

Truth: One or Many or Both?
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1. Introduction: Truth – the One and the Many

Truth pluralism is a metaphysical theory of the nature of truth. The pluralist rejects the deflationist claim that truth is at best a ‘shallow’, insubstantial property. Indeed, the pluralist embraces a *plurality* of substantive truth properties (such as *superwarrant*, *supercoherence*, or *correspondence*), appropriate to different domains of discourse.

What is the intuitive motivation for pluralism? In a recent exposition, Crispin Wright offers the following thought: Perhaps protagonists in the traditional debates over the nature of truth (for example, proponents of coherence, or pragmatist, or correspondence theories of truth) have failed to reach agreement because their views were each appropriate to some domains but not all. Accepting that “all the protagonists were saying locally plausible things...”, one could, by embracing truth pluralism, not only accommodate the failures of specific theories of truth to extend beyond certain paradigms, but also “resist *deflationary* accounts of truth”.¹

As a second motivation for truth pluralism, Wright mentions Dummett’s failure to provide a viable anti-realist construal of the *meanings* of sentences that could replace truth-conditional semantics (which, Dummett thinks, is unsustainable). Recognizing a plurality in *kinds of truth* appropriate for different domains, Wright thinks, may allow us to capture differences between realist and anti-realist conceptions, while adhering to a truth-conditional semantics across the board.

The idea, then, is that pluralizing truth promises to have the following advantages:

1. It can allow us to preserve the intuitive plausibility of the different substantive theories of truth; and

2. It can allow us to reconstruct the realist/anti-realist debate in terms of *kinds of truth*, rather than in terms of *kinds of meaning*.

As regards 1, one might worry that the pluralist will inherit all the main problems of the various traditional substantivist theories of truth, not just their advantages. In addition, however, we think that pluralism faces distinctive difficulties, having to do, specifically, with supposing truth to be many. In what follows, we'll be focusing on *moderate* pluralism – a view that acknowledges, in addition to diverse truth properties, a single property of truth (so that truth emerges as *both one and many*). After presenting a recent, influential version of moderate pluralism (Section 2), we will articulate the main difficulties we see with this view (Section 3). We believe that the difficulties we raise extend to other pluralist views, but we do not address other pluralisms, except in passing.

Now, given the difficulties, it is natural to wonder whether there is a metaphysically more conservative way to accommodate the core intuitions that originally motivated pluralism. In Section 4, we explore one such way. To anticipate, we will suggest, first, that the difficulties raised in Section 3 speak strongly in favor of thinking of truth as one, but not also many. At the same time, we agree with Wright and others that a certain plurality must be recognized, if we are to allow for substantive metaphysical debates between realists and anti-realists in various domains. However, we think such debates should not be construed *either* in terms of kinds of meaning *or* in terms of kinds of truth. For, properly construed, they concern our conceptions of e.g., mathematical or ethical or comic *reality*, or different kinds of 'matters of fact'.

On the conservative alternative we consider, there is only one way for sentences, propositions, beliefs, etc. to be true; though when they are, there may be multiple ways things can *be* to make them so. A joke's being funny is a very different sort of thing from someone's act

being wrong, or a number's being divisible by 2, or a chair's being red – and then an act's being morally wrong is a different sort of thing from it being socially wrong; and then again a chair's being red is a different sort of thing from someone's hair being red! The plurality here is at the level of the world. The appeal to a metaphysical plurality of truth properties contributes no explanatory power beyond what can be got by focusing on the plurality in kinds of worldly conditions that are apt to render the claims made in different domains true. Thus, if we are right, there is nothing to prevent a truth monist – or, for that matter, even a deflationist – from recognizing a plurality that will capture realist and anti-realist conceptions as appropriate to different domains.

2. Moderate Pluralism

Here we focus on moderate pluralism, the kind of pluralism that takes truth to be both one and many. This is in contrast to *strong pluralism*, where truth is many, but not one as well. It's fair to say that most pluralists take moderate pluralism to be preferable, because it has ready answers to certain objections that have been raised against pluralism. Here are two:

(1) There appears to be some unity to the ways in which propositions can be true – for example, it seems that any truth property would supply a criterion for the correctness of beliefs, and it seems that any truth property would be preserved by valid inference. So there should be a generic truth property to capture this unity.

(2) Consider the conjunction <Speeding is illegal and there are mountains>.² This is an example of mixed discourse: the two conjuncts are drawn from two different domains of discourse. The first conjunct is from the legal domain, and we may suppose that it does not have the correspondence property. Rather, it is superwarranted: it is warranted at the present stage of inquiry, and would remain warranted without defeat at every successive stage of inquiry. The

second conjunct is an atomic sentence from the geologic domain, and we may suppose that it does have the correspondence property – it is true because it corresponds to geologic reality. But what about the conjunction as a whole? It is true. However, we cannot say that it has the correspondence property, because its first conjunct doesn't. Perhaps we can say that the conjunction as a whole is superwarranted – we might allow that the second conjunct has the correspondence property *and* is superwarranted. But attributing superwarrant to the conjunction doesn't adequately explain why it is true, because it doesn't adequately explain the truth of the second conjunct. Here, the moderate pluralist has an answer: the truth of the conjunction is explained in terms of generic truth.

