ Cf. Horwich 1995, pp. 364-365.

⁴ Cf. Horwich 1995, p. 365.

epistemological underdetermination. We might not know which function the speakers of the foreign community compute, but from this it does not follow that there is not a fact of the matter, regarding their disposition, as to whether they compute ADDITION or QUADDITION. If in our thought experiment we imagine that the speakers of the foreign community have the disposition to use “quus” in the deviant way, then according to the dispositionalist conception of meaning “quus” means QUADDITION. Horwich insists that KW has the burden of the proof that “quus” diverges in extension from “plus”, while having the same basic patterns of use, and points out that KW has not provided such a proof.

3.

Miller has criticised Horwich’s attempt to defend the dispositionalist conception of meaning. According to him, there is a notion of determination that does not imply inflationism and prevents the anti-dispositionalism argument from falling prey to the charge of equivocation. This notion – call it “determination_M” – is spelled out as follows⁵:

The fact that constitutes “a”’s meaning X must be inconsistent with “a”’s meaning Y, where X and Y are not co-extensional.

Miller argues that this is the notion of determination needed to run the anti-dispositionalism argument, since no fact about foreign speakers’ dispositions can constitute their meaning ADDITION by “quus” given that any such fact is consistent with “quus” having the extension of QUADDITION.

Miller seems to restate the anti-dispositionalism argument in the following way. According to the dispositionalist view, an expression’s having a certain meaning is constituted by the fact that some constitutive patterns of use underlie its overall use. Then, appealing to determination_M, Miller argues that the meaning constitutive patterns of use of “quus” underdetermine whether it means ADDITION or QUADDITION, since even if “quus” had the extension of QUADDITION, still it could have the same meaning constitutive patterns of use as our “plus”.

At first sight, and from Horwich’s perspective, Miller’s reply seems to suffer from the very same difficulty as KW’s thought experiment. Miller simply assumes, without justification, that it is possible for “quus” to have the extension of QUADDITION. He concedes that “quus” has the same meaning constitutive patterns of use as “plus”. Despite this, he says, “quus” might have the extension of QUADDITION. As we will see in section 7, this assumption begs the question against Horwich’s notion of determination_W.

⁵ Cf. Miller 2000, p. 164.

However, Miller also criticises Horwich's claim that there are only two possible ways of justifying condition (2*), both of which fail. As noted, Horwich concedes that "quus" might have the extension of QUADDITION only if either of the following conditions were fulfilled: (i) if it were a complex expression and (ii) if it were used in the deviant way by the speakers of the foreign community. Both conditions are negated in KW's thought experiment. Miller objects that "quus" might be syntactically simple but semantically complex (since we can give a definition of its application-conditions in terms of the application-conditions of "plus"). Therefore, although in the foreign language "quus" has no constituents and a fortiori it cannot possess use-relations to its constituents that are not possessed by "plus", still it might be semantically complex and have the extension of QUADDITION. So, "quus" might have the same meaning constitutive patterns of use as "plus" but a different extension. This reply by Miller does not overcome the charge of begging the question. Indeed, to assume that "quus" might be semantically complex in the way envisaged by Miller is tantamount to assuming that it might have the extension of QUADDITION, despite the fact that it has the same meaning constitutive patterns of use as "plus". As said above, we will see that this is the assumption that begs the question against determination_w. The view that "quus" might have the extension of QUADDITION and the view that "quus" might be syntactically simple but semantically complex stand or fall together. If the former is question begging, so is the latter.

4.

In his attempt to defend the anti-dispositionalism argument, Miller is raising a charge of indeterminacy. He grants Horwich the existence of meaning constitutive patterns of use. Still, he challenges Horwich to show that what constitute "quus"'s meaning ADDITION is not consistent with "quus"'s meaning QUADDITION. If this is the correct way to report his reply to Horwich, then Miller should be understood as claiming that two theorists, faced with the task of constructing the theory of meaning for the language to which "quus" belongs, might come out with incompatible but equally well supported theories: one stating that "quus" means ADDITION and the other that it means QUADDITION⁶. So, the meaning constitutive patterns of use of "quus" do not rule out ways of constructing its meaning on which it means QUADDITION instead of ADDITION.

