Truth as One and Many

By Michael Lynch

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In *Truth as One and Many*, Michael Lynch offers a new theory of truth. There are two kinds of theory of truth in the literature. On the one hand, we have (for want of a better term) logical theories, which seek to construct formal systems that are consistent (or sometimes paraconsistent), while also containing a predicate (or predicates) which have as many as possible of the properties which we ordinarily take the English predicate 'is true' to have; salient examples include Tarski's and Kripke's theories of truth. On the other hand, we have (again for want of a better term) metaphysical theories, which seek to give a non-formal account of the nature of truth – of what (if anything) truth consists in, of what it means to say that something is true; salient examples include correspondence, coherence and deflationary theories of truth. Lynch's theory – *functionalism* about truth – is of the second sort.

The theory takes its start from a number of principles which Lynch classifies as *truisms* about truth:

> *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.
> *Norm of Belief*: It is prima facie correct to believe that *p* if and only if the proposition that *p* is true.
> *End of Inquiry*: Other things being equal, true beliefs are a worthy goal of inquiry.

Lynch argues that other familiar principles can be derived from these: for example, Objectivity together with some auxiliary principles and definitions yields versions of the T-schema, and of the principle that beliefs can be true without being warranted and vice versa. These principles are supposed to give the *nominal essence* of truth – to constitute our *folk theory* of truth. Lynch allows that there is room for debate concerning exactly *which* principles comprise the core of the folk theory of truth – but he is committed to the idea that there *is* such a folk theory, comprising some core truisms about truth. From this starting point, there is a number of ways to go when it comes to constructing a theory of truth of the second sort mentioned above.

One thought is that we should look for the underlying nature – the *real essence* – of truth: a property *P* such that identifying truth with *P* yields explanations of *why* the truisms hold. Enter the correspondence and coherence theories, according to which *P* is 'correspondence with reality' and 'coherence with our overall system of beliefs', respectively. Lynch discusses versions of both these approaches, but ultimately rejects them, chiefly on the grounds that each suffers from (a different version of) the 'scope problem'. The problem (in each case) is that only *some* of the beliefs which we intuitively regard as true can plausibly be held to have property *P*. Consider, for example, the correspondence theory. Lynch argues that beliefs can be said to correspond to reality only when they are *causally responsive* to an external environment. Now consider three beliefs: that the cat is on the mat (suppose one can see it there), that two plus two is four, and that stealing is wrong. The first belief is indeed causally responsive to the environment, and so can be said to correspond to reality; but the latter two are not so causally responsive: numbers may be real, says Lynch, but we do

not interact with them causally, and wrongness does not seem to be a natural property with which we have causal interactions. Yet intuitively, all three beliefs are true. So the real essence of truth cannot be correspondence with reality. Thus, the objection is that the correspondence story works well for beliefs about middle-sized dry goods – but not for beliefs about mathematics or morals. Similarly, coherence stories are held to work well for some normative beliefs, but not for all beliefs.

In fact, Lynch's arguments count not against correspondence theories of truth, but against simple-minded causal theories of *reference*. Following Field and others, Lynch holds that a Tarski-style definition of truth (for sentences, or sentence-like things) is incomplete without an associated theory of reference (for the components of sentences). On this sort of view, a correspondence theory of truth is a *package* of a Tarski-style definition of truth with a (preferably naturalistic) theory of reference. So far so good. The scope problem, as discussed above, emerges only when we plug in simplistic theories of reference. Lynch admits that the theories he discusses (a causal and a teleological theory) are 'toy versions' – but nowhere is the argument made that all naturalistic theories of reference must run into the same problems. What emerges, then, is a clear *requirement* on correspondence theorists of truth: make sure that your theory of *reference* does not lead you into the scope problem. No reason has been given, however – apart from the failure of two toy theories – for thinking that the requirement is even difficult, let alone impossible, to meet. At this point in Lynch's dialectic, then, those (such as this reviewer) who reject simple-minded causal theories of reference, but nevertheless think that a form of correspondence theory of truth – combining a broadly Tarski-style definition of truth with a more sophisticated, but still naturalistic, theory of reference – is correct, will find themselves unconvinced.