Once we have truth as one and many, we need some account of how the many relate to the one. Moderate pluralists offer a variety of accounts of this relation – for example, one account takes the relation to be *realization*, and another account takes it to be *manifestation*.³ Either way, we start with certain core principles which characterize the *concept* of truth. According to Michael Lynch, for example, there are at least three core principles, or “core truisms”:

Objectivity: The belief that p is true if, and only if, with respect to the belief that p, things are as they are believed to be. (Lynch 2009, p.8)

Norm of Belief: It is prima facie correct to believe that p if and only if the proposition that p is true. (*op. cit.*, p.10)

End of Inquiry: Other things being equal, true beliefs are a worthy goal of inquiry. (*Op. cit.*, p.12)

Most pluralists are monists about the *concept* of truth, and these core truisms are taken to pin down this unique concept. Then, at the level of properties, we have, according to the moderate

pluralist, the generic property of truth, call it *truth-as-such*, and the various properties which relate to it – perhaps by *realizing* this generic property, perhaps by *manifesting* it.⁴

To focus the discussion, we consider Lynch's *manifestation pluralism* – though we think that what we have to say carries over to other versions of pluralism. According to manifestation pluralism, truth-as-such is the property that satisfies the core principles *as a matter of conceptual necessity*. Now consider the manifestation relation: what is it for, say, superwarrant to manifest truth-as-such? It is for superwarrant to have among its features those that truth-as-such has essentially. So suppose that a truth about traffic laws has the superwarrant property. For the superwarrant property to manifest truth-as-such is for superwarrant to satisfy the core truisms, since truth-as-such satisfies these principles essentially. In legal discourse, say, superwarrant satisfies the core truisms, and so here superwarrant manifests truth-as-such.

Clearly, truth-as-such manifests itself – the features that truth-as-such has essentially are among the features that truth-as-such has. So, for example, the proposition that speeding is illegal has two truth-manifesting properties: truth-as-such and superwarrant. Following Lynch, call a proposition that has two truth-manifesting properties an *unplain truth*, and a proposition that is *only* true-as-such a *plain truth*.

To see manifestation pluralism in action, consider the mixed conjunction <Speeding is illegal and there are mountains>. This conjunction as a whole does not possess superwarrant or correspondence. Rather it is *plainly true*: it is true-as-such, and has no other truth property. The plain truth of the whole conjunction supervenes on the unplain truth of its conjuncts. Each separate conjunct is what Lynch calls *strongly grounded* – the truth-as-such of each conjunct is manifested by a further truth property. <Speeding is illegal> is true-as-such because the proposition is superwarranted; <there are mountains> is true-as-such because the proposition

corresponds to the facts. In contrast, the truth-as-such of the whole conjunction is not manifested by any further truth property of the conjunction itself. The conjunction itself is a plain truth that is *weakly grounded* in the unplain truth of its components.

3. Moderate Pluralism and Truth Attributions

Our question now is: What should the truth pluralist say about *truth attributions*? Lynch is one pluralist who has explicitly addressed this question, so we will be focusing on what Lynch has to say about it.

Observe first the familiar equivalence between the proposition that p and the truth attribution <p is true>. There is some disagreement about how exactly to characterize this equivalence, but we think it can be agreed that the equivalence

$$\langle p \rangle \text{ is true iff } p$$

is at least a *necessary* equivalence: the two sides of the biconditional have the same truth values in every possible world. Now consider the proposition that speeding is illegal. According to manifestation pluralism – and the second-order functionalist – this proposition is true-as-such, *and* it has the superwarrant property, where the superwarrant property manifests truth-as-such. <Speeding is illegal> is an unplain truth.

According to manifestation pluralism, things are *different* with the truth attribution <<speeding is illegal> is true>. This is a *plain truth*: it is true-as-such, but has no further truth property. In particular, it does not have the superwarrant property. The attribution <<speeding is illegal> is true> is weakly grounded in the unplain truth of <speeding is illegal>.

One might be tempted to suppose that the truth attribution <<speeding is illegal> is true> should *inherit* the truth properties of <speeding is illegal>. But Lynch takes the inheritance view

to be 'hopeless'.⁵ It is hopeless, Lynch argues, in view of the fact that we use truth to generalize over propositions. Suppose I say:

(G) Everything George says is true.

This is a universal generalization over propositions:

For every proposition p, if George says that p then p is true.

Now suppose that George expresses propositions about all kinds of subject matter – about speeding, about prime numbers, about mountains. According to the inheritance view, truth attributions inherit their truth properties from their attributees. But the attributees of my truth attribution (G) have a variety of truth properties – superwarrant, supercoherence, correspondence. So (G) will have all those truth properties together – and that is not possible. That is not to say that there cannot be truths that possess all three properties; we are not ruling out the possibility that there are truths with the correspondence property that happen also to be superwarranted and supercoherent. But (G) ranges over propositions that aren't correspondence-apt. So (G) itself is not correspondence-apt. So (G) cannot inherit all the alethic properties possessed by the propositions over which it ranges. According to the manifestation pluralist, then, the inheritance view must be rejected.

But we think the inheritance view, or something very like it, is right. And it is hard to see how the manifestation pluralist – or the second-order functionalist -- can resist it. Consider the proposition <speeding is illegal>. Recall that a belief is superwarranted just when believing that p is warranted at some stage of inquiry and would remain warranted without defeat at every successive stage of inquiry. A proposition that is true in this way is one that is warranted to believe, and remains warranted to believe, however our information is expanded or improved. Assuming with the manifestation pluralist that the proposition <speeding is illegal> is

superwarranted, it follows that the truth attribution $\langle\langle\text{speeding is illegal}\rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is also superwarranted. No further information can undermine either $\langle\text{speeding is illegal}\rangle$ or $\langle\langle\text{speeding is illegal}\rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ without undermining the other; if one remains warranted through every successive stage of inquiry, so does the other. This is because anyone who grasps the concept of truth will accept the conceptual equivalence of $\langle\text{speeding is illegal}\rangle$ and $\langle\langle\text{speeding is illegal}\rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$.⁶ In general, $\langle p \rangle$ is superwarranted if and only if $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is superwarranted. Similarly, if we work with the truth operator on propositions: $\langle p \rangle$ is superwarranted if and only if $\langle \text{it is true that } p \rangle$ is superwarranted. It follows, then, that $\langle\text{speeding is illegal}\rangle \text{ is true}$ and $\langle \text{it is true that speeding is illegal} \rangle$ are both true-as-such and superwarranted. They are not plainly true.