I will argue that this argument for indeterminacy fails if the theorists accept Horwich's notion of determination_w. However, the discussion will show that Miller is right in maintaining that the anti-dispositionalism argument does not involve any commitment to inflationism. I agree with Miller that determination_M does not imply the inflationary

⁶ In this paper I take for granted the manoeuvre of the anti-dispositionalist from epistemological underdetermination to ontological indeterminacy of theories of meaning.

conception of truth-theoretic notions. As Miller shows⁷, determination_M is implied by determination_W . So that, were determination_M to imply the inflationary view, then so would determination_W . Nevertheless, I contend that Miller overlooks the fact that Horwich's distinction between $\text{determination}_W/\text{determination}_S$ hides the divide between Horwich's conception of meaning and the truth-conditional conception of meaning, to such an extent that Miller's defence of the anti-dispositionalism argument is still question begging. To give support to my contention, I will start commenting on Horwich's distinction between $\text{determination}_W/\text{determination}_S$.

Endorsing the notion of determination_W is to accept the principle that the extension of an expression is a function of its meaning and, as a consequence, that if two expressions have the same meaning then they must be co-extensional. However, those who accept determination_S agree on this point too. So, what Horwich has in mind when he draws the distinction between determination_W and determination_S must be something stronger than the functional principle. Indeed, what Horwich has in mind is first of all a certain conception of meaning and its explanatory priority in respect of truth. Horwich takes determination_W not merely in the functional sense, but in the stronger and deflationary sense according to which Convention T fixes a *sufficient* condition for constructing theories of truth. Convention T says that we need to define truth in L in such a way that the T-sentences, which are derived by the definition, fulfil a crucial condition: the sentences of the metalanguage used in the right-hand side must be the translation of the sentences of the object-language quoted in the left. The notion of translation presupposes the notion of meaning. We cannot speak of translation without speaking of the correctness of translation, and a translation is correct if and only if it is meaning preserving.

The reliance on the notion of meaning in the condition of material adequacy for theories of truth has an important consequence for the notion of meaning itself. If we accept an account of truth for a language L because it satisfies Convention T, we cannot accept a notion of meaning spelled out in terms of truth-conditions. It would be plainly circular to use the notion of meaning to construct an account of truth in L and at the same time to cash the notion of meaning in terms that require an account of truth in L. We can point out the circularity by the following reasoning⁸.

Convention T states that a sufficient condition for an account of truth to be materially adequate is that it imply T-sentences in which the sentences used in the right-hand side of the biconditionals are the translations of the sentences quoted in the left-hand side. Hence, Convention T uses the two-place meta-metalinguistic predicate "x is equivalent in meaning to y", where "x" ranges over the sentences of the object-language and "y"

⁷ Cf. Miller 2000, pp. 164-165. I will not discuss Miller's argument, whose soundness I take for granted.

⁸ I borrow this argument from Patterson 2002. However, it should be noted that the argument for the incompatibility between deflationary theories of truth-theoretic notions and truth-conditional theories of meaning was first presented by Dummett 1959 "Truth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 59, pp. 141-162.

over the sentences of the metalanguage. But how should we explain the relation of being equivalent in meaning? Any explanation according to which x is equivalent in meaning to y if and only if x and y are true under the same conditions would require that we already possess a truth predicate for the object-language and the metalanguage in a meta-metalanguage. But if we are able to define truth in L in a meta-metalanguage, then we can already define it in a metalanguage, since the meta-metalanguage is a metalanguage. Therefore, Convention T would state what is sufficient to define truth in L in a metalanguage only by assuming that we are already able to define it in another metalanguage. If this were the correct interpretation of Convention T, then any account of truth that is accepted insofar as it satisfies Convention T would be deprived of its philosophical import. The account of a given notion preserves its interest only if it does not presuppose the availability of another account of the same notion. The upshot is that we cannot be content with an account of truth for the reason that it is constructed in accordance with Convention T and at the same time maintain that the notion of meaning has to be explained primarily in terms of truth-conditions.

We conclude not only that Convention T requires the availability of the notion of meaning, but also that it forces upon us the rejection of the truth-conditional conception of meaning. One alternative to the truth-conditional conception of meaning is the conception of meaning as use. This is the conception of meaning that Horwich has in mind when he replies to the indeterminacy objection by invoking determination_w.

