

CDD: 149.94

DEFLATIONISM: RESPONSE TO PAUL HORWICH

OSWALDO CHATEAUBRIAND

*Department of Philosophy
Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro
Rua Marquês de São Vicente, 225, Gávea
22453-900 RIO DE JANEIRO, RJ
BRAZIL*

oswaldo@puc-rio.br

Abstract: My disagreement with the deflationist treatment of truth affects my attitude to Paul Horwich's approach to meaning and intentionality. In my response I summarize objections to the deflationist account of truth developed in some detail in chapters 2, 7, and 12, and argue that the notion of intentionality should be treated naturalistically in a broader context than the context of the referential import of the locution "means that".

Keywords: Deflationism. Language. Intentionality. Meaning. Truth.

DEFLACIONISMO: RÉPLICA À PAUL HORWICH

Resumo: Minha discordância com a visão deflacionista da verdade afeta minha atitude em relação às propostas deflacionistas de Paul Horwich para a intencionalidade. Em minha réplica faço um resumo das objeções ao deflacionismo em relação à verdade, detalhadas nos capítulos 2, 7 e 12, e argumento que a noção de intencionalidade deveria ser tratada naturalisticamente em um contexto mais amplo que o contexto do alcance referencial da locução "significa que".

Palavras chave: Deflacionismo. Linguagem. Intencionalidade. Significado. Verdade.

My basic problem with deflationism is that I do not agree with the deflationist treatment of truth, and this affects my attitude to Paul's deflationist approach to meaning and intentionality. In the first volume of *Logical Forms* I criticize the deflationist approach to truth in relation to the views of Frege and Tarski, but I do not discuss its more recent formulations, of which Paul's has been particularly influential. In 2006 I participated of the Pécs conference "Deflationism: Paul Horwich's minimalist theory of meaning and truth", where I gave the talk "Truth, Falsity, and Neither", arguing that Paul's deflationist formulations are not adequate for dealing with truth-valueless sentences (propositions, statements, etc.) and with non-denoting terms. Since Paul himself points out in note 5 that the fundamental principle for the referential import of 'means that' depends on the "truly fundamental principles" for propositional and sentential truth (Tarski's truth schema), my criticisms of the deflationist account of truth would seem to apply as well to the deflationist account of aboutness.

1. INTENTIONALITY

Part of the motivation for my remarks on intentionality quoted by Paul at the beginning of his paper, were the strong reactions to Searle's appeal to this notion in his arguments against strong A.I. One may disagree with Searle, but to treat his appeal to intentionality as an unscientific "religious diatribe" seems clearly uncalled for.¹ This is not Paul's position, of course, although he also thinks that taking intentionality as a basic primitive goes against some form of naturalism.

¹ See Hofstadter's comments in Searle (1980, pp. 433-434).

In any case, my references to intentionality in various chapters of *Logical Forms*, were not really part of a discussion of the referential import of ‘means that’, but of a discussion of intentions—in the more general sense of the word—in connection with my reformulation of Kripke’s (1980) account of reference fixing, transmission, etc.

As I say in Chapter 13 (p. 24) I do not know how to account for intentionality, but I do think it is a fundamental notion for semantics. I am also encouraged in this view by some recent books on the origins of language—especially Tomasello (2008)—that place intentionality at the basis of the evolution of communication among animals and humans. The three main hypotheses of Tomasello’s book are the following (pp. 11-12):

1. Human cooperative communication emerged first in evolution (and emerges first in ontogeny) in the natural spontaneous gestures of pointing and pantomiming.
2. Human cooperative communication rests crucially on a psychological infrastructure of shared intentionality, which originated evolutionarily in support of collaborative activities, and which comprises most importantly: (a) social-cognitive skills for creating with others joint intentions and joint attention (and other forms of common conceptual ground), and (b) prosocial motivations (and even norms) for helping and sharing with others.
3. Conventional communication, as embodied in one or another human language, is possible only when participants already possess: (a) natural gestures and their shared intentionality infrastructure, and (b) skills of cultural learning and imitation for creating and passing along jointly understood communicative conventions and constructions.

