There’s a distinctly modern take on truth, an appropriate and common label for which is Deflationism. A number of philosophers have advanced different versions of this view. The ones I’ll be focusing on here are the prosentential theory of truth, the minimalist theory of truth and the pure disquotationalist theory. These theories differ from each other in a number of respects, but also share an important common core. At the very heart of the deflationary conception lies a negative claim about truth’s nature. Truth, deflationists insist, is not a ‘substantive’ or ‘explanatory’ property. But what does that mean, and what turns on it?

Getting one’s mind around the question, and the debate to which it has given rise, is not a straightforward matter. It really is a very basic issue. Furthermore, it can quite quickly – and for good reason – demand a level of precision to which I cannot aspire here. Finally, there is the fact that though the issue may sound interesting enough, it can easily seem to be a relatively narrow one. This is not so. I shall say very little about the differences between the three abovementioned theories, and will instead focus on what it is they have in common. My aim is to provide something that might serve as a way into the topic, in a manner which reveals its wider significance. Rather than simply being about which among several theories of truth we should choose, the question that underlies this debate constitutes a fault line: it is one of philosophy’s pivotal issues.

The question about truth’s nature is au fond one about truth’s relations – or lack of such relations – to other things. It’s about truth’s place in the world, so to speak. It’s for this reason that taking a stand on the matter has implications that aren’t confined to the philosophy of truth (as it is customarily pursued). The most striking consequence, perhaps, is that coming down on one side or another of the debate has immediate implications, at the most fundamental level, about the nature of mind. If deflationism is right, then intentionality is nowhere to be found. If so, then whether the deflationary conception of truth is correct depends on the nature of mind. Thus, an informed decision on the question about truth’s nature has to involve consideration of our best theories of mind. I am myself convinced that this involves careful scrutiny of the most advanced sciences of the mind, which I shall argue for in the last section of the paper.

Deflationary theories compete with more traditional ones, such as the correspondence and coherence theories of truth. If deflationism is right, they are wrong. A quick look at the disagreement between them can not only help locate the views in relation to one another, but also give us an initial handle on what it means to assert or deny that truth is a ‘substantive’ property.

Traditional theories seek to answer the question: What is it for a statement or a proposition to be true? In what does something’s being true consist? (Some of these theories should be seen, not as directly trying to answer this metaphysical question, but rather as attempting to provide an analysis of the concept of truth. But this needn’t concern us.) The correspondence theory, for example, starts from the idea that a statement’s being true is a matter of its
being in accord with reality. Unpacked ever so slightly, on such a theory, a statement’s being true consists in its standing in a particular relation – the correspondence relation – to the appropriate part of reality.

Though the initial idea obviously has immense appeal, correspondence theorists more or less immediately ran into a host of problems trying to work out the details of their proposal, not least that of giving a precise account of the specific correspondence relation they envisage, and settling on a workable conception of the relata. This is where we can see the deflationist as proposing to slice through a Gordian knot. For the correspondence relation is precisely an instance of a ‘substantive’ property – it’s a relational property that obtains between things. And that, according to deflationists, is where the traditional theories make their most basic mistake. By denying that truth is a substantive property, deflationists deny an assumption that underlies the traditional debate between correspondence and coherence theorists. Rather than seeking to provide a different answer to the question that occupied the latter theorists, deflationists reject it.

At this point, a little more needs be said about the notion of a substantive (or explanatory) property. Consider the world (so to speak). It contains all manner of things – cabbages and kings and even propositions (if philosophers are to be believed). Now, of some of the myriad things that comprise the world, we want to know if they have natures, or how they are constituted, and we also want to know how they causally interact with one another, if they do. Substantive properties are the ones we would have to invoke in giving correct explanations of (some part or aspect of) the world’s constitutive and causal structure. This is why the properties in question are also called ‘explanatory’ properties. (My preference for the term ‘substantive’ stems from the fact that a property’s being ‘explanatory’ is ultimately a matter of its figuring in world’s constitutive and causal structure.)

