Superscriptibility and the equivalence schema: a dilemma for Wright’s antirealist

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Abstract
Crispin Wright champions the notion of superscriptibility as providing a truth predicate that is congenial to antirealists in many debates in that it satisfies relevant platitudes concerning truth and does so in a very minimal way. He motivates such a claim by arguing that superscriptibility can satisfy the equivalence schema: it is superscriptible that $P$ if and only if $P$. I argue that Wright’s attempted proof that superscriptibility can satisfy this schema is unsuccessful, because it requires a premise that has not been properly motivated and is prima facie implausible. I further argue that, even if the dubious premise is accepted, the resulting proof is intuitionistically invalid. This is problematic, because a proponent of superscriptibility as a truth predicate has independent reasons to adopt a logical revision in the direction of intuitionism. The resulting dilemma suggests that superscriptibility may not be an adequate truth candidate for any significant ranges of discourse.

Keywords
Antirealism · Crispin Wright · Equivalence Schema · Intuitionistic logic · Minimal truth · Realism · Superscriptibility

In *Truth and Objectivity*, Crispin Wright argues that the notion of superscriptibility affords the antirealist (with respect to a given range of discourse) a viable alternative to the realist’s more robust notion of truth. Toward this end, he endeavors to prove that a superscriptibility predicate can satisfy the traditional equivalence schema: it is true that $P \leftrightarrow P$. (Wright takes satisfaction of this schema to be a criterion of adequacy for any viable truth predicate.) In this paper, I will argue that, not only does Wright’s attempt to prove that a superscriptibility predicate satisfies the equivalence schema fail, an examination of its failure reveals a dilemma for the antirealist who would adopt superscriptibility as a model of truth.

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I will first sketch Wright’s views on the minimal requirements for an adequate truth predicate and explain how the minimal nature of the notion of truth allows realist/antirealist debates to be recast as debates concerning whether or not there is reason to prefer a truth predicate that is more robust than superassertibility for the relevant range of discourse. Second, I will examine Wright’s general strategy for showing that a superassertibility predicate can satisfy the equivalence schema. In the third section, I will explore some of the pressures put on Wright’s antirealist to affect a logical revision in the direction of intuitionistic logic. In section four, I will reveal a gapping hole in Wright’s alleged proof that a superassertibility predicate satisfies the equivalence schema and argue that the most obvious way to close the gap in Wright’s proof is unavailable to one who adopts an intuitionistic logic. I will conclude, in section five, that the proponent of superassertibility as a model of truth is left with a dilemma: if he pursues Wright’s general strategy for showing that a superassertibility predicate satisfies the equivalence schema, he faces various pressures to adopt an intuitionistic logic, but, if he adopts an intuitionistic logic, he cannot close the gap in Wright’s proof that the equivalence schema is satisfied.

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Wright argues that any predicate that satisfies a relatively small and intuitive set of platitudes constitutes a viable truth predicate. Indeed, he claims that this set can be further reduced to the following key platitudes:

\[(A)\] To assert is to present as true
and

\[(SN)\] Any truth-apt content has a significant negation which is likewise truth-apt.

From these two platitudes, according to Wright, one can deduce further platitudes and more formal schemata that serve as useful criteria for testing what we might call the truth adequacy of a predicate.

Wright takes platitude (A) to establish a connection between the concept of assertion and the concept of truth. He sometimes glosses this connection by saying that asserting that P has the same assertoric force as asserting that P is true. According to Wright, the traditional equivalence schema:

\[(E)\] It is true that P \(\leftrightarrow\) P

is then entailed by platitude (A). The traditional disquotational schema:

\[\text{Ibid., p. 34.}\]

\[\text{Ibid., pp. 23–24.}\]

\[\text{It is worth noting that (E) only follows from (A) in any obvious way, if we interpret the biconditional operator as ‘has the same assertoric force as’, i.e., as equivalence in assertoric force. It is far more standard to read the biconditional in (E) as expressing a relation between semantic values, not assertoric force. In classical logic, the biconditional expresses material (truth functional) equivalence. In intuitionistic logic, the biconditional expresses equivalence in confirmation status in all accessible evidential states. (For a more thorough account of the intuitionistic valuation rule for the biconditional, see Note 32.) However, if we interpret the biconditional as an operator that expresses semantic equivalence (either material or in all accessible evidential states), it is hard to see how (E) could follow from (A). (A) relates assertions of ‘P’ to assertions of ‘it is true that P’, while (E) makes the claim that ‘P’ and ‘it is true that P’ have the same semantic value (either materially or in all accessible evidential states), whether or not either is ever asserted or presented as true.}\]