

Inconsistency and Replacement*

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1. Introduction

In a number of articles and now a book, *Replacing Truth* (OUP, 2013)¹, Kevin Scharp defends a view on truth with the following components:

- (i) The ordinary concept of truth is inconsistent.
- (ii) Its inconsistency means that it must be replaced (at least for theoretical purposes.)
- (iii) What it ought to be replaced by are two concepts, ascending truth and descending truth. (The naïve truth rules are *from p to infer T<p>* and from T<p> to infer p. Ascending and descending truth obey one naïve truth rule each.)

One immediate question concerns what it means for a concept to be inconsistent. I talk about this in some detail below. Briefly, though: It is common ground between all who seriously talk about inconsistency of concepts in the way Scharp does that this somehow is a matter of the concept being governed by inconsistent rules.² That in turn immediately invites the question: what is it for a concept to be governed by a rule? Different theorists spell this out in different ways. But somehow or other it has to do with what competence with the concept involves.

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¹ All references in what follows will be to Scharp (2013) except where noted.

² The general sort of inconsistency view favored by Scharp is different from dialetheism, the view that there are true contradictions. For discussion of the relation between dialetheism and inconsistency views of the kind here at issue, see my (2002a).

Saying what it is for a concept to be inconsistent is one thing; arguing that a particular concept is inconsistent is another. The argument that the concept of truth is inconsistent is based on the liar paradox. In brief: the liar paradox does not have an acceptable solution of the kind sought, and the explanation is that truth is an inconsistent concept. Important here is the so-called revenge problem. Every otherwise seemingly acceptable solution to the liar paradox employs conceptual tools such that a new version of the liar paradox, one the solution cannot deal with satisfactorily, can be stated using the conceptual tools in question. Just to give a quick example: for someone who attempts to say of the original liar sentence, which says of itself that it is false, that it is neither true nor false, the revenge problem concerns what to say about a “strengthened” liar sentence that says of itself not that it is false but that it is *not true*. The suggestion that this sentence is neither true nor false entails that the sentence is not true. But then the sentence is true after all! So that did not work. And what is done here is to use the new conceptual category – neither truth nor falsity – and formulate a new paradox.

One complication, not much paused on by Scharp in his discussion, is that it is not the truth rules by themselves that lead to paradox. We are also, e.g., employing a particular logic. Why then single out truth rather than one of the logical expressions as the culprit? A theorist more cautious than Scharp could say that the liar paradox shows our language/system of concepts to be inconsistent without singling out truth specifically. But in what follows, I will not pause on this complication.

When it comes to the proposal briefly described under (iii), there are different questions that can be raised. Some are technical, and concern the consistency and strength of a system such as Scharp’s. Some are more philosophical and have to do with what theoretical purposes we want a concept of truth (or some replacement) for. The questions I will raise are of a philosophical nature.

Scharp isn’t the first theorist to have proposed an inconsistency view in response to the liar paradox. Other theorists before him have said that the liar paradox arises because our language (or specific expressions and concepts) is inconsistent. Tarski famously said this, and when Tarski presented his hierarchy

view it was explicitly a proposal for reform. In his (1979), Charles Chihara defended an inconsistency view. In his (1993), Stephen Yablo defends an inconsistency view. And other authors have taken the liar paradox to show that linguistic reform is needed, but didn't explicitly pause on the question of the inconsistency of our language.

But it is more recently that inconsistency views have been more popular. Such views have been defended by, for example, Jody Azzouni (2006, 2007), Alexis Burgess & John Burgess (2011), Kirk Ludwig (2002), Douglas Patterson (2007, 2008, 2009), and myself (2002, 2002a, 2008) – and by Kevin Scharp in various works (apart from his 2013, see especially 2007, 2008 and 2013a). Scharp's book provides the first book-length treatment of the view.

There are differences between the inconsistency views defended. First, virtually no two inconsistency theorists agree on all details regarding what it is for something to be a rule or a meaning-constitutive principle for a concept. Second, different inconsistency theorists have different views on what the inconsistency of truth implies as regards the question of whether some things are true. Moderates like me and Scharp take it not to entail anything that extreme as that all or no sentences of our language are true; theorists like Patterson, Azzouni and Burgess & Burgess, by contrast, are happy to embrace such radical conclusions. Third, different inconsistency theorists have different attitudes toward the question of whether our language needs to be reformed, for example whether our concept of truth needs to be replaced. I have tended not to be concerned with the question at all. I summarized Scharp's view above. Burgess & Burgess think that we should continue to talk about truth but adopt a "fictionalist" attitude toward such talk.

