

# *Analetheism: a Pyrrhic victory*

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## 1. Introduction

In a recent article JC Beall and David Ripley (2004), bending a term of Terry Parsons's (1990), describe a position concerning the paradoxes of self-reference that they call 'analetheism', and claim that it would appear to be just as good as the dialetheic account advocated by Priest (1987) – hereafter *IC*. They say:

As far as we can see, the analetheist achieves whatever expressive virtues that the dialetheist achieves; and she also partakes of the same sort of expressive vices as the dialetheist. What could tip the scales in favour of one position over the other? We do not know. (33)

The present note provides an answer.

*IC* provides what is, in effect, a three-valued logic in which the middle value is interpreted as *both true and false*. And since it is at least true, it is designated. Analetheism adopts exactly the same logic, but interprets the middle value as *neither true nor false*. What distinguishes analetheism from more simple-minded truth-value gap theories is precisely that it takes the middle value to be designated. In particular, things with the middle value are just as assertable as things that are true.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. An expressive difficulty

According to dialetheism, paradoxical sentences are both true and false (i.e. have a true negation). Indeed, some sentences, such as the liar paradox in the form  $\lambda: \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle$ , are both true and not true:  $T\langle\lambda\rangle \& \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle$ .<sup>2</sup> It follows (by De Morgan laws, which are valid in the logic) that  $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$ . Now, Beall and Ripley say (32):

The intended interpretation of ' $T\langle\lambda\rangle$ ' (that  $\lambda$  is true) renders ' $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$ ' as the claim that  $\lambda$  is neither true nor not true, certainly not something the dialetheist wants to say given her aversion to truth-value gaps.

<sup>1</sup> 'Given that some sentences of the form  $A \& \neg A$  may be designated (and hence assertable), ...' (Beall and Ripley 2004: 32).

<sup>2</sup> We use  $T$  for the truth predicate, and angle brackets as a name-forming device. Beall and Ripley use  $\lambda$  as a name, not a sentence, and so write  $T\lambda$ .

Now, it is not clear why the dialetheist should be averse to the claim in question. There are no truth-value gaps in the dialethic semantics; but neither does this sentence say that  $\lambda$  is a gap. This would be expressed by the sentence  $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$ , which is not forthcoming without the principle that  $T\langle\lambda\rangle \rightarrow \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle$ , which *IC* (4.9) rejects.

So why should it be thought so? The sentence is, after all, true: both disjuncts are false; so, therefore, is their disjunction. The problem, if there is one, is in thinking that the sentence means something that it does not, namely that it rules out  $\lambda$ 's being true (and not true). In consistent contexts, it does so, but things are not always as they seem in inconsistent contexts. In a paraconsistent logic,  $\neg\alpha$  does not rule out  $\alpha$ . In particular,  $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$  does not rule out  $T\langle\lambda\rangle$ .

Any residual discomfort one might experience here can be accounted for by pointing out some facts about conversational implicature. When we assert, we are bound by the Gricean conversational maxim to say everything that is relevant. Thus, simply to assert  $\neg\alpha$ , when  $\alpha$  and  $\neg\alpha$  are both true, is misleading. A hearer may reasonably draw the conversational implicature that  $\alpha$  is simply false. Better to say  $\alpha \ \& \ \neg\alpha$ . To assert just  $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$  is misleading in a similar way, since  $T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle$  is also true. Better to say  $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle) \ \& \ (T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$ .

As Beall and Ripley note, if dialetheism has any problem here, analetheism has a similar problem. An analetheist asserts that  $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$ . By De Morgan's laws, this is equivalent to  $T\langle\lambda\rangle \ \& \ \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle$ , which appears to say that  $\lambda$  both is and is not true. But the reply is the same: even though we are dealing with truth-value gaps, contradictions are still acceptable. In particular,  $T\langle\lambda\rangle \ \& \ \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle$  does not rule out  $\neg(T\langle\lambda\rangle \vee \neg T\langle\lambda\rangle)$ . Similar points about conversational implicature also apply.

### 3. *The T-schema*

Let us now turn to reasons for preferring dialetheism to analetheism. *IC* subscribes to the T-schema:

- $T\langle\alpha\rangle \leftrightarrow \alpha$

It does not, however, accept its contraposited form (*IC*, 4.9):

- $\neg T\langle\alpha\rangle \leftrightarrow \neg\alpha$

That  $\neg\alpha$  does not entail that  $\alpha$  is not true: it might be a truth-value glut. Playing the other side of the street, analetheism accepts the contraposited form of the T-schema, but not the T-schema itself. That  $\alpha$  does not entail that  $\alpha$  is true: it might be a truth-value gap.