My weight is an example of a substantive, or explanatory, property. If I step on a sturdy cardboard box, say, what happens will roughly depend upon some of the box’s properties and some of mine – inter alia my weight. Consider, then, the property of being a place where my mother loved to go shelling. Neither is a part of the fabric of the world. Both are reflections of the structure of our language.

If God were to make an inventory of all the properties that make a difference in the world, truth would not be among them; that’s one way of formulating deflationism’s key metaphysical thesis. Deflationism denies, in other words, that truth can be identified with any substantive property. This thesis cannot rest on its (allegedly) having been shown that truth cannot be identified with one, two or three of them. And a full-dress defence of deflationism requires more than showing that the traditional theories of truth are inadequate. (One might suppose that there is at least a decent inference to the best explanation to be made in deflationism’s favour, but, for reasons that will emerge, that too is doubtful.) How, then, might one argue for as strong a metaphysical claim as the one that deflationists want and need to make?

It’s time to turn to the other two principal elements of a deflationary theory. Words have a purpose, they answer to the needs of a community and its individuals. If a fragment of language were to lose its function, it would very likely wither away. (Unless, of course, the words that comprise it are put to new use.) The second element in a deflationary theory is an account of why we have, and often use, a truth-predicate (and cognate expressions). On that basis, and as its third principal element, a deflationary theory puts forward an account of the rules and principles governing its use (which may be said to account for its meaning, or the concept it expresses).

These are very interesting issues. But they present themselves with particular force to the deflationist. For the word ‘true’ (or ‘is true’) is, from a grammatical perspective, clearly a predicate. And, at least upon reflection, a considerable number of us (not just philosophers) would agree that it is used to speak about something highly significant. After all, in the lives of rational, reflective beings truth is the (or at least a) fundamental dimension of assessment of our beliefs, assertions, theories, etc.

According to deflationism, however, truth – whatever
it is that is the worldly correlate of the word – is something utterly trivial. But if it really is that trivial, how come we have a word for it? What is its point, its raison d’être? One can perhaps see why philosophers could have made a mistake about truth’s nature, prone as they are to lofty speculation based on highly controversial assumptions. But no philosopher is responsible for the existence, and continued use, of a word for truth in natural languages. So, surely, the deflationist owes us an explanation for its existence.7 As we shall soon see, the account they give of the matter turns out to be of huge importance for their overall view.

Deflationists disagree among themselves both about the point of the truth predicate – what it does for us – and about the concept it expresses (or its meaning). These, I have said, are two of the three main elements of a deflationary theory of truth. In addition, deflationists disagree on several issues that also loomed large in the earlier debate – about what are the primary bearers of truth (sentences, utterances, or propositions, for example), and whether truth can be defined. Thus, there’s a perfectly natural perspective from which it seems that just about the only thing deflationists agree on is the (negative) metaphysical thesis. Whence the significant common ground I have been insisting upon?

Here it is important to remember that the claim that truth is not a substantive property is the sum total of what deflationists think is worth saying about the metaphysics of truth. (Insofar as there is anything more one could add to their account, it is, on their view, of no significance.) So they agree on what there is to say about the nature of truth. And that is no small thing. Furthermore, the suggestion that this is still the only thing they have in common overlooks the crucial unifying feature of these otherwise disparate accounts. Each of the competing sets of answers to the last two questions – what the point is of our notion of truth, and what its content is – are in the service of the metaphysical thesis. They comprise variants of the deflationists’ master argument for their position(s).

The basic idea is very simple (as good ideas often are). It begins by acknowledging that, grammatically, ‘true’ is indeed a predicate. But – and this is their crucial claim – if we reflect on the point of the truth predicate, and then carefully consider the actual uses to which it is put, we will see that none of them really involve attributing the property of being true to anything in the world. As an ordinary predicate, it could have been used, as many of them are, to ascribe a substantial property to things. But as a matter of fact, it never is. And, once we understand its actual role, we can see that there is little to suggest that it ever will be. (What that role is, according to deflationism, needs some spelling out, which I shall attempt to do shortly.) At a minimum, deflationists take this argument to show that their position has earned the right to be considered the default position unless and until contrary evidence is found. In philosophy this is a lot as it means that deflationists are in possession, and that the burden of proof lies with its opponents.

