Irreplaceable Truth

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Forthcoming in *Synthese*

Abstract

Conceptual engineers are always on the lookout for concepts that can be improved upon or replaced. Kevin Scharp has argued that the concept TRUTH is inconsistent, and that this inconsistency thwarts its ability to serve in philosophical and scientific explanatory projects, such as developing linguistic theories of meaning. In this paper I present Scharp's view about what makes a concept inconsistent, and why he believes that TRUTH in particular is inconsistent. Then I examine the concepts that he suggests should replace TRUTH for various explanatory and expressive duties. I argue that those concepts are not up to the tasks for which they are posited, and so Scharp's replacement methodology itself needs to be reengineered.

Introduction

If concepts are tools our minds use for categorizing, representing, and understanding the world, how should we respond if we discover that one of them is seriously defective? That is the question conceptual engineers raise, and Kevin Scharp has provided one of the most thoroughgoing examples of what a conceptual reengineering project involves. Scharp argues that the concept TRUTH is inconsistent, and should therefore be replaced (for certain purposes) by a pair of replacement concepts.[1] I argue that those replacements are not up to the task. Although my objections don't entail that Scharp's inconsistency view about TRUTH is incorrect, they do raise doubts about the tenability of the framework Scharp uses to defend his view.

I begin in section 1 by presenting Scharp's account of inconsistent concepts, and argue that inconsistent concepts are ontologically empty. In section 2 I present his argument for why TRUTH is inconsistent, and then discuss his replacement concepts, demonstrating how our understanding of them is crucially limited. Next I argue that Scharp's replacements cannot perform the expressive and

[1] Words in small caps denote concepts. Properties are frequently identified with italics.

explanatory duties for which he himself commissions them. In section 3 I argue that Scharp's replacements cannot replicate the crucial expressive duties of TRUTH, even outside of paradoxical contexts. In section 4 I argue that Scharp's replacements cannot fulfill the explanatory functions that, by his own lights, any replacement for TRUTH must fulfill.

1. Scharp on inconsistent concepts

In Scharp's framework, concepts have constitutive principles.[2] These principles determine the meaning for the words that express the concept. For example, presume that *If something is triangular, then it is three-sided* is a constitutive principle for TRIANGLE such that it is part of what gives meaning to the word 'triangle'. Because this principle partly determines what the word 'triangle' means, encountering someone who denies it may trigger *meaning reflection*, where you wonder if this person means something different by 'triangle': "Violating a constitutive principle is a reason for thinking that someone doesn't mean what you do by one of the words in the conversation" (Scharp 2019: 444; cf. 2013a: 47, 2013b: 431, and 2020: 408). If someone tells you about the seven-sided triangle they drew last week, you have (at least some) reason to suppose that they mean something other than TRIANGLE when they use 'triangle'. Being a constitutive principle is no guarantee of analyticity or even truth, as some can be used to derive consequences that contradict the facts; such principles, therefore, are untrue. When the principles that are constitutive of a concept contradict the facts, the concept is inconsistent.[3]

Words that express inconsistent concepts are perfectly meaningful—their constitutive principles, though collectively untrue, nevertheless determine a meaning for the words that express them. But their presence in one's idiolect is an alethic time bomb: reasoning with inconsistent concepts exposes one to deriving what isn't true. Take Scharp's example 'rable' (2007a: 296, 2007b: 607, 2013a: 36). He stipulates a meaning for 'rable' via these two principles:

(1) For all x, 'rable' applies to x if x is a table.
(2) For all x, 'rable' disapplies to x if x is a red thing.

[2] See Scharp 2019: 438-446 for the most detailed presentation of his view on constitutive principles, where he presents it as a measurement theory.

[3] I write 'contradict the facts' rather than 'are false', as Scharp does (2007b: 608, 2013a: 36, 2019: 422). This is because, as I argue below, Scharp is committed to nothing being false.

These principles make the word 'rable' meaningful, and so are constitutive of the concept RABLE. If you reasoned with these principles while shopping at IKEA, you would conclude that the blue table in front of you is a rable, and that the red sofa to your left is not a rable. The inconsistency arrives when you notice the red TINGBY side table. Using (1) and (2), you can conclude that it's a rable because it's a table, but also that it's not a rable because it's red. Alternatively, principles (1) and (2) entail that the red TINGBY you're staring at doesn't exist. So the principles are inconsistent because they (in conjunction with some facts) entail something untrue. Consequently, RABLE is inconsistent: while RABLE exists and 'rable' is meaningful, at least some of its constitutive principles are untrue.

The conceptual and linguistic implications of inconsistent concepts are straightforward. But there are metaphysical consequences as well. On Scharp's view, some words designate properties and express concepts (2021b: S648). For example, the word 'white' expresses the concept WHITE and designates the property *being white*, which is the property that belongs to all and only things that are white. Not all words succeed in designating properties. In fact, Scharp argues that 'true' doesn't designate a property "because no property comes close enough to satisfying the platitudes for truth" (2021b: S650). The reason that Scharp thinks that no property satisfies those platitudes is that they are inconsistent. (Consider: given what we know about rables, if there is a property *being a rable*, then it must be the sort of property that, *per impossibile*, both applies and doesn't apply to the red TINGBY.) Because the constitutive principles for inconsistent concepts cannot be satisfied, there are no properties designated by words that express inconsistent concepts.[4]

Conceptual inconsistency therefore has ontological implications. If a concept is inconsistent, then—*precisely by virtue of that inconsistency*—it can't be used to categorize anything in the world. Simply put, there are no properties (or, if you prefer, no *instantiated* properties) that correspond to inconsistent concepts. Wherever they are found, inconsistent concepts inherently misfire, and fail to represent anything in the world. This feature of inconsistent concepts is shared by what we might call—for lack of a better phrase—*concepts of impossibility* such as ROUND SQUARE.[5] These concepts aren't inconsistent because their constitutive principles don't contradict the facts. Reasoning with *For all* x, x *is a round square if and only if* x *is round and* x *is square* will lead you to the sound conclusion that there are no round squares. Hence, while there is something rationally destructive about inconsistent concepts that is

[4] See also my 2022: 689-691.

[5] Scharp refers to these concepts as being "unsatisfiable" (2013a: 39, 2019: 458), but that doesn't distinguish them from inconsistent concepts.

absent in concepts of impossibility, both are metaphysically broken: things can't be the way these concepts need them to be. Since Scharp believes TRUTH is inconsistent he is committed to there being no property *being true*, and thereby to nothing being true.[6]

2. TRUTH and its replacements

Scharp argues that TRUTH is inconsistent. The basic argument is that TRUTH's constituent principles, together with empirical facts such as liar sentences being meaningful, entail a contradiction. The relevant principles are:

(3) For all *p*, if '*p*' is true then *p*.
(4) For all *p*, if *p* then '*p*' is true.

