**Linguistic Barrier and the Deepest Problem of Embedding**

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According to Sinnott-Armstrong, the only way that expressivists can adequately solve the deepest problem of embedding is by providing a positive semantic claim. In response, the expressivist might want to resist this based on the claim that the linguistic barrier might prevent them from solving the problem of embedding. That is, they might disagree with Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument that they need such a positive semantic claim. In this paper, I will argue for Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument and show that *the claim regarding the linguistic barrier is not a viable response to Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument.* Expressivists need a positive semantic claim to solve the problem of embedding.

Expressivists often make three claims regarding evaluative assertions (p.678). The first claim is the negative semantic claim, which suggests evaluative assertions do not contain truth value. The second claim is the negative pragmatic claim, which suggests evaluative assertions do not describe the world. The third claim is the positive pragmatic claim, which suggests evaluative assertions express motions or other non-cognitive attitudes. As Sinnott-Armstrong notes, these claims form the foundation of expressivism. According to Sinnott-Armstrong, without providing a positive semantic claim, expressivists may not be able to solve the deepest problem of embedding.

Sinnott-Armstrong provided the standard version of the problem of embedding, it follows (p.679):

1. Lying is Wrong.
2. If lying is wrong, then getting one’s little brother to lie is wrong.
3. Getting one’s little brother to lie is wrong,

The argument presented is an example of modus ponens, a valid argument form, which makes (1)-(3) valid. However, as noted by Sinnott-Armstrong, expressivists might have encounter difficulties dealing with such an argument. That is, without a positive semantic claim, expressivists may not be able to explain the meaning of premise (1) and (2). While it is not a necessary condition to prove that the argument (1)-(3) is valid, it certainly creates a gap for expressivists if they can not explain the meaning of premise (1) and (2). To fill such a gap is called the deepest problem of embedding.

To further explore the potential flaw that expressivism consists, Sinnott-Armstrong presented another argument follows (p.689):

(1\*) Bob is hiyo.

(2\*) If Bob is hiyo, so is his little brother.

(3\*) Bob’s little brother is hiyo.

The word “hiyo” is just an abstract term created for the sake of this argument. Since expressivism subscribes negative semantic claim that rules out the possibility for evaluative assertions to have a truth value. That is, one cannot tell the meaning of premise (1\*) and the antecedent of premise (2\*), because we do not have a prior understanding of the term “hiyo”. When expressivists interpret such an argument, they might be able to explain the validity of it by ruling out that both premise (1\*) and the antecedent of premise (2\*) have the same meaning. However, that still does not help in explaining the meaning of premise (1\*) and the antecedent of premise (2\*). According to Sinnott-Armstrong, *it is almost impossible for expressivists to solve the deepest problem of embedding without a positive semantic claim*.

Expressivists might want to resist Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument and claim that it is not their responsibility to provide a positive semantic claim. That is, *expressivists may not be accountable for solving the deepest problem of embedding*. The analogy follows that suppose an evaluative assertion is expressed in English, and which has a truth value. Such truth value may not be the same as what you think it would be, but none the less, it has a truth value. We can further suppose that such evaluative assertion is expressed to non-English speakers and they claim that such evaluative assertion expressed has no meaning. Since the non-English speakers do not understand anything in English and hence, their claim is valid based on their perspective. Expressivists can further extend this analogy to resist Sinnott-Armstrong’s argument by suggesting that the expressivist does not hold an account for someone who cannot explain the meaning of premise (1\*) and the antecedent of premise (2\*). That is, it is important to notice that the onus is not on the expressivist and expressivists are not accountable for providing any semantic claim to explain such evaluative assertion.

In response, someone like Sinnott-Armstrong would say that since expressivism subscribes to the negative semantic claim that evaluative assertions do not contain truth value. Unless expressivists can provide more of a picture regarding the meaning of an evaluative assertion rather than what evaluative assertions do not mean. That is, *it is not the case that expressivists can dodge the problem of embedding based on the claim of the linguistic barrier since expressivism itself subscribes negative semantic claim*. The analogy follows that, imagine someone introduces a term called “hiyo”. For expressivists, they can tell what “hiyo” does not mean according to expressivism, which subscribes to the negative semantic claim. However, it neither helps us understand what “hiyo” means nor solves the deepest problem of embedding. That is, without a positive semantic claim which supports what “hiyo” means, it is almost impossible for expressivists to explain the meaning of “hiyo”, and for this reason, impossible to solve the deepest problem of embedding.

**Reference**

Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (2000). Expressivism and Embedding. *Philosophy and Phenomenological*

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