**Deflationism trumps pluralism!**

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**1. Introduction**

Let us define a *substantial, monistic theory of truth* as a theory that, if correct, explains what it is for any proposition to be true. This it will do by uncovering what truth *consists in:* a property *F*, common to all and only the true propositions,that allows us to say thatthe true propositions are true because they have *F* (David 1994: 65-66).The ‘because’ here is, I think, the ‘because’ of conceptual explanation; so the property *F*, if its possession by all and only the true propositionsis to explain what it is for a proposition to be true, must be conceptually more fundamental than the concept of truth itself.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Attempts to uncover the explanatory property *F* are familiar from the literature: historically significant candidates are *corresponding to an entity in the world*, *belonging to a coherent set of propositions*, and *being a belief that all investigators would share, if they investigated long enough and well enough*. But we are also familiar with two sources of skepticism concerning the very project of prosecuting a search for *F*. The first such source – *deflationism* about truth – has been around for a while, and has been variously adopted by philosophers such as F.P. Ramsey (1927), Ludwig Wittgenstein (1953: §§134-137), W.V.O. Quine (1970), J.L. Mackie (1973), Dorothy Grover *et. al.*(1975), Hartry Field (1986), and Paul Horwich (1998). Deflationists accept that truth is monistic, but deny that it is substantial since, in their view, truth is not susceptible of the kind of analysis so beloved of seekers of a substantial theory: there is no property *F* that allows us to say that the true propositions are true *because* they have *F*.

This deflationary conclusion is usually drawn in the following way. ‘True’ would not be needed in our language were it not a certain kind of expressive device (Quine 1970: 11; Horwich 1998: 2-5): a device that facilitates the endorsement of propositions that we cannot explicitly formulate, either because we do not know what they are, or else because there are too many of them (Quine 1970: 10-12).[[2]](#footnote-3) That is, we only have need of ‘true’ in order to make indirect endorsements, as in

(1) What Wittgenstein just said is true,

and compendious endorsements, as in

(2) Everything Wittgenstein said is true.

Were it not for these uses, we would not need a truth predicate in our language at all, since to say that 〈*p*〉 is true is just to say that *p*. But now the deflationary thought is this: given that we only have need of the truth predicate in order for it to act as an expressive device, we have no reason to expect truth to be anything more than that whose expression in a language gives that language such a device; and, evidently, this does not require there to be any property *F* that truth consists in. So, for example, Horwich argues (1998: 5) that explaining how ‘true’ comes to play its expressive role requires us only to acknowledge that the following equivalence schema holds (at least, if the replacements for ‘*p*’ are not paradox-inducing):

(E) 〈*p*〉 is true if and only if *p*.

Whilst not all deflationists offer precisely this account of what grounds the expressive function of ‘true’, all agree that explaining this function does not require us to view truth as substantial (Williams 2002: 148). For this reason, deflationists take themselves to be entitled to deny that there is anything that truth consists in until and unless it is demonstrated that this deflationary perspective is deficient in some way.

The second such source of skepticism about the prospects for a substantial, monistic theory of truth is a more recent phenomenon: *alethic pluralism*.Unlike deflationists, alethic pluralists accept that truth is substantial: there is always *something* in which the truth of a proposition consists (Wright 1996: 865). What pluralists deny is that this *something* is invariant between discourses. In their view, truth is *many* in the following sense: whilst there is no (non-disjunctive) property *F* in which truth consists across all discourses, there may be distinct domain-specific properties – *F*1, *F*2, *F*3, etc. – in which truth consists in discourses *D*1, *D*2, *D*3, etc. Thus, Crispin Wright, who offered the first sustained defence of alethic pluralism, adopts the following position: whilst our *concept* of truth ‘admits of a uniform characterization wherever it is applied’, this monistic concept is also susceptible to what he terms ‘variable realization’, since truth may consist in different things in different discourses (1996: 924).[[3]](#footnote-4) Truth, he goes on to suggest, consists in superassertibility in certain (evaluative) discourses (1992: 142; 1996: 923),[[4]](#footnote-5) but in some sort of ‘fit with an external reality’ (1992: 142) or ‘robust correspondence’ (1996: 923) in others. Along the same lines, Michael Lynch claims that whilst truth is a matter of correspondence for propositions concerning the antics of physical objects, the same cannot be said, for example, of ethical truths. (2009: 34). According to Lynch, the truth of an ethical proposition consists, not in its corresponding to a fact, but in its having the property of concordance (2009: 175).[[5]](#footnote-6)

Alethic pluralism admits of many formulations.[[6]](#footnote-7) However, I shall abstract from the different forms pluralism may take, in order to focus squarely on the benchmark claim made by any pluralist: namely, that truth consists in different things in different spheres of discourse (Wright 2001: 761). For it is the main contention of this paper that this benchmark thesis, however subsequently elaborated, has not been successfully motivated. To be more specific, I claim that a deflationary version of alethic monism is the default position in the theory of truth – the theory that must be accepted unless it is defeated – and that no pluralist arguments offered up to now have been sufficient to defeat it.

With a view to making good this claim, in §2 I explain why deflationism is *prima facie* correct, and then introduce the version of it that I take to be optimal. In §3 I employ a general counter against those with pluralist sympathies: namely, that the existence of differences between the truths of one domain and the truths of another need not be regarded as marking a difference in the properties that constitute truth in the respective domains. Having done this, and having thereby taken much of the wind out of the pluralist’s sails, I complete my anti-pluralist case by explaining why a deflationist will not be moved by the specific attempts of Wright (§4) and Lynch (§5) to motivate pluralism. To clarify my position, I do not want to claim that resisting pluralism *requires* us to adopt deflationism. My claim is that (a version of) deflationism is *prima facie* correct, and that we have, as yet, no reason to abandon this position for alethic pluralism.

**2. A version of deflationary monism**

Since I agree with Horwich both that ‘true’ is a genuine predicate (Horwich 1998: 2) and that this predicate is ascribed to propositions (Horwich 1998: 16-17), I also agree with the fundamentals of his account of how the truth predicate comes to serve as the kind of expressive device outlined in §1. It is the fact that (E) holds (at least, when the replacements for ‘*p*’ are not paradoxical) that enables the truth predicate to serve as a device for canceling propositional ascent, since its ascription to 〈*p*〉 is just a way of indirectly asserting that *p*. Consequently, the truth predicate comes into its own in precisely those situations in which we want to talk about reality by talking about propositions: that is, situations, as in (1) or (2), in which we want to endorse a proposition without formulating it, or in which we want to make compendious such endorsements. For example, if what Wittgenstein just said is 〈The world is everything that is the case〉, the correctness of (E) guarantees that asserting (1) is just an indirect way of asserting that the world is everything that is the case.

Of course, a deflationist and a substantial monist may agree with this account of how ‘true’ is able to accomplish its expressive function. What distinguishes them is that the deflationist holds that truth is *nothing more than* that property whose expression in a language gives that language a device for canceling propositional ascent, and hence that there is *no more* to a proposition’s being true than is supplied by the relevant instance of (E). For the deflationist, nothing more about truth need be assumed. There is no need to posit a property *F* that truth consists in.