This conclusion remains even if we accept that there is a sense in which the truth of $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ is dependent on the truth of $\langle p \rangle$, and not vice versa. Both $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ are superwarranted, given the necessary equivalence between $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$. The inheritance view is sensitive to this dependence: $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ inherits its truth properties from $\langle p \rangle$, and not vice versa. But, to state the obvious, if $\langle\langle\text{speeding is illegal}\rangle \text{ is true}\rangle$ inherits the property of superwarrant, it has the property – it is not plainly true.

The case of *supercoherence* runs parallel. Following Lynch, we can characterize coherence and supercoherence along the following lines. The coherence of a framework is, of course, a complicated matter, involving many ingredients (consistency, simplicity, completeness, mutual explanatory support, and so on). Assuming that we have a characterization of a coherent framework, suppose we go on to say that a proposition $\langle p \rangle$ *coheres* with a framework F if including $\langle p \rangle$ in F would make F more coherent.⁷ Now introduce the notion of supercoherence as follows: $\langle p \rangle$ *supercoheres* with F if and only if $\langle p \rangle$ coheres with F at some stage of inquiry

and would continue to do so without defeat, through all successive and additional improvements to F. That is, $\langle p \rangle$ *supercoheres* with F if adding $\langle p \rangle$ to F makes F more coherent, and will continue to do so through all subsequent improvements to F. Now consider the proposition $\langle p \rangle$ and the truth attribution $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$. Suppose that $\langle p \rangle$ supercoheres with F. So when we add $\langle p \rangle$ to F, it makes F more coherent, and will continue to do so through all improvements to F. But suppose instead that we add $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$. Then $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ will supercohere with F. Adding $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ instead of $\langle p \rangle$ will also make F more coherent, and will continue to do so through all improvements. If either one supercoheres with F, then so will the other. But then $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is not a plain truth. And, similarly, $\langle \text{it is true that } p \rangle$ is not a plain truth.

What about correspondence? Here, the discussion cannot be quite so clearcut, just because the relation of correspondence is (notoriously) unclear. Suppose that $\langle p \rangle$ corresponds to fact F. Given the correspondence between $\langle p \rangle$ and F, there will be a necessary connection between F and the truth of $\langle p \rangle$. Any world that contains F is a world in which $\langle p \rangle$ is true; and any world that does not contain F is a world in which $\langle p \rangle$ is false. But given the necessary equivalence between $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$, there will also be a necessary connection between F and the truth of $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$. That is, any world which contains F is a world at which $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is true, and any world which does not contain F is a world in which $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is false. It seems natural to take this as saying that there's a correspondence between $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ and F. But then it follows that $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is not plainly true – like $\langle p \rangle$, it is both true-as-such *and* has the correspondence property.

At this point, the manifestation pluralist might appeal to the dependence asymmetry between $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$: $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ depends for its truth on the truth of $\langle p \rangle$, but not vice versa. The truth attribution $\langle \langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ is weakly grounded; but $\langle p \rangle$ itself is strongly

grounded. Now this might support the thought that the correspondence between $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ and F is dependent on the correspondence between $\langle p \rangle$ and F. $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ corresponds to F only because (i) $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ are necessarily equivalent, and (ii) $\langle p \rangle$ corresponds to F. But even if this is so, the correspondence between $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ and F remains. Even if this correspondence is in some way derivative, still $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ has the correspondence property – it is not plainly true. Again, we can take the inheritance view as reflecting the derivative way in which $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ has the correspondence property: it *inherits* the property from its attributee $\langle p \rangle$. And again we can state the obvious: If $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ inherits the correspondence property, it has the property.

The manifestation pluralist might claim that there's a relevant difference between $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ and $\langle p \rangle$. $\langle\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ has a *proposition* as its subject; $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ has grass as its subject. Does this make a difference to the correspondence relation? This depends on one's view of the equivalence between $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ and $\langle p \rangle$. We might hold, with Frege and many others, that the necessary equivalence between $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ and $\langle p \rangle$ is an indication of the special, transparent way in which the truth predicate works when applied to individual propositions. The predicate 'true' is not an ordinary property-ascribing predicate. If we accept that the truth predicate is transparent in this way, it is very hard to see how $\langle p \rangle$ and $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ could differ in whatever truth properties they do have – in particular, if one corresponds to F, so does the other.

If, on the other hand, one thought of 'true' as an ordinary property-ascribing predicate, then, as a correspondence theorist, one should think that $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ corresponds to a fact involving the proposition that $\langle p \rangle$ and the property truth (and not, say, a fact concerning grass and greenness). Now $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ corresponds to a different fact from $\langle p \rangle$ -- one fact involves

a proposition and the property of truth, the other involves grass and greenness. But still $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ has the correspondence property. Again, according to the inheritance view, $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ will have the correspondence property in a derivative way. The proposition $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ corresponds to the non-semantic facts, and that's why $\langle\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ corresponds to the semantic fact that $\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle$ is true. Still, $\langle\langle \text{grass is green} \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ has the correspondence property. It is not plainly true.

We should observe again that truth attributions can take another form, employing a sentential operator, as with $\langle \text{it is true that grass is green} \rangle$. Here there is no reference to propositions, and no use of a truth predicate (property-ascribing or otherwise). And again we will have a necessary connection, a correspondence, between the proposition $\langle \text{it is true that grass is green} \rangle$ and the fact that grass is green.

To sum up, we've argued that

(1) A truth attribution shares its truth properties, whatever they may be, with its attributee. In addition, we've taken the inheritance view to handle the natural thought that the truth of $\langle\langle p \rangle \text{ is true} \rangle$ depends on the truth of $\langle p \rangle$, but not *vice versa*. And we've observed what is obvious, that the inheritance view implies (1). Now, we also agree with Lynch that (2) (1) is incompatible with a pluralist view of truth properties, in virtue of truth's role in generalizing over propositions, as exemplified by (G) above. (Of course, given (2), and given that the inheritance view implies (1), it follows that the inheritance view is also incompatible with pluralism about truth properties.) If we are right about (1) and (2), then it follows that we should reject pluralism about truth properties.

