

Preface

This book combines two essays which, though differing in character and dealing with disparate issues, are united by a common topic and concern. While the second one focuses on matters of interpretation of a specific statement articulated in a certain philosophical tradition, the first one is dedicated to a purely theoretical problem. The central concern permeating both essays lies in propagating the relevance of acknowledging diverse types of meaning and, as corollary, distinct varieties of interpretation.

The connection between the topics of truth paradoxes and meaning consists in the fact that in the context of analysing truth paradoxes a schematic principle linking meaning to truth plays a pivotal role. It can be formulated as follows:

(T) [For any sentence *s*:] If *s* expresses that *p* then *s* thereby expresses a truth if and only if *p*.

(T) provides a link between meaning and truth on account of the fact that the question of what linguistic units express depends on their meaning(s). A significant subclass of sentences even permits to substitute ‘expresses’ by ‘means’ in (T). This principle obviously combines two subprinciples:

(T1) [For any sentence *s*:] If *s* expresses that *p* then *s* thereby expresses a truth *only if* *p*

(T2) [For any sentence *s*:] If *s* expresses that *p* then *s* thereby expresses a truth *if* *p*.¹

¹ Or equivalently:

[For any sentence *s*:] If *s* expresses that *p* and *s* thereby expresses a truth then *p*.

[For any sentence *s*:] If (*s* expresses that *p*) and *p*, then *s* thereby expresses a truth.

The second subprinciple, (T2), plays a crucial role in all varieties of truth paradox considered in the first essay. If we deny its general validity we can maintain all logical rules that are employed in their derivation. It is possible to accommodate even (T2) to the intuition which presumably underlies its apparent plausibility if one replaces the relation the term ‘express’ signifies by a different but similar relation linking sentences to a type of content which does not coincide with the content they express in virtue of their linguistic meaning (or in virtue of their linguistic meaning together with certain features of the extra-linguistic context).

For some time now it has been customary to distinguish various semantic notions like reference (‘*Bedeutung*’) and sense (‘*Sinn*’) as conceived by Gottlob Frege and ‘conventional significance’ as conceived by Michael Dummett² which comes closest to the ordinary notion of (linguistic) meaning. According to the account of truth paradoxes that is proposed in the first essay, even in the realm of sentences without indexical elements (where Fregean sense and conventional significance coincide) an additional kind of content can be specified to which both (T1) and (T2) can be applied without leading to paradoxes and which seems to be a suitable candidate for the status of the bearer of absolute, not relativized, truth values. By this move the variety of semantic concepts is increased. Given that different semantic notions correlate with different types of interpretation, the variety of types of interpretation which are apt to attain relevance also increases. Now it may seem as if the need to appeal to the additional kind of content that licenses applications of both (T1) and (T2) remains restricted to quite ‘exotic’ cases where items expressing truth-value assessments refer to themselves or to other truth-value assessments. So, it comes as no surprise that historically oriented scholars (although some of them deal with rather exotic issues themselves) are sometimes inclined to infer from the outlandish nature of

² Cf. M. Dummett, *The Interpretation of Frege’s Philosophy*. (Harvard University Press) Cambridge/MA 1981, esp. 44, 77 and 99–104.

theoretically conceivable situations their irrelevance. But the appearance of a restriction to outlandish cases turns out to be deceptive if one takes a number of facts into account:

1) Although initially examples exhibiting obvious self-reference are most apt to strike the eye it turns out that similar phenomena can equally be detected among items which do not exhibit immediately noticeable self-reference. Accordingly, one should remain prepared for the possibility that deeper going investigations reveal that the area of relevant cases is far larger than initially supposed.

2) Ascriptions of truth or absence of truth obviously play a vital role in many contexts of life. Phenomena which are manifested by truth-value assessments in a particular domain may bring properties to light which pertain to all such assessments. Against this backdrop one cannot be offhand about the circumstance that particular specimens unveil differences capable of affecting the truth of truth-value assessments.

3) A dependence of the truth value of ascriptions of truth or absence of truth on semantic facts that are not linguistically expressed by them can be detected even in cases which do not belong to the specific group generating truth paradoxes. In the case of many ordinary truth assessments one can easily ascertain that the issue of whether linguistic items articulating them express a truth crucially relies on semantic properties belonging to different linguistic units, i.e. the question which truth value they have depends on the question of what other items mean or express.³ The

³ Essentially the same sort of dependence can be noticed in the realm of answers to questions, especially when made by saying 'Yes' or 'No'. It evidently depends on the content of a pertinent question whether or not answers given by using those words can be assessed as correct. Furthermore, under different circumstances the very same words can involve a difference of the kind of content that is asserted. Sometimes the content of those assertions can be also represented by expressions that result from transforming the questions into (complete) declarative sentences. (This latter

notion of a specific variety of content that can be regarded as a bearer of absolute truth without giving up either (T1) or (T2) takes account of this phenomenon.