To my mind, it is the demystificatory quality of this deflationary attitude towards truth that entails that its optimal manifestation (*i.e.* the most convincing available deflationary theory) is the default position on the subject, and for the reason briefly introduced in §1.[[7]](#footnote-8) Since the truth predicate would not be needed in our language were it not a certain kind of expressive device, and since we can explain how the truth predicate acts as such a device without there being anything that truth consists in, considerations of theoretical economy demand that we refrain from positing such a property. We should call off the search for the fugitive property *F* until we have been shown that our concept of truth demands that there be such a thing. Consequently, inasmuch as the alethic pluralist presumes that truth always consists in something (even if this something may vary from discourse to discourse), she must provide compelling reasons why the supporter of the optimal deflationary theory of truth should abandon her position in favor of pluralism.

But what is this best deflationary theory of truth? Famously, Horwich eschews any attempt to capture the deflationary insight by means of either an explicit formulation or a finite compositional theory (Horwich 1998: 25-31), offering instead a *minimalist theory* – (MT) – that consists of the infinity of the (non-paradoxical) instances of (E). As a consequence, the biconditionals comprising (MT) are claimed by Horwich to be *explanatorily* fundamental in two respects (2001: 149). First, our underived inclination to accept these biconditionals is the source of everything else we do with the truth predicate and, as such, is what our grasp of the concept of truth consists in. Second, the biconditionals comprising (MT) explain all of the facts about truth (Horwich 2001: 150): there is no fact about truth that cannot be explained by (MT) alone or by its conjunction with facts not involving the property of truth.

But it is at this point that I part company with Horwich, preferring to follow Wolfgang Künne in his *modest account* of truth (2003: 333-374): an account that captures the infinity of the (non-paradoxical) instances of (E) in the following semiformal universally quantified proposition:

(TD) ∀*x* (*x* is true if and only if ∃*p* (*x* = 〈*p*〉 ∧ *p*)) (Künne 2003: 337).

(TD) exploits both standard nominal quantification (*i.e.* quantification into name-position) and sentential quantification (*i.e.* quantification into sentence-position, in which the bound variables range over *ways things can be*).And it is this feature that enables (TD) to make the finitely stateable claim that can be glossed as follows: any entity *x* is true just in case, for some way things may be said to be, *x* is the proposition that things are that way, and things *are* that way.

So what has (TD) to be said for it? Two things, at least. First, since any instance of (E) can be proved by appealing to (TD) and some logical inference rules (Künne 2003: 353), (TD) is more fundamental than (MT). Whilst it is the holding of (E) that explains how ‘true’ can fulfil its expressive function, the truth of (E)’s instances is ultimately explicable by means of (TD). Second, since (TD) is itself a universally quantified proposition, it avoids the debilitating *generalization problem* that afflicts (MT). In short, the generalization problem is this: since (MT) consists merely in the infinity of (E)’s (non-paradoxical) instances, it does not give us the means to explain our acceptance, and hence use, of any of the universal generalizations that we formulate using the truth predicate (Armour-Garb 2004: 494), including – irony of ironies – generalizations such as

(2) Everything Wittgenstein said is true.

True enough, if someone is prepared to accept any proposition provided Wittgenstein asserted it, then her possession of the inclination to accept each of (E)’s instances will thereby explain her potential acceptance of *each instance* of

(3) If Wittgenstein said 〈*p*〉, then 〈*p*〉 is true.

But since a universal generalization is not entailed by the set of its instances, what remains unexplained is an acceptance of (2) itself.[[8]](#footnote-9) The neat thing about the modest conception is how it side-steps this problem. It is because (MT) consists only of the *instances* of (E) that it is unable to explain our acceptance and use of generalizations such as (2). Since (TD) captures these instances in a universal generalization, it is not subject to the same explanatory lacuna.[[9]](#footnote-10)

Of course, some have doubted whether the sentential quantification exploited in (TD) ultimately makes sense. Such quantification cannot be substitutional since it would render (TD), *qua* definition of truth, viciously circular (Horwich 1998: 25): on the usual way of understanding the substitutional reading of the quantifiers, ‘∀*xFx*’ means that every substitution-instance of ‘*F*…’ is true, whilst ‘∃*xFx*’ means that at least one such substitution-instance is true. Hence, the deflationist, if tempted by the modest account, must regard (TD)’s sentential quantification as objectual. But now the charge commonly leveled at formulae such as (TD) is that they are malformed. Specifically, it is commonly claimed that bound objectual variables occupy places that are available exclusively to names and, as a result, must be understood to function like ordinary language pronouns (Quine 1970: 11-12). Clearly, if this is right, then the string ‘*x*=〈*p*〉 & *p*’ is ungrammatical: the second occurrence of ‘*p*’ – a place-holder for a name – can no more be a conjunct than can the pronoun ‘it’.

But, as A.N. Prior (1963: Ch. 33), Mackie (1973: 60-61), and Künne himself (2003: 360-365) have suggested, this dilemma is illusory. And the key to understanding why lies in seeing how the charge of malformedness rests on a groundless assimilation of sentential quantification to nominal quantification. Right enough, the sentential quantification in (TD) is fully objectual in the sense that it is quantification *over* ways things can be: its bound sentential variables have such ways as values. But what does *not* follow from this is that sentential variables take the place of names and, hence, must be taken to function as ordinary language pronouns do. For the quantification is into *sentence-position*, and sentences do not *refer* to ways things can be; they *express* them.

Consequently, rather than functioning like ordinary-language pronouns, the bound sentential variables in (TD) should, in fact, be given a pro*sentential* reading (Künne 2003: 336): a reading that is achieved quite happily by using ordinary-languageexpressions such as ‘things are that way’ and ‘that is how things are’. On such a reading, ‘*x*=〈*p*〉 & *p*’ turns out to be perfectly grammatical: the final occurrence of ‘*p*’ should not be glossed pronominally, but prosententially; and since the variable is this way syntactically akin to a complete sentence, it is suitable for serving as a conjunct. Someone could, I suppose, continue to insist that variables always function pronominally and that we cannot understand sentential quantifiers and variables in the way suggested; but in the absence of an argument for this restriction, we are entitled to regard such a point-blank refusal to countenance a prosentential reading of sentential variables as mere neo-Quinean prejudice: a stand which, to paraphrase Mackie (1973: 61), treats the symbols as our (first-order) masters rather than as our instruments.

The sentential quantification in (TD) is, I thus contend, perfectly in order; and what this means is that (TD)’s avoidance of the travails of Horwich’s minimalism is not chimerical. The moral is this: we should not allow the well-known difficulties afflicting Horwich’s version of deflationism to undermine our confidence in the deflationary project. In (TD) we have something fit for purpose as our default theory of truth.

**3. Motivating alethic pluralism: a general problem**

As David Wiggins has noted (1987: 332), theoretical parsimony demands that we regard alethic monism – whether this be elaborated along deflationary lines or not – as the default position pending disproof. Given, additionally, that the deflationary attitude towards truth enjoys similar default status, and that (TD) is the most plausible version of deflationism on offer, what the pluralist must do is come up with a convincing reason for abandoning (TD) in favor of pluralism. The problem, though, is that this seems to be something of a tall order.

