

Week 12 Handout

Passages from Huw Price “Truth as Convenient Friction” (2003, first version 1999):

I want to maintain that in order to account for a core part of ordinary conversational practice, we must allow that speakers take themselves and their fellows to be governed by a norm stronger than that of justification. Not only is this a norm which speakers acknowledge they may fail to meet, even if their claims are well justified—this much is true of what Rorty calls the cautionary use of truth—but also, more significantly, it is a norm which speakers immediately assume to be breached by someone with whom they disagree, independently of any diagnosis of the source of the disagreement. Indeed, this is the very essence of the norm of truth, in my view. It gives disagreement its immediate normative character, a character on which dialogue depends, and a character which no lesser norm could provide. [TCF 168]

[M]y view rests on the claim that a norm of truth plays an essential and little-recognized role in assertoric dialogue. In pursuit of this conclusion, it will turn out to be helpful to distinguish three norms, in order of increasing strength, roughly: sincerity, justification, and truth itself. [TCF 169]

that practice would not support dialogue as we know it. What is missing—what the third norm provides—is the automatic and quite unconscious sense of engagement in common purpose that distinguishes assertoric dialogue from mere roll call of individual opinion. Truth is the grit that makes individual opinions engage with one another. Truth puts the cogs cognition, at least in its public manifestations. [TCF 169]

Concerning his own view of truth, Rorty describes himself as oscillating between Jamesian pragmatism, on the one hand, and deflationism on the other: "swing[ing] back and forth between trying truth to justification and propounding some form of minimalism about truth." [TCF 171]

my view of truth is also pragmatist, for it explicates truth in terms of its role in practice. [TCF 171]

In another sense, it conflicts with pragmatism, for it opposes the proposal that we identify truth with justification. [TCF 172]

(Subjective assertibility) A speaker is incorrect to assert that p if she does not believe that p; to assert that p in these circumstances provides prima facie grounds for censure, or disapprobation. [TCF 173]

(Personal warranted assertibility) A speaker is incorrect to assert that *p* if she does not have adequate (personal) grounds for believing that *p*; to assert that *p* in these circumstances provides prima facie grounds for censure. [TCF 174]

[A] better move for a pragmatist is to resist the pressure to identify truth with other words, simply to reject the assumption that an adequate philosophical account of truth needs to answer the question "truth?" Better questions for a pragmatist to ask are the explanatory ones: Why do we have such a notion? What job does it do in language? What features does it need to have to play this role? And how would things be different if we did not have it? [TCF 175]

(Truth) If **not-*p***, then it is incorrect to assert that *p*; if not-prima facie grounds for censure of an assertion that *p*. [TCF 175]

What we need to imagine...is a linguistic community who use sentences to express their beliefs, and have a purely disquotational truth predicate, but for whom disagreements have no normative significance, except insofar as it is related to the weaker norms of assertibility. [TCF 176]

Think of a community who use language primarily preferences in restaurants. [TCF 177]

In this practice there need be no place for a norm analogous to truth, however—an objective standard, over and above personal warranted which preferences properly aim to meet. At least to a first approximation, we can imagine a community who treat expressions of beliefs in the same way. They express beliefs—that is, let us say, the kind of behavioral dispositions we would characterize as beliefs—by means of a speech act we might call the merely-opinionated assertion (MOA). [TCF 177]

There really is a third norm, we are inclined to think, even if these simple creatures do not know it. If two of them make **incompatible assertions** then one of them must be objectively incorrect, even if by their lights they both meet the only norms they themselves recognize. [TCF 178]

Without a norm stronger than that of warranted assertibility *for me*, or *for us*, the idea of improving my, or our current commitments would be incoherent. The third norm functions to create the conceptual space for the idea of further improvement. [TCF 1180]

We can do better than the passive account, however. The third norm does not just hold open the conceptual space for the idea of improvement. It positively encourages such improvement, by motivating speakers who **disagree** to try to resolve their disagreement. [TCF 180]

I will call this the active account of the role of the third norm. In effect, it contends that the fact that speakers take their belief-expressing utterances to be subject to the third norm plays a causal,

carrot- and-stick role in encouraging them to settle their **differences**, in cases in which initially they **disagree**. [TCF 181]

The notion of disagreement requires particular care...