These principles manifest truth's "transparency": in some sense, a claim and its semantic ascent are equivalent. But they also wreak havoc when teamed up with sentences like:

(5) (5) is not true.

From (3) we may infer that if '(5) is not true' is true, then (5) is not true. Because '(5) is not true' *is* (5), it follows that if (5) is true, then (5) is not true. From (4) we may infer that if (5) is not true, then '(5) is not true' is true. Because '(5) is not true' *is* (5), it follows that if (5) is not true, then (5) is true. Therefore, (5) is true if and only if (5) is not true: contradiction. Because (3) and (4) are constitutive of TRUTH (the evidence for which is provided by the fact that conversation with those denying (3) or (4) would provoke meaning reflection), TRUTH is inconsistent.

What is novel and most valuable about Scharp's view is that he proposes and gives theories of replacement concepts to play the various roles of TRUTH. That is to say, he thinks we need to add new concepts to our conceptual repertoire that can perform the practical and theoretical duties for which

[6] And likewise for falsity: nothing is false, either, given that FALSITY suffers the same inconsistency as TRUTH. Given Scharp's negative appraisal of what he calls the "error theory of truth" (2013a: 241, 2013b: 468, and 2021b: S672-S673), and his positive "assessment-relative" account of truth (2013a: chapter 9, 2013b), it seems that he would resist this implication. But I don't see how he can. He is very clear that he believes that there is no property of truth because TRUTH is an inconsistent concept (2013a: 263, 2013b: 493, 2014: 636, 2020: 413, 2021a: 673, 2021b: S650), and that "When something is true, it has the property of being true" (2021a: 675, 2021b: S648). It plainly follows that nothing is true.

inconsistent TRUTH is sorely inadequate.[7] Crucially, no *single* concept can perform that work and avoid paradox; hence any replacement approach to the study of truth needs to employ a division-of-labor strategy that divides TRUTH's role in half, with two distinct concepts bearing one of the loads individually. Scharp uses the names 'ASCENDING TRUTH' and 'DESCENDING TRUTH' for these concepts, but I believe that they are misleading.[8] On Scharp's view, there is no truth. There is no property of truth; being true is not a way that things can be. To say that something is ascending or descending true is to suggest that it has a *kind* of truth, albeit not the regular variety. But there are no kinds of truth, because there is no truth at all. We have an inconsistent concept, TRUTH (and the meaningful word 'true'), but due to its inconsistency there is nothing that could have any sort of property associated with it. Whatever ascending and descending truth are, they are not kinds of truth. It's to Scharp's rhetorical advantage to have his concepts look as much like TRUTH as possible; given the nature of my objections, it's to my rhetorical advantage to not bias the reader into thinking that his replacement concepts can be assumed to be just like TRUTH in all its non-paradoxical respects. So I refer to his replacement concepts as 'ASCENDY' and 'DESCENDY'.

A central duty of the replacement theorist is giving a thoroughgoing theory of the replacement concepts, and that is what Scharp offers (2013a: chapter 6). After all, the words 'ascendy' and 'descendy' remain meaningless until Scharp gives a clear account of the principles that constitute their meaning. Given the concept he aims to replace, Scharp emphasizes the consistency of ASCENDY and DESCENDY: they do not succumb to any paradox paralleling the alethic paradoxes, and reasoning with them will not land you straightaway in contradiction. Scharp presents the theory of his concepts by means of a list of twenty constitutive principles that govern ASCENDY and DESCENDY. These principles (collectively referred to as 'ADT') are part of what give 'ascendy' and 'descendy' their meaning. (Also important, as seen below, is what Scharp calls the "interpretation" of ADT and how it "is applied to languages" (2013a: 172).)

I will not present Scharp's defense of the consistency of ASCENDY and DESCENDY, nor his arguments for how they avoid generating paradoxes isomorphic to the Liar while not succumbing to revenge paradoxes. (This feat is easily the strongest plank in his platform for replacement; see Pinder

[7] Scharp advocates holding onto and employing TRUTH for ordinary (i.e., non-paradoxical) situations and non-explanatory purposes (e.g., 2013a: 2, 174, 275 and 2020: 412). Previously he had endorsed "retiring" TRUTH from our conceptual scheme (2007a: 273): "inconsistent concepts should not be employed" (2007a: 298). I argue below in section 3.2 that this retention is untenable.

[8] Ripley (2014) concurs. See also Greenough 2019: 416.

2015 and 2021and Bacon 2019 for doubts about it.) What I will do is teach you how to reason with ASCENDY and DESCENDY, much as I did above with RABLE. Start with ASCENDY. Half of Scharp's constitutive principles involve it, but most crucial is the first:

(A1) $\phi \rightarrow A(\langle\phi\rangle)$

Suppose you think that snow is white. (A1) tells you that if snow is white, then 'Snow is white' is ascendy. So 'Snow is white' is ascendy. (A1) serves as a kind of introduction principle, in that it tells you some conditions under which 'ascendy' applies to a sentence. It tells you, in effect, that the things you incorrectly thought were true are ascendy. Note that we have sufficient conditions only here: if something isn't the case, (A1) and its brethren don't say anything about its ascendyness. Thus, it's consistent with ADT that *both* 'Snow is white' and 'Snow is not white' are ascendy. The former is ascendy by way of (A1) and snow being white, and ADT is silent regarding the latter. Importantly, there is no corresponding elimination (or, better, disquotational) principle for ASCENDY. Suppose you know that a sentence that says that *p* is ascendy. Can you infer that *p*? No. Ascendy is thus weaker than truth. According to TRUTH's constitutive principles, one can infer freely between '*p*' and "*p*' is true'; but one can freely infer only from '*p*' to "*p*' is ascendy', not vice versa. This directionality is key to avoiding paradox.

Because snow is white, 'Snow is white' is ascendy. Is it descendy? I don't know. Eleven of Scharp's constitutive principles govern DESCENDY, and indeed three of them inform you as to when you may introduce it. However, what those principles—(D5), (D6), and (D7)—tell you is that tautologies of the first-order predicate calculus, theorems of Peano arithmetic, and the axioms of ADT are descendy. 'Snow is white' is none of those things. So the theory gives us no guidance.[9] ADT does tell us that DESCENDY (unlike ASCENDY) functions disquotationally:

(D1) $D(\langle\phi\rangle) \rightarrow \phi$

[9] As Bacon observes, it is consistent with ADT that *no* statement not covered by (D5), (D6), and (D7) is descendy (2019: 383-384).

If I were to know that some sentence that says that *p* were descendy, I *would* be able to infer that *p*. But not vice versa. So descendy is stronger than truth. This added strength exclusive to DESCENDY is key to avoiding paradox.