A second main line of argument for deflationism has played a role in the debate, though not as prominently. It rests on the assumption that truth can only be a substantive property if it can be reduced to other ones.8 To which it is then added that we know by now, or can begin to see, that no reductive account of truth is possible. The two arguments are related as follows: The second argument essentially amounts to the claim that the notion of truth as a substantive property of the world is illegitimate because it cannot meet the appropriate naturalistic or reductionist standards. Thus, however much we might feel we need to use it, we cannot do so. The first and most prominent argument, on the other hand, amounts to saying that we needn’t worry about this, because the idea of truth as a substantive property is otiose, it’s an idle wheel that does no work. (The mistake was to think otherwise.) This is part of the reason why the first line of argument figures so prominently in the debate: Reductionists can breathe a sigh of relief because there is one less thing they have to worry about (the pesky business about giving a reductive account of truth), and anti-reductionists are less likely to dispute the force of an argument that doesn’t involve an assumption they reject.

Here, then, is a sketch of the master argument, crucial parts of which I shall go on to unpack.9

P1: The reason why we have the truth predicate, and the only point of having a concept of truth, is “to enable the explicit formulation of schematic generalizations” (such as “Every statement of the form ‘If p, then q’ is true”). So truth is “nothing more than a device of generalization” (Horwich 1990:146).

P2: To fulfil its only role, all that is required is that the truth predicate be governed by (instances of) the equivalence schema: The proposition that p is true if and only if p.

C: Thus, there is no good reason to suppose that there is more to the concept of truth than what is collectively expressed by the (uncontroversial) instances of the equivalence schema, and so there is no need to go beyond the deflationist account of truth’s nature.
Assuming a more rigorous formulation, it’s safe to say that the argument is valid, i.e. the conclusion follows from the premises. Furthermore, though I don’t have the space to explain why, the second premise is correct. This highlights the critical argumentative significance of deflationism’s claim about the point, or utility, of our notion of truth – that it is “nothing more than a device of generalization” (Horwich 1998:146).

Understanding exactly what this claim comes to is obviously very important. But the explanations we are given are often compressed to something along the following lines: We are told that “the function of the truth predicate is to enable the explicit formulation of schematic generalizations” (Horwich 1998:37), and we are given examples such as

Every statement of the form ‘If $p$, then $p$’ is true

This is unsatisfactory, however. For it is perfectly natural to want to respond: why is the generalization not simply an illustration of the attribution of a property – that of being true – to statements of the form ‘If $p$, then $p$’? And, if so, we seem to have gotten nowhere – for the question whether the property in question is substantive has not been addressed.

But characterizations such as these leave out a crucial element of the deflationist’s claim. It’s uncontroversial, or at least seems to be, that the quantified sentence generalizes over an infinite number of statements:

If snow is white, then snow is white
If lionfish are poisonous, then lionfish are poisonous
If seaweed is good for you, then seaweed is good for you

In saying that truth is an instrument of generalization, the deflationist says something significantly more than this. Indeed, the key element of the deflationary conception of truth’s utility is that schematic generalizations serve as substitutes or surrogates for sentences or propositions that are framed without the use of the truth predicate. In the present case, the deflationist maintains that what you would have asserted, if only you could, is the infinite conjunction: If snow is white, then snow is white; and, if lionfish are poisonous, then lionfish are poisonous; and, if seaweed is good for you, then seaweed is good for you, etc. But since we can’t assert, or think, an infinite conjunction, we use the generalization as a surrogate (Horwich 1998:2–3)

This is not obvious. Nonetheless, I propose to leave the matter at that. For our purposes, the most important thing to keep in mind is that, according to deflationists, sentences involving the truth predicate only ever stand proxy – they are substitutes or surrogates – for ones that don’t. If so, it follows that we never use the truth predicate to attribute a substantive property – that of being true – to anything.

