Three Norms of Assertability, or How the MOA Became Extinct

Huw Price, 1998

Overview

Horwich: Deflationist theory of truth.

Wright objects: Deflationism cannot account for normativity of truth.

Horwich responds: It does.

Price: Wright is correct, but for the wrong reasons. Truth is still non-substantive, but the theory is not complete.

Deflationism

i) Truth is not a substantive property

ii) "p" is true iff p

What is a norm?

Prescriptive norm : A reason to perform an action

- Truth as prescriptive norm of assertion: By the T-scheme, a reason to believe that "p" is true is a reason to assert p. (Wright)

Descriptive norm: Positive correlation with an action

- Truth as descriptive norm of assertion: Assertions made under warranted assertability are the same as those taken in light of their truth. (Wright)

Warranted assertability = Truth?

No, "p" may be true, but it may not be necessary to assert p.

Thus, truth is a distinctive norm of assertion, that follows directly from ii) and goes against i).

Horwich's Response

- Deflationists never claimed that truth is not a norm of assertion, it is compatible with i).
- From ii) it follows directly that:
  1) Believing that p is true provides grounds to assert that p.
  2) The fact that p is true provides good reason to assert that p.

Price's clarification

1) and 2) are different from what Wright actually said (and different from each other):

    3) A *reason* to believe that p is true is a *reason* to assert p

1) depends on belief, not 'actual' truth

2) depends on fact, closer to truth (but is it a norm?)

3) depends on the reason *for* belief

Why Wright is wrong

- In line with Horwich's intuition, 3) follows directly from ii)
- True in ii) can be replaced with any tautological property to amount to a norm of assertion.
- Purely syntactic use of biconditional.

Is truth still a norm of assertion?

Yes, along the lines of 2).

But first, two weaker norms of assertion

A. Subjective assertability: It is appropriate to assert that p if one believes that p. (subject to sincerity as opposed to truth)

B. Objective assertability: It is appropriate to assert that p if one is justified to believe that p. (subject to coherence)

(Note that the "true" does not appear in either norm)

Third norm of assertability

C) If not-p it is incorrect to assert that p.

Is this a distinct norm from A) & B) and if so, does it have anything to do with truth?

Merely Opinionated Assertions (MOA)

Consider a language community where A) and B) are the only two norms of assertability.

- Criticism based purely on sincerity and coherence; disagreement doesn't imply incorrectness.
- ii) functions as agreement; no third norm gets added.

C) is distinct

- We *feel* as though someone must be incorrect when incompatible assertions are made.
- Truth plays a role best observed in disagreements.
- This role is not explained by ii), since ii) can exist without C).

WWHD (What would Horwich do?)

"Truth may be normative, but has nothing to do with the third norm of assertion."

Let's assume that the third norm simply concerns 3rd degree correctness.

- Intuitively they are the same.
- Correspondence and coherence relate truth to a 3rd degree standard.
- If correctness isn't truth, than it is at least as- if not more interesting than truth.

Genealogy of truth

The role of truth must be explained through its genealogy.

How truth can enter MOA language:

- Substantively
  - There is some property that the MOA lacks, corresponding to "the world as it is".
- Utilitarian
  - Pretending this property exists, leads to individual and societal success.

Objections

Can such a limited language that lacks discussion ever conceive this property?

- Complex discussion evolved from practical discussion

Successfulness of beliefs is substantial

- "Success plays a role in the genealogy of an insubstantial notion of truth... [rather than] truth reduces to the substantial property of successfulness"

Since we know truth is a property of belief, it can be discovered substantially

- Utilitarian explanation still plausible

Conclusion

Deflationists need not abandon i) or ii), but some account is required of the genealogy of truth to explain for its normativity:

Truth being a norm of assertion makes an advantageous difference in disagreement.

Discussion

If the 3rd norm is not truth, despite it being more interesting, deflationism may still be ok. (might still need some argument why truth is normative)

Is there no other way to account for the normativity other than genealogy? (unconvincing)

Does the MOA language provide us with a good starting point for this genealogy?