Scharp does provide one way of inferring that something empirical is descendy:

(M3) $\phi \wedge S(\langle\phi\rangle) \rightarrow D(\langle\phi\rangle)$

Principle (M3) establishes that if snow is white, and 'Snow is white' is *safe*, then 'Snow is white' is descendy. If a sentence is safe, then ASCENDY and DESCENDY line up: if '*p*' is safe, then *'p'* is ascendy if and only if it's descendy. So if I knew that 'Snow is white' were safe, I could infer that it's descendy. So what is safety? One of Scharp's principles governs what safety is:

(M2) $S(\langle\phi\rangle) \leftrightarrow (D(\langle\phi\rangle) \vee \sim A(\langle\phi\rangle))$

According to (M2), 'Snow is white' is safe if and only if it is either descendy or not ascendy. We know it is ascendy, so it is safe if and only if it's descendy. Is it descendy? If it's safe. Because Scharp defines safety in terms of descendy, and we can deduce that (non-logical) statements are descendy only if we already know they're safe, we're stuck without any way of determining which non-logical claims are descendy.[10]

Summing up, Scharp proposes that we add ASCENDY and DESCENDY to our conceptual scheme. Because these concepts are consistent, there are properties corresponding to them that sentences can possess. (These properties have always existed; what Scharp's concepts enable us to do is articulate and identify them.) Where we find these properties out in the world depends on the constitutive principles that identify the relevant property. Those principles tell us that because snow is white, 'Snow is white' is ascendy. They tells us that 'If something is a quokka then something is a quokka' is descendy. That they don't tell us much more will be central to my objections below.

[10] Scharp gives an informal gloss on unsafety: "the rough idea is that if applying [(A1)], [(D1)], and their converses to a sentence leads to contradiction, that sentence is unsafe" (2007b: 616). But this offers only a sufficient condition on unsafety, and so only a necessary condition on safety. The point remains that we can't apply (D1) until we know which sentences are descendy, and we don't know that independently of knowing which sentences are safe.

3. Endorsement and rejection

Much of the work on truth in the last century has focused on explicating the expressive utility enabled by having a truth predicate in one's language. One such use for the truth predicate is that it enables one to endorse or reject the assertions of others (see Scharp 2013a: 174). Consequently, capturing this expressive utility is a core desideratum of Scharp's replacement theory. In this section I contend that the ascendy and descendy predicates do not succeed in serving as devices for endorsement and rejection, which undermines the adequacy of Scharp's replacement proposal. First I argue that the replacement predicates fail to perform their intended expressive role. Next I counter a possible (but concessive) response: even if we can't rely on the new predicates, perhaps we can still rely on 'true' so long as we're not in a paradoxical setting. Finally, I consider how Scharp might respond to one of my key premises, that his notions of safety and descendy are inaccessible.

3.1. Expressive futility

In my view, truth's role as a device for endorsement and rejection is just a specific application of its more general "same-saying" ability. If Sophia says 'The store is sold out of yeast', Phil can endorse what she said by saying 'That's true' instead of saying 'The store is sold out of yeast' again. He can reject it by saying: 'No, that's not true' instead of 'The store is not sold out of yeast'. But he can do lots of non-committal things as well that have nothing to do with endorsement and rejection, like assert 'If that's true, then we can't bake bread today'. That sentence is perfectly equivalent with 'If the store is sold out of yeast, then we can't bake bread today'. So 'that's true' says the same thing in this instance as 'The store is sold out of yeast', even though that sentence is being neither endorsed nor rejected.[11] Basically, 'true' allows you to do whatever you can do with any particular content without having to state it explicitly again. It accomplishes this because of the (supposed) equivalence between a content and an ascription of truth to that content. Scharp breaks that equivalence, and so has to replace it. Even if the store is sold out of yeast, 'The store is sold out of yeast' is not true—nothing has the non-existent property of truth. So calling the sentence true is making a mistake about what someone said, not endorsing it.

[11] I don't have a formal definition of same-saying to offer here, as different theorists may disagree about its nature, given the various strengths of equivalence that may hold between claims and attributions of truth to those claims. But I hope that the examples offered help to isolate the general phenomenon in question.

Ascendy is too weak to serve as an endorsement device. This is straightforward, since establishing that a claim is ascendy does not establish the claim itself. If Sophia says that the store is out of yeast, and Phil declares that what she said is ascendy, he has said something weaker than what Sophia has said. After all, the claim that Phil has expressed doesn't entail that the store is out of yeast. As we've seen, it's consistent with the principles governing 'ascendy' that Sophia's claim and its negation are *both* ascendy. So calling someone's claim ascendy isn't a strong enough claim to establish what was said initially. Thus ASCENDY fails as a device for endorsement. Scharp agrees (2013a: 280). By contrast, calling someone's claim descendy is stronger than the original claim, so this could serve as a device for endorsement, much as 'That is known' does. But as we've seen we don't know how to identify descendy claims that aren't first-order tautologies or parts of Peano arithmetic or ADT. So in principle DESCENDY is a tool for endorsement, but one we can hardly ever use. Thus, Scharp has not provided us an adequate replacement tool for endorsement.

Here is another way of viewing the matter. The predicate 'is believed by Barry' is not a useful tool for endorsement. If Sophia tells Phil that their pet guinea pigs are in love, Phil doesn't endorse what she said by replying 'That's believed by Barry'. Maybe it is, but that doesn't establish that their pet guinea pigs are in love, which is what a proper endorsement would need to do. A device for endorsement needs to be factive; the factivity in turn enables the relevant disquotation. Ascendy is not disquotational: this is by design so as to avoid paradox. Now consider the factive predicate 'is believed by an omniscient God who hopes to retire in Kentucky'. This predicate would be a handy tool for endorsement, if only we knew when to use it. But we don't have an independent handle on its extension. The beauty of TRUTH is that it is the Goldilocks version of a tool for endorsement. It's not too weak like 'is believed by Barry', nor is it too strong like 'is believed by an omniscient God who hopes to retire in Kentucky'. Truth is a *same*-saying device, which is why it's just right. By design, neither 'ascendy' nor 'descendy' are same-sayers. "Stronger-sayers" like 'descendy' can in principle be tools for endorsement, but only if we know when to use them. And that is knowledge that we lack.

A parallel point applies to rejection. Sophia tells Phil that pizza is poisonous. If Phil responds by denying that 'Pizza is poisonous' is descendy, he doesn't thereby commit himself to pizza not being poisonous. Because the claim that 'Pizza is poisonous' is descendy is logically stronger than 'Pizza is poisonous', committing to the negation of the former does not require committing to the negation of the latter. So Scharp claims that ASCENDY is the proper device for rejection (2013a: 174). Phil can deny Sophia's claim by asserting that 'Pizza is poisonous' is not ascendy. If pizza were poisonous, then 'Pizza is poisonous' would be ascendy. So if the claim isn't ascendy, pizza isn't poisonous. The problem

again is that we still have no grasp on what would entitle Phil to declare that Sophia's claim is not ascendy. Denying that something is ascendy is stronger than denying that something is true because assigning 'ascendy' to something is weaker than assigning 'true' to it. Recall that it's consistent with ADT that 'Pizza is poisonous' and 'Pizza is not poisonous' are both ascendy. So for Phil to withhold 'ascendy' from 'Pizza is poisonous' requires more than just a rejection of pizza's poisonousness. Is Phil entitled to that extra bit of rejection? It's impossible to say: Scharp's principles governing 'ascendy' don't reveal what makes it less than truth, just as they don't tell us what makes descendy more than truth. Phil wants to deny *what Sophia said*. He can't use 'ascendy' to do that because ascendy claims are weaker than their corresponding ground-level claims.