I now turn to the beginnings of an assessment of deflationism as well as of the master argument for it. (In the course of considering the argument’s second premise I shall also say a little more about the last of deflationism’s central claims.) Roughly speaking, the over-all assessment of an argument involves weighing the evidence for its premises up against whatever reasons there might be for thinking that the conclusion is false, or at least doubtful.

Deflationists have looked extensively at various uses of the truth-predicate in ordinary life, in philosophy, and, though less so, science. And it’s fair to say that they have confirmed what Michael Dummett noted quite some time ago: Namely, that these standard uses of the truth predicate can be accounted for within a deflationary framework. Is it then reasonable to suppose that sufficient evidence has been provided for the initial, and only controversial, premise of the argument? Here’s why I think not.

For the purposes of defending deflationism it is not enough to focus on explicit uses of the truth predicate in what I shall call first-order explanations (or explanatory practices). By a first-order explanation, I simply mean one that doesn’t have, as its explanandum, something that is itself an explanation. Such explanations are, of course, to be found all over the place: in ordinary life and science, of course, but also in philosophy. The reason why this just won’t do is that an explanation of something may invoke truth essentially, but nevertheless do so only implicitly. This is so if any of the basic explanatory concepts it uses themselves require elucidation (at least in part) in terms of the concept of truth. There may well be aspects of our concept of truth – as manifested in our explanatory practices – that cannot be uncovered simply by reflection on our explicit use of the predicate ‘true’. (If you are already convinced that deflationism is right, then you will have no reason to suppose that that is in fact the case. But if what you want to do is provide a solid argument for deflationism, you simply cannot assume that the full content of our concept of truth can be read off of the rules governing the use of the predicate.)

I now turn to a brief consideration of the content and import of the argument’s second premise. This may ap-
Pear to be an altogether different topic, but in fact it’s not. According to the view we are currently looking at, ‘true’ is implicitly defined by the equivalence schema.

The proposition that \( p \) is true if and only if \( p \).

But what does this tell us about the meaning of ‘true’ (or the concept it expresses)? I take it that that’s not immediately obvious. But we should, in fact, be focusing on a different (though of course related) question. All parties to the debate accept the (uncontroversial) instances of the equivalence schema, and can agree that they contribute to an implicit specification of the meaning of ‘true’. Deflationism’s characteristic claim is that there is nothing more to truth than what they express. As stated here, the equivalence schema is an equivalence schema for propositions, and for present purposes we can simply identify propositions with the meanings of declarative sentences (with what they express). Now, the dominant conception of linguistic meaning in the philosophy of language is one that holds that a key component of the meaning of a declarative sentence is its truth-conditions. In other words, one understands (grasps) this aspect of its meaning when one knows what has to be the case for it to be true.

But if truth and meaning are related in this way, then deflationism about truth is false. For then there would be something more to truth than what the equivalence schema expresses. (This point goes back to Dummett’s seminal paper Truth from 1959.) Deflationism about truth presupposes that meaning is prior to truth, that meaning can be explained without appeal to the notion of truth. Deflationists, then, need an account of meaning that is not framed in terms of the notion of truth-conditions.

It’s fair to say that deflationists have – to date – come up with no such thing. Paul Horwich, one of the leading deflationists, has worked on the matter for years and written several books on meaning. What he currently has – as he has conceded – is a research program. A research program is, of course, not a theory. It stands to a theory roughly as my wish to visit Madagascar stands to my actually being there. A research program is a framework within which one might hope to arrive at a theory. The point, then, is that the plausibility of the deflationary conception of truth is hostage to there being a theory of meaning that comports with it. That being so, it’s hard to see how one could reasonably suppose that our current evidence counts in favour of deflationism. (To put it slightly differently: The evidence we have that is based on our explicit use of ‘true’ cannot be taken as supporting the idea that deflationism is the default position, because we already know that there is a crucial question that remains unaddressed, and concerning which the question of our explicit use of the truth predicate has no bearing.) And there is more to come.

