ABSTRACT. For the sentences of languages that contain operators that express the concepts of definiteness and indefiniteness, there is an unavoidable tension between a truth-theoretic semantics that delivers truth conditions for those sentences that capture their propositional contents and any model-theoretic semantics that has a story to tell about how indefiniteness in a constituent affects the semantic value of sentences which imbed it. But semantic theories of both kinds play essential roles, so the tension needs to be resolved. I argue that it is the truth theory which correctly characterises the notion of truth, per se. When we take into account the considerations required to bring model theory into harmony with truth theory, those considerations undermine the arguments standardly used to motivate supervaluational model theories designed to validate classical logic. But those considerations also show that celebration would be premature for advocates of the most frequently encountered rival approach – many-valued model theory.

In recent years, two (at least superficially) different approaches to truth-conditional semantics have been prominent: truth-theoretic semantics in the Davidsonian tradition, and model-theoretic semantics – an approach more often favoured by philosophers of language with an interest in the formal semantic analysis of natural languages. When proposals of both kinds have been produced to handle the same class of sentences, the question of the connection between them has, at times, seemed quite murky, as has the derivative (and more specific) question of what, if anything, is at issue when one chooses to adopt one approach rather than the other. The issue has been obscured, I think, by the cosy fantasy that perhaps nothing of importance is really at issue between the approaches; that, when applied to the same language, they are complementary rather than genuine rivals.

There is neither motivation nor warrant for complacency in this matter. In Section 1, I shall present two reasons for thinking that complacency is justified, whilst in Section 2, I shall motivate a constraint on truth-conditional semantic theories that can later be exploited to undermine the considerations of Section 1. Thereafter, I shall be concerned to demonstrate two things. First (Section 3), I shall show that, for languages which either contain aoristic modal operators – operators that express concepts of definiteness or determinacy – or into which such operators could be significantly introduced, there is a genuine clash between truth-theoretic
semantic proposals and the most commonly encountered model-theoretic proposal for dealing with indefiniteness: classical supervaluations. Second (Section 4), I shall argue that the constraint on truth-conditional semantic theories motivated in Section 2 warrants the rejection of the use of supervaluations to validate classical logic, even though there will inevitably be a clash between truth theory and any acceptable model-theoretic proposal for handling indeterminacy. Section 5 ties up some loose ends left by the preceding discussion.

1. TWO REASONS FOR COMPLACENCY

When constructing a truth theory for a hitherto untreated class of sentences it is customary to design that theory to deliver homophonic truth conditions for those sentences; i.e. it is to be so framed as to issue in a theorem of the following form

\[(\text{Hom}) \quad Tr(\bar{A}) \leftrightarrow A\]

for each sentence, \(A\), of the language involved.\(^3\) To adopt this policy is not, of course, to deny that heterophonic statements of truth conditions might be equally correct and perhaps more informative for some purposes than homophonic statements. It is just to recognise that homophonic statements are in a unique position to have their claim to correctness respected, for \((\text{Hom})\) seems to capture, as well as any formal constraint on truth definitions could, the requirement that a truth predicate be lean in content: it is simply – and certainly no more than – a predicate we ascribe to a sentence to confirm its literal factual correctness. The idea was well captured by Aristotle in his observation that truth is ‘to say of what is that it is’. If we regard the leaness of homophonic accounts as an untrumpable virtue when the correctness of truth conditions is at issue, then we are presumably entitled to regard a truth theory that meets \((\text{Hom})\) as, in an intuitively clear sense, canonical, for \((\text{Hom})\) exploits the fact that we are providing truth conditions for the sentences of a language in the same language to provide a syntactic guarantee of leaness. Other statements of truth conditions are to be judged correct only in so far as they may be regarded as plausible translations of homophonic statements. (We shall come presently both to another deep reason for regarding homophonic truth conditions as (almost always) correct and to a statement of the required translation relation.)

There seem to be two important considerations that give rise to the idea that there is no genuine clash between apparently rival truth- and model-theoretic proposals. The first is the correct observation that, for