

Disagreement and the Normativity of Truth beneath Cognitive Command

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Summary of the Salient Points of my Thesis

The following is a list of the salient points and original contributions of my thesis:

- Chapter 1: I outline the basic features of the framework within which I carry out my discussion of the normativity of truth in connection with disagreement. I defend the legitimacy of what I call the *objectified form of judgment* in domains beneath Cognitive Command. I do so by arguing that objectified judgments are amenable to *sui generis* conditions of defeat that do not affect more subjective forms of judgment. This provides us with a functional story in support of the use of the objectified idiom in domains of taste, moral and comedic.
- Chapter 2: I accomplish two things. First, I present some important features concerning disagreement and I critically discuss how they are manifested differently in different areas as a function of the subject matter at issue. Second, I provide a comparative analysis of disagreements in some areas beneath Cognitive Command (taste, moral and comedic). I give what I take to be the best explanation of these differences in terms of the variable normative role that truth plays in such areas – from a *lightweight* constraint in the taste domain where truth does not exert any deontic constraint, to a more *robust* constraint in the moral domain where truth exerts a *sui generis* deontic constraint. I also argue that this normative variability in the deontic constraint can be modeled by means of the notion of *alethic suberogation*.
- Chapter 3: I outline a framework for understanding the normative function that truth might play in enquiry in which I distinguish between four different aspects of the normativity of truth: the teleological, the evaluative, the deontic and the axiological. For each aspect, I critically discuss the various formulations that can be given, and I

defend what I take to be the best formulation. I take it that this framework provides a valuable tool for conducting a systematic investigation into the normative aspects of enquiry.

- Chapter 4: I address the question: What conception of truth should we adopt in the light of the results of my discussion? I set two desiderata – *normative lightness* and *normative variability* – that an account of truth has to meet in order to be explanatorily adequate with respect to the phenomena discussed in this thesis. I consider Horwich’s version of deflationism and, relying on the framework outlined in Chapter 3, I provide a detailed discussion of the various normative challenges against that view. I argue that Horwich’s deflationism faces difficulties for addressing some of these challenges. I will propose my own version of deflationism – what I call *minimally inflated deflationism* – and show that it fully addresses the normative challenges. I also show that it provides a satisfactory account of our desiderata.

Declarations

I, Filippo Ferrari (the candidate), hereby certify that:

The thesis has been composed by the candidate.

The thesis has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree.

The work has been done by the candidate.

All quotations have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

Aberdeen, 6/4/2014,

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'F. Ferrari', written over a horizontal line.

Per Viola

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Introduction

Disagreement and the Normativity of Truth beneath Cognitive Command

§0.1 *The Topic*

This thesis is principally about the normativity of truth in connection with disagreement. Its overall aim is twofold. First, to provide a general model for studying how variations in the character of a specific kind of disagreement – what I will call *cognitive disagreement* – can be explained in terms of the variable normative role that truth plays in different areas of enquiry. Second, to offer a deflationary account of truth – what I will call *minimally inflated deflationism* – which proves adequate for explaining all the normative aspects of truth I will be concerned with.

Although the framework defended in this thesis is meant to be fully general, I will focus on cognitive disagreement as it occurs in domains that fall beneath what Crispin Wright has called *Cognitive Command*. The primary function of judgments in these domains is not that of ‘mirroring’ states of affairs to ensure convergence in opinions. On the contrary, the possibility is left open for a divergence in judgments that does not involve any misrepresentation or misconception on the part of the judging subjects in these domains.

More specifically, in this thesis I will deal exclusively with situations of disagreement as they occur in what I take to be three core areas of discourse beneath Cognitive Command: the moral domain, the comedic domain and the domain of taste. This is because, in order for the project to achieve some concrete result within the space of this thesis, a few restrictions are required in the range of examples I will consider. However,

such restrictions are not arbitrary. I believe that examples from the three aforementioned domains are heterogeneous enough to give us a representative sample of the kind of distinctions we are concerned with.