For a deflationist is not only proscribed from explaining linguistic meaning in terms of truth-conditions, he or she cannot use the notion of truth conditions in any explanatory context. And the fact is that the notion figures prominently in the philosophy of mind as well – in standard accounts of the nature of beliefs, desires, and so on; the so-called propositional attitudes. (It also figures in what is probably the most prevalent view of the nature of perceptual states.) Take a particular belief, say, the belief that lionfish are beautiful, have venomous fin rays, and are very tasty (think sashimi). What makes it the mental state that it is, and not some other one, is partly a matter of its being a belief and partly a matter of its content (that lionfish are beautiful...). Contents are standardly characterized in terms of truth-conditions, and it is no straightforward matter to come up with an alternative that does not – even implicitly – draw on the notion of a truth condition.12

At this point, you might find yourself inclined to agree that deflationists have a good deal of unfinished business that they need to attend to. And you may even be on the cusp of agreeing that, things being as they are, it’s hard to see deflationism as more than an extremely interesting alternative to traditional ways of thinking about truth. All well and good, but how is any of this related to the bold claim, made initially, that deflationism entails that there is no such thing as intentionality? And what of the alleged bearing of perceptual psychology on the metaphysical question of the nature of truth? These are the questions to which I now turn. (That I have waited so long is simply because a number of things needed to be said, and at least partially explained, before they can fruitfully be addressed.

Perceptual psychology, and visual psychology especially, provides a particularly salient illustration of the relevance of cognitive science for one of the basic questions in philosophy. One of its fundamental concerns is that of explaining ‘visual constancies.’ For our purposes, these can be understood simply as the capacities a visual system has to
perceive features of its environment (including, centrally, objects and their properties). Vision science makes explicit use of the notion of truth, for what it seeks to explain is how visual systems manage to get things right (when they do). Its aim, that is, is to explain how visual processes that take place after light has impinged on the retina result in veridical perceptual states. Now, it’s not at all unlikely that the science’s explicit use of the truth predicate comports with the deflationist account of how we use the truth predicate. But that’s not where the issue lies.

One of the fundamental concepts in all of cognitive science is that of representation: Cognitive states are taken to be representational states and cognitive processes (e.g., trains of reasoning) are taken to be (often complex) transformations of representational states. And the central – and outstanding – question that has a bearing on the metaphysical issue of truth’s nature is how to understand the notions of representation that figure so prominently in the science.

Do the cognitive sciences make use of a notion of representation that essentially but implicitly presupposes the notion of truth? When mental states are said to be representational states, is that tantamount to individuating mental states in terms of the conditions under which they represent things correctly? If the answer is ‘yes’, that amounts to an exceptionally strong argument against deflationism. For then the notion of truth really is being used substantively – in a scientific explanation of a part of the world’s causal and constitutive structure.

Finally, we get to the matter of deflationism and intentionality: There are, very roughly, two ways in which intentionality is ordinarily characterized. When Brentano originally (re)introduced the notion, he did so in terms of a special notion of ‘aboutness’ or, equivalently, in terms of the notion of the mind’s ‘taking an object’. Nowadays, intentionality is often explicated in terms of a state’s having representational content, as a matter of a state’s representing things as being one way or another.