Horwich⁹ holds that meanings are determined by meaning properties and that meaning properties are constituted by dispositions to use expressions. More precisely, an expression having a certain meaning is constituted by speakers' dispositions to accept certain sentences and/or inferences in which the expression occurs. So, meanings are determined by basic acceptance properties of expressions. The important point is that the truth-theoretic notions are not employed to describe the acceptance properties nor are they employed to spell out the notion of acceptance. Acceptance properties, and consequently meaning properties, are characterised as non-semantic, non-intentional properties of use. Horwich's view then is that the use theory of meaning and deflationism about truth-theoretic notions support each other. As noted above, deflationism demands an account of meaning, while the use theory of meaning demands an account of the representational relations that link language to the world, which is accomplished by the instances of the T-schema.

This relation between deflationism and the conception of meaning as use brings out the explanatory priority of meaning in respect of truth-theoretic notions. Truth conditions are not constitutive of meaning but are derived by the help of the theory of meaning and the deflationary schemata. As Horwich (1998 p. 72) says, a sentence's truth condition is a consequence of its meaning, not constitutive of it. Specifically, our knowledge

⁹ See Horwich 1998, ch. 3.

of a sentence's truth condition is the product of (i) our knowledge of its meaning and (ii) our knowledge of a deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions. Together they allow for the derivations of the instances of the T-schema. And in so far as we understand all the constituents of the instances of the T-schema, we can be said to know what they state, namely the representational link between language and world. Thus, our knowledge of the truth condition of a sentence is derived from our knowledge of its meaning. More precisely, truth conditions are derived by the union of the theory of meaning with the deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions obtained applying the deflationary schemata. In this sense, the union of the use theory of meaning with the deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions is a theory in which meanings determine_w extensions.

One important point to be noticed is that the empirical adequacy of such theory depends entirely on the empirical adequacy of the theory of meaning¹⁰. Once it is established what an expression means, its extension can be specified through a deflationary schema. If the use of two expressions is governed by the same acceptance properties, then they have the same meaning and it can be concluded that the two expressions have the same extension. Nothing more is needed to justify that conclusion. As we will see in section 7, this move makes it possible to defend dispositionalism against the sceptical objection of indeterminacy.

In conclusion, to embrace determination_w in Horwich's strong sense is not simply to accept the functional principle that synonymous expressions must have the same extension¹¹. It is also to deny extensions a constitutive role in the theory of meaning. And to deny extensions a constitutive role in a theory of meaning amounts to denying that meaning is primarily truth-conditional or, if you prefer to speak of knowledge of meaning instead of meaning itself, to denying that knowledge of meaning is primarily knowledge of truth-conditions. In sum, endorsing determination_w in Horwich's strong sense amounts to endorsing a deflationary account of truth-theoretic notions, which in turn require a non-truth-conditional account of meaning¹². And this is the very implication that makes determination_w relevant for overcoming the indeterminacy objection, not merely the fact that it avoids conceptual or reductive analysis of truth-theoretic notions¹³.

¹⁰ This does not mean that the deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions is analytic, in the sense of apriori and unrevisable. One might endorse Quine's web-of-beliefs picture and maintain that the deflationary theory is situated in the centre of the web, like logic and mathematics, and does not confront experience directly.

¹¹ I need to be clear on this point. I am not claiming that determination_w in the functional sense implies deflationism. Indeed, the functional import of determination_w is accepted by inflationists as well. I am claiming that Horwich takes determination_w in a sense stronger than the mere functional one. And in this stronger sense, determination_w amounts to deflationism.

¹² Even though the notion of meaning is not explicitly mentioned in all deflationary theories, it is nevertheless indispensable for selecting the right instances of the T-schema.

¹³ A terminological question might be of concern: the point of view of those who take truth as primitive can still be seen as a form of inflationism, if the latter is to be taken as the view that the T-biconditionals do not exhaust the

5.