In fact, it is not so infrequent to hear people disagreeing about whether capital punishment is morally wrong, about whether a certain joke is funny, and, contrary to the motto *de gustibus non est disputandum*, about whether sushi is delicious. However, disagreements in these areas are notoriously difficult to arbitrate. Despite an initial expectation of convergence in judgments, we think that many such disagreements are extremely hard to settle, primarily because we believe, perhaps rather naïvely, that there is ‘no fact of the matter’ that we can appeal to in order to establish who is right and who is mistaken. Moreover, in some cases, such as some mundane disagreement about matters of taste, we might even think that judgments of both disputants are somehow equally legitimate.

This generates an interesting puzzle: how to account for the possibility of disagreements in which each disputant, although committed to judge the opinion of her opponent as false, might nevertheless judge such an opinion as somehow a legitimate one to have. To this difficulty, we should add that there seem to be significant differences in the way disagreement occurs in these three domains. For instance, we think that a disagreement about whether capital punishment is a morally permissible practice is more substantive and urgent to solve than a disagreement about whether sushi is delicious. This is because we typically care about reaching a convergence in moral judgments more than we care about reaching a convergence on matters of taste. These two aspects of cognitive disagreements will take centre stage in this thesis.

My proposal, very briefly, is that we can account for the full range of differences in disagreements occurring in domains beneath Cognitive Command in terms of the variable normative role that truth exhibits in those domains. The thought is that what specific constraint truth exerts on judgments in a given area of enquiry will vary in part as a function of their subject matter.

The methodology I will adopt to carry this project out is that of pursuing a

comparative analysis of disagreements as they occur in the moral, taste and comedic domains. I will carry this analysis out along three main axes of comparison: *faultlessness*, *parity*, and *rational sustainability*. For each axis, I will compare situations of disagreement from these three domains, and I will highlight what I take to be the most significant differences.

The main motivation for pursuing such a comparative analysis comes from the fact that, despite the popularity of discussions of disagreement in recent debates in philosophy of language and epistemology, no substantive work has been done in the direction of a systematic comparison of disagreement as it occurs in different areas of enquiry. On the contrary, the recent debate on alethic relativism is generally vitiated by a certain Procrustean attitude towards questions of disagreement. Even though it is now customary to distinguish between different *varieties* of disagreement, very little has been said regarding how and to what extent disagreement about moral matters differs from disagreement about matters of taste or about comic matters.

I take this to be an important task. Part of the original contribution of this thesis is, thus, to provide a framework for conducting comparative analyses of disagreement in various domains. I will offer, as a starting point, my own analysis of disagreements in the moral, the taste and the comedic domains. As we will see, the results of my analysis reveal significant variations in the metaphysical and normative contour of these three domains. Any discussion about disagreement should take these variations in serious consideration and provide an explanation.

In the light of all this, a pivotal question is how we should conceive of truth. I will subscribe to a broadly deflationary conception of truth. Standard versions of deflationism, including that proposed and defended by Paul Horwich, are often criticized because unable to fully account for the *sui generis* normative character of truth. I will offer a detailed discussion of this criticism, arguing that it amounts to several challenges targeting different aspects of the normativity of truth. I will concede that, to a certain extent, traditional forms of deflationism have difficulties in explaining some normative facts about truth. However, I will propose an amended version – *minimally inflated deflationism* – which I argue can

explain all normative facts about truth. My account differs importantly from the version defended by Horwich in that, in subscribing to the thesis that truth is a *sui generis* norm of enquiry, it maintains that the property of truth has an underlying nature which is explanatorily relevant. I will then argue that, its normative nature notwithstanding, this conception of truth qualifies as deflationary, and I will show how minimally inflated deflationism can account for the variable normative character of truth.

§0.2 *Outline of the Chapters*

I will begin my investigation in Chapter 1 by defending the legitimacy of truth-talk in the moral, the taste and the comedic domains. In particular, I will vindicate the legitimacy of a certain form of judgment in such domains – what I will call the *objectified form of judgment*. Objectified judgments are judgments like “Capital punishment is morally wrong”, “This sushi is delicious”, or “This joke is funny”. The thought is that the primary function of such judgments is not that of merely reporting our emotions or subjective reactions to a given gustatory, moral or comic experience – as when we say, using a more subjective form of judgment, “I am amused by this joke”, or “I am delighted by this sushi”, etc. Rather, objectified judgments purport to say something *about* the wrongness of torturing, the deliciousness of sushi and the funniness of the joke. I will show that these two forms of judgment are amenable to different conditions of defeat, and this provides us with a functional story in support of the use of objectified judgments in the moral, taste and comedic domains.

