

...IFF SNOW IS WHITE

ANNE MAZUGA

This article is a book review of Dirk Greimann, Geo Siegart (eds.): *Truth and Speech Acts. Studies in the Philosophy of Language*. (= Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy 5), New York, London: Routledge 2007. 398 S. ISBN 978-0415-40651-2, € 107,99.

1. *Aims and Structure*

The anthology *Truth and Speech Acts. Studies in the Philosophy of Language* represents volume 5 of the *Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy*. It was edited by Dirk Greimann, Professor of Philosophy at the Federal University of Santa Maria (Brazil), and Geo Siegart, Professor of Philosophy at the University of Greifswald (Germany). *Truth and Speech Acts* contains 17 articles by authors specialized in the philosophy of language, logic, epistemology and the philosophy of mind, respectively. In their contributions to the volume at hand they investigate the relationship between theories of truth and the role played by so-called truth-talk, i.e. linguistic expressions like the predicate ‘.is true’.

The introductory remarks of the editors outline the main currents of the philosophical debate on truth and some basics of the traditional speech act theory. Besides, they convey the core questions of the presented articles: Is truth-talk redundant, serving merely expressive purposes? Or is truth an indispensable concept, standing for a substantive property? How can an analysis of this concept contribute to an understanding of speech acts like assertions? Further, the question of normative implications of truth ascriptions arises. Addressing these questions requires a systematic discussion not only of truth theoretic conceptualizations, but of common practices of ascribing truth as well. Stimulating such a discussion is the explicit aim of *Truth and Speech Acts*. Since space does not permit to discuss every paper in detail, I will choose some and illustrate the main theses and arguments which are brought forward.

The articles are divided into four sections: The first three articles deal globally with (I) *The illocutionary significance of the concept of truth*. The

next four papers analyse the relationship of (II) *Truth and assertion*. Part III consists of six articles focussing on *The normativity of truth*, and the two articles of the final section investigate the connection of (IV) *Truth and propositional meaning*. Annotations and references follow each article. Besides, there is a comprehensive index of names in the appendix.

2. *The Contributions*

The first section on *The illocutionary significance of the concept of truth* contains articles by William P. Alston, John R. Searle and Geo Siegwart. In the opening article, *Illocutionary acts and truth*, William P. Alston briefly outlines the minimalist account of the concept of truth. The basic claim of this approach is that the application of a truth-predicate to a proposition p adds nothing to the propositional content of p . This view is normally displayed in a version of the truth schema (T):

(T) The proposition that p is true iff p

Alston then examines whether this truth schema can serve to distinguish types of speech acts, especially whether it helps to characterize assertions as truth-related. If the use of the predicate ‘.is true’ in ‘ p is true’ is to be understood in a realistic manner, it ascribes the property of truth to the proposition p . With reference to Frege Alston states that the sole assertion of p is not an assertion *about* this proposition, a fortiori not an assertion about p being true. No property is ascribed to the proposition p by simply asserting it. For this reason Alston doubts that assertions — or any other type of speech act — bear a conceptual link to truth; consequently, truth cannot help to characterize any certain type of speech act. Or could there be a less obvious, mediated link to truth? In his own account Alston keeps types of speech acts apart by their distinct conditions of permissibility. He then elaborates how such conditions relate to truth. In performing a speech act of a certain type, the speaker takes responsibility for the holding of particular conditions. For example, when S orders his son H to clean up his room, S takes responsibility for the holding of the following conditions:

- (A) H has a room
- (B) It is possible for H to clean it up
- (C) S has the authority to lay on H an obligation to do so

The necessity of condition (C) is questionable, but given that (C) is a necessary condition, then (A) through (C) must hold if S 's uttering is to count as

an order which is permissible under the given circumstances. But, as Alston argues, (A) through (C) can only be said to hold if the propositions expressing them are true. Thus a relationship between a specific kind of speech act and the concept of truth exists insofar as the truth of certain propositions is necessary in order for a speech act of that specific kind to be permissible. Contrary to the primary suspicion, there is a link of truth to speech acts, but it takes a detour via the conditions restraining the permissibility of a certain speech act in a given situation.