Horwich himself appears to overestimate the role of inflationism and to overlook the point that the demand for conceptual or reductive analysis does not play any substantial role in the anti-dispositionalism argument. He says that determination_s requires that we be able to read off the extension of an expression from its meaning constitutive patterns of use. He holds that the *reading off* proceeds by three steps¹⁴ (for ease of exposition I will follow Horwich in focusing on predicates only):

(1**) There must be a relation R such that each predicate stands in R to the members of its extension.

(2**) We deduce from a predicate P having a certain pattern of use that it stands in relation R to the members of a certain set.

(3**) From (1**) and (2**) we deduce that the set of things to which predicate P stands in relation R is its extension.

This model of reading off the extension of an expression from its meaning constitutive patterns of use assumes the demand for conceptual or reductive analysis at step (1**). For example, in the case of predicates the model assumes that the semantic relation of *being true of*, which holds between predicates and the things that fall in their extensions, must be defined through the following biconditional:

for any x and y, x is true of y if and only if R(x, y)
 – where R is specified in non-semantic terms.

I agree with Miller that the notion of determination_s is not needed to run the anti-dispositionalism argument. Rather, I argue that the relevant element for running the anti-dispositionalism argument is the truth-conditional conception of meaning, according to which, and contrary to Horwich's perspective, truth-conditions are constitutive of meaning and not merely derivable by means of a theory of meaning together with deflationary schemata.

This is a different sense in which meanings determine extensions: meanings determine extensions since having a certain meaning is constituted by having a certain extension. Miller is right in claiming that this notion of determination accords with the functional

content of the notion of truth. So, in a certain sense, the divide between deflationism and inflationism seems to play still a role in the issue about dispositionalism. In this paper I adopted Horwich's terminology that restricts the term "inflationary" to those theories that aim at an explanation of truth-theoretic notions. But the concern of dissatisfaction with deflationism by those who take truth-theoretic notions as primitive is that they accord a central place to truth-theoretic notions in theory of meaning. So the point remains that what counts as fundamental for a defence of dispositionalism is the divide between the truth-conditional conception of meaning and the conception of meaning as use. And this is the point I wish to highlight in this paper.

¹⁴ Cf. Horwich 1995, pp. 362-363.

import of Horwich's notion of determination_w: if having a certain meaning is constituted by having a certain extension, then any two synonymous expressions will be co-extensional. Moreover, this notion of determination is not committed to inflationism at all. Indeed, a theorist who espouses the truth-conditional conception of meaning might take semantic notions like reference and truth as primitive, denying that they can be analysed or reduced¹⁵.

The problem is that insofar as one shapes the notion of meaning primarily in terms of truth-conditions, in the sense that having a certain extension or having a certain truth condition is constitutive of having a certain meaning, for sub-sentential expressions and sentences respectively, he falls prey to the indeterminacy charge. In fact, a truth-conditional theory of meaning delivers for each sentence of the language under study a theorem that fixes its truth condition. When a theory of this kind is thought of as a theoretical representation of linguistic competence, the theory is taken to describe the body of knowledge that speakers possess implicitly. To say that someone has an implicit knowledge of the theory of meaning amounts to saying that he has a set of dispositions. These are the dispositions to judge that sentences have the truth-conditions that the theorems of the theory of meaning assign to them¹⁶. The difficulty for the truth-conditional conception of meaning is that speakers possess finite dispositions, while mathematical functions, for example, take infinitely many pairs of arguments and yield infinitely many values. In other words, while speakers' dispositions are finite, the extensions of expressions have an infinitary character. Indeed, speakers' do not possess dispositions to apply "quus" to number so large that they cannot compute. Therefore, we lack any evidence on how speakers would extend the application of "quus" to pairs of numbers larger than *k*, because there are always indefinitely many functions that accord with a given finite list of previous performances.

The core of the indeterminacy objection, then, is that no finite object can identify a meaning that lays down a normative constraint over an indefinite number of cases. Even if two theorists could contemplate all the dispositions to use "quus" of the speakers of the foreign community, given that such dispositions are necessarily finite, they might define many functions that accord with the given finite list of the previous applications. Therefore, they might provide incompatible but equally well supported theories of meaning for the language of the foreign community. One stating that "quus" has the extension of ADDITION and the other stating that it has the extension of QUADDITION. The indeterminacy charge follows that there is no fact of the matter as to whether the speakers of the foreign community use "quus" to mean ADDITION or QUADDITION.