TRUTH'S role in endorsement and rejection is a specific application of its same-saying role. ASCENDY and DESCENDY, by design, are not same-sayers. And one can use non-same-sayers for endorsement and rejection only if one has a handle on how they come apart from truth. But that's what we lack in Scharp's case: we don't have guidance on which claims are descendy and on which claims are not ascendy. So it's not just that Scharp's new devices are imperfect tools for same-saying that work most of the time, whenever the paradoxes are moot. (Scharp acknowledges that they don't serve their expressive role with respect to unsafe sentences.)[12] The point, rather, is that they don't work at all because we can't put them to work, even in non-paradoxical settings. If we could somehow know that most ordinary sentences had the property of being safe, then we could employ the ascendy and descendy predicates to endorse and reject them. But absent that knowledge, Scharp's replacement concepts fail to fulfill the expressive purpose that is one of their *raisons d'être*.

3.2. The unacceptability of inconsistent concepts

A possible response for Scharp would be to suggest falling back to using TRUTH—in spite of its inconsistency—for endorsement and rejection in non-paradoxical settings. According to this response, truth's same-saying ability can continue to be exploited so long as nothing paradoxical is afoot. As Scharp makes clear, he does not advocate eliminating TRUTH from our minds and 'true' from our mouths (2013a: 2, 2020: 406, 412). So perhaps we can retain TRUTH's expressive functions, even though we must accept its inability to exert any explanatory prowess. Central to Scharp's presentation is that the differences between truth on the one hand and ascendy and descendy on the other are

[12] See Scharp 2013a: 281. Cf. Ripley 2014 and Greenough 2019: 407, as well as Scharp's reply to the latter that concedes that his replacements don't always serve their advertised role (2019: 460-462).

minimal when we are not dealing with paradoxical situations. Consequently, he reasons, "it is *acceptable* to use 'true' iff one is dealing with a situation in which the difference between ascending truth and descending truth is negligible" (2013a: 153; emphasis added). I have already argued that we have no grasp regarding what those negligible situations are—I return to this issue in the next section. My goal in this section is to demonstrate that because TRUTH is inconsistent, it is *unacceptable* to continue using 'true' in the ways Scharp envisions, even if we are dealing only with safe claims.

When a sentence is safe, it is ascendy if and only if it's descendy. So safe sentences have both or neither of the properties corresponding to the new concepts. Because snow is white, then presuming that 'Snow is white' is safe, 'Snow is white' is both ascendy and descendy. Because snow isn't green, then presuming that 'Snow is green' is safe, 'Snow is green' is neither ascendy nor descendy. So ascendy and descendy closely resemble truth in safe contexts. But these facts provide no basis for the claim that it's acceptable to apply 'true' to 'Snow is white'. 'Snow is white' *isn't* true, if Scharp is right, so if one reasons by way of TRUTH's (untrue) constitutive principles from snow's being white to the truth of 'Snow is white', one has made an error. That's a bad form of reasoning, given Scharp's view: it uses untrue premises to derive an untrue conclusion. Nor should I use TRUTH to accomplish the various tasks that deflationists have identified as its expressive *raison d'être*. I shouldn't ever say 'The central thesis of Scharp's book is true' because if I agree with the central thesis of his book, then I won't believe that the central thesis of his book is true. Far from being legitimate, it would be transparently irrational to turn around and contradict myself in order to express agreement with Scharp. Because TRUTH is corrupt, nothing is or even could be true. There is no sense in pretending that things might still be true, once we accept that they're not.[13]

There is simply no basis for continuing to apply a corrupt concept in a serious (i.e., not pretending) way. One can't apply it to anything without making a mistake, and any argument one uses that asserts or commits to a constitutive principle that one rejects is, by one's own lights, unsound. No one should go around assigning properties to things when they don't believe in the existence of those properties. Bear in mind that Scharp is not advocating the view common among, say, mereological nihilists who reject the existence of chairs in favor of simples-arranged-chairwise. These theorists maintain that sentences committed to chairs are false but nevertheless "useful and appropriate" (Merricks 2001: 10). The justification for the continued use of the empty predicates is

[13] Fictionalists about truth disagree. See Beall 2004 and Armour-Garb and Woodbridge 2015. Scharp distances himself from the fictionalist approach to inconsistency (2013a: 136-137).

entirely pragmatic. (For one thing, it helps avoid all the meaning reflection that would inevitably result by going around denying the existence of tables and chairs.) This is not Scharp's approach: he gives no indication that his sense of 'acceptable' is purely pragmatic. To the contrary, he writes: "It seems to me that if it is permissible to use an inconsistent concept in certain situations (e.g., by asserting that "grass is green" is true), then words that express inconsistent concepts have non-empty extensions and anti-extensions" (2007b: 619). The permissibility here is not pragmatic. If something belongs in the extension of 'true', then it *is* true. For the mereological nihilist, the extension of 'table' is empty, even if it's pragmatically permissible to call the red TINGBY a table while shopping at IKEA. (Except in the metaphysics classroom display.) Calling the red TINGBY a table is a pro-social little white lie. Scharp is clear that he thinks continued uses of 'true' are not like that, but this view is inconsistent with the metaphysical fallout of TRUTH'S inconsistency. Scharp's early view that endorses the unacceptability of inconsistent concepts (2007a) is, it turns out, the correct one.

Scharp would likely reply by turning to his analogy with NEWTONIAN MASS, which he takes to be an inconsistent though useful concept.[14] He writes: "It is acceptable to use 'mass' iff one is dealing with a situation in which the difference between relativistic mass and proper mass is negligible. Likewise, it is acceptable to use 'true' iff one is dealing with a situation in which the difference between ascending truth and descending truth is negligible" (2013a: 153). The idea, I take it, is that NEWTONIAN MASS sufficiently *approximates* RELATIVISTIC MASS and PROPER MASS such that the actual differences between the old and new concepts can be ignored. The analogy, however, does not provide the support Scharp needs, and deserves much more scrutiny. There is no such thing as Newtonian mass, despite the fact that one might be able to deduce a correct (or approximately correct) prediction of some empirical fact within a physics problem while ignoring the relativistic nature of space-time. The right response to the utility of Newtonian mechanics for ordinary physics problems is not that things really do have Newtonian mass in the context of those problems, but that momentarily pretending that they do in certain contexts won't introduce any (further) discernible errors.