Once a case for the practical and epistemic legitimacy of such a form of judgment is made, the question concerning *cognitive disagreement* becomes salient. In particular, two issues will be the focus of my discussion in Chapter 2. Firstly, I will discuss the issue concerning the role of cognitive disagreement in the three areas of discourse I am primarily concerned with. Secondly, I will investigate whether cognitive disagreement as occurring in such areas is a uniform phenomenon, or whether there are significant

variations from one domain to another. As I have already anticipated, I will argue, by means of a comparative analysis, that there are indeed important variations that have to do primarily with a difference in the normative constraints that truth exerts in the three domains – from a *lightweight* constraint in the taste domain to a more *robust* constraint in the moral domain.

I will argue that this variability in *normative strength* depends on which aspects of the normative profile of truth operate in a given discourse. The thought is that, as I will make clear in Chapter 3, there are four main dimensions of the normativity of truth. I will discuss each of these dimensions and defend what I take to be for each of them the best formulation. Thus, when we say that truth is normative – or, that truth is a norm of enquiry – we may mean one, or more, of the following things: (teleological) that truth is the aim of enquiry; (evaluative) that truth is a *sui generis* standard of correctness of beliefs; (deontic) that truth is what we ought to believe; or, lastly, (axiological) that it is valuable to believe the truth.

I will suggest that, depending on factors concerning the nature of the subject matter of the disagreement, some of these aspects may be operating in some discourses but be silent in others. In particular, I will argue that whereas in the moral domain truth exerts a deontic control, this normative aspect of truth is absent in both the taste and comedic domains. I develop the idea of *alethic suberogation* as a model for understanding the specific normative function of truth in the taste and comedic domain and I show how it helps in accounting for both parity and faultlessness.

In the last Chapter I will be concerned with the following question: what conception of truth should we adopt in the light of the results of our discussion so far? I will start by specifying two *desiderata* – *normative lightness* and *normative variability* – that an account of truth has to meet in order to be explanatorily adequate with respect to the phenomena discussed in this thesis. Based on a general methodological principle of metaphysical parsimony, I will argue that a novel version of deflationism – what I will call *minimally inflated deflationism* – provides the best account of truth for the purposes of our project. I will contend that this version of deflationism represents an improvement on

Horwich-style deflationism in that it can effectively deal with all the various aspect of the normative challenge to deflationism.

The proposal defended in this thesis needs some stage setting. I will deal with this important task in the first part of Chapter 1 where I outline the semantic framework within which I will conduct my investigation. This framework is a bare-bones version of that pioneered by Crispin Wright in his *Truth and Objectivity*.

Chapter 1

Minimal Truth, Minimal Truth-Aptness and the *Objectified* form of Judgment

In this Chapter I will lay down the foundations for the project of this thesis. The subject matter of the project is an investigation about the different normative role(s) that truth plays in those areas of discourse generally called *evaluative*. The framework I am going to assume for conducting such investigation is the one canvassed by Crispin Wright in *Truth and Objectivity*. As I will work within this framework, it is important that we have a comprehensive exposition of all its parts that are essential for my purposes.

I will begin by describing the basic features of minimalism about truth and truth-aptness; I will expose the main marks of a realistic position concerning truth and assertoric content in a given domain of discourse, for then exploring more in depth one of these marks – what Wright calls *cognitive command*. Insofar as this particular mark is going to play an important role in this project, I need to be as clear as possible about it.¹ In the final section of the Chapter I will illustrate the functional role that a particular form of discourse – what I will call the *objectified* form of judgment – plays within the evaluative domain. I take this to be a significant addition to the original framework canvassed in *Truth and Objectivity*, and one that has an important preparatory role for the discussion of disagreement in areas of discourse beneath cognitive command, which will be the focus of Chapter 2.