It is, in fact, open to both parties to accept both the T-schema and its contraposited form, as Beall and Ripley themselves point out at the end of

their paper. We will return to this later. For the moment let us just consider analetheism in the form in which they present it. An evident weakness of this is just that it does not endorse the T-schema, the ability to do which is one of the great advantages of dialetheism.

It might be contested that dialetheism suffers from an analogous weakness: it does not accept the contraposed form of the schema. But this principle is not in the same league. From Aristotle, through Tarski, to contemporary deflationism about truth, it is the T-schema that is taken as fundamental to truth, not its contraposed form. To say of what is that it is, this is the truth.<sup>3</sup> The contraposed form does not even say what truth *is*; it just comes along for the ride – on the back of contraposition, if that holds for the biconditional employed in the schema.

This is one weighty consideration.

#### 4. *Truth and assertion*

We now come to a weightier one: the evident oddity of designating the middle value if this is interpreted as *neither true nor false*. In a many-valued logic designation picks out those sentences that are acceptable or assertable (given the interpretation in question). More generally, validity is defined in terms of designation-preservation,<sup>4</sup> validity being important because it preserves the property of being a sentence that we are to accept.

Now, it is a widely held view that truth is the telos of acceptance and assertion. That is, truth just is what correct assertion aims at. If this is right, designated values must be truths of some kind. The view that truth is a telos of assertion is not only one that appears to recommend itself to common sense; it has been widely defended, e.g. by Dummett (1959); Brandom (1983); Priest (*IC*, 4.6); Williamson (1996).<sup>5</sup> It is not our aim to reproduce the various arguments employed by these writers. The point we wish to make here is simply that Beall and Ripley cannot subscribe to this view. They are certainly under no illusion about this. They point out that on the account in question one should assert things that are neither true nor false, and so not true. But they do not attempt to contest the arguments concerning truth as the telos of assertion.

The oddity of the claim that one should assert things that are neither true nor false is also fairly evident. It is not just certain self-referential sentences that might be thought to be neither true nor false. There are a whole panoply of sentences that have been claimed to have this status:

<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Beall himself is a deflationist, and endorses the T-schema. See, e.g., Beall (2004).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Priest 2001: 7.2.

<sup>5</sup> In particular, then, it is not ‘dogmatically’ that we accept the view that it is truths that are to be asserted, contra what Beall and Ripley say (34).

future contingents ('there will be a sea battle tomorrow'), denotation failures ('the King of France is bald'), nonsense ('Twas brillig and the slithey toves did gyre and gimble in the wabe'), and so on. It follows from the analetheist norm that these should be asserted too – which would seem quite wrong. Of course, one may deny that these sentences are neither true nor false. Maybe they are one and all false. But the analetheist is still committed to the conditional that if any of these examples did turn out to be neither true nor false, we would have to assert them. The counter-intuitiveness of this is plain enough.

### 5. *Falsity and Assertion*

Beall and Ripley might suggest<sup>6</sup> that dialetheism also has some counter-intuitive consequences concerning norms of assertion. Specifically, dialetheists cannot subscribe to the norm of assertion to the effect that one should refrain from asserting what is false, since they are prepared to assert something that is false, as long as it is also true. An analetheist, by contrast, does respect this norm.

Care must be exercised at this point, however. The notion of falsity may reasonably be taken in two ways. To say that  $\alpha$  is false might be to say that it has a true negation (which is the way we have interpreted it till now); or it might be to say that  $\alpha$  is not true. So the norm in question might be:

- one should refrain from asserting what has a true negation

or it might be:

- one should refrain from asserting what is not true

Of course, given classical logic the two notions of falsity are equivalent. It is therefore easy to confuse these two norms. But once gaps and gluts are on the scene, the two notions of falsity are quite distinct. One must therefore ask which of these two norms it is that is at issue here.