Notice, then, that any acceptability of continuing to use NEWTONIAN MASS *must* be purely pragmatic, on pain of scientific refutation. If Scharp said about NEWTONIAN MASS what he says about TRUTH, he'd be committed to saying that things *do* have Newtonian mass (that the extension of NEWTONIAN MASS is non-empty) whenever it's convenient to appeal to it in a physics problem. What Scharp is latching on to in the case of mass is that it's fine to pretend *as if* things have Newtonian mass

[14] Though Scharp also says that it's not good for "serious theorizing" (2013a: 134).

in scenarios where that little white lie makes no difference. But Scharp is adamant that his retention of TRUTH has nothing to do with playing pretend. So his analogy with NEWTONIAN MASS collapses.

It's important here to distinguish between two *concepts* approximating one another and two *theories* (and/or their predictions) approximating one another. Two theories that deploy different concepts may make predictions that approximate one another. If the question is, for example, how close the Earth and the moon will be to one another at a particular moment, a theory that (incorrectly) presupposes the existence of Newtonian mass may make a prediction that closely approximates the prediction made by a theory that (correctly) doesn't presuppose the existence of Newtonian mass. Here we have numerically specified predictions that can then be judged to approximate one another (or not). But two theories making predictions that approximate one another is distinct from the concepts embedded in those theories being approximations of each other. That latter sort of claim is left completely unclear absent any sort of metric by which to compare the concepts in question. It certainly can't be given extensionally, given that inconsistent concepts have empty extensions.

Furthermore, what is the alethic analogy of the physics problem? A likely answer is that it is an issue of interpretation, as in a case where TRUTH is being used in one of its expressive modes. Consider this interpretive puzzle:

> Naïve Ned believes that TRUTH is a consistent concept; he's never heard of the inconsistency theory of truth. Enlightened Edna knows better. Together they walk into a classroom where the sentence 'Free will and determinism are compatible' is written on the chalkboard. Pointing to the sentence, Ned says 'That's true'. Edna believes that Ned has just made a mistake in calling something true, but she has no trouble determining whether or not Ned is a compatibilist. What is Ned's view on free will and determinism?

This problem is easy to solve. Ned is a compatibilist because he used 'true' to endorse the sentence on the board. In so doing, he reasoned using corrupt constitutive principles that Edna rejects. To read Ned's mind, Edna relies on her knowledge of what TRUTH'S constitutive principles are and her belief that Ned employs them, but that doesn't mean she actually *uses* those principles as premises in her own deduction. She just needs to know that Ned relies on them.[15]

[15] Note that this exercise is quite easy, and Edna doesn't need to endorse Scharp's assessment-sensitivity theory to accomplish it (see chapter 9 of Scharp 2013a and 2013b). Scharp claims that an advantage of assessment-sensitivity views

Suppose Edna wants to inform Ned that she, too, is a compatibilist. She would succeed if she were to say to Ned 'You're right, that is true'; Ned now infers that Edna also endorses the sentence on the board. This is an outright lie, given that Edna is committed to exactly the opposite claim. But it would be obnoxious and impractical for her to say to Ned: 'No, that sentence is not true. But: free will and determinism are compatible'. In that scenario, Ned would have reason to think that Edna doesn't know what 'true' means. (Replacement theorists of any stripe are always faced with a conflict between maintaining sincerity and causing meaning reflection in their interlocutors.) Nevertheless, Scharp's advice to Edna still seems to be that she go on using 'true' as a device for endorsement, so long as no paradoxes are afoot. But look at what this recommendation means for Edna. She wants to assert a claim that she accepts. Scharp asks Edna to express her agreement with Ned by uttering a sentence that she rejects. Sure, Edna's uttering 'That's true' would fulfill one conversational function, but at the same time force her to violate conversational and moral norms (e.g., don't lie) and contradict her own philosophical views. The right way to endorse someone's claim is not to assert something that you reject.

Again, one could invoke a pragmatic form of legitimacy for using 'true' here: though one thinks with the learned, one must speak with the vulgar. That's not the legitimacy with which Scharp intends to ground the preservation of truth-talk (it obviously doesn't show that things *are* true), but it's the only legitimacy I can identify behind continuing to use 'true' once one has accepted that TRUTH is corrupt. Certainly, Scharp and his fellow replacement theorists shouldn't go around endorsing and rejecting claims by using 'true' with each other, as that would be an exercise of bad faith and hypocrisy. According to replacement theorists, 'Snow is white' is not true: end of story. It's not like it is temporarily true in conversational contexts where paradoxes are irrelevant.

I don't deny that there are cases where it's appropriate to assert something that you reject. I might believe that it's 12:01 p.m. and yet say 'It's noon' if someone asks me what time it is. A natural thing to say here is that my assertion is "approximately true", and "close enough" to fulfill the conversational purposes that the assertion sets out to accomplish. Approximate truth is also useful, as above, for understanding why theories that employ broken concepts like NEWTONIAN MASS can nevertheless be empirically successful. But here again the analogy breaks down (and not just because nothing is approximately true for the replacement theorist). Calling 'Snow is white' true does not

is that those who believe TRUTH to be inconsistent and possess ASCENDY and DESCENDY can "interpret people—in a consistent way—who use 'true'" (2013a: 260). So can Edna.

approximate calling it what it is (for the replacement theorist), namely, ascendy (and perhaps descendy as well). Ascendy is not an approximation of truth.[16] It's just a different alethic property, one that certain sentences have and others don't. And truth isn't even a property at all, or at least not an instantiated one. To call a sentence true is to assign it a property it couldn't possibly have, not to come close to assigning it a property it does have.[17]

3.3. The inaccessibility of safety

My argument for the expressive futility of ASCENDY and DESCENDY turns on my earlier argument that our knowledge of how to determine their extensions is critically impoverished. Because we have no independent basis for determining when something is safe, there is no way to determine when TRUTH's replacements come apart. Scharp interdefines safety, ascendy, and descendy, and so there is no way to break into the circle.

I believe that Scharp would respond to this argument by claiming that I am ignoring the role of interpretation in his theory. He presents the formal theory of ascendy and descendy (i.e., ADT), and then discusses how it is to be interpreted. ADT is thus a subtheory of the ultimate theory of ascendy and descendy (2013a: 153); the "interpretation" then, presumably, fills out the rest of the overall theory. He writes: "The guiding principle for interpreting ADT is that ascending truth and descending truth should be as close as possible to one another […] we can think of the guiding principle as saying that we should strive to minimize the set of unsafe sentences when interpreting ADT" (2013a: 169-170; cf. 203). So as we apply ADT to English, say, we assign safety to 'Snow is white' and 'Grass is purple' and other sentences we believe to be unproblematic. And now we can infer that those sentences are ascendy if and only if they are descendy.