In what follows I will focus on criticisms of Scharp. But let me first stress that I very much admire Scharp's book. The book is the first book-length treatment of an inconsistency view of truth. Throughout it is marked by carefulness, intellectual honesty and inventiveness. And it manages to be both a technically sophisticated treatment of the semantic paradoxes and a discussion that throughout relates this formal work to ongoing concerns in the philosophy of language.

2. Scharp's inconsistency view

Let me first the specific form that Scharp's inconsistency view takes, and the arguments Scharp mounts for it.

On Scharp's view, a concept is inconsistent iff its constitutive principles are inconsistent, where "rules" are constitutive for a concept C if "they determine (in part) the meaning of ['C'] and the identity of the concept [C]".³

As an example of an inconsistent concept, Scharp offers (that expressed by) 'rable', whose constitutive principles are the following:

(1a) 'rable' applies to x if x is a table.

(1b) 'rable' disapplies to x if x is a red thing⁴

Given the existence of red tables, (1a) and (1b) jointly lead to contradiction. On one way of using 'inconsistent concept', the concept expressed 'rable' is not plainly inconsistent but is only inconsistent *with the empirical facts*. Scharp uses 'inconsistent concept' in such a way that for him inconsistency with the empirical facts is sufficient for (plain) inconsistency. I find that a bit jarring myself, but nothing substantive hinges on it. It is just a matter of terminology.

Turning to the question of what it takes to possess a concept, with a special eye toward the question of what it takes to possess an inconsistent concept, Scharp argues against broadly psychological accounts given which possession of a concept is a matter of believing (or being disposed to believe, etc.) its constitutive principles. What he argues is that all versions of such views face counterexamples.⁵ As he sums it up, "What we need is a consistent theory of inconsistent concepts that is compatible with the claim that we can possess *and employ* them without committing ourselves to contradiction".⁶ Instead Scharp proposes an epistemic account, on which possession of a concept is a matter of *being entitled to* believing its constitutive principles, and refers to Burge on

³ p. 36. Scharp uses this formulation in the context of discussing a particular concept. The formulation used is problematic (it runs together what is constitutive for words with what is constitutive for concepts) but Scharp later cleans up the formulation.

⁴ p. 36.

⁵ pp. 43ff.

⁶ p. 45.

entitlement.⁷ (Or, taking into account that one might have countervailing evidence, being such that one would have been entitled to believe the constitutive principles provided one had no countervailing evidence.) This may be fine as far as it goes but it is natural to react by thinking that this just pushes the question back one step: by virtue of what is a given thinker entitled to believe the principles in question? Scharp does not really address the issue. He does bring up the question “what is the source of the entitlement that is the link between possessors and principles?”, but the discussion does not provide much help. He brings up Christopher Peacocke’s account of possession conditions, which is more psychological than epistemic, adverting to what thinkers find “primitively compelling”.⁸ He mentions positively Donald Davidson’s interpretivism given which an agent *s* possesses a concept *c* just in case a radical interpreter’s “theory of *s*’s beliefs and desires and the meanings of the sentences in *s*’s language entails that some of *s*’s beliefs and desires have *c* as a constituent”.⁹ This does not directly speak to the question of what must be true of *s* in order that the radical interpreter’s theory should be like that. Scharp does make clear that his general view is that it is by virtue of having certain practical abilities that we have the entitlements in question, but the issue of how these practical abilities are related to entitlements is never thoroughly addressed. Perhaps the view is that nothing both general and informative can be said.

Scharp also presents considerations like the following:

We certainly make judgments that a particular person is not competent with a word (does not possess a concept) and we do it based solely on evidence from conversations with the person in question. My claim is that whatever such a person fails to do can be construed as not accepting enough constitutive principles for the concept (word) in question.¹⁰

First, one may wonder how this reasoning fits with Scharp’s entitlement view on competence. If competence is a matter of what principles one is entitled to

⁷ p. 46f.

⁸ p. 47f.

⁹ p. 48.