One further remark. The manifestation pluralist might take a leaf out of the deflationist's book, and regard a generalization such as (G) as equivalent to an infinite conjunction of

conditionals: If George says that there are mountains then there are mountains, and if George says that grass is green then grass is green, and Similarly, a generalization such as ‘Something George said yesterday is true’ would be regarded as an infinite disjunction. Then the problem of dealing with generalized truth attributions reduces to the problem of dealing with truth-functional compounds. The manifestation pluralist will say, as we saw above, that truth functional compounds are plainly true, while their atomic components are unplainly true. This is so whether the compounds are mixed (as with <Speeding is illegal and there are mountains>) or unmixed. Lynch writes: “Compound propositions, mixed or not, are true because they are plainly true”.⁸ The plain truth of a conjunction is a matter quite independent of the discourses from which the conjuncts are drawn. But now problems emerge for truth-functional compounds, in parallel with the problems for truth attributions.

Suppose that at some stage of inquiry, both <p> and <q> are separately warranted, and would remain warranted without defeat at every successive stage of inquiry. Then it seems hard to deny that <p&q> is warranted at the given stage and at every successive stage: that is, if <p> and <q> are separately superwarranted, then <p&q> is superwarranted. And if we accept a sense in which the truth of <p&q> depends on the truth of <p> and <q> separately, then this asymmetry is accommodated naturally by the inheritance view, which preserves the superwarrant of <p&q>. Similarly with supercoherence. If adding each of <p> and <q> separately to F makes F more coherent, and will continue to do so through all subsequent improvements, then so will adding <p&q> to F. Or suppose <p> corresponds to fact F, and <q> to fact F*. Then the worlds which contain both facts F and F* will be exactly those worlds in which <p&q> is true – we have a correspondence between <p&q> and the facts. In each case, we have an unmixed conjunction which is superwarranted, or supercoherent or corresponds – they are not plainly true.

The manifestation pluralist's claim is that *any* true conjunction is plainly true. The plain truth of a conjunction is a matter supposedly independent of the mixed or unmixed character of the conjunction. But now we have seen that there are conjunctions that are not plainly true. So the manifestation pluralist's argument for the plain truth of conjunctions has broken down – we've now lost whatever motivation there was for supposing that, say, <Speeding is illegal and there are mountains> is plainly true. And, as we saw earlier, the conjunction cannot possess the correspondence property, given the first conjunct, and even if we allow that the conjunction is superwarranted, this fails to explain the truth of the second conjunct. The conjunction is true, but the manifestation pluralist has no adequate account of its truth.

The point here connects to the case of truth attributions. Suppose George only ever says two things: "Speeding is illegal" and "There are mountains". Now consider again:

(G) Everything George says is true.

Under the circumstances, (G) is equivalent to <<Speeding is illegal> is true and <There are mountains> is true>, which is in turn equivalent to <Speeding is illegal and there are mountains>. So if manifestation pluralists doesn't have an adequate account of the truth of this conjunction, they will have have not have an adequate account of the truth of (G).

4. Wherein Plurality?

Difficulties with moderate pluralism, some independently motivated commitments, and an attempt to accommodate the main motivations for pluralism, lead us to propose the following set of desiderata for a view of truth:

1. No wholesale deflationism (as per arguments we have provided elsewhere).⁹
2. No commitment to quietism about realist/anti-realist debates.
3. Acknowledgement of *some* plurality, so as (a) to make room for substantive

realist/anti-realist debates, and (b) to accommodate the idea that, in some sense, no ‘one true size fits all’ when it comes to different discourses.

4. No plurality of *truth* properties (as per the above objections).

5. No commitment to a plurality of kinds of meaning.

We’ll address these desiderata in turn.

Regarding desideratum 1, we have argued in earlier work that the *concept* of truth is richer than deflationists can allow, that it has links to other important ‘nodes’ in our conceptual scheme (such as meaning, belief, and assertion) that cannot be ‘disquoted away’.¹⁰ We agree with Frege, Davidson, Wright, and others, that the concept of truth is fundamental in our conceptual scheme, and though it may not be given an analytic definition, it can be illuminated by articulating its connections with other concepts (in the style proposed by Strawson, for example¹¹). It is not clear to us, however, whether accepting the conceptual robustness of truth commits one to there being a substantive (or ‘nonabundant’) metaphysical property denoted by the predicate ‘is true’ that has an underlying *nature* shared by all and only true things. So, despite rejecting wholesale *conceptual* (as well as *linguistic* deflationism), we have been prepared to leave the door open (at least provisionally) for *metaphysical* deflationism: the claim that nothing explanatory may be gained by invoking a property denoted by the predicate ‘is true’ (and its equivalents). Here, however, we are only concerned to deny that the conceptual robustness of truth requires recognizing different *kinds of truth*, each appropriate in different domains, and capturing diverse ways for statements to *be* true.

Turning to desideratum 2, some deflationists – notably Horwich – maintain that “[t]he use of these labels [‘realism’ and ‘anti-realism’] within philosophy is an unholy mess – to the point that they surely lack determinate application”; indeed, Horwich says he would “like to

avoid ‘isms’ altogether”.¹² He thinks that in areas where anti-realism may seem tempting, “we can devise a coherent and attractive perspective combining the most plausible contentions of the self-styled ‘realists’ with the most plausible contentions of the self-styled ‘anti-realists’”, bypassing all concerns about metaphysically ‘spooky’ facts.¹³ According to this ‘quietist’ view, once we admit that it is legitimate to speak of truth, propositions, and even beliefs and facts, in a given domain, there remains *no* philosophically significant issue of metaphysical relevance to be settled regarding the discourse in question. We reject this quietism.