Geo Siegwart's neatly structured *Alethic acts and alethiological reflection* expressly aims at an *Outline of a constructive philosophy of truth*. Stressing the need of true information for prudent and efficient acting, the author treats the "alethic business" mainly as means to successful action. By "alethic business" he understands the qualification of propositions as true. According to Siegwart, reflecting on the truth of a given proposition is a kind of action support, for error prevention serves to avoid failure in actions undertaken on the basis of erroneous presuppositions. Since we fail occasionally but fortunately not all the time, we can distinguish successful from failed actions. Moreover, we can try to make explicit the conditions under which a particular action is performed successfully. At this point Siegwart deploys the concept of rules. Alethic rules state the conditions under which a certain alethic act may be performed. The route from successful actions to actions permitted by certain rules is not apparent at first sight. The alethic rule for assertions, for example, is given as follows: "If there is a proof for a proposition Δ , then Δ may be asserted." (p. 49) Obviously, this rule presupposes or better: fixes a very tight understanding of assertions. If a formal proof is a success condition, many utterances of everyday talk will not qualify as assertions. Herein lies one of the main differences to Alston's proposal, in which no formal proof is required for assertions. In his clearly drawn map of the cognitive landscape Siegwart would probably put assertions of everyday speech among the "imperfect forms" of cognitive acts, as presumptions or accepted hypotheses. Only "[t]he impossibility of always performing the truth-qualifying procedures [...] leads to the establishment of forecast, retrodiction, and many other forms of imperfect cognition" (p. 57). Apart from the questionable perfection-talk, Siegwart's crucial point consists in the functioning of alethic rules as >truth-connector<, an idea parallel to Alston's, yet formally far more elaborated by Siegwart: The required proof for Δ as a permissible assertion is a truth-qualifying procedure for Δ . A truth-qualifying procedure for an assertion is nothing but a truth-criterion, so if the alethic rule for asserting Δ is met, Δ is at the same time proven to be true.

Section II, *Truth and assertion*, consists of six articles by Dorit Bar-On and Keith Simmons, Dirk Greimann, Gary Kemp, Wolfram Hinzen, John Collins

and Bo Mou, respectively. The papers revolve around the pragmatics of assertions, the rules guiding this practice and the compatibility of a conception of truth with certain accounts of what we do when we make an assertion. In *The use of force against deflationism: assertion and truth* Dorit Bar-On and Keith Simmons distinguish between three claims of accounts of truth. From the point of view of "metaphysical deflationism", truth is not a genuine property. This view is joined by "linguistic deflationism", as Bar-On and Simmons chose to label minimalist and diquotationalist approaches as well as the redundancy theory of truth. Thirdly, proponents of conceptual deflationism claim that the concept of truth plays no substantive role in the explanation of other concepts, e.g. assertion or meaning. Bar-On and Simmons argue that conceptual deflationism is untenable, and though metaphysical and linguistic deflationism are not inevitably rebutted by the arguments defeating conceptual deflationism, the former do not imply the latter. The authors start with a short discussion of the accounts of Horwich, Field and Ramsey. It is shown that, despite differences in detail, they all share the "isolationist" claim that an account of the concept of truth can be given independently of concepts like belief, meaning or assertion. Against this central statement of conceptual deflationism, Bar-On and Simmons put forward the thesis that understanding the notion of assertion requires a substantive concept of truth. To back this up, they draw a distinction between 1st- and 2nd-order uses of the truth-predicate. The origin of this distinction is once again found in Frege. As he pointed out, the application of the truth-predicate to a proposition p does simply mark p as an assertion, since the simple utterance of p has assertoric force already. It is the form of the statement that makes it assertoric. A truth-predication is therefore linguistically redundant. But Bar-On and Simmons insist that this does not allow the conclusion that truth is also an explanatorily redundant concept. When we apply the truth-predicate in this way we are making 1st-order use of it. But on top of that we can also reflect on these cases of 1st-order truth-talk. For example, when it is stated that asserting p is to represent p as true, the word 'true' is used in a reflective, explanatory manner, not in 1st-order manner. By this reflective 2nd-order use a special kind of *acts* is characterized, viz. assertions. This kind of truth-talk is not redundant, rather it deploys a substantial concept of truth for the explanation of another concept. Robert Brandom has presented a very similar approach, which Bar-On and Simmons also refer to. Brandom identifies asserting something with taking-it-true. To assert something means to take on a commitment. In order to explain why it is assertions that go along with commitments and justificatory responsibilities, one has to dispose of an explanatory, >inflated< concept of truth. May there be no genuine property of truth and may all 1st-order uses of the truth-predicate be redundant, "[a]s long as we need the concept of truth to explain certain speech-acts, we must reject conceptual deflationism" (p. 85).