¹⁰ p. 55.

accept, how do questions about what one actually accepts enter in? If Scharp explains the facts about what a thinker is entitled to by appeal to what the thinker actually accepts, then one wonders why he cannot accept a psychological account in the first place. Second, it is natural here to want to raise the following objection. Compare a (slightly) different case, analyticity. An important point about analyticity made by Quine (1960) had to do with the explanatoriness of the notion. Analyticity is not the same as obviousness, but what exactly of explanatory worth is added to the claim that something is obvious by saying that it is analytic? Whether or not Quine in the end is right that the notion of analyticity ought to be jettisoned, the methodological point – why appeal to something theoretically more involved when appeal to obviousness will do? – is a good one. And the point is relevant to what Scharp is discussing, even though Scharp does not employ the notion of analyticity. “There are trees” is hardly meaning-constitutive for “tree”, nor is “many trees have leaves”, etc. But these sentences are obviously true. If I were in a conversation with someone who rejected many of these obvious truths, I would –all else equal – be inclined to judge this person not to mean *tree* by “tree”.¹¹ The theoretical explanation, moreover can simply appeal to charity: after a while it becomes more charitable to interpret the person as meaning something non-standard by “tree” than to interpret her homophonically and as believing many obvious falsehoods.

Scharp’s notion of constitutivity admits of degrees, and Scharp can say in response to concerns like the one presented that it is all right to maintain that something like “there are trees” is to some degree meaning-constitutive for “tree”.¹² It is only when we operate with a binary notion of meaning-constitutive versus not so that we find it implausible that “there are trees” should count as meaning-constitutive. If Scharp makes this response, however, he starts seeming in some respects much more like a Quinean than might have been apparent from the book. Suppose someone were to say, based on her acceptance of Quine’s distinction between core beliefs and periphery beliefs and the idea that in

¹¹ The “all else equal” is important. If she defended her view by saying that big corporations was responsible for there not being any real trees anymore, and saying that they had put up many tree replicas, I might be inclined to regard her as unreliable but I would no longer think of her as linguistically deviant.

¹² See p. 55f. Much of the discussion is in terms of our credences in constitutivity, but overall it is clear that Scharp thinks constitutivity comes in degrees.

translation one ought preferably not to interpret someone as rejecting core beliefs, that she is an inconsistency theorist about truth because the general assumptions that lead to core beliefs. (Note that one certainly can be Quinean in the respect outlined without buying into other elements of Quine's picture.) I think the proper reaction would be that this is not a very interesting inconsistency view: it is rather *recherché* that core beliefs in Quine's sense can be and sometimes are inconsistent. If Scharp makes the moves suggested in this paragraph then he appears much like this theorist, even if there are differences of detail (like that what makes a belief closer to the core for Quine need not be exactly what makes it constitutive for Scharp).¹³ In the Introduction, Scharp says that in his view "philosophy is, for the most part, the study of inconsistent concepts".¹⁴ That is on the face of it a striking claim. The claim that philosophy often studies inconsistencies in our core beliefs is, while not toothless, not nearly as striking.

In ch. 3, Scharp turns specifically to the case of truth, and argues that this concept is inconsistent. The arguments are similar to the ones Scharp has presented in his general discussion of constitutivity. He says, e.g.,

The second way of avoiding the obvious argument is to deny that (T-In) and (T-Out) are constitutive of truth predicates. But think how odd it would be to participate in a conversation where an interlocutor asserts that some declarative sentence is true but also asserts the negation of that sentence...It would be hard to know how to interpret such an utterance. Indeed, one might wonder whether one had heard the person properly. At a bare minimum, experiencing something like this should make one question whether the interlocutor means what we mean by 'true'. And that is exactly what it takes for a principle to count as constitutive on the account given in Chapter 2.¹⁵

¹³ Note that the only thing I say about the "Quinean" is that she rejects the notion of there being particular principles that are meaning-constitutive, and replaces this with the talk of core belief versus periphery belief. Such a Quinean could at least in principle agree that there are quite determinate facts about reference.

¹⁴ p. 3.

¹⁵ p. 63.

But first, again one may wonder what constitutivity adds to talk of obviousness, or of being closer to the core. I will wonder whether someone means what I mean by 'tree' already if she rejects "there are trees", but "there are trees" is hardly constitutive for 'tree'. Second: The *intuitive* evidence that Scharp marshals suggests a link between believing, or accepting, the meaning-constitutive principles and possessing the concept. But his official criterion is as mentioned epistemic: possessing the concept is a matter of being entitled to believe the meaning-constitutive principles. And he thinks he is forced to go this way, for by his lights more psychological conceptions of concept possession face damning arguments.