To see why, consider the following remark of Quine’s:

There are philosophers who stoutly maintain that ‘exists’ said of numbers, classes, and the like and ‘exists’ said of material objects are two uses of the ambiguous term ‘exists’. What mainly baffles me is the stoutness of the maintenance. What can they possibly count as evidence? Why not view ‘true’ as unambiguous but very general, and recognize the difference between true logical laws and true confessions as a difference merely between logical laws and confessions? And correspondingly for existence? (Quine 1960: 131)

We should not let ourselves become distracted by the fact that Quine’s explicit target here is the philosopher wont to treat ‘true’ and ‘exists’ as ambiguous, since his point generalizes beyond this crude formulation of the pluralist’s intuition. What Quine, in effect, is saying here is this: before we accept that there are different *kinds* of existence or truth, different *ways* in which things can exist or be true, or different ways in which existence or truth can be *constituted*, we need to be told why the relevant differences uncovered are not really differences concerning *the things that are true* and *the things that exist*, as opposed to differences in the kind of existence or kind of truth enjoyed.

As Quine suggests, and as Mark Sainsbury elaborates (1996: 900), when it comes to existence, the obvious thing to do is to offer a ‘very general’ (one might say ‘deflationary’) account of its nature, applicable across the ontological board, and then explain differences between what is involved in the existence of physical objects and what is involved in the existence of numbers as differences between physical objects and numbers. As for existence, so for truth. Here, by analogy, the natural thing to say is that truth admits of a uniform, general and deflationary explanation, via (TD), and that the sorts of differences between truths described by pluralists can be construed, not as differences in *the way* these propositions can be true, but as differences in the respective *subject matters* of these propositions (Sainsbury 1996: 900).

With this strategy in mind, let us now consider the four ways in which Wright thinks that truths from variant discourses may differ (1992). First, certain spheres of discourse might, whilst others might not, contain truths that outrun *superassertibility* (where, roughly, for a proposition to be superassertible is for it to be assertible and to remain so no matter how much more information comes in) (Wright 1992: 77).[[10]](#footnote-11) Presumably, even many convinced ethical realists will deny that ethical truths may transcend our recognitional abilities in this sense (Wright 1992: 9).

Second, and in an echo of the Euthyphro contrast, two discourses might differ with respect to the *direction of explanation* obtaining between a proposition’s being true and its being superassertible (1992: 108-139): that is, it might be the case that in one discourse a proposition’s being true provides the explanatory ground of its being superassertible, whilst in another discourse the converse obtains (Wright 1996: 86).

Third, it might be the case that truths from certain discourses do, whilst truths from other discourses do not, exhibit *cognitive command* (Wright 1992: 92-93): for example, whilst it is plausible to think it *a priori* that a difference of opinion over the truth of 〈Heat is molecular motion〉 can only be explained in terms of some kind of cognitive shortcoming on behalf of one of the disputants, even someone who takes evaluative propositions to be capable of truth might deny that they share this feature.

Fourth, whilst truths in certain domains have a *wide cosmological role*, there are other domains in which this seems not to be the case: for example, it might be thought that the truth of 〈Heat is molecular motion〉, but not the truth of an evaluative proposition, can feature in explanations of other facts besides speakers having certain attitudes towards such truths, and can feature in explanations in other ways than merely as the *objects* of such attitudes (Wright 1992: 196-199).

However, once we are armed with a Quinean ‘very general’, deflationary truth predicate, we can detach Wright’s insights from his pluralism. First, the fact that the truths of discourse *D*1 outrun superassertibility, but that those from another discourse *D*2 do not, does not entail that truth is constituted by different properties in *D*1 and *D*2 respectively. For the source of the relevant difference here is surely ultimately located in the two discourses’ divergent *subject-matters*: due to a difference in the kinds of facts they respectively state, in *D*1 it can be the case that *p* even if it is not superassertible that *p*, whereas in *D*2 this is not possible. This is not a difference in how truth is constituted between *D*1 and *D*2; it is a difference in the nature of the respective things the propositions of the two discourses are *about*.In the same vein, the fact that the propositions of *D*1, but not those of *D*2, are superassertible because they are true is perfectly compatible with deflationist monism, since the fact in question can be put thus: in *D*1, but not *D*2, it is *that p* that makes 〈*p*〉 superassertible, and not *vice versa*. Again, the relevant difference in the truths of *D*1 and *D*2 is ultimately a difference concerning the things in the world they respectively concern, not in how they are true. That we tend to formulate the issue in terms of the notion of truth is quite compatible with a deflationary understanding of the truth predicate, since such a formulation merely sees us exploiting the truth predicate’s familiar expressive role. Finally, as is evidenced by Wright’s own discussion of cognitive command and wide cosmological role, these features need not be formulated using the concept of truth at all (1992: 92-93; 196-199). Whether a discourse exhibits cognitive command and wide cosmological role is a matter, respectively, of *how disagreement is explained* and *how much is explained* by the facts the discourse expresses. Keeping (TD) in place, the fact that these questions might admit of different answers with respect to *D*1and *D*2 is easily acknowledged. For the said differences will concern, respectively, whether faultless disagreement is possible and whether the discourse involves the explanation of mind-independent phenomena; and, once again, such differences will naturally be taken to have their source, not in differences in how truth is constituted across *D*1and *D*2, but in differences in the two discourses’ respective subject matters.

Oddly, Wright’s response to the making of points such as these has tended to be concessive. Choosing to focus on rebutting the charge that his own version of pluralism treats ‘true’ as ambiguous, he has tended to deny that he has any quarrel with those critics who dispute the need to take up a pluralist position (Wright 1996: 925). One thing this reveals is the nature of Wright’s priorities: he is more concerned to argue that he has uncovered the genuine cruces of realism/antirealism disputes than he is to make the case that these cruces require us to endorse alethic pluralism. But for our purposes, an important lesson has been learned. Someone seeking to make the case for alethic pluralism cannot proceed simply by pointing to the fact that the truths of one discourse possess different features to the truths of another. For, given that we can locate such differences in the respective subject matters of the divergent truths, and given that we must distinguish differences in subject matter in any case (Jackson 1994: 169), theoretical economy demands that we acknowledge such differences without adopting pluralism.[[11]](#footnote-12)

Consequently, if the pluralist is to stand any chance of converting the deflationist, she must come up with further arguments for her position. It is to the two most prominent such arguments that I now turn.

**4. Wright on pluralism and realism/antirealism disputes**

It was Wright (1992) who offered the first serious defence of alethic pluralism in analytical philosophy, so it is fitting that we first of all turn to him for an attempt to persuade us of this thesis. And on this matter Wright is admirably clear. The major motivation for alethic pluralism is, he claims, that its adoption is best placed to explain the nature of realism/antirealism disputes in such a way that their substantial nature is preserved. As Wright sees it, ‘[a] pluralistic conception of truth is … philosophically attractive insofar as an account which allows us to think of truth as constituted differently in different areas of thought might contribute to a sharp explanation of the differential appeal of realist and antirealist intuitions about them’ (1999: 225). The problem for Wright, however, is that a deflationist about truth is herself fully able to account for the substantial nature of realism/antirealism disputes, so there is no pressure on her to abandon (TD) on this score. Let us see why not.