4) The type of content for which principle (T) can be maintained as valid even with respect to items responsible for the origination of truth paradoxes exhibits the distinctive feature of potentially transcending both everything that is explicitly conveyed by words and the actual intentions of language users. Now the same characteristic is discernible even in connection with a category of truth-value appraisals which do not threaten to entail paradoxical conclusions. The very existence of this phenomenon, especially the fact that sometimes any attempt to ascertain the mental states of language users is entirely irrelevant, possesses significance for interpretation in general.

5) Even more important than all this is the fact that the enterprise of analysing problems posed by the occurrence of truth paradoxes gives rise to questions about meanings of a fundamentally different type — meanings that do not pertain to linguistic objects. Within the broad category of meanings ascribable to non-linguistic items a sub-category attains particular relevance here, namely meanings which are the topic of questions of the forms ‘What does it mean for (an) X to be F?’, ‘What does (an) X’s being F mean?’, ‘What does it mean that (an) X is F?’ or more generally ‘What does it mean that p?’. The plain observation that the placeholder ‘X’ can be replaced by terms denoting linguistic objects suffices for making obvious the potential relevance of those formulae even for linguistic matters. In addition to this, their prospective significance for the question of truth or untruth derives from the circumstance that the other placeholder, the letter ‘F’, can be substituted by ‘true’, ‘express something which is true’ or similar terms. As a matter of fact, questions of the type: ‘What does it mean for s to be

form of answering questions whether things are thus and so is quite commonly employed in a number of languages and linguistic communities.)

true?’ or, more explicitly ‘What does it mean for *s* to express something which is true?’, ‘What does it mean that *s* says something true?’, or ‘What does it mean that *s* is used for saying something true?’, where ‘*s*’ is replaceable by a term referring to a linguistic object, play a pivotal role in the first essay in this book. Taking those questions into consideration assists in solving problems that arise from inconsistent truth-value ascriptions. Although the pertinent inconsistencies emerge only in very special cases, general significance can be ascribed to the fact that certain topics require or at least strongly suggest that one brings into play questions of meaning pertaining to linguistic items *and* issues of meaning pertaining to non-linguistic entities. Hence it is advisable to view the activity of interpretation as comprising, at least in principle, two different but closely linked types of investigation that focus on meanings of two different kinds. Settling questions concerning the meaning of linguistic objects and settling questions concerning the meaning of non-linguistic items both belong to the activity of interpretation — even if in particular contexts it can be legitimate to focus exclusively on one of these inquiries. The existence of different types of meaning and of different aspects of interpretation correlates with the fact that possible objects of *understanding* are not only linguistic units like sentences or texts, i.e. webs of sentences, but also non-linguistic entities, in particular objects expressible in language, such as theories, proofs, arguments etc. Carefully distinguishing the most fundamental varieties of meaning and interpretation enables us to recognize both the relevance and the limitations of philological enquiries which exclusively concern meaning of the first type. The tendency of some historically oriented scholars to ignore those varieties or to brush them aside as irrelevant made it mandatory to include some polemical passages in the second essay.

The topic which is elaborated in the first essay is touched upon for the sake of illustration in the second essay. Readers of the first essay are likely to raise the question whether, or in what respect, its main results might have a bearing on other less theoretical and

less ‘exotic’ matters, in particular on historically orientated inquiries. The second essay answers this question affirmatively. In the first essay issues of meaning enter the limelight whereas the second essay deals primarily with interpretation. Because of the intimate connection between both kinds of issues we did not seek to avoid a certain overlap between both essays.

In the exploration of the varieties of truth paradox technical segments alternate with non-technical expositions. This phenomenon is due to the maxim that the treatment of this topic should be as non-technical as possible and as technical as necessary. As it is a major aim of the inquiry to precisely ascertain the principles and rules coming into play in the derivation of inconsistencies or other disconcerting outcomes, it was impossible to abstain from technical methods: they make involved presuppositions explicit to a maximal degree and thereby enable us to identify those factors which turn out to be most questionable. A short explanation of the employed derivation technique is presented in an appendix at the end of the first essay. Readers who are not (yet) acquainted with the employed techniques may find it helpful. The explanations of the pertinent rules of derivation should make it clear how well-entrenched the underlying intuitions are which would have to be disregarded if one were to dismiss any of these rules in order to preserve (T) in its original form, that is, in the form in which it does not take into account the need of invoking different types of content.