The right response to Scharp here is that there is no sense in which it is up to us to decide which sentences in our language have any of the alethic properties of interest to his project. Scharp can take credit only for bringing ASCENDY, DESCENDY, and SAFETY into existence. In no way did he bring the properties *being ascendy*, *being descendy*, and *being safe* into existence. Framing the issue in terms of how to "interpret" the formal theory obscures this dimension of his view. Scharp thinks he has latched on to those three alethic properties, and so it is incumbent on him to tell us *what those properties*

[16] At one point Scharp uses the language of approximation, but doesn't provide the relevant metric that would make sense of it (2013a: 169-170; see also 266). As noted earlier, any such metric can't be given extensionally. The extensions of 'true' and 'ascendy' do not approximate one another; the former is empty, the latter vast.

[17] The notion of approximate truth itself, of course, is not without issues. See Schurz 2018 for discussion.

are. 'Snow is white' is ascendy because snow is white, and it's always been ascendy, even before Scharp conjured up his concepts. Scharp merely called our attention to that fact (a fact that we couldn't articulate before he gave us ASCENDY). Similarly, consider the new concept SCHARPY, which is governed by the following principle: *If a sentence appears in the published work of Scharp, then it is scharpy*. It's not up to me which sentences are scharpy, though it was up to me that sentences that are scharpy can be referred to as such by being called 'scharpy'. When one introduces a conceptual and linguistic mechanism for thinking and talking about a particular property, one doesn't thereby have any say over which things have that property.

ADT by itself doesn't tell us what properties they are; anything further that helps to identify them is not a matter of interpretation, but just further specification (via constitutive principles). Consider how Scharp introduces the concept SAFETY. He writes: "Intuitively, a safe sentence is one for which both directions of the principles for ascending truth and for descending truth hold. Unsafe sentences are those for which they do not" (2013a: 153). That is how he teaches us to use SAFETY and 'safe'. That's what it is for a sentence to be safe. So is 'Snow is white' safe? I don't know, because although I know it's ascendy, I have no guidance as to whether it's descendy. It's descendy or it isn't, and the fact that it's descendy if and only if it's safe isn't helpful.

(I have framed my objection in terms of my ignorance of which sentences are descendy. I've been presuming that 'Snow is white' is descendy or it isn't—I just don't know which. But there's a stronger view in the offing: it's simply indeterminate whether the sentences uncovered by (D5), (D6), and (D7) are descendy. Consider SCHARPY again. I invented this concept, and taught it to you by way of a single sufficient condition. There's nothing else one could possibly mean by 'scharpy' beyond what I just told you, because I made it up. I'm pretty sure that the sentence 'I once officiated a wedding between an echidna and a paperclip' has never appeared in Scharp's corpus, used or mentioned. Is it scharpy? Well, what could possibly settle the question? I have given you no conditions under which something is not scharpy. I haven't given you other conditions for being scharpy. So one should perhaps conclude that it's simply indeterminate or undefined what to say about the scharpiness of sentences that fall outside Scharp's corpus. This would seem to render SCHARPY a *partial* concept, a concept that fails to apply or disapply to everything (Scharp 2013a: 40).[18] If ASCENDY and DESCENDY

[18] The metaphysics of properties corresponding to partial concepts deserves some consideration, since they also appear to be misbehaved: no extension seems to correspond to them in particular. If the right conclusion is that partial concepts are also unsatisfiable, then we have another problem for Scharp's replacements: ASCENDY and DESCENDY appear to be partial, and so nothing may be ascendy or descendy after all.

turn out to be partial because ADT is simply silent on how they apply to most sentences, then the set of safe sentences untouched by (D5), (D6), and (D7) shrinks to nil, and the replacement concepts will therefore be unable to satisfy their expressive duties.)

Return to my quandaries about when something is descendy or safe. Those are properties that sentences do or don't have, independently of what I or Scharp or anyone else thinks. But which properties are they? It entirely falls to Scharp, who made up the words, to identify the properties in question. If his account of what 'descendy' and 'safe' mean doesn't answer the question, what possibly could?[19] Scharp notes that it is "compatible with ADT" that a language with no semantic vocabulary has no unsafe sentences (2013a: 170). Hence, it's possible that a semantically stripped-down version of English could contain no unsafe sentences, and so it's possible that the sentences of actual English that don't involve semantic terms are safe. But what matters is that it is *actual* that all the semantics-free statements of English are safe. That they *might* be is no substitute. But how do we determine that all the semantics-free statements of English are in fact safe?

What I am pressing here can be formulated as a dilemma. Scharp needs it to be uncontested that 'Snow is white' and its boring, empirical friends are safe, if ASCENDY and DESCENDY are going to be useful for their expressive purposes. But how do we establish that 'Snow is white' is safe? I see two options, both of which are problematic.

First, Scharp could simply stipulate that 'Snow is white' and its comrades are safe. But he has no authority to do *that*. He can say what 'safe' means, but having done so he doesn't get to determine what is safe. Given that snow is white, stipulating that 'Snow is white' is safe is tantamount to stipulating that it's descendy, which is even stronger than stipulating that it's true. And that's not up to him.

Alternatively, he could stipulate that 'ascendy', 'descendy', and 'safe' all mean something such that it follows that 'Snow is white' is safe. This would be a dimension of their meaning that extends beyond the twenty provided constitutive principles, and so would be a supplementary axiom to ADT. As a result, it would have to be a constitutive principle of SAFETY that 'Snow is white' is safe. If someone (say, me) suggests that some particular empirical sentence might not be safe, that is reason to think that they don't understand safety. (In essence, a sentence's being safe becomes an analytic matter.) I infer that this is not Scharp's view, since he says merely that his theory is *compatible* with all

[19] Cf. Bacon: "In so far as we have a grasp on these notions [i.e., ascending truth, descending truth, and safety] at all, it is acquired solely by the things Scharp tells us about them" (2019: 383).

the empirical sentences being safe, not that his theory proves by definition that they are. Moreover, it would be undesirable to stipulate the nature of safety in this way. Doing so amounts to adding an enormous *ad hoc* element to one's replacement theory that is precisely what Scharp is trying to avoid (2019: 435). If one can simply allow 'safety' to mean whatever it needs to in order to avoid generating any paradoxes, one may as well do the same for truth: let all the constitutive principles for TRUTH be the ones that don't generate any paradox. Plus, plenty of future sentences—sentences we can't presently formulate because they will express concepts we don't yet possess—need to be safe as well, and it's not clear how Scharp can define a concept such that it's constitutive of that concept that it applies, axiomatically, to all sorts of sentences that Scharp literally cannot comprehend. (Each *particular* empirical sentence needs to be connected, constitutively, to SAFETY, including all those that Scharp cannot understand.)