To start with, consider the following, wholly natural, claim that realism about a discourse *D* is true just in case:

(4) *D*’s declarative sentences express propositions (*i.e.* are truth- apt).[[12]](#footnote-13)

(5) Some of the propositions expressed by declarative sentences of *D* are (non-vacuously) true.

The realist about *D* thus holds, from (4) and (5) respectively,that both non-cognitivism about *D* and an error theory of *D*’s sentences are false. Wright’s claim is that if *D* is one of the areas that has been subject to a lively realism/antirealism dispute (for example, ethics, aesthetics, mathematics, intentional psychology, or theoretical science), then a commitment to what he terms the ‘minimalist perspective’ (1992: 140) towards truth and truth aptness establishes (4) and (5) all too quickly, and for reasons that are independent of the issues that have been seen by realists and antirealists alike to be the touchstones of such debates. This being so, Wright concludes that we have no choice but to conclude that the traditional characterization of realism/antirealism disputes has failed to identify what is really at stake. The only option for us is to reconfigure disputes as to realism in such a way as to give the antirealist at least a fighting chance of winning; and Wright’s suggestion is that the best available such reconfiguration has it that they concern the *kind* of truth that the propositions of a contested discourse enjoy (1992: 78). If the truth predicate can vary in the ‘“metaphysical” payload’ (Wright 1992: 23) it carries from discourse to discourse, then what matters for establishing realism about *D* may turn out to be, not *whether* (some) of its declaratives can be (non-vacuously) true, but *the way* in which they are true. Wright’s celebrated research project is that of giving substance to this idea by setting out ‘a number of realism-relevant ways in which what is involved in a statement’s being true may differ depending on the region of discourse to which it belongs’ (Wright 1996: 865).

Now, before we get on to the details of Wright’s thinking here, we must note at once that his discussion admits of complications along two distinct axes. The first such complication is that Wright draws a distinction between deflationism and what he calls ‘minimalism’. Minimalism, in Wright’s sense (as distinct from Horwich’s) is deflationism ‘unencumbered by the classical deflationist’s claim that truth is not a substantial property’ (1992: 24); and this claim that truth is minimal, yet not deflationary, can be explained, in turn, as the conjunction of two theses. First, the deflationist is wrong to think that truth is just that property which, when introduced into a language, gives us a device for canceling propositional ascent. According to Wright, ‘is true’ expresses a norm of our assertoric practice that is distinct from that of warranted assertibility inasmuch as satisfaction of one need not entail satisfaction of the other (1992: 16-21). But second, the deflationist is, nonetheless, right in her intuition that truth is not intrinsically a substantial notion, and that what makes a predicate a truth predicate is its satisfaction of a set of platitudes. Whilst the deflationist focuses on platitudes such as (E) or (TD), Wright takes the set of platitudes forming the touchstone of truth also to include the following: to assert is to present as true; any truth apt content has a significant negation that is truth apt; to be true is to correspond to the facts; and a statement can justified without being true, and *vice versa* (1992: 34).

The second complication in Wright’s adoption of alethic pluralism involves the introduction of a distinction that is apt to be glossed over by talk of ‘accounts of truth’. For Wright’s thesis is *not* that a deflationary (or indeed, minimalist) account of truth *simpliciter* renders the truth of (4) and (5) too easily demonstrable for their conjunction to be the crux of realism. It is that this latter result is the product of a more general deflationary *perspective* that combines a deflationary (or minimalist) account of truth with a deflationary account of truth apt*ness*, where the latter thesis is that whether a sentence expresses a proposition can simply be read off from surface features of its syntax and use. Indeed, Wright’s own favored deflationary account of truth aptness is ‘disciplined syntacticism’ (Jackson, Oppy and Smith 1992: 293): the thesis that a sentence’s being declarative and being subject to *discipline* (*i.e.* ‘firmly acknowledged standards of proper and improper use’ (Wright 1992: 29)) jointly suffice for its expressing a proposition. So, to be clear, although Wright thinks that the deflationist (or minimalist) about truth will also be attracted to disciplined syntacticism (1992: 36), the two views are, strictly speaking, distinct (1996: 864); and it is the *combination* of these deflationary views that Wright regards as making (4) and (5) too easily achievable for their conjunction to be definitive of realism.

Having made these clarificatory remarks, let us now examine how Wright’s argument is supposed to work. Unconvinced as I am by his claim that the would-be deflationist about truth should retreat to Wright’s own doctrine of minimalism,[[13]](#footnote-14) I shall put the differences between this latter doctrine and deflationism to one side. My focus will be squarely on the thesis that the deflationist about truth and truth aptness has no room to deny that (4) and (5) hold of disciplined discourses such as our ethical, aesthetic and mathematical talk.

It is, of course, true that a deflationist about *both* truth and truth aptness must hold that (4) obtains for any disciplined discourse *D*. But we should notice, at once, that it is the deflationary account of *truth aptness*, not deflationism about *truth*, which does all the work here: *however* we think of truth, an acceptance of Wright’s disciplined syntacticism leaves no future for non-cognitivist treatments of our ethical and aesthetic discourses, for example. But this just goes to show that a deflationist about truth is only prevented from adopting a non-cognitivist stance to a disciplined discourse, if she has no choice but to accept disciplined syntacticism. And this, as Wright, in effect, admits (1996: 864), is not the case. For deflationism about truth is in itself *silent* about what makes for truth aptness. To see this, note that (TD), whilst it claims that only propositions can be true, says nothing about what is required of a sentence to express a proposition (*i.e.* be truth apt). For all (TD) says, there could turn out to be no ethical propositions at all. The ethical non-cognitivist, for example, could turn out to be right.

It follows that deflationism about truth (as distinct from a Wrightian deflationary perspective on truth *and* truth aptness) is compatible with the following, decidedly *non*-deflationary, conception of truth aptness: a declarative, disciplined sentence is only truth apt (*i.e.* only expresses a proposition), if it can be used to give the content of a *belief* held by someone who sincerely utters it (Jackson 1994: 165).The reason why this account of truth aptness is non-deflationary is that whether sincere utterers of a class of declarative sentences are giving voice to beliefs may be, to borrow Wright’s own phrase, a ‘potentially covert’ characteristic of a discourse (1992: 35). For what makes a given psychological state a genuine belief-state is that it plays the kind of functional role distinctive of beliefs: minimally, it must be a representational state that serves to fit the world, which combines with desires to guide us around the world, and which is susceptible to change in the wake of recalcitrant information (Jackson, Oppy, Smith 1994: 296). And whether the sincere utterers of a certain class of declarative sentences are in states occupying this functional role is not determined merely by whether this class of sentences is ‘disciplined’ in Wright’s sense. Consequently, such an account of truth aptness, wholly compatible with (TD), in no sense guillotines the traditional debate between realists and non-cognitivists in ethics. Non-cognitivists will argue that our ethical convictions do not so much guide us around the world in conjunction with desires as provide the motivational push distinctive of desires. Realists will either deny that ethical judgments are intrinsically motivational, or else insist that their motivational character does not compromise the thought that an agent sincerely uttering an ethical declarative counts as giving voice to an ethical belief.[[14]](#footnote-15)

It is, of course, one thing to point out that there is conceptual space for a deflationist about truth to adopt a non-deflationary account of truth aptness, but quite another to argue that deflationists should adopt the latter position. However, such a non-deflationary account of truth aptness is in itself eminently sensible. Wright himself accepts that a platitude linking truth aptness and belief is the following: if someone sincerely utters a sentence, then she has a belief whose content can be characterized by means of the sentence used (Wright 1992: 14). All that our substantial account of truth aptness amounts to is a coupling of this platitude with a (necessarily) non-platitudinous account of what a belief is.