Another kind of argument Scharp gives involves going through extant purported solutions to the liar paradox – solutions that do not involve embracing any sort of inconsistency view – and finding them all wanting. Here is a general concern about the limitations of that argumentative strategy. By Scharp's own lights it does not follow from P's being a constitutive principle for some concept C that P is something that by the end of the day one ought to accept, or is true. Questions about what principles are true and about what principles are meaning-constitutive are different, and not only because some principles that are true are not meaning-constitutive. But then take a theorist who agrees with Scharp about exactly what principles are to be accepted and are true, but who has a different view from Scharp on constitutivity. Perhaps this theorist denies that there are any constitutive principles (there is just what is closer to the core). Her overall philosophy of language and mind is different. Perhaps she equates meaning with semantic value (reference, extension). No review of extant purported solutions to the liar paradox will help show that Scharp's view is better than this other theorist's view. Similar remarks apply to what Scharp says about the revenge problem specifically. He argues for the inconsistency view by arguing that all consistency views fall foul of revenge problems. But by Scharp's own lights, there is an account of what principles are acceptable and are true that avoids the revenge problem: his own preferred account. But then consider a theorist who accepts that account but who – perhaps because of general qualms about the idea of constitutive principles – rejects the inconsistency view.

Scharp also offers what he calls the "the meaning argument":

- (i) If truth is a consistent concept, then there are meaningful sentences that cannot be treated by truth-conditional semantics.
- (ii) If there are sentences that cannot be treated by truth-conditional semantics, then truth-conditional semantics is unacceptable.
- (iii) Truth-conditional semantics is acceptable.
- (iv) So, truth is an inconsistent concept.¹⁶

When assessing this argument, it is important to keep in mind that there's a sense in which Scharp himself must say that truth-conditional semantics is unacceptable. He thinks one must replace the concept of truth in theoretical enterprises like this by talk of ascending truth and descending truth. Accordingly there is a sense in which he thinks what's acceptable is ascending-truth-and-descending-truth semantics, not truth-conditional semantics. This can be seen as a mere quibble: Scharp's replacement notions are *truthish* enough he can be said to hold on to truth-conditional semantics. But the point is still crucial in the present context. Let us distinguish between *strictly* and *roughly* truth-conditional semantics. Strictly truth-conditional semantics employs the ordinary notion of truth, whereas roughly truth-conditional semantics can employ some other truthish notion. Scharp holds on to roughly truth-conditional semantics but does not hold on to strictly truth-conditional semantics. Given the distinction, we obtain two different versions of Scharp's argument. Consider first:

- (i*) If truth is a consistent concept, then there are meaningful sentences that cannot be treated by strictly truth-conditional semantics.
- (ii*) If there are sentences that cannot be treated by strictly truth-conditional semantics, then strictly truth-conditional semantics is unacceptable.
- (iii*) Strictly truth-conditional semantics is acceptable.
- (iv) Truth is an inconsistent concept.

This would not do for Scharp, since he himself disagrees with (iii*). Let us then try to speak of roughly truth-conditional semantics instead:

¹⁶ p. 125.

(i**) If truth is a consistent concept, then there are meaningful sentences that cannot be treated by roughly truth-conditional semantics.

(ii**) If there are sentences that cannot be treated by roughly truth-conditional semantics, then roughly truth-conditional semantics is unacceptable.

(iii**) Roughly truth-conditional semantics is acceptable.

(iv) Truth is an inconsistent concept.

But Scharp cannot reasonably want to argue from (i**)-(iii**) to (iv), for (i**) sounds odd. The general point is simple. What does the consistency of the *actual* concept of truth have to do with the acceptability of *roughly* truth-conditional semantics? For example, suppose philosopher X does not want any truck with inconsistency views, for example because X takes all talk of constitutive principles to be rubbish, but agrees with Scharp that the ordinary notion of truth will have to be replaced, and by the replacement notions Scharp suggests. X can be convinced that only Scharp's replacement notions (taken jointly) have the requisite expressive power; no single notion will do. X will believe the antecedent of (i**), but X will see no reason to believe the consequent.