¹ All those parts of the framework canvassed in *Truth and Objectivity* that are not essential for the project, I will leave aside.

§ 1.1 The ‘Truth’ Question

§1.1.1 *The Ordinary Conception & Tarski’s T-Schema*

What does it take for a statement to be true? Intuitively, many would *simply* say that a statement is true if and only if things stand as it says they are. This idea is perhaps our most basic intuition about truth.² According to Michael Lynch this is one of the *truisms* about truth that underlies our ordinary conception of truth.³

Various formulations of this intuitive thought are found in the writings of many philosophers since, at least, ancient Greece. For instance, both Plato and Aristotle⁴ informally characterized truth along these lines. In their words:

“Socrates: Then that speech which says things as they are is true, and that which says them as they are not is false?”⁵

“To say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false, while to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true.”⁶

As it is clear from these passages, there are two key ingredients in the ordinary conception of truth. On the one hand, there is the question of what the statement says. On the other hand that of whether what the statement says is in agreement with, or corresponds to, the way things are – or, more simply, to reality. These two elements seem

² See Künne, W. (2003):§6.2.1 for a list of philosophers endorsing this ‘*correspondence*’ intuition as a basic feature of our conception of truth.

³ See, Lynch, M. (2009):8. Lynch expresses this truism, which he calls *the Objectivity truism*, as follows: “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” (8).

⁴ See Paolo Crivelli’s excellent work on the theory of truth in Aristotle: *Aristotle on Truth*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, (2004); and Jonathan Barnes’ *Truth, etc.*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2007): Chapter 1 for an overview of the various conceptions of truth in ancient Greek and Latin philosophy.

⁵ Plato *Cratylus* 385b2; translated by Harold N. Fowler. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1921; Cf. Pl.Sph.240d9–241a2; 263b4–10.

⁶ Aristotle *Metaphysics*, G 7 1011b25–7.

deeply entrenched in our ordinary conception of truth.

Alfred Tarski, perhaps more than anybody else in the history of Western philosophy, has contributed to clarify and put in a rigorous form this core intuition behind the ordinary conception. Although Tarski found such conception roughly on the right track and adequate with respect to most of our everyday purposes, he nevertheless considered the various formulations that had been elaborated inadequate from the point of view of formal correctness, clarity and freedom from ambiguity. This is precisely the task that Tarski sets for his semantic characterization of truth.

In his seminal paper “The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages”⁷ Tarski’s main concern is, accordingly, that of providing a materially adequate and formally correct definition of sentential truth – relative to unambiguous and adequately regimented portions of natural language.⁸ Since the publication of this masterpiece, Tarski’s theory has been taken by many philosophers as the paradigm work on truth.⁹

As Davidson at various times pointed out, it is very important to be clear about the fact that Tarski never attempted to give a general definition of truth. Rather, what he did was to give a characterization of the various predicates of the form ‘true-in-L’, each applicable to a single language, for different languages.¹⁰ Therefore, it is no surprise that Tarski’s theory fails, as Putnam has claimed, as a general account of truth. It was never

⁷ Tarski, A. (1935) “Der Wahrheitsbegriff in den formalisierten Sprachen,” *Studia Logica* 1: 261-405. This is the enlarged German translation of the Polish version published in 1933. English translation by J. H. Woodger in Tarski *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983): 152-278. All references are to the English translation.

⁸ Tarski develops his theory of truth for formalized languages; in particular, he chose as a sample language for developing his theory the language of the calculus of classes – a proper fragment of mathematical logic.

⁹ The correct interpretation and aim of Tarski’s theory is object of debate. Tarski explicitly states one of the main methodological concerns in proposing his theory: “I shall not make use of any semantic concept if I am not able previously to reduce it to other concepts” [Tarski, A. (1933/1938): 152-3]. Hartry Field (1972) thinks that Tarski’s endorsement of this methodological constraint was motivated by his adherence to physicalism. For a discussion of this point, see also Frost-Arnold, G. (2004), “Was Tarski’s Theory of Truth Motivated by Physicalism?” *History and Philosophy of Logic* 25 (4):265-280. Contrary to what Tarski explicitly says, Field thinks that the correct way of understanding Tarski’s characterization of truth is to take it to be a reduction of one semantic notion – truth – to three other semantic notions, and thus to explain what it is for a sentence (token) to be true in terms of certain semantic features of the *primitive* components of the sentence, which are: *denotation* (what it is for a name to denote something); *satisfaction* (what it is for a predicative expression to be satisfied by an object); and *fulfillment* (what it is for a function symbol to be fulfilled by some pair of objects). Cf. Davidson, D. (2005): Chapter 2.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Davidson, D. (2005): Chapter 1.

