

KEVIN SHARP, **Replacing Truth**. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 352. ISBN 9780199653850, \$85.00.

At 300-some pages, with narrow margins and small print, the work under review, a spirited defense of an inconsistency view of truth, defies adequate summary, let alone evaluation, in the space available here. Let me to begin with simply list some of the topics addressed: After a short programmatic introduction, chapter 1 attempts a taxonomy of philosophical theories of the nature of truth (e.g. correspondence), philosophical theories of the nature of the paradoxes (e.g. contextualism), and types of formal logical models (e.g. Kripke's). Chapter 2 presents an account of inconsistent concepts. A main thesis of the book will be that our ordinary concept of *truth* is such a concept. This was Tarski's view, but until fairly recently it has not had many other supporters. Chapters 3 and 4 expound arguments involving liar paradoxes and strengthened liar paradoxes against theorists who attempt to vindicate the ordinary notion of truth and show that it is *not* inconsistent. There is a special emphasis on detailed critical examination of the views of the most recent and complicated consistency theories. Chapter 5 criticizes previous inconsistency theorists as well, mainly for doing nothing about *replacing* the defective notion of truth by something better. Chapter 6 presents an axiomatic theory ADT of a *pair* of notions, ascending and descending truth, that the author proposes as together providing a such replacement, leaving the task of making the connection between the axiomatic theory and empirical linguistic phenomena to later chapters. Ascending truth is supposed to admit inference, both in categorical and in hypothetical reasoning, from *p* to *it is true that p*, and descending truth inference from *it is true that p* to *p*. In the reasoning of the liar paradox and its various cousins, one always needs to use *both* forms of reasoning, and so the paradoxes are blocked once one splits the notion of truth in two. It is crucial to understand that it is not *being* claimed that the ordinary notion of truth is ambiguous between ascending and descending truth; rather, those are notions intended to *replace* the ordinary notion.) The chapter has a substantial technical appendix. Chapter 7 sketches a global stance in philosophy dubbed 'metrological naturalism', which is supposed to be the setting for what follows. Chapter 8 indicates how the ascending and descending notions are supposed to share the roles truth has heretofore played in connection with such notions as assertion, knowledge, validity, and so on. Chapter 9 is mainly concerned with how the pair of successor notions are supposed to function as replacements for the undivided truth concept in 'truth-conditional semantics'; the new-age relativism of John MacFarlane is brought in as part of the story. Chapter 10 briefly answers objections.

The greatest *philosophical* strengths of the book lie, in the reviewer's opinion, in the early chapters, and especially in the author's critique of consistency theories. Though in recent decades inconsistency theorists have become more numerous, they are still vastly outnumbered by consistency theorists, who are constantly coming out with new proposals. There seems to be a need every so often for inconsistency theorists to explain why the newest efforts of the consistency theorists fall short. John Barker did this in the nineties for the then-novel kind of contextualism

associated with Tyler Burge. The author now takes on the next generation of consistency theories, carefully dissecting the sophisticated or sophistical approaches of Hartry Field, Tim Maudlin, and others, showing them similarly wanting.

The greatest *logical* interest in the book, and hence presumably the greatest interest for readers of the present journal, is likely to lie in chapter 6. Despair of achieving consistency with our ordinary, undivided notion of truth motivates the introduction in that chapter of a pair of replacements, and the axiomatic theory ADT. An extremely elaborate model-theoretic construction is used to prove the consistency of this theory. The problem of determining proof-theoretic strength, recently surveyed in the case of other axiomatic theories of truth by Volker Halbach, may prove to be especially challenging in the case of this new theory.

The later chapters of the book are philosophically more ambitious, and inevitably will be even more controversial than the earlier ones. In the reviewer's opinion these chapters are also less successful. About the overarching idea of 'metrological naturalism' no more need be said than that no one could disagree with the author's disarming final statement about it (on the last page of text), to the effect that it 'needs considerable development before one could expect it to entice others'. But chapters 8 and 9 call for more scrutiny.