I myself actually believe that there is an argument from revenge paradoxes to an inconsistency view. The argument is that revenge paradoxes seem to show that there is something intuitively deeply unsatisfactory about any account of the semantic values of the key expressions concerned, and an inconsistency theory best explains this: the explanation is that any account is incompatible with at least some meaning-constitutive principle. But this argument from revenge, whatever in the end its fate, is not the same argument as what Scharp calls "the revenge argument". The argument from the revenge paradox that I like is structurally like what Scharp calls *the abductive argument*:

(i) If we assume that truth is an inconsistent concept, then we can explain the presence of the alethic paradoxes and the presence of revenge paradoxes.

(ii) The inconsistency explanation of the alethic paradoxes and the revenge

paradoxes is better than any of the others.

(iii) Probably, truth is an inconsistent concept.¹⁷

This form of argument is what I myself would put forward. But there are some problematic aspects of Scharp's discussion of the abductive argument to which I would like to call attention. Much of Scharp's discussion in support of this argument is to the effect that it is truth and not something else that is the source of the liar problems. He critically discusses Michael Glanzberg's (2001) contention that the source of the liar problems lies in context-dependence with its source in quantification, and Hartry Field's (2008) claim that, as Scharp puts it, "the problem of revenge paradoxes...is a problem that arises only when truth, which is intelligible, is combined with other resources (e.g., exclusion negation, other non-monotonic sentential operators, hyper-determinateness operators, etc.), which are not intelligible".¹⁸ But first, the issue of what notion or notions is responsible for the liar paradox to arise is orthogonal to inconsistency per se. As remarked earlier, an inconsistency theorist can well maintain that it is the constitutive principles for a number of key expressions used in the liar reasoning that together lead to contradiction, without singling out any notion as the inconsistent one. (For all I wish to argue here, at least, Scharp could have a case that truth is the guilty party. My point here is just that this is an *extra* claim.) Second, more importantly, one can agree with Scharp that truth in some sense is the guilty party without buying into an inconsistency view. One can, for example, reject the whole idea of constitutive principles but think that it is our conception of what truth is that is mistaken, and not put the blame on context-dependence, or exclusion negation, or any other suspect.

3. An assessment-sensitive semantics for "true"

Having introduced his pair of replacement notions, Scharp turns (chapter 9) to the question of what is the proper semantics for "true" given his tools. He favors the idea that "true" is *assessment-sensitive*. (That is, it has the same content with

¹⁷ p. 121.

¹⁸ p. 119.

respect to every context of utterance but its extension varies with the context of assessment.)

A point I have made a few times in the preceding is that one could in principle agree with Scharp regarding what the actual semantics for “true” is, without buying his inconsistency view. One possible retort for Scharp is to say that while such a position is *consistent*, the *support* for the assessment-sensitive semantics for “true” is crucially dependent on the inconsistency view. One thing he could maintain is that already the use of replacement notions in stating the semantics is bound up with the inconsistency view. I turn to this issue in the next section. Another, more specific suggestion would be that the case for assessment-sensitivity specifically depends on the inconsistency view. Let me address that in the present section.

The main case for the assessment-sensitivity view is built on considering, and rejecting, alternative views. Scharp considers, inter alia, the following alternatives: ambiguity, context-dependence, semantic indeterminacy, fictionalism and error theory.¹⁹ My own favored view is to appeal to semantic indeterminacy. Let me turn to what Scharp says about that.²⁰ (The views considered are not exclusive. Some words can, e.g., be both ambiguous and context-dependent. Nor are they all in obvious tension with the assessment-sensitivity diagnosis. I can believe a word exhibits both assessment-sensitivity and, say, semantic indeterminacy. What Scharp assumes is that there is some semantic feature that is more closely linked to an inconsistency view than other features are. The question he deals with is what that feature is.)

He assumes that to believe that “true” is semantically indeterminate is to hold that it has a number of acceptable interpretations, as familiar from discussions of supervaluationism. He then notes that someone who takes this line can understand validity either as global validity (an argument whose premises are in set G and whose conclusion is p is valid iff: if all the members of G are true in each acceptable interpretation, then p is true on each acceptable

¹⁹ Scharp discusses some alternatives on pp. 228ff and some on pp. 241ff.