This leads directly to our next desideratum, 3. As a default position, we agree with Wright and others that there may well be a point to drawing metaphysical distinctions among various areas of discourse, and that we can be cautiously optimistic about the prospects of making philosophical sense of debates between realists and anti-realists in various domains. Moreover, we think that this requires acknowledging a certain plurality.

However, we deny that satisfying desideratum 3 requires accepting a plurality of truth properties. In addition to the objections we, and others, have raised against moderate pluralism, there is a general worry about the invocation of a plurality of truth properties. Suppose we ask: *Why* is correspondence truth the right kind of truth for statements about middle-size physical objects? Why is it *not* appropriate for ethics? Why is superassertibility appropriate for comic discourse? And so on. Presumably, the pluralist would agree that the reason has something to do with the ontology of the relevant domain – with the relevant facts. Alethic pluralism is thus motivated by ontological pluralism, according to which domains of discourse may be objective to different degrees, or exhibit different degrees of mind-dependence. But if this is so, then it’s very unclear what the appeal to diverse truth properties adds, explanatorily speaking, to the already acknowledged ontological plurality. Hence desideratum 4.

For related reasons, we propose desideratum 5. In agreement with Wright, we think one should deny (contra Dummett) that the plurality required for capturing realist/anti-realist debates is a plurality in *kinds of meaning*, or one that holds “at the level of the propositions” expressed by sentences in different discourses.¹⁴ Nothing in the semantic behavior of sentences in different discourses suggests that they possess different kinds of meaning. And, as with truth pluralism, if we acknowledge plurality at the level of ontology, it is not clear what an appeal to diverse meanings would add, explanatorily speaking.

As a default position, then, we think that the debates between realism and anti-realism should be reconstructed neither in terms of kinds of truth properties nor in terms of kinds of meaning. Instead, we suggest, more conservatively, that the plurality be assigned to the relevant realms of facts – to the *worldly conditions* that could *render* statements in given domains true.

In a critique of Wright’s *Truth & Objectivity*, Pettit proposes something along these lines: Under the envisaged scenario, there remains only one sort of truth: that which is defined by the platitudes-satisfying role. It is just that what truth involves in one area – what realizes the appropriate role – may be different from what it involves in another. The difference ... will be explained by reference to *the different subject-matters: the different truth-conditions, and the different truth-makers*, in each discourse.¹⁵

Now, to gain traction against the truth pluralist, who insists on locating the relevant plurality in kinds of truth *as opposed to* kinds of meaning, it is important to note that the notion of *truth-conditions* (as well as that of *subject-matter*, and even *content*) is invoked in discussions of truth in two ways that can – and, we submit, *should* – be separated.

A Davidsonian truth-conditional theory of meaning aims to yield as theorems *meaning-specifying* biconditionals, such as

(W) “Wasser ist nass” is true if, and only if, water is wet.

The right-hand side of the biconditional is a sentence that can be *used* by the theorist to specify the meaning of the sentence *mentioned* on the left-hand side. Here, the right-hand side picks out the worldly condition – water’s being wet – under which the mentioned sentence is true.

However, as recognized by Davidson,¹⁶ that is not sufficient for the biconditional to be *meaning* giving. Crucially, the right-hand side must pick out that worldly condition in a way that is fit to capture the *semantic place* occupied by the mentioned sentence. Contrast (W) with

(W’) “Wasser is nass” is true if, and only if, H₂O is wet.

Although (W’) is a true biconditional, and its right-hand side picks out the same worldly condition as the right-hand side of (W), (W’) is, intuitively, not meaning-giving. We must here set aside the difficult question whether – and how – a truth theory for a language L can, as Davidson hoped, do all that we may expect of a theory of meaning for L. Still, we must be careful with the familiar slogan: “The meaning of a sentence is given by its truth-conditions”. In a Davidsonian theory of meaning, when the meaning of a sentence is given by specifying its truth-conditions (as does the theorem (W)), it matters *how* those conditions are picked out. So the notion of truth-conditions relevant to the familiar slogan is a *semantic* one, to wit:

- (i) truth-conditions as they figure in *meaning-giving* biconditionals – worldly conditions *picked out in a way fit for specifying the meaning* of a given sentence.¹⁷

However, when Pettit invokes truth-conditions as obviating the need for a plurality in kinds of truth, he is presumably thinking of truth-conditions in a different way (as suggested by his reference to ‘truth-makers’¹⁸). The notion of truth-conditions relevant here is a *metaphysical* one, to wit:

- (ii) *worldly conditions* (objects, properties, states of affairs – if any) identified by a metaphysician as revealing the underlying nature, ontological constitution, etc., of elements in the relevant domain.

Our aim in what follows will be to take a stab at clarifying the distinction we have in mind, and to explain how this distinction bears on what we take to be the best way to accommodate the motivations behind pluralism.¹⁹

Begin with truth-conditions as they figure in meaning-giving biconditionals. Truth-conditions thus understood feature in Davidson's seminal "Truth and Meaning", where he proposes that a theory of meaning for a natural language should take the form of a theory of *truth* for that language.²⁰ Meaning-giving biconditionals are designed to capture the logical place occupied by individual sentences in the whole (potentially infinite) network of sentences of a language. Meaning-giving biconditionals are relatively neutral, metaphysically speaking. This relative neutrality is well-captured by Davidson himself, when he says:

If we suppose questions of logical grammar settled, sentences like 'Bardot is good' raise no special problems for a truth definition. The deep differences between descriptive and evaluative (emotive, expressive, etc.) terms do not show here. ... we ought not to boggle at "'Bardot is good' is true if and only if Bardot is good'; in a theory of truth, this consequence should follow with the rest, keeping track, as must be done, of the semantic location of such sentences in the language as a whole—of their relation to generalizations, their role in such compound sentences as 'Bardot is good and Bardot is foolish', and so on. What is special to evaluative words is simply not touched: the mystery is transferred from the word 'good' in the object-language to its translation in the meta-language.²¹

On the Davidsonian picture presented in "Truth and Meaning", the truth-conditions cited in meaning-giving biconditionals have the following important features:

(1s²²) They are arrived at through systematic *logico-semantic* analysis of the relevant object language. To do its job, such an analysis will exhibit the truth-conditions of sentences as a function of the semantic values of their parts, in a way that reveals how they systematically interact with other sentences and sentence parts, how they embed in various constructions (such as conditionals, modal and propositional attitude contexts), and so on.