Very helpful, basic distinctions are drawn in *The concept of truth and multiple facets of the speech-act equivalence thesis concerning "true"* by Bo Mou. He notes that the speech-act equivalence thesis (E) is both vague and ambiguous. As far as ambiguity is concerned, Mou offers different interpretations of (E):

(E) To say of a sentence that it is true is equivalent to using that sentence

His first proposal follows the analyses of Frege and Ramsey, respectively:

(FR) One's claim that p is true means no more than what one's utterance p means

In Mou's refined version:

(M) For any utterance p that a person X understands, her claim that p is true means (for X) the same as her assertion p

' p ' is to be instantiated by the quotation name of a sentence in a given language. By claiming that p is true, X ascribes the property of truth to this sentence. This interpretation allows the elaboration of a Strawson-style equivalence thesis:

(I) For any utterance ' q ' that person X understands, X 's utterance "' q ' is true" has the same illocutionary force (for X) as X 's utterance ' q '

Mou stresses that in the utterance "' q is true" the truth-predicate is not used as a descriptive term but as a performative. As such it can occur in various different speech acts like endorsing, agreeing, etc. After coping with ambiguity, the author deals with the vagueness of (E). As he observes, (E) is occasionally conflated with the Tarskian extensional equivalence thesis (T):

(T) x is true in L if and only if p

After a careful examination of (T) with respect to (E) Mou finally denies that (E) can correctly be called a version of (T). (T) neither delivers the same message, nor does it serve the same purpose. Rather, (T) is a "non-epistemic semantic thesis whose understanding is based upon a pre-theoretic understanding of non-linguistic truth" (p. 183). (E), however, delivers a pragmatic

description of (T) by explicit reference to an agent performing the speech act. This upshot is further investigated by a comparison of (E) and (M). (M) is also an epistemic and pragmatic thesis, involving the epistemic attitude of assertion. Here Mou seems to follow the same direction as Bar-On and Simmons when they distinguish 1st- from 2nd-order uses of the truth-predicate. Mou makes clear that a speaker might claim that a sentence is true without using the quotation name of that sentence. She might, for example, claim truth of the sentence *Snow is white* by referring to it as '*Tarski's favourite sentence*'. Her utterance would then be '*Tarski's favourite sentence is true*', but what she asserts is that snow is white. In this case, the same speech act could not be achieved simply by uttering the descriptive name '*Tarski's favourite sentence*'. One has to apply a truth-predicate in order to create a complete sentence and to make the assertoric force of the utterance explicit. The truth-predicate serves as a semantic device for talking about a sentence that is not explicitly uttered. Instantiating (T) for this case results in (T*):