meant to provide such an account.¹¹ In Tarski's own words:

“There will be no question at all here of giving a single general definition of the term. The problem which interests us will be split into a series of separate problems each relating to a single language.”¹²

Tarski very explicitly declared that his theory is to be understood as a formal elaboration of our ordinary conception of truth. In fact, he saw his work as offering a more precise expression of our intuitions (which adhere to what he calls the *classical Aristotelian conception of truth*) that truth somehow consists in a kind of correspondence with reality. In the first paragraph of his paper, he says:

“[T]hroughout this work I shall be concerned exclusively with grasping the intentions which are contained in the so-called classical conception of truth ('true-corresponding with reality').”¹³

And in a later paper:

“The desired definition does not aim to specify the meaning of a familiar word used to denote a novel notion; on the contrary, it aims to catch hold the actual meaning of an old notion.”¹⁴

The way Tarski captures what he thinks is the main insight behind the Aristotelian informal characterization of truth is by means of the more advanced (than what were available at the time of Aristotle) tools provided by modern logic and semantics, in the form of the famous equivalence:

¹¹ Putnam, H. (1985):64.

¹² Tarski, A. (1933/1983):153.

¹³ Tarski, A. (1933/1983):153.

¹⁴ Tarski, A. (1944):341; see also his ‘Sur les ensembles définissables de nombres réels I’, reprinted and translated in Tarski, A. (1983):128-129.

(TS) ‘P’ is true-in-English if, and only if P,¹⁵

where what occurs on the left side of the equivalence in quotation marks – ‘P’ – is the canonical name (or a structural descriptive name) that uniquely refers to the sentence in question – P –; and on the right side we have the sentence itself in its declarative form. The expression “if and only if” in (TS) is to be understood in terms of a material biconditional.¹⁶ The ‘L’ in the parenthetical remark is not a variable, but rather the name of a particular language, and an undetachable part of the predicate.

According to Tarski, the relation to the ordinary conception of truth is made manifest by (TS), in that it requires that the truth predicate for a language L be so defined as to entail, for any sentence ‘P’ of the language, a theorem of the form (TS). This provides the conditions for the material adequacy of the definition and use of the truth predicate. As Tarski puts the point:

“[W]e wish to use the term “true” in such a way that all equivalences of the form [TS] can be asserted, and *we shall call a definition of truth “adequate” if [and, presumably, only if]*¹⁷ *all these equivalences follow from it.*”¹⁸

Now, (TS) is a sentential schema, and it expresses a potentially infinite number of equivalences (depending on the expressive richness of the language in question). Whenever we plug into the schema a specific declarative sentence on the right, and its canonical name on the left, we obtain a specific equivalence. According to Tarski, each instance of the equivalence schema can be taken as a partial definition of truth, for a specific language. Thus, the general definition of truth relative to that language has to be, roughly, a logical conjunction of all these partial definitions. The big conjunction of all the

¹⁵ Or, more generally, (TS) can be stated as follows: *s* is true-in-L iff *p*, where “*p*” translates L’s sentence *s*.

¹⁶ Cf. Davidson, D. (2005):25.

¹⁷ See Carnap, R. (1942):26-28; and Künne, W. (2003): 185.

¹⁸ Tarski, A. (1944):344. As Davidson expresses the point, the T-sentences “alone constitute an unmistakable test that a theory has captured a concept of truth we are interested in”; see Davidson, D. (1973).

equivalences obtained from plugging in all the sentences of a specific language will give us the extension of the truth predicate for that language.