Scharp might be responding to my main concern here when he writes that "one condition for the replacements is that empirical sentences (i.e., those without occurrences of semantic expressions like 'true', 'refers', 'ascending true', 'descending true', etc.) are all safe. That is, they are either descending true or not ascending true […] Although this condition is not built into ADT, it is a crucial element of how ADT is applied to languages" (2013a: 172). The question is what 'condition' comes to. His suggestion that it's not built into his theory suggests that he doesn't embrace the second horn of my dilemma. The comment about applying ADT to languages, again, doesn't speak to the concern; Scharp's theory has to tell us what 'safe' and 'descendy' mean—nothing else can do that. But Scharp also needs the result that ordinary sentences are safe. So far as I can tell, that result is either the product of illegitimate brute force or a complete leap of faith.[20]

4. Explaining meaning

So far I've argued that Scharp's replacement concepts do not satisfy his desideratum of capturing TRUTH's core expressive functions such as expressing agreement and disagreement. In this section, I turn to another core theoretical desideratum for Scharp. Scharp is most concerned with showing how his replacement concepts can fulfill TRUTH'S *explanatory* roles. The explanatory role of TRUTH that most animates Scharp is its role in linguistics. Specifically, he has in mind the truth-

[20] Bacon claims that Scharp treats safety as a primitive (2019: 375). I don't see that in the text, though he may be latching on to the idea that Scharp can only claim that ordinary sentences are safe by assuming that they are. In responding to Bacon, Scharp claims (2019: 430) that he "stipulates" that all grounded sentences are safe at Scharp 2013a: 170, though I don't find that obvious in the text. Nor is he bestowed with any such power.

conditional theorist of meaning who analyzes meaning in terms of truth (e.g., Davidson 1967). Scharp reserves his harshest scorn for those who disagree with him in this terrain, yet it's not clear that he has offered a coherent stance on the matter.

Scharp's wielding of truth-conditional theories of meaning lands his critics in a philosophical Catch-22. He is very clear that those who reject the inconsistency approach to TRUTH "have to give up truth-conditional semantics as an all-purpose device for explaining facts about natural language" (2013a: 121). The problem as usual is due to liar sentences: giving a truth-conditional account of their meaning lands one in contradiction. Thus, those in the consistency camp are committed to there being "no hope" for "one of the main goals of contemporary formal semantics" (2013a: 121). If one responds by pursuing a non-truth-conditional approach to meaning, then one "is just as condemnable as being a creationist or a flat-Earther or a proponent of any other non-empirical superstition" (2013a: 124).[21] Clearly, then, rejecting truth-conditional semantics is off the table.

But be careful about retaining it, even if you adopt the inconsistency theory. Patterson (e.g., 2009) has also defended an inconsistency theory of TRUTH, though he derives the radical conclusion that natural languages are meaningless. What leads him to this conclusion, in Scharp's view, is the truth-conditional theory of meaning: "It seems to me that Patterson adopts his view because of a commitment to truth-conditional semantics. […] he is so sure that meaning should be explained in terms of truth conditions that it has convinced him that there is no such thing as meaning" (2013a: 129).[22] Scharp, accordingly, charges Patterson with philosophical infanticide: "it is more like throwing out the baby *instead of* the bathwater" (2007b: 612, 2013a: 129). Clearly, then, accepting truth-conditional semantics is off the table.

Scharp's attitudes about truth-conditional theories of meaning are anything but straightforward. They are said to have a place in science analogous to the roundness of the Earth. Yet Scharp prognosticates that "there is a coming revolution in philosophy of language" in favor of dynamical semantics that will render it unclear "what place truth conditions have in explaining meaning any more" (2013a: 207). Confusing matters further is that Scharp recognizes that truth-conditional semantics "cannot be saved in its current form"; in its place we need a "new theory" (2013a: 125). Eklund also notices these tensions, suggesting that "there's a sense in which Scharp

[21] Burgess (2014: 1089) *argues* that Scharp is cavalier in his inference here. Scharp responds not by engaging the argument but by mocking him (2019: 453).

[22] Cf. Scharp 2007b: 611-612, where this criticism is also directed at Azzouni (e.g., his 2003).

himself must say that truth-conditional semantics is unacceptable" (2019: 394). Here we see one effect of indulging Scharp in his use of 'ascending truth' and 'descending truth'. The unstated presupposition here is that a theory of meaning in terms of those is still a *truth*-conditional theory of meaning. But such a theory is no more a truth-conditional theory of meaning than is the theory of meaning I might build on the basis of my pet hamster Alitheia.

The "sense" of the truth-conditional theory of meaning that Scharp must reject is the only sense worth taking seriously: the view that the meanings of sentences are to be understood in terms of their truth conditions. Ascendy conditions are not truth conditions. Descendy conditions are not truth conditions. If TRUTH is inconsistent, then there is no property of truth, and so nothing is true. Therefore, no sentence has any truth conditions whatsoever. There is no possible condition of the world that would render 'Snow is white' true, not even snow's being white. If meanings are or depend on truth conditions, then no sentence of any language has a meaning, on Scharp's view.[23] This is the view Patterson defends. Scharp is himself stuck on his dilemma between empirical superstition and philosophical infanticide.

Ultimately Scharp must reject the truth-conditional theory of meaning, which places him in the same camp as all of those whom he accuses of offending Science. The fact that Scharp has the beginnings of a replacement for the truth-conditional theory of meaning provides him no escape from being a linguistics-denier. As Scharp observes, "no one has even heard of ascending truth" (2019: 466). *A fortiori*, no linguist has ever heard of ascending truth, and so ASCENDY (alongside DESCENDY) enjoy zero uptake in linguistics. Since linguists have at least heard of, say, use theories of meaning, it seems that Scharp's approach to meaning has the least engagement with linguistics of all the current contenders.

One response Scharp might make here, parallel to the move considered in section 3.2, is that although truth-conditional theories of meaning can't ultimately be correct, they are still useful in ordinary cases, just as Newtonian mechanics is useful for certain kinds of physics problems. And Scharp might claim that his outlook is the most capable of extracting whatever explanatory utility can be distilled from truth conditions. In fact, however, Scharp's view is the least able to find any utility in truth conditions. With respect to physics, Scharp's view is that Newtonian mechanics remains useful

[23] Furthermore, Scharp declares MEANING inconsistent (2020: 397). Therefore, *being meaningful* is not a property that something could have. Yet Scharp tells us he can't imagine "reading in the newspaper that scientists have discovered that the entire French language is meaningless" (2007b: 611, 2013a: 128).

whenever the difference between relativistic mass and proper mass is negligible; similarly, he might claim that we can still appeal to truth conditions for those cases where the difference between ascendy conditions and descendy conditions are negligible. I've argued already that we don't know how to identify such cases, but set that aside. Suppose Scharp is correct about which cases feature ascendy conditions and descendy conditions that don't come apart. Those are not cases where sentences have truth conditions. Scharp believes that 'Snow is white' is a case where it is ascendy if and only if it is descendy. But it has *no* truth condition whatsoever. No matter what happens to the world, the sentence can never be true, because being true is not a way that a sentence can be, on Scharp's view. Truth conditions are of no use to a theorist who is committed to the non-existence of truth.

