

Paul Horwich

Truth – Meaning - Reality.

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In this collection of essays Paul Horwich, Professor of Philosophy at New York University, both engages with and challenges his colleagues to continue to explicate the underlying nature of truth. The essays (chapters) are organized in such a way as to address three aspects: the deflationary view of truth (1-5), the implications of such a view (6-8), and its philosophical significance (9-14). Acknowledging ‘that truth is generally taken to be one of the most important concepts’ (2), he begins to answer the question ‘What is Truth?’ (1-11) by revealing the inadequacies of traditional analytical attempts over the last two thousand years. Throughout this first essay Horwich illustrates that deflationism seems to move the attempts a step closer and suggests that this perspective is worthy of consideration in the search for a definitive understanding of truth. He goes on to discuss the virtues and shortcomings of six promising positions within deflationism, namely, the redundancy, minimalist, Tarskian, sentence-variable, prosentential, and disquotational theories of truth. He compares and contrasts each stance to uncover their potential to further the quest for truth (19-33). He concludes that of the six theories the minimalist approach, which is further clarified in the third essay (35-56), offers the best defensible deflationary position (13-34).

In order to defend his conclusion, Horwich addresses a specific position, namely, ‘that the meaning of the truth predicate is fixed by the schema; “the proposition *that p* is true if and only if *p*”’ (35). Reiterating that the focus of this third essay is on the central component of minimalism, Horwich highlights several objections by Harry Field, Anil Gupta, Mark Richard, Michael Dummett, Donald Davidson and a couple posited by Horwich himself; and he maintains that ‘the *full* minimalist picture of truth includes considerably more than (his) thesis’ (56). After reviewing the value of truth (57-77) and critiquing Tarski’s contribution to the arguments concerning the ‘compositional definition of truth’ (89) as well as ‘the derivability of *general* facts about truth’ (92), Horwich suggests that ‘minimalism responds to a genuine problem by offering an account of our actual concept of truth’ (96). Further, he states, ‘there appear to be no facts about truth that fall beyond its (i.e. minimalist) scope’ (97).

Horwich continues to defend his position by discussing the relationship between words and their distinctive meanings (99-112). Wrestling with the idea of ‘intentionality or aboutness’, he asks ‘what sort of activity—mental or behavioral or social—could result in investing a certain word with a certain meaning’ (100). Horwich posits that ‘regularities help engender facts about which *rules* of use we are implicitly following; that these facts suffice to fix what we *mean* by words and hence sentences; and that the meanings of our sentences determine their *truth* conditions’ (113-14). Whether truth has any foundation in the formulation of words and sentences leads Horwich to discuss

semantic theory. He defends a ‘*use* based rather than *truth* based’ theoretical approach, suggesting that truth is a secondary notion and that the verifiability of a sentence depends on its referent *that p* (143 - 65).

The remaining six essays aim to convince the readers of the philosophical significance of ‘the conjunction of deflationism about truth with a use-conception of meaning’ (vi). This, Horwich achieves by relating this premise to normativity (Chapter 9), epistemology (Chapter 10), paradox (Chapter 11), realism and anti-realism (Chapters 12, 13), before finally subjecting his deflationary critique to the truth-maker theory (Chapter 14). Horwich engages the propositions put forth by his colleagues and contemporaries, such as Allan Gibbard, Hartry Field, Paul Boghossian, Bob Hale, Crispin Wright, and Kit Fine, and who in turn critique the ideas propounded by earlier thinkers such as Wittgenstein, Hilbert, Poincaré, Bertrand Russell, and Gottlob Frege. He discusses the relative merits and difficulties with arguments proposed by his colleagues, concluding that his exposition of deflationism withstands criticism. Further, Horwich advances a hypothesis intended to ‘represent the beginnings of an attempt to develop a neo-Wittgensteinian account of *normative* notions (such as OUGHT, WRONG, JUSTIFIED, and OBLIGATORY)’ (167) and elaborates a theory that, he suggests, is a product based on Wittgenstein’s own arguments.

Whether or not one agrees with Horwich’s position, he has laid down the gauntlet to evoke a continuing search for truth, meaning and reality. I believe he would encourage the discerning reader to engage the texts and respond.

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