There is an important sense in which, on the proposed account, it is practice of applying the third norm which **creates the disagreement, where initially there was mere difference**. Properly developed, view seems likely to be something like this. There is a **primitive incompatibility** between certain behavioral commitments" of a single individual, which turns on the impossibility of both doing and not any given action A—both having and not having a cup of coffee, for example. All else—both the public perceived incompatibility of "conflicting" assertions by different speakers, and the private perceived incompatibility essential to reasoning—is by convention, and depends on the third norm. [TCF 182]

[M]y claim is simply that truth does play the role of this third norm, in providing the friction characteristic of factual dialogue we know it. (I also claim, roughly, that this is perhaps the most interesting fact about truth, from a philosophical perspective.) [TCF 182]

The difference that truth and falsity make is that they make our linguistic practice genuinely assertoric, rather than Mo'an. [TCF 183]

Recall that I began by challenging Rorty's claim that no behavioral consequences flow from a distinction between justification and truth. In one sense, my challenge does indeed amount to pointing out the third norm—a notion of truth stronger than justification—brings with it the following behavioral difference: a disposition to criticize, or at least disapprove of, those with whom one **disagrees**. [TCF 184]

Without truth, the wheels of argument do not engage; disagreements slide past one another. [TCF 185]

The crucial point is thus that assertoric dialogue requires an intolerance of **disagreement**. This needs to be present already in the background, a pragmatic presupposition of judgment itself. I am not maker of assertions, a judger, at all, unless I am already playing game to win, in the sense defined by the third norm. [TCF 186]

Passages from Huw Price “Why ‘Not?’” (2006):

This paper addresses some questions about negation. What is negation good for? What is its linguistic function? How might it plausibly have developed in natural language, and what if anything does this tell us about its properties? The project is thus to explain the existence and nature of negation in ordinary language. [WN 221]

I think, the notion of assertion must be considered conceptually prior to that of truth. ...the important thing is that in introducing the notions of affirmation and denial we have the beginnings of an account of why negation should matter-of what it does for speakers of a language. For as Quine points out, affirming the negation of a statement seems to be equivalent to denying that statement. If we can discover why denial matters, we shall have a promising start to an explanation of why negation matters. And if we can explain **denial** without invoking the notions of truth and falsity, then we'll have the prospect of an account of negation that does not itself depend on these notions. [WN 223]

What might denial be for? One way to approach this question is to try to imagine a community whose language does not allow for denial. Perhaps they have never developed it; or perhaps they are 'Ideological Positivists'...What linguistic capabilities do they lack? [WN 223]

Where it does lie...is in exhibiting **conflicts between beliefs**, and thereby facilitating argument. [WN 223]

Me: 'Fred is in the kitchen.' (Sets off for kitchen.)
 You: 'Wait! Fred is in the garden.'
 Me: 'I see. But he is in the kitchen, so I'll go there.' (Sets off.)
 You: 'You lack understanding. The kitchen is Fred-free.'
 Me: 'Is it really? But Fred's in it, and that's the important thing.'
 (Leaves for kitchen.) [WN 224]

[I]t is plausible that for a variety of purposes, agents need an ability to detect and register **conflicts** between new suggestions or hypotheses and their existing beliefs. [WN 225]

Where might a sense of **incompatibility** first arise? I think there are at least two possible evolutionary stories. The first, which I shall call the active account, would locate our first grasp of a sense of incompatibility in our experience as agents. We often find ourselves faced with a choice between performing and not performing a specified action. [WN 226]

we might say that on the active account negation first arises in the non-descriptive part of language. The alternative seems to be that it arises in direct association with the development of the descriptive use of language. [WN 226]

[T]hat even such a basic linguistic task as that exemplified by our signalling ancestors contains the materials on which to build negation. To signal significantly one needs to be capable of discrimination. One needs to signal in some circumstances and to remain silent in others. One needs a sense that these are mutually exclusive possibilities. Notice that this brings the descriptive account very close to the active account. The choice to signal or not to signal is the choice between actions, even if an understanding of the significance of these particular actions depends on a sense of the existence of exclusive possibilities in the world. As descriptive speech becomes deliberate we thus require a sense of the incompatibility of both speaking and not speaking, as well as that of the conditions under which we ought properly to do one or the other. [WN 227]

In summary, I suggest that **negation** be explained in terms of **the primitive notion of incompatibility**. Where P signals a state of affairs of a certain kind—whether an intention to act, or the obtaining of some condition in the world— \sim P signifies the corresponding incompatible state. The importance of the latter signal stems from its use in marking disagreements. [WN 228]

Neil Tennant:

In order for challenges by means of [negation] to belong to the same language game, or at least to the same level therein as the assertions challenged, they must be conceived of as possessing warrants that are as open to independent public assessment as are the warrants of the assertions challenge. [WN 229]

The suggestion is thus that it is appropriate to deny a proposition P (or assert P) when there is some proposition Q such that one believes that Q and takes P and Q to be incompatible. [WN 231]

Negation is grammatically a toggle operator, a fact explicable in terms of its association with the bi-polar activity of **assertion and denial**. [WN 236]