(2s) Calling the worldly conditions that feature in the biconditionals “*truth-conditions*” seems apt, given the involvement of truth in recovering logical structure, entailment relations among sentences, etc. But to play its role here ‘truth’ need not be understood as denoting any robust (or specific) metaphysical property. At the same time, the use of the Tarskian truth schema to specify sentences’ meanings in no way *commits* one to deflationism about truth, and on some views is incompatible with it. (As is well known, Davidson himself has argued *against* deflationism about truth, for reasons we cannot rehearse here.²³)

(3s) Davidsonian semantic analysis can yield surprising results. It can reveal covert ambiguities and context-sensitivity; it can assign sentences logical forms that diverge radically from surface forms (think of Russell’s analysis of sentences containing definite descriptions, or Davidson’s own proposed analysis of action sentences)²⁴; it can exhibit unexpected relations among sentences; and so on. The assignment of truth-conditional meaning to mentioned sentences is not a trivial matter; it is subject to substantive constraints, and the semantic contents it yields are not ‘thin propositions’ that are merely the shadows of all syntactically well-formed sentences. (For example, the theory may rule out as meaningless sentences such as ‘’Twas brillig and the slithy toves did gyre and gimble’, or even ‘Colorless green ideas sleep furiously’.) Thus, a Davidsonian theory is *not* a disquotational theory of *meaning*.

(4s) However, there is no presumption that a Davidsonian semantic theory will yield in every case an analytic *paraphrase*. Take, for example, the sentence “Both Jack and Jill are Americans”. It’s reasonable to expect our semantic theory to unpack the meaning of this sentence in terms of the conditions that Jack is American and Jill is American – in contrast with the different set of conditions for “Jack and Jill lifted the piano”. But there is no presumption that the theory could do any better for “Jack went up the hill” than telling us that it is true iff Jack went up the hill. Similarly, for a sentence such as “There are ten mountains in the Taconic range”, the theory may do no better than offer a disquotational truth-condition. In general, there is no presumption that a truth-conditional analysis will reveal anything interesting about the meaning of semantic ‘atoms’ such as the English terms ‘dog’, ‘mountain’, ‘water’, ‘walk’, ‘love’, ‘blue’, ‘tall’; let alone ‘happy’, ‘beautiful’, ‘funny’, ‘good’, ‘wrong’, and so on. So there is a sense in which the meaning-giving biconditionals are somewhat modest, semantically speaking.

(5s) More importantly, as Davidson himself remarks, meaning-giving biconditionals are also *ontologically* or *metaphysically* modest. For they may not in general reveal facts about the existence, composition, or underlying nature of the worldly conditions that the semantic theorist invokes in her specifications of meaning. In propounding, e.g., *Harrison Ford was good in Blade Runner* as the truth-condition of the English sentence “Harrison Ford was good in Blade Runner” (as well as its translations into other languages), we as theorists of the object language can remain relatively neutral on *what makes for good acting*. This means that settling on the biconditionals that specify the meanings of sentences in a given domain can leave room for substantive metaphysical questions and debates. Having settled on the meanings of mathematical sentences, for example, it is open to the semantic theorist (who may or may not herself be a metaphysician) to ponder the nature of mathematical facts – whether there are numbers, what

kinds of things they are, and so on. *Using* the vocabulary of an area of discourse, and putting on a metaphysician's hat, so to speak, one can ask questions such as 'What in the world (if anything) makes something *beautiful, morally right, funny?*'. These questions are not in general questions about language, but are instead questions raised in the 'material' mode, *using* language.

(6s) In the case of areas of discourse thought to involve commitment to ontologically problematic facts, there seems to be a great advantage to recognizing the availability of the semantic notion of truth-conditions. Acknowledging that the meanings of sentences across a wide array of discourses can be specified by giving their truth-conditions (using the appropriate biconditionals) allows us to accommodate undeniable logico-semantic continuities between the allegedly problematic areas and more straightforwardly 'descriptive' ones. (Unless a sentence such as "Hunting for fun is morally wrong" can be assigned truth-conditional meaning, it is entirely unclear how it can embed in conditionals or participate in logical inferences involving purely descriptive elements.)

(7s) At the same time, the association of truth-conditional meanings with sentences of, e.g., ethics, does not automatically remove all worries about the problematic character of putative facts in the relevant domain. One can still be an 'anti-realist' about ethics, even if ethical sentences can be assigned truth-conditional meanings. We would argue that securing truth-conditional meanings for sentences in an area of discourse does not mute all significant disputes between realists and anti-realists regarding its status.

This brings us to the second notion of 'truth-conditions' – the one that seems to be at work in the 'scenario' Pettit puts forward. On our way of carving things up, these are *worldly conditions* invoked when attempting to answer metaphysical questions about ontology, nature,

constitution, and so on – questions such as e.g., What is pain? What is color? What makes a person happy? How are mountains to be individuated? When does S know that p? These conditions have the following important features:

(1m²⁵) They are semantically innocent. They are provided – and are offered in response to questions that are posed – in the ‘material mode’, as opposed to responding to questions about the meanings of sentences. Metaphysical questions *can* follow on the heels of assigning semantic truth-conditions to sentences, as when we learn from the semanticist – perhaps disappointingly – that “Torturing animals is morally wrong” is true iff, well, torturing animals is morally wrong, and we press: but what *makes* a practice morally wrong? However, *this* question (about the *nature* of moral wrongness) can arise prior to, and independently of, recovering the truth-conditional meaning of any sentence involving the phrase “morally wrong”.

