



Book Review  
*Deflationism and Paradox,*  
edited by J.C. Beall and Bradley Armour-Garb

Sergi Oms Sardans  
Universitat Barcelona, LOGOS

*Disputatio* Vol. 4, No. 29  
November 2010

DOI: 10.2478/disp-2010-0011

ISSN: 0873-626X

## Book reviews

**Deflationism and Paradox**, edited by J.C. Beall and Bradley Armour-Garb. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 288 pp.

The 14 essays of this collection deal, as the title indicates, with the problem that the Liar Paradox poses for deflationist theories of truth.

Since the Liar Paradox was stated, about one thousand and three hundred years ago, by the Greek philosopher Eubulides of Miletus, it has been a topic that must be addressed by any investigation of the notion of truth. On the other hand, one of the most popular approaches to the concept of truth during the twentieth century has been deflationism; originating probably with Frege, this view has evolved in a myriad of versions.

There are good reasons to relate these two topics; first, there is not much deflationist literature on semantic paradoxes and, second, this kind of paradoxes seems to be, at least *prima facie*, more problematic for deflationist theories of truth than for non-deflationist ones.

Deflationist theories of truth are centered on the concept of truth and its use in our linguistic behavior. They deny that there is an underlying nature of truth and regard as conceptually and explanatorily fundamental the instances of the T-schema (angle brackets are intended to indicate some appropriate name-forming device either for sentences or for propositions, depending on the kind of truth bearer):

(T)  $\langle A \rangle$  is true if, and only if  $A$ .

So to speak, deflationism claims that all that can be said about truth does not go beyond the T-schema.

Why is the Liar Paradox, then, a special problem for Deflationism? Let us take first a Liar sentence such as

(The Liar) The Liar is not true.

By substitution in the relevant instance of the T-schema of the co-referential terms 'The Liar' and 'The Liar is not true' we arrive, by familiar reasoning, to a contradiction. Now, although non-deflationist theories can try to face The Liar by invoking brute metaphysical facts

and restricting the T-schema, it seems that this strategy cannot be followed by deflationist theories, since they could be accused of being committed to some underlying nature of truth. On the other hand, notice that, if deflationists assume (as they do) that falsity is truth of the negation, then to say that a sentence is neither true nor false is to say that the sentence is not true and that it is not the case that its negation is true, which, in classical logic, is to say that it is not true and true. This contradiction shows that deflationists must be careful if they want to use truth value gaps to face the Liar.

Contributors to the volume are J.C. Beall, Hartry Field, Graham Priest, Paul Horwich, Bradley Armour-Garb, Greg Restall, Michael Glanzberg, Anil Gupta, Christopher Gauker, Dorothy Grover, Volker Halbach, Leon Horsten, Alan Weir and Jody Azzouni.

Papers are organized in three parts. The first and the second ones deal with two of the main views within Deflationism: Disquotationalism and Minimalism. The third one, less unified, deals with other subjects more or less related to Deflationism.

Most authors defending the disquotational view understand the notion of truth as a device applied to sentences. They also understand the biconditional of the T-schema as a material equivalence; thus, the phrase 'is true' added to a quotation name of a sentence *A* yields another sentence equivalent to *A*. The Equivalence principle, which is at the core of disquotationalism, claims, precisely, that the sentence *A* and the sentence that *A* is true can always be intersubstituted and are cognitively equivalent. That is why the truth predicate is so useful; it allows us to express, by means of quantification, certain generalizations of the kind 'all you said yesterday was true.' This cognitive equivalence, which plays a central role in disquotationalist theories of truth, is captured by the instances of the T-schema, which are understood as trivial products of the fundamental cognitive equivalence. It is in this sense that the T-schema is not regarded as underived by Disquotationalism; nevertheless, it does not mean, disquotationalists claim, that it is not explanatory and conceptually fundamental. To sum up, Disquotationalism sees the truth predicate as a mere device the sole role of which is 'to enable generalizations that [...] we could not otherwise express' (p. 7). Since disquotationalists are committed to all instances of the T-schema, they try to solve the Liar paradox by giving up classical logic.

On the other hand, Minimalism, mainly defended by Horwich, applies the T-schema to propositions rather than sentences and,

unlike Disquotationalism, claims that such schema is underived. Our use of the word 'true' is then explained by our disposition to accept the instances of the T-schema; the idea is that the meaning of 'truth' is determined by our use of the word, which, in turn, is explained in terms of our dispositions to accept a given basic regularity, namely that expressed by the instances of the T-schema. The minimalist offers the idea just outlined as her account of the concept of truth. This account basically coincides with her account of the property of truth, for the minimalist theory of truth has as axioms also instances of the T-schema. Minimalism typically tries to solve the Liar paradox, not by rejecting classical logic, but by restricting the T-schema and taking only its unproblematic instances as correct.