Naturally, Wright’s reply to this line of thought is to insist that the above account of belief is an unwarranted hijacking of the notion. According to Wright, ‘*any* attitude is a belief which may be expressed by the sincere endorsement of a sentence which complies with the constraints of syntax and discipline imposed by [disciplined syntacticism]’ (1994: 170). And, true enough, the folk unreflectively describe ethical convictions and aesthetic opinions as ‘beliefs’ (Wright 1994: 171). But two points beg to be made at this stage. First, the fact that ethical and aesthetic opinions tend to be described in this way no more shows that utterances of such sentences give voice to genuine beliefs than does the folk’s tendency to describe computers as ‘intelligent’ show that computers can think (Jackson, Oppy and Smith 1994: 297). In both cases, our everyday talk is loose talk, which is not surprising given that a perspicuous grasp of the nature of our concepts is not required for much everyday discourse.

Second, our practice of ascribing beliefs actually embodies the possibility that someone may sincerely utter a declarative sentence without holding the corresponding belief. If the Prime Minister sincerely says to his Cabinet colleagues, ‘I am merely first among equals’, the said colleagues may nonetheless come to the conclusion that the Prime Minister does not really *believe* this if, for instance, he consistently overrules his fellow ministers and generally behaves in a dictatorial fashion.[[15]](#footnote-16) The Prime Minister’s colleagues may conclude that even though he is sincere in his utterance, he does not really believe what he is saying; and the reason for this would be, I take it, that he does not occupy a state with the kind of links to behaviour definitive of the belief in question. But if this is right, and if someone can sincerely utter a disciplined declarative sentence and yet not have a belief whose content can be captured by the said sentence, then there is clearly room for truth aptness to be the potentially covert feature of a discourse that the non-cognitivist trades on. And if this is correct, then non-cognitivism concerning our ethical discourse remains a live, albeit controversial, option for the deflationist.

It is not true, then, that deflationism about truth settles the case against non-cognitivism. What I want to point out now is this: even if the deflationist were to accept disciplined syntacticism, and thereby close off the possibility of adopting the non-cognitivist form of antirealism about, say, our ethical discourse, she would not thereby be debarred from adopting an error theory concerning it. Wright seems to think otherwise, however. For whilst he argues that his own brand of minimalism faces a problem of *motivating* such an error theory (1992: 86-87), he seems to regard this particular antirealist paradigm as simply *ruled out* by a deflationist who accepts that the discourse in question is truth apt.[[16]](#footnote-17) So consider, once more, the ethical domain. According to Wright (1992: 85-86), an error theorist will accept both that there exist standards of warrant for the assertion of this discourse’s propositions *and* that many ethical propositions – propositions such as 〈Torturing people for fun is wrong〉, for instance – meet these standards. Consequently, if an error theorist is to defend the thesis that 〈Torturing people for fun is wrong〉 is false, she must be able to point to a ‘shortfall between the standards of warrant that actually inform the discourse in question, and the notion of truth that actually applies therein’ (Wright 2003: 128-129). In other words, in order for such an error theory to be an option, it must be possible for ethical propositions to be warrantedly assertible and yet fail to be true. But, so the Wrightian argument continues, precisely this distinction looks to be unavailable to the deflationist. For if ‘true’ is nothing but a device for making indirect or compendious assertions, then ‘the only norms operating in assertoric practice are norms of warranted assertibility, and … the truth predicate can mark no independent norm’ (1992: 18). And if this is right, then the deflationist must say that the propositions that meet the standards of warrant operative within the discourse *just are* true. The deflationist seems not to have the requisite room for manoeuvre to endorse an error theory of our ethical talk.

But such an argument rests on a false lemma; and the lemma in question is that an error theorist will accept that certain propositions of the contested discourse are, in fact warrantedly assertible. Let us reconsider the ethical case for a moment. The error theorist about our ethical talk, as represented in print by J.L. Mackie (1977), holds that when we make ethical judgments, we thereby ascribe properties to things that they simply could not have: namely, *objectively prescriptive properties*: *i.e.* properties whose instantiation imposes demands upon us to act in certain ways (Mackie 1977: 38-40). But insofar as the error theorist takes the making of such judgments to embody this metaphysical superstition, she will insist that we in fact *lack warrant* for making them. Since, she will argue, we are not warranted in believing in the existence of objectively prescriptive properties, we cannot be warranted in making judgments that entail their existence (Jackson 1994: 167). The point generalizes. Error theorists about *D* will deny that any of *D*’s (non-vacuously true) propositions are warrantedly assertible, and they will do so because they hold that such propositions carry the implication of metaphysically preposterous entities (Mackie 1977: 87): moral properties, aesthetic properties, numbers, or whatever.[[17]](#footnote-18)

This being so, the apparently impossible task Wright sets for the would-be deflationist who wishes to adopt an error theory – namely, that of explaining how a proposition can be warrantedly assertible without being true – turns out to be bogus. Since an error theorist about *D* denies that any of *D*’s (non-vacuously true) propositions are warrantedly assertible, there is nothing for her to explain here. The *explanandum* disappears. And what this means is that such an error theory, whatever its independent merits, is by no means ruled out by deflationism.

The moral of the story is this. In §3 we saw that the details of Wright’s own proposals for reconfiguring realism/antirealism debates can be detached from their pluralist setting. What we know now is that the deflationist should dispute the need for any such a reconfiguration in the first place, thereby undermining Wright’s claimed motivation for pluralism at source. As long as we couple our deflationism with a non-deflationary account of truth aptness, non-cognitivist strains of antirealism remain live options; whilst an error theory of a disciplined discourse *D* will always be open to a deflationist as long as such an error theory is understood to insist that *D*’s implication of metaphysically preposterous entities prevents its disciplined declaratives from being warrantedly assertible. *Pace* Wright, there is no reason for us to abandon deflationism for alethic pluralism in the course of prosecuting a much-needed reconfiguration of realism/antirealism disputes. Deflationists can happily regard such disputes as being in fine working order as they stand.

**5. Lynch on ‘the scope problem’**

Lynch’s more recent attempt to persuade us towards alethic pluralism fares no better. As Lynch sees it, the basic problem to which pluralism is the solution is what he calls ‘the scope problem’ (2009: 4): namely, that it seems that for any candidate property *F* which truth supposedly consists in, there are classes of proposition that are capable of being true whilst lacking *F* (2009: 4).[[18]](#footnote-19) The depth of this problem is appreciated, Lynch supposes, by considering the case of the most historically significant candidate for *F*:correspondence.[[19]](#footnote-20) For it is correspondence, supposedly, that the truth of the propositions of the natural sciences, as well as the truth of propositions concerning how things stand with ‘middle-sized dry goods’ (2009: 32), consists in; and so correspondence would seem to be the most plausible candidate property to be an alethic common denominator. But according Lynch, at least three classes of truth – evaluative truths, arithmetical truths and legal truths – are insusceptible of such an analysis.