As I said, Tarski takes ‘true’ to be a predicate that applies to structural descriptions of interpreted sentences of a specific language. However, a sentence of one language is no less a candidate for being true than a sentence of another. Tarski’s theory says very little about how all these different truth predicates are related to each other. Notoriously this opens the way to all sorts of Davidsonian and Quinean worries concerning the indeterminacy of translation.¹⁹ I will not discuss this issue here.

Nowadays many philosophers working on truth who endorse the main intuitions behind Tarski’s theory are happy to take propositions on board. Propositions, in their most general sense, are taken to be the semantic contents of interpreted sentences in a context of use. In this sense, they play the role of what different (inter-translatable) sentences from different languages express in a given context.

Many different accounts of propositions have been given during the 20th century. In this thesis, although I take on board propositions as the primary bearers of truth and falsity, I will not commit to any particular account of propositions. The only work I expect propositions to do is the fairly minimal one to be the semantic value of declarative sentences in context. And this feature is something all the various theories of proposition on the market agree on.

Once I have propositions on board, I might restate Tarski’s criterion in the following way:

(ES) The proposition that p is true if and only if p ,

where the left-hand-side of the schema refers to a propositional item (denoted here with the expression ‘*that p*’) and, the right-hand-side expresses the fact, or state-of-affairs, represented by the proposition.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Davidson, D. (1984), especially section 3 and Quine, W.V.O. (1996). See also Field, H. (1994), especially section 8.

§ 1.1.2 *T-Schema and Metaphysical Commitments*

Expressions such as ‘corresponding to reality’ or ‘representing the facts’, which, as we have seen, are generally part and parcel of our intuitive conception of truth, are sometimes associated with what might be called an *ontologically robust* conception of representation and facts. One might even claim that such a conception is entrenched in the way the folk – perhaps those not completely unfamiliar to philosophy – use these words in ordinary conversation. Thus, on the face of it one might think that such a conception of truth makes sense only if correlated with a strong commitment to realism.

However, this commitment should not be thought as an essential and indispensable feature of the classical conception of truth. Certainly, Tarski has been very explicit in pointing out that his semantic conception is completely neutral with respect to the metaphysical issues. In his own words:

“[W]e may accept the semantic conception of truth without giving up any epistemological attitude we may have had; we may remain naive realists, critical realists or idealists, empiricists or metaphysicians – whatever we were before.”²⁰

Many philosophers share the kind of neutral attitude expressed by Tarski in this quote. In fact, there seems to be nothing belonging to the essence of truth that requires a commitment to robust realism. On the contrary, the core of the notion of truth, characterized in Tarskian terms, is minimal and metaphysically lightweight. As such, it is taken to be compatible with a variety of different specific proposals about what the nature of truth consists in.

However, how minimal we can get is a matter of dispute. Among those who share a

²⁰ Tarski, A. (1944):362.

deflationary attitude towards truth, the most hard-core deflationists, as, for instance, Quine, would even deny that ‘true’ denotes a property, maintaining that the only role that truth has is purely semantic – a device for ascending or descending semantically. Less radical deflationists, such as Paul Horwich, maintain that although ‘true’ denotes a property, this property is metaphysically insubstantial and that all there is to the notion of truth can be explained in terms of the Equivalence Schema alone. Other more moderate accounts, such as that I will defend in Chapter 4, insist that any genuine notion of truth which, as such, respects the Equivalence Schema, is associated with a property that, although metaphysically lightweight, cannot be as insubstantial as more radical deflationists want to maintain. The main reason for this claim has to do with the normative role(s) that truth plays in enquiry. It is because of the specific normative profile of truth that certain radical forms of deflationism about truth are not viable accounts of truth.²¹ All this will be dealt with extensively in subsequent Chapters.

In what follows I will set up the framework for conducting our investigation about disagreement and the normativity of truth. I will first explore what the notions of *minimal truth* and *minimal truth-aptness* amount to (§2). Secondly, I will discuss the various marks of realism Crispin Wright introduced in his *Truth and Objectivity* (§3), in order to explain in more detail, in (§4), one specific mark that will play a fundamental role in the present project – what Wright called *cognitive command*. In the last section of the Chapter (§5), I will deal with the important question why we have a certain kind of objectified form of discourse in those areas – such as moral, taste and the comic – where a presumption of robust objectivity seems to be particularly unsuitable.