As I said, Disquotationalism mainly tries to face the Liar by abandoning classical logic. That can clearly be seen in the papers that form the first part of the collection. Thus, Beall presents what he calls 'transparent disquotationalism,' a dialethic approach that saves the Equivalence principle and the T-schema (that is, the naïve theory of truth). Field, in a paper that could be read as a response to the previous one, presents a non-dialethic many-valued approach to the Liar (under the program of pure disquotationalism) and claims that, since we already have the naïve theory of truth within a non-dialethic logic, the dialethic view loses all reasonable motivations. Priest, in response to Field, argues that, although it is true that Field's approach is consistent whilst dialetheism is not, since inconsistency only arises in abnormal cases, it is not clear that this is a real advantage. The first part of the book is closed by another paper of Field, which discusses a proposal offered by Yablo that weakens classical logic and, adopting a new conditional capable of retaining the Equivalence principle, tries to face the Liar.

In their contribution to the second section, Armour-Garb and Beall analyze the stance of Minimalism on the Liar. They call this position, which takes the Liar to be indeterminate, 'Semantic Epistemicism.' According to Semantic Epistemicism, the Liar sentence is indeterminate in the sense that, although it is either true or false, it is impossible to know, due to semantic reasons and the restriction of the T-schema, which truth value it has. Recall that the meaning of 'true' is given by our disposition to accept the instances of the T-schema. Now, since, as I said, Minimalism faces the Liar by restricting the T-schema, there will not be any instance of such schema involving the Liar, which means that, within minimalist theory (which have as

axioms instances of the T-schema), we will neither be able to prove that the Liar is true nor that it is false. The minimalist takes this fact to show that it is conceptually impossible to know that the Liar is true and it is conceptually impossible to know that the Liar is false. Nevertheless, since Minimalism is committed to classical logic and, hence, accepts the principle of bivalence, the Liar is, after all, either true or false.

The virtues that Armour-Garb and Beall attribute to this approach are the lack of *Ad Hocery* and the possibility of offering a unified solution to semantic paradoxes and paradoxes related to the phenomenon of vagueness. About the former, minimalists can claim that ‘the regularity underlying our use of ‘not’ is incompatible with that underlying our use of ‘true’ (p. 92) and, hence, our inclination to accept the Liar instance of the T-schema is cancelled. The idea seems to be, thus, that we do not have dispositions to accept paradoxical instances of the T-schema, because they are inconsistent. I think, though, that the contingent Liar presents a problem for this view. Some sentences are paradoxical depending on some features of the world; take, for example, the sentence ‘the sentence written on the blackboard of room 202 is not true.’ If the world is such that a token of this sentence is written on the blackboard of room 202, then the sentence is paradoxical. That allows the possibility of paradoxical sentences such that we do not know (even after reflection) that they are paradoxical and, hence, makes less reasonable the claim that we are not inclined to accept its instances of the T-schema as correct.

The authors also claim that Semantic Epistemicism can offer a unified solution to semantic paradoxes and paradoxes related to the phenomenon of vagueness. Nevertheless, it is not clear whether this approach can count as a common solution; it is true that in both cases the semantic epistemicist can claim that the regularities involving our use of certain predicates do not completely determine their meanings and, hence, we cannot know the truth value of certain sentences involving them. But, should we not expect some story about the connection between vague and truth predicates that helps to explain why they can be treated in the same way?

Anyway, Armour-Garb and Beall do not consider Semantic Epistemicism a convincing point of view. One of the objections they raise is that, if some of the instances of the T-schema must be rejected, then there is no reason to assert the principle of bivalence, that is, there is no reason to assert that for any sentence *A*, *A* is true or *A* is

false. For  $A$  can always be a paradoxical sentence and, then, the  $A$  instance of the T-schema is not correct. And, for the same reason, we cannot assert generalizations like, for example, ‘an inclusive disjunction is true iff one of its disjuncts is true’ (p. 102). In his paper, Restall appeals to some ideas from Gupta’s revision theory to try to solve this problem. He proposes to interpret the instances of the T-schema as revision rules:

$\langle A \rangle$  is true (at stage  $i+1$ ) iff  $A$  (at stage  $i$ )

where stages are ‘what one uses to evaluate expressions’ (p. 104) containing the truth predicate. Notice that the truth value of the Liar oscillates from truth to falsity in every stage. The interesting thing is that it can be demonstrated that, after sufficiently many stages, all non-paradoxical sentences will become stable. That means that only the paradoxical ones oscillate. Now, the minimalist can say that the concept of truth is given only by the instances of the T-schema, read now ‘as rules of revision’ (p. 104). Then, since the T-schema do not determine any stage as an intended one, we cannot know whether the Liar is true or not; but we do know that it is true that the Liar is true or false at any stage  $i$ , for it will be either true or false at  $i-1$ .