²⁰ As Scharp himself mentions, the alternative views he discusses need not be exclusive. He refers to me as someone who favors a “weighted most” principle according to which the semantic value of “true” is what satisfies a weighted most of the associated constitutive principles (p. 228fn11). That is correct. But I also think that it is reasonable to speculate that if this is how the semantic value of “true” is determined then “true” will be semantically indeterminate.

interpretation), or as local validity (an argument with premises G and conclusion p is valid iff: for each acceptable interpretation I, if all the members of G are true in I, then p is true in I). Understanding it as global validity means giving up some principles of classical logic. Scharp labors under the methodological assumption that classical logic ought not to be tampered with, so he sets this possibility aside. Understanding validity as local validity is compatible with classical logic. About this possibility Scharp says that the resulting view and the assessment-sensitivity view are not competitors.²¹ The assessment-sensitivity view just adds more detail. Scharp does not say that if the friend of indeterminacy understood validity as local validity then her view would be tantamount to embracing assessment-sensitivity. I think if he said that he would say something false, but such a claim would be strong enough for his purposes. By contrast, so long as he only says what he does say, it is open to the friend of the indeterminacy view who takes this route to claim that there is indeterminacy but reject assessment-sensitivity. Scharp is right in insisting that one would like to hear more from a theorist who favors the local validity view, beyond what she says about logic. One can for example wonder about how to link up the view to claims about under what conditions sentences are properly assertively uttered.²² But that is a different matter. He does not have an argument against the view that we are dealing with a case of indeterminacy but not assessment-sensitivity. At least, this is so unless he takes it that the only way to add more detail to the indeterminacy view (or the version of the indeterminacy view that is compatible with classical logic) involves accepting an assessment-sensitivity view. He does not explicitly make this further, rather striking claim.

Now return to what got us into these issues: the suggestion that the assessment-sensitivity view favored by Scharp is only motivated given an inconsistency view on truth. What we have now seen is that Scharp's considerations don't favor assessment-sensitivity over indeterminacy. And surely one does not need the full strength of an inconsistency view in order to argue that the truth predicate is semantically indeterminate.

²¹ p. 243.

²² In my (2010) I defend an view on indeterminacy of the kind in question, and discuss proper assertibility to some extent.

4. Replacement

Having criticized, at some length, Scharp's motivation for embracing an inconsistency view, I should note that the case for an inconsistency view plays a much less central role in Scharp's overall argument than one might be led to think by the structure of the book. Scharp's official line of argumentation is this. The naïve truth rules are constitutive principles for our ordinary truth predicate. The liar paradox shows this predicate, and the concept it expresses, to be inconsistent. Hence we must look for a replacement, and the replacement had better have the disquotational features that we want a truth predicate to have. In fact, the best replacement is a team of two predicates, for this team gives us the disquotational features better than any one predicate would.

But here is an alternative argument for replacement, one which bypasses the inconsistency view altogether: To get the disquotational features we want in a truth predicate, a pair of predicates works better than any single predicate would. Since our actual truth predicate is only one, it should be replaced. Hence, there is an argument for replacement that does not proceed via an inconsistency view. (None of this should be surprising. Ordinary concepts can be appropriately replaced by theoretical ones for various purposes independent of inconsistency.)

I also think that one can favor an inconsistency view without favoring replacement. I have elsewhere discussed this at some length so let me here be brief.²³ Saying that a concept is inconsistent certainly sounds like a way of condemning the concept. But while the inconsistency of the concept would be a damning feature of it if the inconsistency of a concept meant that it applied to everything, or to nothing, or that employing it demanded having inconsistent beliefs or reasoning incoherently, nothing like that is the case on Scharp's own inconsistency view. On his view, the semantics of 'true' is not trivial. And on his view, employing 'true' does not require having inconsistent beliefs or reasoning incoherently: it only involves a default entitlement to believing inconsistent things.

Once inconsistency and need for replacement are clearly seen to be separate issues, the question becomes all the more central: why, exactly, does Scharp favor replacement? One theme that keeps coming up in the discussion is

²³ See Eklund (2014).

that truth has an expressive role: it is a device of endorsement and a device of rejection. But the ordinary concept of truth, which so to speak is aimed to be both at the same time, is inconsistent. We can consistently have the device of endorsement we want and the device of rejection we want only given a division of labor: we have one concept, descending truth, for one job, and another concept, ascending truth, for the other.