²¹ See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this point.

§ 1.2 Minimal Truth and Truth-Aptness

§ 1.2.1 *Minimal Truth*

What has been said so far tells us nothing about the minimal requirements that a linguistic expression needs to fulfill in order to express a truth-evaluable content (a proposition). In this section, I deal with this issue. In so doing, I will discuss what a minimalist view about truth and truth-aptness amounts to.

A minimally truth-apt content is a content which is apt for a minimal kind of truth. This is not to suggest that questions concerning truth-aptness and those concerning minimal truth coincide. In fact, there are two distinct, although connected, projects. One issue is to outline the criteria for minimal truth, and thus what counts, among the truth-apt contents as apt for (merely) minimal truth. The other issue concerns the question what are the features that a certain linguistic item needs to possess in order to count as truth-apt. At least in principle, a commitment to minimal truth is not necessarily a commitment to minimal truth-aptness; nor is a commitment to the latter necessarily a commitment to minimal truth. In what follows, I will deal with both issues.

Nonetheless, there is an important connection between the two projects. Once a characterization of minimal truth is in play, what it takes for a content to be truth apt, in a minimal sense, is nothing more than the applicability to such a content of a predicate which qualifies as a genuine truth predicate – in the sense that it satisfies all (but not necessarily only) those features characteristic of minimal truth.²²

Let us begin by discussing Wright's minimalist view about truth. The main idea is

²² Paul Boghossian (1990) has argued that these two aspects of the minimalist theory cannot be separated – specifically that a commitment to minimalism about truth carries with it a commitment to minimalism about truth-aptness. Other philosophers have argued, on the contrary, that minimalism about truth and minimalism about truth-aptness can, and perhaps should, be separated, arguing that an expressivist about evaluative judgments can still be a minimalist about truth whilst rejecting minimalism about truth-aptness (see for instance, Holton, R. (1993), Jackson, F., Oppy, G., and Smith, M. (1994) and Smith (1994)). I agree with Boghossian's remarks on this issue. Once a minimalist proposal concerning truth is on the table it is hard to see how a minimalist view about truth-aptness can be avoided.

that all it takes in order for an expression to qualify as a truth predicate is its satisfaction of each element of a set of core features of truth. In the most recent paper on the topic, Wright provides the following list of basic features:²³

- Attitudinal Transparency: to judge (assert, believe) that p is to present p as true;
- Epistemic Opacity: this incorporates a variety of weaker and stronger principle – that a thinker may be so situated that a particular truth is beyond her ken, that some truths may never be known, that some truths may be unknowable even in principle;²⁴
- Embedding: truth-aptness is closed under embedding within the context of negation, conjunction, disjunction and conditionals;
- Correspondence: for a proposition to be true is for it to correspond to reality – to tell it like it is;
- Extensional Divergence: truth and warranted assertibility are potentially extensionally divergent – a proposition might be true without being justified and vice versa;
- Stability over time: truth is timeless – if a proposition is true, then it always is, so that whatever may, at any particular time, be truly asserted/believed may – perhaps by appropriate transformation of mood, or tense – be truly asserted/believed at any time.
- Absoluteness: truth does not come in degrees – propositions are completely true, if true at all.

This list, which is not assumed to be exhaustive, includes features that are taken to be both necessary and sufficient of the concept of truth. One interesting question is how these features relate to the Equivalence Schema which, as we have seen, essentially governs the logic of the truth predicate. For one thing, Wright sees the Equivalence Schema as based upon what I am calling here the Attitudinal Transparency feature of truth. This basic feature of the truth-concept is taken to give an explanation of why the truth predicate is

²³ Wright, C. (2001):760.