How are the two related? First of all, and this is not controversial, they are two ways of getting at one and the same thing – the very thing most philosophers take to be one of the fundamental features of the mind (the other being consciousness). What is more difficult to show – again a matter that really requires further discussion – is that the Brentanian concept of intentionality, and the more modern one framed in terms of the notion of representational content, are, in fundamental respects, one and the same. So the two explications, as different as they may seem to be at first sight, are different attempts to explicate the same concept. If that’s correct, as I believe it is, then the Brentanian characterization of intentionality must be seen as implicitly relying on the notion of truth (or, more generally, of veridicality). One way of noting how this can be – and thereby pointing to a fundamental connection between the two accounts – is by focusing on a well-known difficulty with Brentano’s original explication. The word ‘take’ is relational – it requires relata. It is impossible to reach out and take an apple, if the apple doesn’t exist. And whoever does the taking must exist too. But – as Brentano himself insisted – we can think, hope and dream about things that don’t exist. What, then, could possibly be meant by a mind’s ‘taking’ an object that doesn’t exist? This is a point at which the other way of characterizing intentionality – the way often used today – is arguably superior. Properly used – and by employing constraints I haven’t mentioned here – the notion of representational content captures the relevant sense of ‘aboutness’ without generating the difficulty we have just considered. A belief, say, can be about something that doesn’t exist insofar as its content is a representation as of there being such an object.13

If, as I maintain, the two notions are one and the same, then deflationism precludes the characterization of anything as exhibiting intentionality. Given that the notion of intentionality presupposes the notion of truth (because they are correlative notions), the claim that minds exhibit intentionality entails that truth is, after all, a substantive property. For by saying of something that it has intentional properties, we would thereby be committed to the view that truth is needed in giving a correct account of a specific part of the world’s constitutive and causal structure – in giving an account of the nature of mind. If deflationism is correct, that can only be because intentionality is nowhere to be found.

The view that there is such a thing as intentionality, and that it’s one of the characteristic features of the mind, commands a very widespread assent. Indeed, it’s more or less taken for granted, as something that can be established with very little effort. It’s one of the things that the majority of philosophers working in the continental and the so-called analytic tradition have in common. Only rarely is it a subject of serious debate. Rather, it forms the back-
ground against which other issues are debated hotly – how to think of the relation between language and thought, what giving an account of intentionality involves, and whether we need naturalistic accounts of these things, to mention but a couple of examples. Many, perhaps most, philosophers would therefore be inclined to take deflationism’s incompatibility with the existence of intentionality as an immediate reductio of the view.

How would deflationists themselves respond to the claim that their conception of truth presupposes that intentionality is nowhere to be found? We have, in fact, already seen how - only it wasn't framed as a response. A slight reformulation of the second line of argument in favour of deflationism serves to highlight the point: (P1) Had there been such a thing as intentionality, it would have had to be reducible. (Because intentionality couldn't be a basic fact about reality.) (P2) Attempts to give reductive accounts of intentionality have failed systematically. (C) From this it follows, at least as an inference to the best explanation, that there is no such thing – nothing in the world has the property of 'aboutness', or represents anything in a sense which requires explication in terms of the notion of truth. Deflationists, in other words, don't dispute the claim, they dispute its significance. They don't see the claim as a bullet that must be bitten or somehow dodged, they embrace it.

This is why the issue over deflationism is correctly described as a fault line in philosophy: it’s a basic issue with profound implications, that is connected with numerous other pivotal issues, and about which philosophers have completely opposing views. The question which anyone with an interest in the matter should ask themselves is what they themselves would say, upon reflection.

My own view – and this will also take us back to the question of the significance of scientific explanations of cognitive phenomena – is that we shouldn’t, as things currently stand, align ourselves with either camp. I have already explained why I think there are currently no good reasons for thinking that deflationism ought to be viewed as the default position. I should probably add that I think that the argument from reductionism has little force. Whether reductive accounts are to be sought can only be decided case-by-case. So the basis for rejecting the argument shouldn’t be a general opposition to reductionism. It's rather that reasons for believing that truth (via the idea of truth conditions) is a substantive property are to be had irrespective of whether a reductive account can be found. It’s quite sufficient if we find successful explanations that employ intentional or representational notions. (This claim needs sharpening, and will be soon.) And that’s why it’s extremely unlikely that a strong case for deflationism can be made out unless the modes of explanation employed in mature cognitive sciences have been found not to involve such notions. To date deflationists have made no serious attempt to consider those explanations.