The theorists who most centrally emphasize the expressive role of truth are deflationists. And if Scharp were a deflationist I could easily see his reasoning. The case for replacement would simply be that the new pair of predicates better perform the expressive role. But Scharp forcefully rejects deflationism, emphasizing that truth has an explanatory role, contrary to what deflationists insist. He says, “The replacement strategy depends on truth’s explanatory role—otherwise there is no reason to replace truth. So deflationists have no reason to accept this view”.²⁴ I don’t think this is a compelling reason to take the replacement strategy to be incompatible with deflationism. Even if the deflationist holds that truth does not have an explanatory role, she thinks the notion of truth has a role in a theory – it serves, or is meant to serve, an important expressive role. But that means that the deflationist can give an argument for replacement, and the tools are provided by Scharp. The argument would be that the ordinary notion of truth cannot actually play this expressive role well, but some replacement concept or concepts can play this expressive role well.

Moreover, Scharp never makes clear what he takes the explanatory role to be, such that considerations about what it takes to perform this explanatory role favor his replacements over the ordinary concept of truth and over other possible replacements. There is no dearth of candidates for what the explanatory role could be. Truth has been centrally appealed to in accounts that purport to expain meaning and content, belief, assertion, and various logical notions and is also a central notion in metaphysics. But Scharp spends only little time on where he thinks truth is explanatory, and the argument for making use of his replacement notions instead does not proceed via considering how well they play the supposed explanatory role in question.

²⁴ p. 281.

Chapter 8 is devoted to showing how talk about truth in various purportedly explanatory projects can be transposed to talk about ascending and descending truth. In some cases, Scharp says, the talk is best replaced by a pair of principles, in some cases it is best replaced only by talk of ascending truth, in some cases it is best replaced by talk of descending truth, and in some cases there is no acceptable replacement. Here are some of the principles Scharp brings up:

It is prime facie correct to believe that ϕ iff the proposition that ϕ is true.²⁵

The proffered content of a sentence uttered (plus perhaps other contextually determined parameters) determines its truth conditions.²⁶

To assert something is to present it as true.²⁷

While the principles are not stated in terms of explanation, it is easy to recast them as principles which (seek to) explain belief, content and assertion in terms of truth.

But absent from the discussion is any evaluation of the explanatory worth of the principles formulated in terms of Scharp's replacement concepts, or a comparison of their explanatory worth either to the original versions or to other replacements that might be offered. One might have expected direct arguments that Scharp's specific replacement principles involving one or both of the concepts of ascending truth or descending truth are more explanatory than rival principles would be, but no such arguments are provided.

A recurring theme concerns what is needed for truth-conditional semantics, so it is natural to hypothesize that Scharp would emphasize truth's explanatory role there. But Scharp actually expresses doubts concerning the role of truth-conditional semantics, predicting a coming "revolution" in philosophy of language where dynamic semantics replaces truth-conditional semantics.²⁸

I take it that Scharp relies on some assumption to the effect that where truth (or something truthish) has an explanatory role, it holds that if his

²⁵ p. 207.

²⁶ p. 208.

²⁷ p. 215.

²⁸ p. 207.

proposed replacements perform truth's expressive role better than alternatives, then they also perform truth's explanatory role better than alternatives do. Such an assumption may be correct, for all I wish to insist on. But I would have liked to see it defended. I don't see that it is anywhere near obvious.

Let me also briefly illustrate how explanatory role and the expressive role can come apart. In the face of indeterminacy, many theorists have distinguished between two concepts of truth, one of which is disquotational and the other of which, sometimes called definite or determinate truth, is not. In a classical setting, given that truth is disquotational (and falsity is too), one can for every sentence derive "S is true or S is false", but S is not determinately true or determinately false. Those who distinguish between two truth concepts can want to assign some roles traditionally assigned to truth to the non-disquotational concept. For example, one can think that it is definite truth that is the aim of assertion or norm of belief. McGee (2005) argues that it is definite truth that is needed to solve the problem of how to "understand the connections between our chalk marks and auditory outbursts and the things or states of affairs that they are about".²⁹ I don't endorse either of these claims about definite truth. But I think the possibility of a position like McGee's helps problematize the assumption that the relation between truth's expressive role and its explanatory role is straightforward in the way Scharp takes it to be.

Concluding remarks

Even though I find much to admire in Scharp's book, the focus here has been on problems. Even though I am favorably disposed to an inconsistency view on truth, I think Scharp's arguments for the view are not persuasive. And I think that before Scharp's case for replacement can be accepted, one would need to think more about the purposes for which one needs a notion of truth, and what best suits those purposes.

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²⁹ McGee (2005), p. 84.

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