It seems to me that Tomasello’s approach throughout the book provides a very clear and compelling naturalistic approach to intentionality in animals and humans, supporting a view of

intentionality as a general and fundamental aspect of animal and human action and communication, as suggested by Searle.²

2. DEFLATIONISM ABOUT TRUTH

The fundamental aim of my discussion of truth in *Logical Forms* was to develop a realistic account of truth as identification of states of affairs, thereby reaffirming the position that truth is a significant relation between various kinds of truth-bearers³ (propositions, statements, thoughts, sentences, utterances, etc.) and reality. The possibility of such an approach is precisely what is questioned by deflationism, and in developing my ideas I argued specifically in Chapter 2 against Frege's claim that an attribution of truth to a sentence has the same content as the sentence itself, in addition to developing various arguments in Chapter 7 against Tarski's use of schema (T) as a basis for a semantic theory of truth. One of my main arguments was that neither Frege nor Tarski could account for truth attributions involving truth-valueless sentences.⁴

Thus, to repeat one of my examples, the sentence

(1) Sherlock Holmes is tall,

is neither equivalent to, nor has the same content as, the sentence

(2) 'Sherlock Holmes is tall' is true,

² See the many references to Searle's works throughout Tomasello's book. Searle (1984) contains a brief presentation of his views on the structure of action.

³ For simplicity I will use 'sentence' as a generic term, but nothing will depend on this.

⁴ Chapter 2, pp. 80-81; Chapter 7, pp. 234-238.

because they do not have the same truth value—(1) being truth-valueless, and (2) false.

Paul recognizes that the deflationist account of truth cannot allow truth-value gaps (1998, p. 76), and proposes to deal with this problem partly by defining falsity as absence of truth—a move also advanced by Russell (1957)—and partly by appealing to Russell’s theory of descriptions, joined with Quine’s technique for eliminating non-denoting singular terms such as ‘Pegasus’ by means of the *ad hoc* predicates ‘pegasizes’, or ‘is-Pegasus’. I do not find either of these moves satisfactory—and argue against both in various chapters of *Logical Forms*.⁵ In “Truth, Falsity, and Neither” I direct my arguments specifically to Paul’s justifications for these moves in sections 26 and 27 of (1998).

My main argument against defining falsity as absence of truth is that there is a fundamental difference between the non-true sentence (1) and a “truly” false sentence such as

(3) Frege was tall.

For, whereas both (1) and its predicate negation

(1') Sherlock Holmes is not tall

are not true, the predicate negation

(3') Frege was not tall

is true.

My main argument against Quine’s elimination technique for non-denoting terms such as ‘Pegasus’, is that the presumed predicates

⁵ On Russell, see Chapter 3, pp. 130-131 (note 22). On Quine, see Chapter 18, p. 243.

‘pegasizes’ or ‘is-Pegasus’ do not have conditions of applicability, and, hence, are not really predicates, do not determine an extension, etc.⁶

Whether these arguments are accepted or not, my point is that given the dependence of the deflationist approach to the referential import of ‘means that’ on the deflationist account of truth, arguments against the latter are equally arguments against the former.

REFERENCES

- CHATEAUBRIAND, O. “Truth, Falsity, and Neither”. Forthcoming in Janos Boros (ed.) *Semantic Deflationism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- HORWICH, P. *Truth*. Second Edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- KRIPKE, S. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- RUSSELL, B. “Mr. Strawson on Referring”. *Mind*, 66, pp. 385-389, 1957.
- SEARLE, J. “Minds, Brains, and Programs”. *The Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 3, pp. 417-457, 1980.
- SEARLE, J. *Minds, Brains, and Science*. London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984.
- TOMASELLO, M. *Origins of Human Communication*. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2008.

⁶ Both arguments are presented in detail in section 5 of “Truth, Falsity, and Neither”.