Philosophers belonging to the traditional camp – intentionalists we could call them – also tend to ignore scientific explanations of cognitive phenomena when it comes to providing reasons for supposing that there are things – minds – whose correct characterization requires appeal to intentional concepts. And this is because it’s generally supposed that doing so is unnecessary; it would merely serve to replicate the reasons that we already have. What they point to is our pre-theoretical use of intentional idiom in explaining, predicting and making sense of ourselves. Our intentional idiom and our use of it in framing explanations are surely in good standing, so the thought goes. For we have absolutely no idea how we might do without such explanations, nor have we been given any good reason for supposing that we ought to try. The burden of proof, it is claimed, is on anyone who claims otherwise. And hence there is no need to enter into the debate until such reasons have been provided.

It’s easy to appreciate the appeal of such a line of thought. However, what’s at issue is not whether our pre-theoretic concepts and explanatory schemes should be kept as is or abandoned wholesale. Natural languages are tremendously flexible instruments and have to be, given the multitude of functions that they serve, and of uses to which they are put. But this also applies to intentional discourse. People – we – use it to explain and describe all sorts of things – computers, of course, but also – at least on the floor where I work – photocopying machines (one of them is fickle, the other generally not) and dishwashers, and the list goes on. We’re not, of course, committed to a literal understanding of all of our ascriptions of intentional states – to calculators and fruitflies, say. And this is neither an invitation to reject the intentional idiom wholesale – in the manner of the Churchlands – nor to suppose that it’s nothing more than an ‘intentional stance’ that can only
ever be justified pragmatically – in the manner of Dennett. The point is rather this: we don’t – or certainly shouldn’t – in general take the structure of our language, or the things we say, to be a reliable guide to reality. And, in the present case, we need guidance about when to take the idiom seriously and when not. (A quick answer to the effect that it is to be taken literally in the cases where we are dealing with clear cases of minds will not do – because the question is precisely one about the nature of those things.) Thus, we can never just rely on pre-theoretic modes of explanation, or linguistic structures for that matter. Rather, we have to consider whether intentional notions are really needed to explain the phenomena in question, and that is to say whether alternative explanations of them are available.15

Now, we’ve already noted the relevance of explanations in cognitive science for the issue over deflationism. And here we can note one of the advantages of considering them. Explanations in science differ from those we employ in the hustle and bustle of ordinary life: for at least some of them are precisely geared, and single-mindedly so, towards yielding an understanding of how things are in the world. In vision science, for example, the notion of representation is used to delineate a natural kind. Furthermore, there are generally accepted standards by which one can judge the success of a scientific explanation or theory: in terms of whether it yields agreement among the science’s practitioners, whether it serves to make questions more testable and precise, and whether it serves to open new questions – to mention a couple (cf. Burge 2010:298).
More than anyone else, Tyler Burge has explored the question how best to understand the notion of representation employed in visual psychology (Burge 2010). And though he has not himself done so with a view to engage in the debate about deflationary conceptions of truth, his conclusions are of immediate relevance. For he has argued, with great care and at great length, that the science’s explanations are framed in terms of an intentional notion of representation. Ultimately, however, I don’t think that his arguments succeed. As much as I would like to do so, I cannot here explain what has led me to that conclusion. If I am right, however, it follows that opponents of deflationism have their work cut out for them too.