(2m) Except when one’s metaphysical inquiry concerns language, the metaphysical search for worldly conditions has nothing to do with the analysis of meaning – though, of course, one will typically have to make competent *use* of language to raise the relevant questions. Familiarly, when the metaphysician of mind tells us that pain is a certain configuration of brain states, or essentially a functional state, this is not offered as a meaning analysis. Similarly for the utilitarian reduction of the goodness of actions to their maximization of utility, and various other reductive accounts.

(It may be thought that *semantic externalism* – a view that connects meaning with conditions in speakers’ external environment – gives the lie to the metaphysical neutrality of semantic analysis just suggested. But this is a misunderstanding. Semantic externalism maintains that, in the case of at least some terms, notably natural kind terms, their meaning is (partly) individuated in terms of the worldly substances to which users of the terms are causally related.

So, crudely, a speaker could not mean *water* by their word “water”, *unless* they were causally related to (the substance) water. First, notice that this only provides a necessary, but not a sufficient condition on meaning *water* by “water”. It thus falls short of giving a semantic analysis of “water” (or the conditions on a competent use of the term). But, second, as far as semantic theorizing is concerned, the necessary condition is not to be specified *metaphysically*. All the externalist semantic theory is in a position to claim is that the meaning of “water” is dependent on the nature of water, *whatever that is*. If water is in fact identical to the chemical substance H₂O, then being H₂O is constitutive of its metaphysical nature. But there is no expectation that “H₂O” should figure in an externalist semantic account of the term “water”.)

(3m) The worldly conditions that figure in the truths of a semantic theory can be seen as *truth-conditions* only in the sense that we can think of them as *making true* some sentences/ propositions/beliefs/etc. and not others. But, so understood, they are conditions that are individuated metaphysically, not semantically. Consider: the worldly condition of H₂O’s being wet is, metaphysically speaking, one and the same condition as that of water’s being wet. So this worldly condition – described either way – makes true the sentence “Water is wet”. But, for all that, “‘Water is wet’ is true iff H₂O is wet” is *not* a meaning-giving biconditional for “Water is wet”. It will not (or at any rate should not) be a theorem derivable from a truth theory for English.²⁶

Where does all this leave us with respect to truth pluralism? Consider a metaphysical inquiry into what makes something illegal. Such an inquiry may conclude that the legality of this or that act depends in some systematic way on our legal practices, on certain aspects of history, and so on. Perhaps it will conclude that nothing *is* legal that would not be *judged* legal by an ideally placed judge, so that it makes no sense to suppose that the legality of an act could

forever elude human judgment. We can summarize the results of this inquiry by saying: In legal matters (in contrast with other sorts of matters), truth is judgment-dependent. But the question is whether putting things this way really commits us to a distinct substantive *truth property* possessed by all true legal sentences (as contrasted with, say, sentences of everyday discourse about mid-sized dry goods). The explanatory gain in invoking a distinct *kind of truth*, as opposed to differences in what *makes* true statements in the legal realm true – what objects, properties, or states of affairs (including practices, history, and so on) make for the legality or otherwise of this or that act or practice – seems to us illusory. Our complaint, in short, is that nothing is added by invoking a metaphysical plurality of truth properties over and above whatever plurality is recognized in the worldly conditions that our metaphysicians have identified or proposed, as they investigate different domains of discourse.

Pedersen and Lynch address what may seem like this complaint under the heading “the double counting objection”. Distinguishing differences “at the level of subject matter” (which they understand as *metaphysical* differences) from differences “at the level of truth” (which they consider to be *semantic* differences), they address the objection that “to accommodate ... the appeal of realism and antirealism with respect to different domains one only needs to buy into differences in subject matter”²⁷. Following Wright, they respond that the metaphysical difference will inevitably bring a semantic difference in its train.

In accounting for the circumstance that <There are mountains> is true it seems right to say that there is a fit between the proposition and reality, *and* that this fit is in no way due to us shaping, or somehow contributing to, what the relevant tract of reality is like.

Matters change when we turn to <Speeding is illegal>.²⁸

Our question is: What are we here adding to the claim that *we* have something to do with things

being illegal, but nothing to contribute with respect to whether something is a mountain? What difference is there in what ‘accounts for the circumstance’ that the two different propositions are true that is not simply a matter of the difference in the constitution of the relevant facts? Of course, we can ‘ascend’ to the formal mode, and instead of talking about what makes for the existence of mountains ask what accounts for the *truth* of <There are mountains>. If we want to generalize over the whole domain, we may *need* to use the truth predicate, viz. “For all p , if p is a mountain-statement, then p is true iff ...”. And, depending on how the condition is filled in, we may be able to say, e.g., that mountain statements are true in a mind-independent way. But our point is that the possibility of characterizing the differences in the ‘formal mode’ in no way betrays commitment to a new, additional difference – one that requires postulating differences in ways of *being* true, or the possession of divergent truth properties by statements in different areas of discourse. Indeed, when Pedersen and Lynch expound the ‘semantic difference’ between the truth of <Speeding is illegal> and <There are mountains>, they themselves immediately resort to talk in the ‘material mode’: “Mountains are mind-independent entities while laws are social – and so, mind-dependent – constructs”.²⁹

Unlike others who have worried about double counting, our objection is not motivated by a pluralist view of propositional content *or* a deflationist view of truth.³⁰ If we are right, there is a way of making sense of disputes between realists and anti-realists that neither goes via a distinction at the level of propositions nor depends on deflating *all* truth.³¹ But it does not depend on invoking different kinds of truth, either. On the alternative we endorse, there is only one way for true sentences, propositions, beliefs, etc. to be true. However, there may be multiple kinds of worldly conditions that make them true. The relevant plurality can be captured ‘in the material mode’; it doesn’t require any semantic or alethic ascent. Of course, given the equivalence of