The reason why Lynch takes this to be so is that he presumes a correspondence theory of truth to be inevitably situated against a naturalistic background. A correspondence theory, Lynch contends, does not merely take a proposition to be true just in case its components ‘stand in certain representational relations to reality and that reality is a certain way’ (2009: 23-24); it also cashes out these sub-propositional denotation relations in a naturalistic style: that is, either causally or teleologically. So Lynch has it that a correspondence theorist will claim that the propositional constituent 〈*a*〉 either denotes: (i) whatever object causes, under appropriate conditions, mental tokenings of 〈*a*〉; or (ii) whatever object it is the biological function of 〈a〉 to be mentally tokened in the presence of (2009: 25-26).

According to Lynch, once such a naturalistic picture of correspondence is in place, the idea that evaluative, legal or arithmetical propositions can be correspondence-true is severely undermined. For the causal or teleological accounts of denotation to hold, it must be the case that the things denoted are found in the world and can prompt mental tokens of them (2009: 32-33); but when it comes to arithmetical truths, evaluative truths, and legal truths this condition seems not to be met. Arithmetical truths, so Lynch claims (2209: 34), cannot be correspondence-true because their subject matter, numbers, are *abstracta*: items that lie outside the causal nexus. And the same goes for ethical truths: 〈Torturing people for fun is wrong〉, though true, cannot be true by virtue of corresponding with reality because the property denoted by ‘is wrong’ is not a natural property with which we can causally interact (2009: 34): it is neither in itself physical nor supervenient on the physical (2009: 1).[[20]](#footnote-21) Finally, legal truths, he says, fail to be correspondence-true because legal facts are not denizens of the mind-independent natural world, but items ontologically dependent upon laws, and hence themselves mental constructions (2009: 35).

What this reasoning shows, if Lynch is right, is that there is no prospect of truth consisting in correspondence across the board: correspondence cannot be the fugitive property *F* sought by the philosopher who presumes truth to admit of a substantial, monistic analysis. But Lynch takes the putative failure of the correspondence theory to extend to the evaluative, arithmetical and legal domains to be illustrative of a deeper point: for whilst propositions from these discourses can be true, they are ‘radically different in subject and function’ (2009: 2) from the kinds of truths for which a correspondence theory seems appropriate; and these differences are best explained as being differences in the *ways* in which these propositions are true. So, for example, since we understand that nothing would be legal or illegal if there existed no legal systems, we do not regard legal truths as having the mind-independence of the truths of physics; and this, Lynch believes, is ultimately a difference in the kind of truth for which the respective classes of propositions are assessable (2009: 34-35). The key motivation for alethic pluralism thus turns out to be this: adopting such a position does maximal justice to the fact that the various kinds of proposition we express are both diverse and unified: diverse inasmuch as these kinds of propositions may differ in their subject and function; unified inasmuch as they are all open to being true (2009: 2).

Clearly, Lynch’s scope problem – inasmuch as it presumes truth to be substantial – will be regarded by the deflationist as little more than a mildly diverting irrelevance. But before I get on to this, and before I discuss Lynch’s arguments against deflationism, it is important to note that even a dyed-in-the-wool correspondence theorist need not feel threatened by it. For a sophisticated correspondence theorist has two possible avenues of response to Lynch’s claimed counter-examples. First, and entirely plausibly, she may drive a wedge between the correspondence theory and naturalism, thereby giving herself room to insist that the apparently recalcitrant propositions Lynch highlights really are correspondence-true.[[21]](#footnote-22) For it is tempting to think that all that is essential to the correspondence conception is a commitment to the thesis that truths need truthmakers (Dodd 2000: Ch. 1; Künne 2003: 149 ff.). Nothing about the correspondence theory *per se* commits its supporter to either a naturalistic account of denotation or to the thought that only mind-independent, concrete items can be truthmakers. Indeed, Armstrong, who remarks that ‘[t]ruthmaker theory is a correspondence theory’ (2002: 30), also says both that the relation between a truth and its truthmaker is *not* causal (1997: 115) and that states of affairs – his favored candidates for truthmakers – have, at the very least, a spatial location that is ‘strange and ambiguous’ 1991: 195). Given that this is so, there is no reason why we should think arithmetical, evaluative or legal truths to be beyond the correspondence theory’s scope, even if they commit us to the existence of entities of which a thoroughgoing naturalist would disapprove.

Second, the correspondence theorist, if impressed by non-cognitivist or error theoretic treatments of the supposedly problematic discourses, may simply deny what Lynch regards as a simple datum here: namely, that there are (non-vacuous) arithmetical, evaluative, and legal truths. Lynch has only come up with counter-examples to the correspondence theory, if it *really is* the case that these discourses offer up truths that are not correspondence-true; and it is open to a correspondence theorist to make use of familiar expressivist or error theoretic arguments either to deny that the disciplined declaratives of the problematic discourses express propositions at all, or else to deny that the propositions they express can be non-vacuously true. Either way, there is plenty of metaphysical space for the correspondence theorist to deny Lynch’s claim that there are true propositions of a kind that cause trouble for the correspondence theory.

Lynch considers objections of these kinds, but what he has to say in reply cuts little ice. For one thing, whilst he is right in thinking that watering down the correspondence theory into the claim that ‘a proposition corresponds to reality just when things are as that proposition says they are’ gives us a ‘vacuous platitude’ (2009: 35), that is not the proposal made by the correspondence theorist’s first line of response. The claim that truths need truthmakers – things whose existence guarantees their truth – is not platitudinous.[[22]](#footnote-23) And besides this, Lynch’s claim that expressivist or error theoretic accounts of disputed discourses are ‘somewhat tired’ (2009: 2) is little more than an unsupported assertion. Insofar as we can recover a philosophical thesis beyond the rhetoric here, it would seem to be this: the adoption of either of these antirealist paradigms could only be *ad hoc*, since making such a move ‘is just to acknowledge that representational theories of truth fail to be plausible in some domains’ (2009: 35). But this claim is false. Expressivists, as we have noted already, seek to make their case by, first of all, arguing for a robust account of what it is for a disciplined declarative sentence to express a proposition, and then pointing to a feature of the said discourse from which it is supposed to follow that its declaratives do not express propositions. Error theorists, meanwhile, construct arguments designed to show that the world does not offer up the kinds of entities required for the discourse to contain any non-vacuous truths. In the one case, the focus is on the nature of the speech-acts we perform; in the other case the issue concerns whether entities of a certain kind really exist. Whether such arguments ultimately succeed will depend upon the specifics of the cases made, but the crucial point is that the only principles about truth required by these arguments are uncontroversial instances of (E); and what this means is that the said arguments may be endorsed by a correspondence theorist non-question-beggingly. There remains plenty of room for the correspondence theorist to wriggle out of the clutches of the scope problem.

