

Dialetheism

PHIL2511 Paradoxes

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Seminar 10

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Admin

Required reading:

Sainsbury, Chapter 6 and 7

Optional Reading:

i) Haack, 'Paradoxes'

ii) Goldstein, 'This statement is not true' is not true

iii) Kirkham, 'The liar paradox' (Harder)

iv) Priest and Berto, 'Dialetheism'

<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dialetheism/#4.2>

Essay 2: Due date is 5pm Friday 27 May. Submit by email at danm@hku.hk

Dialetheism

Dialetheism: Every contradiction is false, but some contradictions are true and false

Rational Dialetheism:

- i) Every contradiction is false;
- ii) Some contradictions are both true and false;
and
- iii) For some contradictions, it is rational to believe that they are true

Argument for Rational Dialetheism

The best solution to the liar paradox and other paradoxes is the Dialetheistic solution.

The Dialetheistic solution to the strengthened liar paradox: L2 is both true and not true

Dialetheism entails that there are dialethia

Def: A dialethia is a sentence that is both true and false

Argument: Suppose ' $A \ \& \ \sim A$ ' is true. Then A is true and ' $\sim A$ ' is true. Since ' $\sim A$ ' is true, A is false. Hence A is true and false.

Note: ' $\&$ ' means 'and', and ' \sim ' means 'it is not the case that'

Argument 1 against Dialetheism

Classical logic has an inference rule called explosion that allows us to derive anything from a contradiction. Given classical logic, then, we have the following argument against dialetheism:

1. Contradictions entail everything (from explosion)

Therefore: 2. If there are true contradictions then everything is true

3. It is not the case that everything is true

Therefore: 4. There are no true contradictions

Response

Def: 'A1,..., An. Therefore B' is valid argument iff, necessarily, if A1,..., An are all true then B is not false'

Explosion is plausible iff true contradictions are impossible

Argument (right to left): Suppose true contradictions are impossible. Suppose 'A&~A' is a contradiction and B is some arbitrary sentence. Then 'A&~A. Therefore B' is valid, simply because it is impossible for 'A&~A' to be true.

Response (cont)

Argument (left to right): Suppose instead that there is a true proposition ' $A \& \sim A$ ', and let B be any false sentence. Then ' $A \& \sim A$. Therefore B' is not valid.

Conclusion: A dialetheist can simply deny explosion is valid and endorse a non-classical logic according to which it is not valid.

Argument 2 against dialetheism:

Dividing possibilities

Each non-defective sentence rules out a set of possibilities: the set of possibilities which are ruled not to obtain by an assertion of the sentence

(1) If the set of possibilities ruled out by a sentence A is S , then set of possibilities ruled out by $\sim A$ is the set of possibilities not in S

Argument 2 (cont)

(2) If the set of possibilities ruled out by sentence A1 is S1, and the set of possibilities ruled out by sentence A2 is S2, then the set of possibilities ruled out by 'A1 & A2' is the set of possibilities in both S1 and S2.

It follows from (1) and (2) that the set of possibilities ruled out by any contradiction 'A & ~A' is the set of all possibilities. Hence all contradictions are false.

Argument 3 against dialetheism: Rejection

A dialetheist needs to be able to reject views she disagrees with, such as the view that there are talking donkeys. Suppose I hold that there are talking donkeys. How can a dialetheist express her disagreement?

Attempt 1

She might assert ‘ \sim (there are talking donkeys)’

Problem: This assertion, on the dialetheist view, is possibly compatible with there being talking donkeys, since it might be that there are talking donkeys and \sim (there are talking donkeys)

Attempt 2

She might assert that 'There are talking donkeys' is not true

Problem: On the dialetheist view, this might also be compatible with there being talking donkeys, since it might be that, while 'There are talking donkeys' is not true, 'There are talking donkeys' is also true, and hence that there are talking donkeys

Attempt 3 (Priest/Berto)

There is a primitive attitude of rejection a person may take towards a proposition that can't be analysed as the acceptance of the negation of a proposition. A dialetheist can disagree with me by primitively rejecting the proposition that there are talking donkeys.

Challenge: To make it plausible that we can adopt such an attitude, a dialetheist must describe plausible cases when we do adopt such an attitude. They must also describe how a dialetheist can express this attitude.

Response 1 to challenge

When we adopt this attitude of rejection we often use the word 'not', but in these cases it does not express negation, but instead some other operator not^* , where it is not possible for it to be the case that A and $\text{not}^* A$.

Problem: Given this, we can formulate a new version of the liar paradox that dialetheists can't solve concerning (L^*) .

(L^*) L^* is not^* true

Response 2 to challenge

Independently plausible examples of primitive rejection arise when we reject sentences lacking true values (truth-value gaps), such as (3) and (4), where John never started beating his wife, and where there is no elephant.

(3) John has stopped beating his wife

(4) The elephant is about to charge.

Objection to response 2

Our “rejection” of the truth-gap cases are very different from our rejection of ‘There are talking donkeys’.

We would typically “reject” (3), for example, by uttering something like:

- i) What are you talking about! John never started beating his wife!
- ii) (3) does not express a proposition since it falsely presupposes that John used to beat his wife

Neither these types of rejection are appropriate to my assertion that there are talking donkeys.

Argument 4 against dialetheism: The incredulous stare

Dialetheism is crazy! How can it be the case that A while it also being that it is not the case that A! Unless we have some plausible explanation for how this can be, we must reject dialetheism as incoherent and mad!