Ultimately – and most importantly – it should be kept in mind that the task at hand is not just one of seeking out evidence that would support one or another view. For I don’t think we understand the issues nearly as well as we should. Deflationism’s claim that truth is a simple and transparent notion, devoid of metaphysical significance, only seems justified as long as one ignores the question of its (possible) role in a correct characterization of the nature of mind. But, human as they are, intentionalists too (or some of them at least) seem to make life too easy for themselves. The notions of truth, and of intentionality, are fundamental elements in our conceptual scheme. And illumination is only to be had by careful probing, by considering arguments not just as providing reasons for belief – which of course they do – but by actively using them as vehicles of understanding. Arguments serve to elucidate the content of thoughts and concepts by exhibiting the relations between them. They are probably the best means we have available for arriving at the kind of understanding philosophy requires. And then there is the ubiquitous phenomenon of confirmation bias. We all have a tendency to look for, and favour, evidence that confirms our pre-existing beliefs. This is especially so for those we hold most deeply. Wittgenstein once wrote: “This is how philosophers should greet each other: ‘Take your time!’” At least for those of us who have tenure, he was surely right.
I am presenting the argument as it would be stated within the frame-work of Horwich's minimalist theory of truth. But the same argument for the deflationary conception of the nature of truth, modulo the issues on which deflationists disagree, is present in the writings of all of the deflationary theorists whose work I’m discussing. That it is the principal argument is also apparent in their work.

Any theory of truth has to find a way of addressing the vexed problem that is illustrated by the liar paradox – namely that our ordinary notion of truth appears to be inconsistent. Deflationist’s insist, probably correctly, that they face no special problem, that is to say no problem that is not shared by everyone. So they set it aside for separate treatment. Hence the restriction to uncontroversial, or non-paradoxical instances of the equivalence schema, instances where the schematic letter p is not replaced by a paradox-generating proposition.

It’s only if deflationists could claim that they have also looked at what I have here called second-order explanations, the explanations we would need to give of all the (relevant) concepts we employ in our explanatory practices – to see whether the concept is used implicitly – that it would suffice to consider explicit uses of the truth predicate. But that’s exactly what they cannot do. As we shall see, the issue ultimately turns on how we are to think about the relation between truth and meaning, as well as the relation between truth and mental content.

An admittedly crude example may help with understanding the nature of the problem. Suppose you are presented with a theory which tells you, not that meanings and mental contents are to be identified with truth conditions but rather with sets of possible worlds, say. Is that an idea that may be of use to a deflationist (barring ontological scruples)? The difficulty here is that the relevant set of possible worlds, with which a sentence's meaning might be identified, is very likely to be the set of worlds in which the sentence is true. How else might one circumscribe them? If the notion of truth is not explicitly used, it is often a sign that the theory isn’t attempting to give you a general account of meaning or content. Rather, it is providing an explanation of what it is for any content to be the content that it is and not some other one. That is to say, it provides an account of how meanings or contents are to be individuated – leaving aside the question what makes something a content, as it were. This is in no way to be taken as an objection to such theories: They may be highly useful for their intended purpose! It’s just very unclear, to say the least, whether they are of any use to a deflationist, given his or her views about the nature of truth. Deflationists in effect acknowledge this, because no deflationist has attempted to make use of any quantified account. This only scratches the surface, I’m afraid. Much more needs to be said about what options are available to a deflationist, including those differing from Horwich’s particular brand. Some of what I go on to say is, implicitly, a response to some of the things they could try to say.

For a careful explication of intentionality that is centered on the notion of representation, see Burge (2010:30–46).

Did you know that male fruitflies who have been spurned in courtship consume considerably more alcohol (when it’s provided) than the happy ones? Perhaps, just perhaps, the difference – at least among the males of the species – isn’t that great after all. (Male elephants, I’m told, have been known to vent their grief by smashing cars.)

At this point, we may also appeal to the fruitfulness of intentional notions as employed in philosophy. What would the philosophy of mind be like without it? There is much to be said for doing so. Nevertheless, I’m reluctant to put much weight on it, in the present context, because I’d like to see how close one can get to finding reasons for beliefs about truth and intentionality that would convince someone who doesn’t already have a view of the matter.

Though I have done my best to explain things clearly, I worry that the paper may be about as enlightening as the preface to Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* when read prior to the book. Thanks to Mariona Eiren Bohlin Sturm and Thomas Hanssen Rambs for their attempts to steer me in the right direction.