¹⁵ Paradigmatically this is Davidson's view.

¹⁶ See, for example, Evans 1981.

The assumption that truth-theoretic notions possess an underlying nature susceptible to reductive analysis plays no role in the indeterminacy argument so restated. The point of the indeterminacy argument is not that we cannot reduce truth-theoretic notions to facts about speakers' dispositions, but that the evidence given by the manifestation of speakers' dispositions underdetermines the theory of meaning, even when truth-theoretic notions are taken as primitive. As Horwich¹⁷ himself points out, two issues should be separated: the explanatory one and the epistemological one. The explanatory issue addresses the question: given the use of an expression, why is a certain entity its extension? The answer to this question calls for an explanation that goes hand in hand with inflationism. The epistemological issue addresses the question: given the use of an expression, what put us in a position to assign a certain entity to it as its extension and to rule out all other assignments? Miller's point seems to be that the epistemological issue is enough to run the anti-dispositionalism argument, when the quest for inflationism and explanation of truth-theoretic notions are given up. The point, then, is to decide whether "quus" is true of triples of numbers that instantiate ADDITION or triples of numbers that instantiate QUADDITION. No matter whether we treat truth-theoretic notions as primitive or not, speakers' dispositions are unfit to determine extensions since the former are finite while the latter have an infinitary character. But (knowledge of) expressions' extensions are what matters for (knowledge of) sentences' truth-conditions. If expressions' extensions are not determined, then sentences' truth-conditions are not determined either¹⁸. Therefore, if we espouse the truth-conditional conception of meaning, we are forced to conclude that meanings are underdetermined by facts about speakers' dispositions.

6.

Horwich, then, seems to be on the right track when he proposes to employ the notion of determination_w in his strong sense in order to defend the dispositionalist theory of meaning against the indeterminacy objection. Determination_w in Horwich's strong sense amounts to deflationism about truth-theoretic notions and deflationism reverses the explanatory priority of truth-theoretic notions over meaning. Theorists who espouse the truth-conditional conception of meaning make use of truth-theoretic notions in explaining meaning: our understanding of the meanings of expressions is spelled out in terms of our grasp of the way in which they affect the truth conditions of the sentences in which they occur. Deflationists in contrast make use of a non truth-conditional conception of meaning. The distinction between determination_w and determination_s is relevant to overcome the indeterminacy objection not because the demand for conceptual or reductive analysis of truth-theoretic notions plays any substantial

¹⁷ Cf. Horwich 1995, p. 365 fn. 9.

¹⁸ Of course when truth conditions are not coarsely taken as sets of possible worlds.

role in the anti-dispositionalism argument, but because determination_w requires a non truth-conditional conception of meaning. While the indeterminacy argument shows that truth-conditional theories of meaning are underdetermined by speakers' dispositions, the possibility remains open that a theory of meaning inspired by Horwich's use conception avoids the charge of being indeterminate. In the next section, I will argue that this is the case.

On the other hand, Miller appears to underestimate the very import of the distinction between determination_w and determination_s: theorists who endorse Horwich's strong notion of determination_w espouse a non truth-conditional conception of meaning. Miller stresses the point that his notion of determination_M does not imply any demand for conceptual or reductive analysis or truth-theoretic notions. But the fact that determination_M does not imply any such demand is irrelevant for deciding whether Miller's defence of the indeterminacy argument begs the question against Horwich's conception of meaning. No matter whether truth-theoretic notions are treated as primitive or not, I will argue that Miller's reply to Horwich begs the question against the use conception of meaning because it assumes that the reason why dispositionalist theories are indeterminate is that it is not possible to rule out that "quus" has the extension of QUADDITION on the basis of the evidence provided by the manifestation of speakers' dispositions. Yet, according to the use conception of meaning like Horwich's one, although it is agreed that the empirical basis for the construction of a theory of meaning needs to be traced to the manifestation of speakers' dispositions, assigning extensions to expressions is not the primary task of the theory of meaning. As said above, according to Horwich we can proceed to assign extensions to expressions by means of a deflationary theory only once we have an account of what constitutes their meanings. And the empirical adequacy of the theory that allows for the derivation of sentences' truth conditions, which is the union of the theory of meaning with the deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions, depends entirely on the empirical adequacy of the theory of meaning. Thus, the impossibility of deciding the extension of "quus" directly out of speakers' dispositions does not threaten the determinacy of the theory of meaning, when the theory is inspired by Horwich's use conception of meaning. And once the theory of meaning is determinate, assignments of extensions to expressions are determinate as well by applying the deflationary schemata.