It seems fairly clear that it should be the second of these. Indeed, this is just the flipside of the truth-norm. The true is just what we should assert; the untrue is, then, just what we should not. If the untrue and the false are the same, then the first-falsity norm is fine. But if one takes it that there are truth-value gluts, then the norm will appear too strong. The fact that something has a true negation does not rule out its being true, and so its being assertable. And if one takes it that there are truth-value gaps (at least in the usual way), then the norm will appear too weak: there will be things one ought to refrain from asserting even though they do not have a true negation (gappy sentences).

<sup>6</sup> As they did in correspondence.

The first falsity-norm may get its pull from two (mistaken) sources. The first is from the classical confusion of what is not true with what has a true negation. The second is from the considerations concerning conversational implicature that we mentioned in §2. If we assert that  $\alpha$  has a true negation, that is,  $\neg T\langle\alpha\rangle$ , and so, by implication,  $\neg\alpha$ , we may well conversationally infer that  $\alpha$  is true-only, that is that  $\neg T\langle\alpha\rangle$ . In this case, we can then apply the first falsity-norm to infer that one should refrain from asserting  $\alpha$ . But this rests on a conversational implicature, not an entailment.

Now that we have this straight, we can ask whether a dialetheist does abandon the falsity norm. The answer is no. A dialetheist (but *not* an analetheist) can well subscribe to the claim that if something is untrue it ought not to be asserted. They can also, as we have just noted, subscribe to the first-falsity norm, but only as a conversational implicature. It is the second-falsity norm that is unreservedly correct.

It is worth noting that the second falsity-norm may give rise to dilemmas on occasions. As we have already observed, paradoxes of self-reference are true and false (have a true negation); but a few – such as the liar paradox as formulated in §2 – are stronger: they are true and not true. For such a paradox, we both ought to assert it, since it is true, and ought not to assert it, since it is not true. Well, life is like that sometimes: we do face dilemmas where you are damned if you do and damned if you don't.<sup>7</sup>

Actually, dilemmas of this kind seem to occur independent of the falsity-norm. Consider the sentence 'It is not the case that this sentence is assertable', i.e.:

- $\alpha$ :  $\neg\langle\alpha\rangle$  is assertable.

Suppose that  $\alpha$  is false; then  $\alpha$  is assertable. But it can't be assertable if it is false. So it must be true (assuming the Law of Excluded Middle, which both the dialetheism and the analetheist endorse). Thus, it is not assertable. But we have just established that it is true, so it is. You ought and ought not to assert  $\alpha$ .<sup>8</sup>

At any rate, the important point in the present context is that a dialetheist can subscribe to the falsity-norm, correctly understood.

## 6. A Pyrrhic victory

We have now seen that there are a number of reasons to prefer dialetheism to analetheism. But let us end with a final observation. As Beall and Ripley

<sup>7</sup> The possibility of dilemmas concerning legal and moral norms is discussed in *IC*, ch. 13. The dilemma concerning the falsity-norm is discussed further in Priest 1993.

<sup>8</sup> This is a version of the 'irrationalist paradox'. For this and other paradoxes of rationality that have nothing to do with self-reference at all: see Priest 2002.

note, dialetheism and analetheism are exactly the same, except that where one says ‘both true and false’ the other says ‘neither’. Is this anything more than a nominal difference? If the truth-norm obtains, then clearly not. Since the middle value is designated, things that have this value are true (as are their negations). So what Beall and Ripley call ‘neither true nor false’ is simply a species of truth.

If the norm of truth does not hold, this may not be the case. However, it remains true that analetheists are still prepared to go around asserting contradictions in the full knowledge that they are contradictions, and with no caveats. This gives dialetheists pretty much everything they ask for. Call such things neither true nor false if you like; it doesn’t really matter. Indeed, it is not really clear what the rationale for, or virtue of, appealing to truth-value gaps is if you end up asserting contradictions anyway. (Normally, the whole point of appealing to the notion, in the context of the paradoxes of self-reference, is to avoid inconsistency.)

The point, we think, is pretty much conceded by Beall and Ripley at the end of their paper. They point out that an analetheist can, in fact, subscribe to both the T-schema and its contraposed form (as can the dialetheist), making  $\alpha$  and  $T(\alpha)$  generally inter-substitutable. And if one does this there are really no differences of any significance left between the two views; they are, as Beall and Ripley themselves say, ‘no longer distinguishable’ (34).

Indeed so. If analetheism has any kind of victory over dialetheism it is an entirely Pyrrhic one.<sup>9</sup>

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