Horwich and Glanzberg papers also concern Minimalism. Horwich establishes a comparison between Tarski’s and Minimalist’s approaches and argues that Tarski’s solution to the Liar could also be applied within Minimalism. Glanzberg, in the last paper of the second section, criticizes Minimalism using a comparison between the Liar and the Russell paradox and asking himself why there is a strengthened version (that is, a new paradox that can be constructed with the conceptual material used to solve the original one) only in the former case.

The third part is, as I said, less unified and covers independent and unrelated subjects. Gauker wonders what kind of definition of logical validity the deflationist can accept and argues that Deflationism is incompatible with the standard model-theoretic approach to validity, which defines validity in terms of preservation of truth in a model; Gauker claims that this approach is committed to an intended model, the model that assigns to every non-logical constant what it really refers to, and that Deflationism is unable to identify it, for it lacks a substantive account of reference. Consequently, alternative accounts of the notion of logical validity must be sought. Gauker presents one

based on the concept of a context for a conversation; logical validity, then, can be defined as preservation of assertability in a context. One of the problems of this approach to validity is that Gauker, in order to avoid paradoxes originated by the new assertability predicates, must block the possibility of anyone talking about the context she is in. The reasons that he offers for avoiding *Ad Hocery*, though, are not very convincing; he basically claims that, when we try to talk about the context we are in we change the context so that we cannot fulfill our goal. The only argument that Gauker seems to offer is a kind of appeal to authority; he uses an analogy with the claim, defended by Kant, Wittgenstein, Sartre and Ryle, that it is not possible to give a representation of oneself, because there will always be an aspect that will not fall under such representation. Some more explanations, though, about the relation between the notion of context and the self should be given in order to make this analogy really convincing.

The rest of the papers that form the third section are the following ones. Gupta argues that Deflationism is not threatened by semantic paradoxes and, consequently, deflationists should remain neutral with respect to them. Grover, using the notion of operative meaning (the use that a word has in a certain context), argues that, since the Liar sentence is never used in natural language (which does not mean that it is never mentioned), it has no operative meaning and, hence, it is not a philosophically interesting sentence. Halbach and Horsten's, and Weir's papers deal with some of the formal aspects of Deflationism; the former presents a new axiomatized theory of truth that, they claim, should be embraced by deflationists; in the latter, Weir presents a three-valued logic and applies it to an inductive account of truth à la Kripke offering a system that, according to him, preserves the naïve theory of truth and is capable of facing the Liar. In the last paper of the collection, Azzouni argues that the truth predicate is redundant, for its job (that is, enabling blind truth ascriptions) can be perfectly met by anaphorically unrestricted quantifiers, quantifiers that can bind prosentences and pronouns simultaneously.

The collection offers a comprehensive overview of the problem that semantic paradoxes pose for deflationist theories of truth. *Deflationism and Paradox*, thus, is a must-have for anyone interested in semantic paradoxes and the notion of truth, as well as those interested in philosophy of language in general. The only thing that I find criticizable is the four-paged introduction; a longer introduction, stating clearly the tenets of Deflationism (and its variants) and giving

more details about their relation with the Liar, would have been desirable.

Sergi Oms Sardans  
 LOGOS — Logic, Language and Cognition Research Group  
 Departament de Lògica, Història i Filosofia de la Ciència  
 Universitat de Barcelona  
 oms.sergi@gmail.com

**Sexual Solipsism: Philosophical Essays on Pornography and Objectification**, by Rae Langton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009, 405 pp.

*Sexual Solipsism* is an excellent collection of essays that collects some classic papers previously published by Langton, three new essays and several responses to critics. The book can be divided in three main topics. The first topic is pornography. In ‘Speech Acts and Unspeakable Acts’ and a series of later papers Langton develops MacKinnon’s claim that pornography silences and subordinates women, drawing on Austin’s speech act theory.

The second main topic of the book is related to objectification and in particular to sexual objectification. Langton interestingly presents two aspects of sexual objectification that she says are related, the moral dimension and the epistemological one. The first type of objectification, the Kantian one, involves treating someone as an object. The second type of objectification, that she calls the ‘Humean’ dimension of objectification, involves taking something as objective which is merely projected by our minds.

The third topic is sexual solipsism. We encounter two types of local sexual solipsisms: in the first type, someone treats a thing as a person; in the second type, someone treats a person as a thing. Langton will argue that in pornography we have both types of solipsisms which are intertwined. She interestingly draws on Kant and tries to offer a solution that allows one to escape from solipsism. A more detailed view on solipsism and escape is presented in her last essay ‘Love and Solipsism.’

I will develop here only two of Langton’s arguments and some criticisms. The first argument I will present is her argument for the claim that pornography is an illocutionary act of subordinating and silencing women. In the second part I will focus on the first dimen-