Let's set aside Scharp's strident criticisms of his opponents and consider the outlook of his positive proposal, which offers an ascendy/descendy-conditional theory of meaning. Scharp must concede that truth-conditional semantics should play no role in the scientific study of language. What he should say is that truth-conditional theories of meaning are not (and never were) essential to the scientific study of language, but rather one (ultimately flawed) way of accomplishing an important theoretical task that is essential to linguistics. There is an independently specifiable theoretical role to be played in linguistics that is essential to the scientific study of meaning, and ascendy/descendy conditions are better suited to play that role than are truth conditions. That is what Scharp must say; my argument now turns to showing why Scharp's replacements are not up to that task.

The deficiencies in the replacement notions that led to their inability to replicate TRUTH's expressive roles are again the basis for why they cannot replicate TRUTH's explanatory virtues. A *truth*-conditional approach to meaning operates on the idea that the meaning of a sentence can be given by stating the conditions under which it is true. According to the myth of truth conditions, the sentence 'Snow is white' is true given the worldly condition that snow is white. This is also the case for the sentence 'Schnee ist weiß'. So those two sentences share the same meaning, since meaning tracks truth conditions. If I tell you that some sentence, I'll call it 'Rudiger', is true if and only if self-actualized people have fully developed ego integrity with well-developed boundaries, then you know what Rudiger means, even if you have no idea what sentence it is, or what language it comes from. What makes *truth* conditions suitable for the project of understanding meaning is that they (or the sentences expressing them) are equivalent to the claim at hand. It's because of the (supposed) equivalence between 'Snow is white' and "Snow is white' is true' that truth is up to the task of explaining meaning.

Now consider a weaker alternative to truth conditions. All true sentences are sentences, but not all sentences are true. Can the meaning of a sentence be captured by the conditions under which

it is *a sentence*? Suppose I offer you a potential sentence from an invented language that builds sentences from strings of digits, such as '10251021'. Now I tell you that the conditions under which that string is a sentence are that it's composed of at least two digits, and that the last digit is identical to the first digit. Now you know that '10251021' is a sentence. But you have no idea what it means. Had I told you that '10251021' is true just in case snow is white, you are now in a far better position to judge what it means: it means the same thing that 'Snow is white' and 'Schnee ist weiß' do. Telling you what makes something count as a sentence isn't enough to help you understand what it means.

Now consider a stronger alternative to truth. Can the meaning of a sentence be captured by the conditions under which it would be publishable in the Supercyclopedia, which collects only the most important facts known to humankind? The Supercyclopedia is compiled by the Committee, a panel of infallible sages who must unanimously agree on the significance of a fact in order for it to be included. Now you know what has to be the case in order for '10251021' to be published in the Supercyclopedia. Suppose it has been so selected; you still don't know what it means. If I give you a more specific accounting of its inclusion conditions—say, that snow be white and the Committee agree on the significance of that fact—then you have learned the meaning only by being told its *truth* condition.

These other conditions are non-starters for thinking about meaning. The problem for Scharp is that ascendy and descendy conditions are likewise no window into a sentence's meaning. Consider again '10251021', and let's suppose that it means that snow is white. One thing that knowing a sentence's meaning enables you to do is to know when you may assert it. According to the myth of truth conditions, this sentence is true if snow is white, and false otherwise. Therefore, since you know that snow is white, you know '10251021' is true. And if a sentence is true, its content may be asserted because 'true' enables disquotation. But now suppose that inconsistency theorists are correct and truth conditions don't exist; we must make do with ascendy and descendy conditions. For example, if snow is white, then '10251021' is ascendy. Next I notice that even if snow hadn't been white, it might still be ascendy. So learning that '10251021' is ascendy doesn't put you in a position to assert its content. '10251021' is assertible only if snow is white, and we have no clue as to whether its ascendy conditions match its assertibility conditions. *Being ascendy* is in this way similar to *being a sentence*: it is a real feature of sentences, but not one that is guaranteed to separate the assertible ones from the non-assertible ones. But by failing to do that, it fails to be a property helpful in understanding meaning. Thus, whatever *being ascendy* is, it's not a property that accounts for meaning.

Scharp can at least point to one sufficient condition on something's being ascendy. But we have nothing to work with for the conditions under which something is descendy. We know that if '10251021' is descendy, then snow is white. And what are the conditions under which '10251021' is descendy? The theory doesn't tell us; there is more to it than snow being white, but what that extra content is goes unexplained. For all we know, no non-logical sentence is descendy. Similarly: the Committee might systematically rule against all empirical facts. Properties that behave this way are in no way suitable for understanding meaning.

The main idea behind truth-conditional theories of meaning is that what it is to know what a sentence means is to know the conditions under which it is true. Scharp's theory of ASCENDY and DESCENDY gives us only some of the conditions under which sentences are ascendy, and doesn't give us any conditions at all under which most sentences are descendy. It provides no guidance for distinguishing between ascendy and non-ascendy sentences, and between descendy and non-descendy sentences. These half-conditions and missing conditions are no substitute for truth conditions when it comes to accounting for what it is to understand language.

Conclusion

The fact that Scharp's replacement concepts aren't fit for purpose doesn't entail that TRUTH after all is. Still, if Scharp's reengineering project for TRUTH is destined for failure, that is reason enough to revisit the theoretical commitments that lead Scharp to look for replacements in the first place. Perhaps constitutive principles are not the key to understanding the nature of concepts. Perhaps Scharp is premature in his dismissal of alternative approaches to the liar paradox. My suspicion is that TRUTH, precisely because of its foundational place in our conceptual scheme, is not the sort of concept that can just be replaced. Arguing that TRUTH is inconsistent is not that dissimilar from using reason to argue against rationality: because using TRUTH is essential to all of our cognitive activities (believing, asserting, arguing, etc.), using those activities to undermine its status is ultimately self-refuting.[24] It remains to be seen what the right response to the alethic paradoxes is, but no one should underestimate the challenges involved in replacing TRUTH. TRUTH may well be irreplaceable.

[24] Indeed, the claim that nothing is true, which I have argued is a consequence of the inconsistency view, has long been seen as self-refuting. If nothing is true, then something is true, namely, the claim that nothing is true. Liggins argues that this ancient argument is question begging (2019: 14).

Acknowledgements

This paper has greatly benefited from ongoing discussion with Max Deutsch, and from the extremely helpful and constructive reports from the referees for *Synthese*.

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