(T*) Tarski's favourite sentence is true in L if and only if snow is white

Although both sides of 'if and only if' convey the same information, someone might understand the one side while not understanding the other, since they are composed of different concepts. Someone who understands 'snow' and '.is white' might still not grasp the meaning of '.is true' and vice versa. According to Mou, the non-epistemic extensional equivalence thesis (T) can serve as a basis for an explanation of truth as a non-linguistic concept. It helps to capture an intuitive, pre-theoretic understanding of truth as a relation of correspondence. The epistemic, pragmatic equivalence thesis (M), however, delivers an intuitive basis for meaning equivalence in assertoric contexts. Thus Mou's disambiguation of the equivalence thesis shows that philosophical investigations of the concept of truth and the associated truth-talk should be preceded by a clarification of which interpretation of the equivalence thesis is presupposed.

The third section combines six articles under the heading *The normativity of truth*. Graham Oppy's considerations on the *Norms of assertion* are less concerned with a possible conceptual link of truth and normativity but rather with the practical consequences of such a link. Oppy characterizes assertions in terms of their function: Asserting is the linguistic means to express one's beliefs — but not, as is often claimed, to express the truth of a proposition. This is further explained after a short revision of the Gricean taxonomy of norms for the performance of assertive speech acts. Of the different kinds of norms distinguished by Grice, only the norms of quality apply exclusively

to assertive speech acts. (Norms of relation such as *Be relevant!* or norms of manner such as *Avoid obscurity!* apply to orders, questions etc. as well.) Oppy follows the Gricean taxonomy, but he reminds the reader of the various alternative ways to classify norms. The norms of quality as Grice formulates them make truth a condition of assertibility:

- (A) Do not assert that which is not true
- (B) Do not assert that which you do not believe
- (C) Do not assert that for which you have inadequate warrant

With regard to the Gricean >super norm< (A) Oppy raises the objection that someone who believes p and asserts p whilst p is not true, does not violate any norm of assertion. If the speaker believed p , she was surely justified in asserting p . What was violated is a norm of belief: Do not believe that which is not true. It is the violation of a norm like this we could hold the speaker liable for. This is a highly interesting observation and it leads Oppy to a persuasive account of the practice of assertion. In opposition to the traditional view of asserting as a practice of information transmission, Oppy pictures it as a means of exchange between agents with "very imperfect and partial access to information, and very different background beliefs into which information must be accommodated" (p. 237). Making assertions serves for the comparison of beliefs, the detection of errors and the improvement of imperfect information. People engage in debate and criticism by uttering their beliefs in the form of assertions. For an act to be a successful act of assertion it does not seem to be required that the expressed beliefs are true. Truth is the purpose and not a prerequisite of assertoric acts. In contrast to the account of assertions given by Siegart, Oppy maintains that suppositions or conjectures aim no less at truth than assertions. What distinguishes the latter from the former is the function, viz. expressing something the speaker actually believes. The rest of Oppy's article consists of a discussion of knowledge-that- p as a requirement for asserting-that- p . As Oppy concludes, such a requirement would demand too much of the participants of a normal reasonable discourse. He finishes his paper by pointing to the "doxastic significance of disagreement": "It seems to me that it will be perfectly in order for agents to assert their beliefs in circumstances in which they recognize that their fellow conversationalists are doxastic peers with whom they disagree; and for these agents to recognize, too, that it is perfectly in order for their fellow conversationalists to assert their beliefs in these same circumstances. And by 'perfectly in order' I mean *assert without violating any of the norms of assertion*.'" (p. 247)

Another author contesting the thesis that truth is a constitutive condition of assertive acts is Michael Rescorla with his paper on *A linguistic reason*