<p> and <<p> is true>, one *can* advert to a ‘formal mode’ and speak of the *truth* of ‘x is red’ being a different sort of thing from the *truth* of ‘x is divisible by 2’ – indeed, sometimes putting things in terms of truth may be indispensable. It is the additional move, to a plurality of *truth properties*, each appropriate to a different domain of discourse, that we here oppose. This move, we maintain, is not forced on us by taking seriously debates between realists and anti-realists. Semantic or alethic ascent is not forced on us by debates between realists and anti-realists. Alethic plurality contributes no explanatory power; all we need is a plurality of kinds of worldly conditions.³²

A final remark. Following Edwards, Wright has proposed the following analogy by way of making pluralism about truth plausible.³³ Winning a game is a unitary concept. But in different games different things count as winning. So there is a plurality of *ways of winning*. Similarly, Wright has suggested, there is a plurality of *ways of being true*, and thus a plurality of truth *properties* that are ‘satisfiers’ of a uniform notion of truth. A difficulty Wright considers for the analogy is that, given a game, it is typically obvious what constitutes winning in the game. By contrast, knowing what constitutes being true in any given domain typically requires extensive philosophical investigation and can be highly contentious. We suggest that our way of portraying things can readily absorb the disanalogy. As regards games, the key idea is what constitutes winning will vary from game to game. Regarding different domains of discourse, the idea should *not* be that what constitutes *being true* varies from area to area. Instead, recast in metaphysical terms – ‘at the levels of facts’ rather than at the level of propositions *or* truth – the idea should be that the kinds of worldly conditions that *make* a statement true will vary. But then it stands to reason that it will not in general be obvious what the ‘realizers’ of truth in various

areas are, in contrast with what constitutes winning a game. Access to what in the world makes true statements true requires a metaphysical investigation. When it comes to games, since they are invented, and in that sense ‘of our own making’, knowing what game is being played guarantees knowing what constitutes winning it. (That is part of what is instituted when the game is designed.) Not so for what renders statements true in a given domain of discourse. In general, engaging in an area of discourse does not bring into existence the relevant worldly conditions. And, whatever disagreements we may have cannot be settled – as they can in the winning case – simply through reflection on the rules of the discourse. The dispute, if such there is, is a metaphysical one.³⁴

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Endnotes

¹ Wright (2013: 124)

² Here and throughout, ‘<p>’ is a name of the proposition that p.

³ See, for example, Lynch (2013).

⁴ See, for example, *op. cit.*

⁵ Lynch 2013.

⁶ The equivalence here is stronger than necessary equivalence. As Andrew Wyatt has pointed out to us, it’s arguable that A and B can be necessarily equivalent without both being superwarranted for a subject S. Consider the necessarily equivalent propositions <There’s water in the glass> and <There’s H₂O in the glass>. Suppose S grasps all the relevant concepts. It is possible that <There’s water in the glass> is superwarranted for S, but <There’s H₂O in the glass> is not, since S may have warrant to believe that there’s water in the glass, but not that there’s H₂O in the glass.

But if S grasps the concept of truth, <p> and <<p> is true> will be conceptually equivalent for S, and if one is superwarranted for S, so is the other.

⁷ Lynch offers this definition of propositional coherence (with respect to moral propositions) in Lynch 2009, p.171

⁸ Lynch 2013.

⁹ Bar-On and Simmons (2007), Bar-On et al. (2004).

¹⁰ Bar-On and Simmons (2007).

¹¹ Strawson (1992).

¹² Horwich (2006: 195).

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ See Wright (2003: 136). Wright registers disagreement with ‘meaning pluralists’ by saying: “the realist/anti-realist debate is not a semantic debate in the end” (2013: 126). This can be confusing, since meaning pluralists like Blackburn sometimes describe their disagreement

with truth pluralism by complaining that it introduces an unnecessary detour via the semantic property of truth.

¹⁵ Pettit (1996: 886) (our emphasis), cited with approval in Wright (1996: 101f.).

¹⁶ Davidson (1984: 171-180).

¹⁷ On some views (though not Davidson's), truth-conditions so understood are what competent speakers have mastered (or internalized) and know, at least implicitly. For relevant discussion and references, see Bar-On (1996).

¹⁸ And witness his subsequent reference to "what it is for something to *hold* in physics – *what the truth-condition is ...*" (*ibid.*, our emphases).

¹⁹ It will be important to bear in mind that we are *not* suggesting, along the lines of e.g. 2-D semantics, that sentences have associated with them *two kinds of meaning*, or two sets of truth-conditions.

²⁰ Davidson (1984: 17-36)

²¹ Davidson 1967/198, p.31.

²² 's' for *semantic*.

²³ Davidson (1990) and (1996).

²⁴ Davidson (1980: 105-122).

²⁵ 'm' for metaphysical.

²⁶ This is perhaps why deflationists about truth are perfectly happy to allow that we do – and can, consistently with deflationism – speak of worldly conditions that we loosely refer to as truth-conditions. For discussion and references, see Bar-On *et al.* (2004).

²⁷ See Pedersen and Lynch (forthcoming).

²⁸ *op.cit.*

²⁹ *op.cit.*

³⁰ Dodd (2013) advances a version of the double counting objection that draws on deflationism.

³¹ For we have here only sought to question the utility of invoking a plurality of truth properties *over and above* the property of truth that, by the moderate pluralist's lights, *all* true items possess (regardless of domain).

³² Asay (2016) also argues that all the plurality we need is to be found in the world, not in a plurality of truth properties. But Asay's plurality is a plurality of truthmakers rather than truth-conditions. And Asay is a primitivist about the concept of truth and a deflationist about the property; we don't make these commitments.

³³ See Wright (2013: VII) and Edwards (2011) and (2013).

³⁴ Our thanks to Andrew Wyatt for many helpful comments.