Continuing with the dialectic, a second thought in relation to the truisms is that truth *has no* underlying essence. Enter deflationist theories. Lynch rejects them chiefly on the grounds that they 'must remove truth from the philosopher's toolbox. They must . . . give up truth as an explanatory notion' (113). At this point, the idea that truth has a single underlying nature has been rejected (because each proposal on the table – e.g. correspondence – allegedly works only for some truths), and the deflationist idea that truth has no underlying nature has also been rejected. Thus, we are in the realm of *pluralism*: the idea that truth has *more than one* underlying nature. Lynch considers four ways of making sense of this idea. One way – quickly rejected – is to say that 'true' is ambiguous, in the way that 'bank' is; that is, it can mean different things in different contexts (sometimes it means correspondence of some sort, sometimes coherence of some sort and so on). A second way – attributed to Crispin Wright – is to say that 'true' functions like a definite description: it always *means* the same thing (this meaning is given in terms of certain platitudes about truth), but it *picks out* different properties in different contexts (sometimes a correspondence property, sometimes a coherence property and so on). Lynch rejects this view chiefly on the grounds that it is too deflationary: while allowing that there is a single *concept* of truth, it denies that there is any single *property* of truth which can be appealed to in giving accounts of other matters, such as content, belief and logical consequence. A third way is to say that there *is* a single property of truth: the second-order property of having *some* property which satisfies the truisms or platitudes about truth. Lynch rejects this view on the grounds that this second-order property does not *itself* satisfy the platitudes, and so cannot be the property *truth*.

This brings us to the fourth option – the positive view advocated in the book: alethic functionalism. This view of truth is analogous to functionalist views of mental properties such as *being in pain*. Functionalists in philosophy of mind hold (i) that there is a single property of pain: it is a *functional* or *role* property, and (ii) that this property is multiply realizable. To be in pain is to be in some state which plays a certain role: it is typically caused by stubbing one's toe, it typically causes one to say 'Ouch!', and so on. The underlying states which are actually playing this role in Bill and Ben when both of them are in pain (i.e. both possess the very same functional property – being in pain) might, however, be different neural states. Similarly, argues Lynch, there is a single property of truth – it is (roughly speaking – Lynch has more to say about this) a *functional* or *role* property – and it is multiply realizable (or, as Lynch prefers to say, it can be *manifested* by different underlying properties). The *role* of truth is given by the truisms. The underlying properties which are actually playing this role in two propositions when both of them are true might however be different: for example, 'the cat is on the mat' might have the underlying property of corresponding to reality, while 'stealing is wrong' has the underlying property of cohering with our overall system of beliefs.

There is a great deal of detailed argumentation and theory-construction in this book which I have not touched upon here: in the space available, I have been able only to give a bare outline of the positive view and to indicate where it fits in the landscape of theories of truth. Anyone with an interest in theories of truth of the metaphysical sort will benefit from reading the book and studying the details.

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New Essays on the Explanation of Action

By CONSTANTINE SANDIS

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The anthology contains twenty-two essays and is divided into two parts. The essays are, in the main, critical responses to aspects of what has come to be known in action theory as the 'Standard View' – the view that traces back to Donald Davidson's contribution to twentieth-century philosophy of action. The view under criticism treats actions as bodily movements caused in a non-deviant way by belief–desire pairs, construes these belief–desire pairs as the primary reasons for the (intentional) actions that they cause, and embraces event-causality.

The issue of how we should conceive of action is taken up in several essays. For example: in Essay 1, Fred Dretske challenges the view that actions are external events (e.g. bodily movements) that are the effect of the reasons for which the action is done. In Essay 16, Helen Steward, proposes that, instead of treating the availability of a