The applications in chapter 8 seem comparatively innocuous, but there is another common kind of application of the truth concept that one would expect to find discussed here that seems to be overlooked, namely, the following kind of reasoning about *truthfulness*. X says that  $p$  and that  $p'$  and that  $p''$  and so on; and  $p$  and  $p'$  and  $p''$  and so on; so it is true that  $p$  and true that  $p'$  and true that  $p''$  and so on; so X spoke truly the first time, and the second, and the third, and so on. Inductively we infer that X (usually) speaks truly. Now X says that  $q$ . We infer that (probably)  $q$  is true, and hence that (probably)  $q$ . Here we reason 'up' from past facts to X's truthfulness, then 'down' from X's truthfulness to present facts. The reasoning is blocked, in much the same way that the liar reasoning is blocked, once ascending and descending truth are distinguished. However, the author introduces as notion of 'safety' — in the end simply amounting to 'if ascending true then descending true' — so that with the additional assumption of safety for  $q$  we do in the end get the conclusion that (probably)  $q$ . Clearly the details of the principles governing 'safety' in this sense will be crucial, if we are to get the ordinary applications of the notion of truth, but not the paradoxes. (The place of such considerations on the author's approach is something like the place of considerations about when it is safe to use classical logic on approaches based on deviant logics.) Though the book is already long, more discussion of such matters — in particular, of what justifies a presumption of safety in particular cases, especially those where it is a contingent matter whether the example is paradoxical or not — would have been appropriate.

Chapter 9, on truth-conditional semantics in the wake of the bisection of the concept of truth, can be expected to become the most controversial part of the book. From quite early in the book the coming of this material later on has been heralded, but this advance publicity contains what is surely the weakest argument in the whole work. The author insists that a revision in the concept of truth like the one he proposes is essential because it is needed if truth-conditional semantics is to be made

fully general, applicable even to sentences containing the truth predicate. But is truth-conditional semantics itself essential? The author argues (pages 123–124) that to reject it would be to place philosophy in immodest opposition to the established science of linguistics. This *argumentum ad verecundiam* is simply preposterous.

Linguistics is not a science whose independence from philosophy is fully established; or rather, branches of it such as phonology are, while branches such as semantics emphatically are not. This can be seen from the facts that there are many academics who hold joint appointments in departments of linguistics and philosophy — something that simply does not happen with chemistry or geology — and that the branches of linguistics in which such persons work tend to be semantics and pragmatics. Moreover, within linguistics the truth-conditional approach to semantics enjoys no consensus in its favor. Notoriously, Noam Chomsky, the individual who has for half a century been overwhelmingly the most influential single figure among linguists, totally rejects that approach, and cogent objections have been raised more recently by Paul Pietroski and others. Moreover, truth-conditionalism of the kind favored by the author, deriving from Donald Davidson, does not even enjoy unanimous support among those semanticists more favorable than Chomskyites to formal approaches. Indeed, the author himself seems more sympathetic to so-called dynamic semantics, though he does not enlarge upon the matter.

Setting aside the question of the status of truth-conditionalism, and whether we really need it, the exposition of the author's revised version brings in new-age relativism in a way that may not be necessary or desirable. Early on the author suggests that the way Scharpians, who distinguish ascending from descending truth, should regard naive uses of an undivided truth concept should parallel the way Einsteinians, who distinguish rest from relativistic mass, regard Newtonian uses of an undivided mass concept: often the truth-values of assertions involving such uses will depend on which of the two replacement notions of truth or of mass, as the case may be, one considers. Rather than rest content with this illuminating analogy, the author later attempts to assimilate this sort of case to the kinds of cases of 'assessment-relativity' considered by MacFarlanites. It is not clear that this accomplishes anything but to involve the author in controversies over the new-age approach. (But at least we are not told about MacFarlane what we are told about Davidson, that to question his ideas is to behave like a creationist or flat-earthier.)

To close on a more positive note, as is only just given the many virtues of the work, there is an enormous amount to be got out of this book, and even from the parts of it most vulnerable to criticism, including enlightenment on a great variety of topics I have not had space even to mention. Those who follow the literature on truth can expect to be encountering discussions of this work for years to come, and challenging as its rather dense argumentation sometimes is, no one with a serious interest in truth studies can afford to ignore it.

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