But, of course, I am no correspondence theorist, and so will draw the sting from the scope problem in a more direct way. As I explained in §2, rather than agreeing with Lynch that the monistic theory of truth occupying default status is the correspondence theory, I take this position to be occupied by (TD). And from this perspective the scope problem is simply bogus. There is no more to a proposition’s being true, in *any* discourse, than is supplied by (TD), and yet saying this is quite compatible with the existence of disciplined discourses susceptible either to expressivist or to error theoretic antirealist analyses. Consequently, the deflationist can acknowledge the substantial nature of antirealist challenges without being forced into construing such a challenge as requiring commitment to the pluralistic claim that the contested discourse’s disciplined declaratives are true in a different way to those of discourses meriting a realist treatment. What this goes to show, once more, is that realism/antirealism disputes are not situated *within* the theory of truth: their cruces are discrete issues in the metaphysics, the philosophy of mind and the philosophy of language. Once we become clear on the nature of truth, we realize that the issues that seem to interest Lynch the most are located elsewhere.

Although Lynch fails to notice the compatibility of deflationism with the familiar antirealist paradigms,[[23]](#footnote-24) he nonetheless appreciates that the deflationist will resist the premise upon which the scope problem is founded: namely, that there is a property in which truth consists in the sense introduced in §1, even if it turns out that this property may vary from discourse to discourse. This being so, it is incumbent upon Lynch to close this deflationary escape route, if he is to succeed in motivating alethic pluralism. But now the problem is this: neither Lynch, nor any other pluralist, has added anything to the debate as to the cogency of deflationism that has not already been rebutted in the literature. Lynch himself gives two reasons for rejecting deflationism: first, since deflationists regard truth as having no genuinely explanatory role, it follows that they cannot give a truth conditional account of the nature of meaning and content (2009: 114); second, deflationists are unable to do justice to the normative nature of truth: the fact that we should believe 〈*p*〉 only if 〈*p*〉 is *true* (2009: 111-113).[[24]](#footnote-25) But as we shall now see, both replies miss their mark.

On the first matter, it does, indeed, follow from deflationism that knowledge of a sentence’s meaning cannot *consist* in knowledge of its truth conditions: for knowledge that

(6) ‘Lions roar’ is true if and only if lions roar

to be knowledge of the quoted sentence’s meaning, we must know already what it is for something to be true; in which case, *pace* deflationism, understanding (6) cannot constitute our grasp of what it is for the quoted sentence to be true. But as Horwich makes clear (1998: 68-69), this just shows that we should deny that understanding a sentence *consists in* knowing its truth conditions. Just to be clear, this is not to deny that an interpretational, Tarski-style truth-theory can serve as a theory of meaning for a language (*i.e.* a theory of *what* we understand when we understand its sentences). After all, the reason why truth is what a theory of sense is a theory of is that ‘is true’ is a device for canceling semantic ascent (McDowell 1976: 8): nothing more about truth need be assumed. What *is* ruled out is a certain conception of *how* we come to understand a language’s sentences: a conception which pictures such grasp as the bringing to bear of the appropriate interpretational truth-theory in such a way as to deduce the relevant theorem. But then so much the worse for this latter claim. Our use of language is the unreflective exercise of a collection of techniques and capacities; our understanding of language is a matter of unreflective perception (McDowell 1977: 118). It can be no objection to deflationism that it blocks the endorsement of a questionable conception of what it is to understand a language.

It is, though, the claim that the normative dimension of truth eludes deflationism that has been more influential within the circles in which alethic pluralists move.[[25]](#footnote-26) But here, once more, the debate has moved on. Lynch, in effect, points to the correctness of

(NB) It is *prima facie* correct to believe something only if it is true,

and then asks, rhetorically, how a deflationist can explain this normative fact (2009: 111). But the response to this worry is familiar by now: (NB) does not express a normative fact about truth at all; ‘true’ just appears in (NB) in its familiar role of facilitating generalization on sentences in such a way as to avoid sentential quantification (Dodd 1999: 294-5). The normativity we are concerned with – a norm of *belief*, not truth– lies in the following schema in which ‘true’ does not appear:

(B) It is *prima facie* correct to believe that *p* only if *p*.

‘True’ only enters the scene in (NB) because we need to capture (B)’s content in a single, universally quantified proposition; and a convenient way of doing this is to produce, in (NB), a proposition with the following logical form:

(BL) ∀*x* (it is *prima facie* correct to believe *x* only if *x* is true).

But the occurrence of ‘true’ in (BL) does not show that (B) is really a norm of truth, since ‘true’ only shows its face in (BL) in order to facilitate its familiar role of cutting a long story short: a role it plays by virtue of being a device for canceling semantic ascent. Indeed, were we more inclined to allow ourselves the use of sentential quantification in our ordinary discourse, ‘true’ would not put in an appearance at all. (NB) could instead be replaced by

(NB\*) It is *prima facie* correct to believe that things are a certain way only if things are that way,

the logical form of which is represented as

(BL\*) ∀*p* (it is *prima facie* correct to believe that *p* only if *p*).

It is only an accident of our linguistic practice – namely, that we tend not to use sentential quantification – that gives ‘true’ any role whatsoever in the kinds of normative claim to which Lynch draws our attention.

Lynch has three responses to this line of argument (2009: 112). First, he claims that the mere fact that (B) does not employ the truth predicate does not entail that it is not really *about* truth. In his view, since (B) is a good paraphrase of (NB), (B) must preserve (NB)’s ontological commitments, and this means that (B) is no less about truth than (NB). Second, he states that it is more plausible to regard both (NB) and (B) as telling us something about truth *and* belief because ‘[b]elief and truth are interrelated concepts’: ‘belief’s standard of correctness is truth … and truth is the standard of correctness of belief’ (2009: 112). Finally, Lynch claims that, since individual normative prescriptions are justified by general normative principles, our acceptance of the instances of (B) is only explicable by our being committed to (NB); and this he takes to demonstrate that (NB) is ‘in the epistemic driver’s seat’ (2009: 112).

However, none of these replies succeeds. First of all, pointing out that (B) must share (NB)’s ontological commitments is a *non sequitur*. Let us grant Lynch’s claim that (B) is *about* truth because (NB) is. The crucial issue is not whether (NB) and (B) involve the property of truth, but *how* the property of truth is involved. And on this score the deflationist’s point is that the truth predicate only appears in (NB) to facilitate generalization on sentences: a role it plays merely by virtue of its being a device for canceling propositional ascent. So whilst ‘true’ enables us to *express* a norm, truth is not itself normative: (NB), though it involves truth, is not *about* truth in the sense of laying out a normative feature of it. Consequently, we may harmlessly grant that (B) is about truth too. But all this means is that the final occurrence of ‘*p*’ is equivalent to ‘〈*p*〉 is true’; and this displays, not that (B) is a norm of truth, but that the truth predicate is a device for canceling propositional ascent.

Having clarified this point, we can see that Lynch’s second reply is question-begging. Belief and truth are, indeed, interrelated concepts, but only in the following, minimal sense: believing that 〈*p*〉 is true is just a way of believing that *p*. And what this shows is, not that truth is what we aim at in belief, but that truth is *too thin* a notion to constitute belief’s standard of correctness. A deflationist precisely *denies* that (NB) ‘tell[s] us something about truth’ (Lynch 2009: 112): it merely displays that ‘true’ serves to cancel propositional ascent.