7.

The indeterminacy argument ought to provide the proof that two theorists facing the task of giving the theory of meaning for the language of the foreign community might come out with incompatible but equally well supported theories: one stating that "quus" means ADDITION and the other stating that "quus" means QUADDITION. But in doing so without begging the question against Horwich's conception of meaning, the proof of indeterminacy ought to proceed without assuming that the theory of meaning

is to be constructed like a theory of truth by axioms that assign extensions to expressions, to the extent that the reason why it is underdetermined is that it is not possible to rule out deviant assignments, like the assignment of the extension of QUADDITION to “quus”, directly on the basis of the evidence provided by speakers’ dispositions to conform to the meaning constitutive patterns of use.

As noted, according to the anti-dispositionalism argument, the reason why dispositions underdetermine the theory of meaning is that they are finite. So, even if the theorists could track them all, they could not provide the evidence needed to rule out the assignment of the extension of QUADDITION to “quus”. But in this argument it is assumed that the construction of the theory of meaning proceeds as a theory of truth. By contrast, according to Horwich’s use conception, the construction of the theory of meaning proceeds first by fixing the basic and explanatorily fundamental patterns of use. It is the union of the theory of meaning with a deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions that provides the assignments of extensions to expressions and of truth conditions to sentences.

So, in order to run his argument against Horwich’s dispositionalism, Miller must show that two theorists who espouse Horwich’s use conception of meaning might come out with incompatible but equally well supported theories of meaning for the foreign language and that their union with a deflationary theory of the truth-theoretic notions might come out with incompatible assignments of extensions to expressions, so that we cannot decide between “quus” having the extensions of ADDITION or QUADDITION. The dialectic presents the sceptic challenging the theorist by the following argument:

(1^{***}) If there are meanings, then it must be possible to select the true theory of meaning.

(2^{***}) It is not possible to select the true theory of meaning.

Therefore

(3^{***}) There are no meanings.

To justify premise (2^{***}), the sceptic cannot assume from the outset that the expressions of the language of the theorist engaged in the construction of the theory possess no meanings. It would be plainly question begging. He must (i) grant that the expressions of the language (L) of his opponent possess determinate meanings and (ii) show that by using this language his opponent cannot construct the true theory of meaning for the foreign language. For any theory (in L) his opponent will provide, the sceptic claims to be able to offer an alternative theory (in L) that fits the evidence equally well.

My contention is that the sceptic’s claim is false if the theorist endorses Horwich’s use conception of meaning. Two preliminary remarks are in order: first of all, the theorist is able to justify the claim that in *his language* (L) “plus” and “plus*” - where “plus*”

is the expression having the extension of QUADDITION - have different meaning. In fact, according to the use conception of meaning, having a certain meaning amounts to having a certain basic and explanatorily fundamental pattern of use. “plus” is a primitive expression and “plus*” is a complex expression defined in terms of “plus” in the theorist’s language. So, the theorist can appeal to Horwich’s suggestion that no complex expression can have exactly the same use as its primitive constituents, since it will inevitably bear some use-relation to its constituents.

Secondly, at least in Miller’s version of the indeterminacy argument, the sceptic is prohibited the move of denying that there is a principled distinction between patterns of use that are meaning constitutive and patterns of use that are not. The sceptic argues that given the meaning constitutive patterns of use of “quus”, it remains underdetermined whether it means ADDITION or QUADDITION. So, that there are meaning constitutive patterns of use is a premise of his argument¹⁹.