for truthfulness. Whereas Oppy claimed that believing p is sufficient justification for asserting p , Rescorla states two norms well compatible with Oppy's claim, yet more demanding. The defence norm requires a speaker to defend an asserted proposition by cogent argument. If a speaker cannot rebut counter-arguments against his assertion, she is required to retract the asserted proposition. These two rules fit in neatly with Oppy's idea of assertions as moves in critical dialogue. The defence norm and the retraction norm prescribe how a speaker is to react if another speaker challenges her assertion, but neither sets any constraint on what may be asserted at the outset. In the dialectical model of assertion which Rescorla proposes, norms like the Gricean >super norm< are not constitutive of assertion, thus truth is not constitutive of performing assertions. Nonetheless, Rescorla concedes that there are strong reasons to comply with non-constitutive rules of honesty, truthfulness or knowledge — namely, if a speaker wants to achieve at least one of the two constitutive goals of assertion Rescorla names: rapprochement and avoidance of decisive counter-argument. By the former the author understands the isolation of relevant, mutually acceptable premises. The latter can be achieved mainly by providing decisive argument against a proponent's objections. Pursuit of these goals by all participants is constitutive of reasonable conversation: "We cannot reason with someone who dismisses all objections, yet neither can we reason with someone who collapses before all objections." (p. 256) The author develops a neat conversational strategy for what he calls a "dialectical model of assertion". It turns out that for a speaker who seriously pursues the above mentioned goals, truthfulness is the cognitively least expensive and morally least risky way to achieve these goals. For this reason, truthfulness should be set as default attitude in rational discourse.

The other contributions of section III are by Adam Kovach, Gila Sher and Cory D. Wright, Richard Schantz and Ulrich Metschl, respectively. In the final section IV of the volume, Richard Heck Jr. and Michael Williams set out to inquire the link of *Truth and propositional meaning*. Both authors refer to works of Donald Davidson and detect some obscurities that make a complete understanding of Davidson's theory of radical interpretation difficult. Davidson maintains that a substantive concept of truth is indispensable for an explanation of the meaning of sentences. In *Meaning, truth and normativity* Williams confronts this thesis with Horwich's minimalist account of truth and his claim that meanings are to be explained in terms of use, not in terms of truth. Since Horwich presents a fully naturalistic account of meaning, according to which meanings are a matter of regularities, he can find nothing intrinsically normative about meaning. Davidson, on the contrary, construes a theory of radical interpretation, not a theory of the nature of meaning or meaningfulness. Radical interpretation appeals to the charity of the interpreter, so it is an essentially normative theory. Since Williams comes to the conclusion that Davidson in fact wished to avoid any appeal

to the notion of meaning in his theory of radical interpretation, one wonders whether Williams' final proposal of "deflationary Davidsonianism" is not a rather forceful linkage of two quite remote approaches.

Richard Heck's main concern in *Meaning and truth-conditions* is with the so-called Foster problem: A minimalist theory of truth could be correct in the sense that all instances of a generic equivalence thesis (e.g. those analyzed by Bo Mou) are true, but still this theory would not help to understand the language used for the formulation of the equivalent sentences. Heck's solution to this problem amounts to the following: If a speaker consciously knows the truth conditions of a given sentence in a language *L* and is prepared to deploy this knowledge in speech acts and acts of interpretation, he is able to understand the language *L* and is able to use *L*.

3. Evaluation

This anthology provides a valuable overview of recent works at the cross section of speech act theory and truth theory and it is no doubt meritorious to arrange such an >intellectual encounter<. Advanced students and professionals in either of the philosophical branches will certainly profit most from it. The texts seem less suited as an introduction into the basics of either truth theory or speech act theory, since most authors presuppose knowledge of traditional positions and debates. The only points of critique concern the arrangement of the articles and the title of the volume. Since the headings of the four subsections are rather general, one would appreciate a less scarce summary of the common points and questions of the texts united under the same heading. This would facilitate orientation within the volume if one is looking for the papers best suited for one's special interest of investigation. The main title of the book announces a treatment of speech acts in general. But reading the articles, it turns out that the large majority of them deal only with assertions. Considering the thoroughness and professionalism of the articles, this seems excusable.

Max-Weber-Kolleg of the University of Erfurt, Germany
Am Hügel 1, D-99084 Erfurt
E-mail: anne.mazuga@stud.uni-erfurt.de