This is not to say, however, that the deflationist need deny that there is a general normative principle that justifies our acceptance of (B)’s instances. (NB) is, indeed, in the epistemic driver’s seat. It is just that (NB)’s occupancy of this position does not entail that (NB) expresses a norm of truth. For, since ‘true’ only figures in (NB) for the purpose of enabling the norm to be *articulated*, it follows that it is not *truth* that is the goal of belief. The nature of the general norm in question is, in fact, clarified by (NB\*). Take any proposition you like: one should believe it just in case the way it represents things is the way they are. This is the norm of belief that Lynch misidentifies as a norm of truth. He has conflated the norm with the means by which we express it. And what this means is that, ultimately, Lynch has given us no reason for abandoning a deflationary theory of truth – namely, (TD) – that neatly side-steps his scope problem.

**6. Conclusion**

As we saw in §3, the pluralist cannot properly motivate her position simply by pointing to differences between truths across domains of discourse. Such differences can be explained away as differences, not in how truth is constituted in the various discourses, but in the divergent subject matters with which the respective discourses are concerned. This being so, pluralists must offer arguments for construing such differences in their terms; and what we have seen is that the arguments of Lynch and Wright do not succeed in this regard. Perhaps there will be other arguments that fare better. Let us wait and see. For the time being, though, we should just stick with our favored version of deflationism.[[26]](#footnote-27)

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1. As Benjamin Schnieder reminds us, ‘[t]he direction of conceptual explanations seems to be owed to factors of conceptual complexity and primitiveness; in general, statements involving complex or elaborated concepts are explained in recourse to more primitive concepts’ (Schnieder 2006: 33). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Quine says ‘sentences’ where I say ‘propositions’, but this difference matters little in the present context. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The distinction between deflationism and alethic pluralism is nicely captured by Wright’s remark that ‘[t]ruth cannot admit of variable realization if, as for the deflationist, there is nothing substantial in which it *ever* consists’ (1996: 925). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. 〈*p*〉 is superassertible if and only if 〈*p*〉 is warranted without defeat at some stage of enquiry, and would remain so at every successive stage of enquiry (Wright 1992: 48). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. 〈*p*〉 is concordant if and only if: (i) 〈*p*〉 *supercoheres* with some framework of propositions ∑ (*i.e.* 〈*p*〉 coheres with ∑ at some stage of enquiry and would continue to do so without defeat, through all successive and additional improvements to ∑ (Lynch 2009: 171-172)); and (ii) ∑ is itself ‘durably coherent with the *external* coherence-independent facts – with whatever kinds of judgment are true, in other words, by virtue of corresponding to an extra-human reality’ (Lynch 2009: 175).  [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. For a discussion of the varieties of pluralism on offer, see Lynch 2009: Chs. 3-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. Similar sentiments are expressed by Michael Williams (2002: 153). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Horwich (2001: 156-158) attempts to answer this objection. For criticism of Horwich’s reply, see Armour-Garb 2004. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. It should also be noted how neatly the modest account avoids another objection leveled at minimalism by Anil Gupta: namely, that (MT) is unable to explain why it is that only propositions (and not, for example, Julius Caesar) can be true (Gupta 1993: 363-64). The modest account faces no such problem since (TD)’s right-hand side says that something can only be true if it is a proposition. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. For a more precise definition of superassertiblity, see n. 4 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. But perhaps I have been unfair. Elsewhere, Wright suggests that it is acceptable to talk of *identity* as variably realizable (1994: 174), arguing that we should recognize ‘that what *constitutes* identity is subject to considerable variation in tandem with the change in the kinds of objects concerned’ (1994: 174). So maybe, by analogy, we should think of truth as similarly pluralistic.

    But the intended analogy is of no help here, since Wright gives us no reason to accept pluralism about identity. True enough, if *a* and *b* are identical material objects, then they are spatially and temporally continuous, whereas the equivalent thesis does not hold if *a* and *b* are identical numbers. But it does not follow from this that *identity is constituted differently* in the material and numerical realms, since we can make what is now a familiar riposte: *i.e.* the self-same anti-pluralist riposte as that made by the alethic monist. For the monist about identity, leaning on considerations of theoretical parsimony, will insist that the differences between material and numerical identicals consist, not in differences in the respective *ways* in which they are identical, but in the differences between material objects and numbers. Whether *a* and *b* are material objects *or* numbers, they are identical in the same way, by sharing the same properties. Which kinds of properties these are depends on the ontological nature of *a* and *b*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. Here I presume that propositions are, by definition, truth apt. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. Wright’s argument for this conclusion is, I am convinced, unsound. For my reply to it, see my 1999 and 2000: 149-155. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. David Brink (1989), for example, takes the first option; John McDowell (1979) takes the second. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. This is an example inspired by Jackson, Oppy and Smith (1994: 297). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. To be sure, Wright is less than explicit on this issue. Nevertheless, he distinguishes his brand of minimalism from deflationism by saying that the former, unlike the latter, takes truth to be a ‘genuine property … which warranted assertions are therefore not guaranteed to possess’: something which, in turn, he takes to show that his minimalism (*unlike* deflationism, presumably) does not ‘immediately shut down all room for the sort of charge of massive mistake which is the error theorist’s stock in trade’ (1992: 35). This certainly suggests that Wright endorses the argument in the main body of the text for the thesis that deflationism *does* in this way shut down all room for adopting an error theory. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. In making this point I have been influenced by the work of Chris Daly and David Liggins (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. This problem has also been called ‘the common denominator problem’ (Sher 1999: 133; Cory Wright 2005: 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. Hence Lynch’s tendency to refer to the scope problem as ‘the correspondence puzzle’ (2009: 79) [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. Lynch appears not to appreciate the controversial nature of this claim: ‘Cornell realists’, such as David Brink (1989), Richard Boyd (1988), and Peter Railton (1986), all deny it. Having said this, I do not want to quarrel with Lynch over this point, for my claim is that *even if* Lynch is right to characterize moral properties in this contested way, this does not justify the adoption of alethic pluralism. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. This kind of response, although not put in quite this way, is made by Sher (2005: 323). [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. As is explained by, among others, Chris Daly (2005), myself (2002), Jennifer Hornsby (2005), David Lewis (1992, 2001), David Liggins (2008), and Gonzalo Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. According to Lynch, if deflationism is correct, then ‘[t]ruth, or rather “true” … is an honorific that all propositions therefore compete for equally’ (2009: 4). If this remark attributes to the deflationist the view that all discourses are on a par when it comes to whether they are truth apt and whether they express propositions that are true, this attribution is false. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. Lynch’s version of this claim says ‘if and only if’, but this difference between us does not affect the discussion that follows. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. That the truth predicate expresses a norm is the premise upon which Wright’s claimed refutation of deflationism depends (1992: 16-21). Cory Wright has also dismissed deflationism on the grounds that it fails to account for truth’s normative dimension (2005: 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. Many thanks to Chris Daly, David Liggins, and Cory Wright, who each gave me very helpful comments on previous drafts. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)