The sceptic argues that whenever the theorist holds that “quus” means ADDITION, he is always justified in holding that “quus” means QUADDITION, and that the theorist cannot disprove his claim. The important point is that the sceptic cannot appeal to the fact that the theorist is unable to rule out the assignment of the extension of QUADDITION to “quus” directly on the basis of the evidence provided by the manifestation of speakers’ dispositions. The reason is that the assignment of extensions to expressions is not the first step to construct a theory inspired by Horwich’s conception of meaning. The fact that an expression has a certain extension is not constitutive of the expression’s having a certain meaning. On the contrary, in order to specify what constitutes an expression’s having a certain meaning, we have to specify its basic patterns of use. The assignment of an extension is given by the deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions, only after we know what the expression means.

Therefore, faced with the indeterminacy objection, the theorist who espouses Horwich’s conception of meaning will reason as follows. In our language we define “plus*” in terms of “plus”. They have different meaning constitutive patterns of use since the former is syntactically complex and the latter is not. So they have different meanings. Moreover, by endorsing deflationism the theorist can conclude that they diverge in extension: “plus*” has the extension of QUADDITION, while “plus” has the extension of ADDITION. Foreign speakers use “quus” the same way we use “plus”. They do not use “quus” the same way we use “plus*”. Therefore “quus” has the same meaning as “plus” and a different meaning from “plus*”. There is no indeterminacy of meaning at all. But if “quus” and “plus” have the same meaning, then they have the same extension in virtue of determination_w. So, “quus” has the extension of ADDITION_w and not of QUADDITION. Meanings determine_w extensions.

¹⁹ That we cannot isolate the meaning constitutive patterns of use is the thesis of the error objection. But, as pointed out in footnote 1, the indeterminacy objection and the error objection should be distinguished.

It follows that the finiteness of speakers' dispositions raises no problem any longer. The theorist who espouses Horwich's conception of meaning might grant that speakers' dispositions are finite. However, the fact that speakers have dispositions to use expressions only in a finite number of cases does not raise an insuperable difficulty since the theorist does not have to reconstruct infinitary objects like extensions to specify what constitute meanings. The theorist only needs to check whether foreign speakers use "quus" the same way he uses "plus". If foreign speakers use "quus" the same way the theorist uses "plus", then the theorist is justified in concluding that "quus" and "plus" have the same meaning, since they are governed by the same meaning constitutive patterns of use. So, the meaning of "quus" is determinate by speakers' dispositions: "quus" means ADDITION. And if meanings are determinate, then the union of the theory of meaning with a deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions will deliver the assignments of extensions to expressions.

The point, which Miller seems to overlook, is that it is the union of the theory of meaning with the deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions that delivers the assignments of extensions to expressions. And such assignments do not need to be directly confirmed through the evidence coming from the manifestation of speakers' dispositions. Strictly speaking, according to this view it makes no sense to say that the assignment of extensions are underdetermined by the evidence provided by the manifestation of speakers' dispositions to use expressions. In other terms, it makes no sense to say that "quus" might have the extension of QUADDITION even if it has the same meaning constitutive patterns of use as "plus". As far as (i) we concede that meaning properties are constituted by basic acceptance properties of expressions and (ii) we endorse deflationism, "quus"'s having the extension of QUADDITION cannot be consistent with "quus"'s having the extension of ADDITION.

Of course, there might be independent reasons for abandoning Horwich's conception of meaning as use or deflationism. But if we grant Horwich both, which is tantamount to granting him the notion of determination_w in the strong sense he takes it, then his defence of dispositionalism against the indeterminacy objection succeeds. The charge of indeterminacy stands only for the truth conditional conception of meaning according to which the assignments of extensions to expressions are the core part of the theory of meaning and must be checked directly against speakers' linguistic behaviour. Thus, Miller's demand that the theorist be able to rule out the assignment of the extension of QUADDITION to the expression "quus" is met by the theorist who espouses Horwich's strong notion of determination_w. If Miller insists that it is the theory of meaning alone that must accomplish the assignments of extensions directly on the basis of the evidence provided by the manifestation of speakers' dispositions and not the union of the theory of meaning together with a deflationary theory of truth-theoretic notions, then he begs the question against the conception of meaning that Horwich espouses.

In sum, Miller has failed to prove that Horwich's notion of determination_W does not avoid KW's sceptical conclusion against dispositionalism, if accepting determination_W is tantamount to accepting deflationism and the conception of meaning as use, which seems to be Horwich's position.

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