²⁴ As Wright observes, “which of these forms of opacity goes with the very concept of truth is, of course, contentious, but not that some do.” See Wright, C. (2001):784, fn13.

governed by the Equivalence Schema. Moreover, other two features – Divergence and Correspondence – are directly supported by the Equivalence Schema. Correspondence is, as we have already seen, indeed part and parcel of any minimal understanding of the schema – in the sense that it can be read directly into its formulation. The Divergence feature can be obtained from the Equivalence Schema plus some assumptions about standards of warrant operating on assertoric content. I will return to this important point in Chapter 4, when discussing Wright’s argument against deflationism.²⁵

According to Wright, in order for a predicate to function as a truth predicate for a given area of discourse it has to possess at least these basic features which are taken to constitute the essential core of our ordinary concept of truth. In this sense, they provide a set of necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for a predicate defined over a certain domain of discourse to function as a truth predicate for that domain.

As it is clear from the formulation, these basic features are not only about truth but also about assertoric content and about the various cognitive attitudes a subject might have with respect to that content. In this sense, when taken together, these basic features constitute a network of interrelated notions, each of which partly contributes to the characterization of the others. I take it that the version of deflationism I will defend in Chapter 4 is compatible with the basic features introduced by Wright.²⁶

§ 1.2.2 *Minimalism and Pluralism*

The proposal leaves open the possibility that in different areas of discourse there might be additional features that a notion of truth needs to satisfy in order to count as the adequate notion in that discourse. The framework is thus compatible with a pluralistic conception of truth, according to which what qualifies as truth for one area of discourse might be

²⁵ See Chapter 4, §4.5.

²⁶ There might be an issue with “Epistemic Opacity”. Since I will operate within domain of discourse beneath cognitive command where the idea of truths that are beyond our cognitive and epistemic ken seems unjustified, I will leave this issue aside.

different from what qualifies as truth in other areas. What all these different notions of truth will have in common is their satisfaction of the basic set of features listed above, which makes them genuine notions of truth for that discourse. More precisely, we would have a unique and minimal concept of truth which is fully characterized by the set of basic features considered above and different truth properties in different domains which all satisfy each of the basic features characterizing the concept of truth and, in addition to this, they would also satisfy different domain-specific features, making them a plurality of truth properties. What makes for truth in ethics might be different to what makes for truth in physics or mathematics despite the fact that these would all be genuine notions of truth insofar as they satisfy, *at least*, all those basic features constituting the concept of truth.²⁷ This coexistence of unity at the level of the concept and plurality at the level of the property is taken to be the hallmark of any genuine and stable form of pluralism. The conceptual unity tells us that the various truth-properties have in common, namely that they are indeed *truth*-properties; whereas the plurality at the level of property provides for the variability that makes the account of truth a pluralistic one.²⁸

It is important to bear in mind that this pluralistic picture, although quite a natural ally to the approach to the metaphysics of truth sketched here, is not forced upon us by an endorsement of the minimalist framework canvassed in *Truth and Objectivity*. One might fully endorse the basic structure of the project without having to commit to the thesis that there is a variety of truth properties in different domains of discourse. For this reason I will remain neutral on the question whether we should adopt a pluralistic conception of truth in any of the ways in which such proposal has been defended in the last two decades or so.

What I will do is rather to take at face value the important idea, already present in *Truth and Objectivity*, that the normative significance of truth might vary from one domain

²⁷ In the last decade or so, research concerning alethic pluralism has been quite intense, and as a result, there are many different ways in which this framework has been developed. The main advocates of pluralism in the current debate are Crispin Wright (1992, 2001, 2013), Michael Lynch (2009), Douglas Edwards (2013), Nikolaj Pedersen & Cory Wright (2013). See Pedersen, N.J.L.L. and Wright, C. (2013) for an overview of the various form of alethic pluralism currently on the market.

²⁸ This model has been firstly proposed by Crispin Wright in *Truth and Objectivity*, and then adopted by Michael Lynch with some important differences.

of discourse to another, and elaborate on that, without committing to the additional pluralistic thesis. All that is needed, I shall argue, in order to account for this variability in the normativity of truth is a fairly minimal notion and the extra bit of normative constraint that is needed in certain domains of discourse, rather than being part and parcel of the notion of truth (or, more precisely, of the nature of the truth property) would be sourced in facts extrinsic to truth, and connected to the nature of the subject matter of the domain in question. I will return to this important point in Chapter 4.

§1.2.3 *Domains of Discourse, Mixed Atomics and Mixed Compounds*

That said there are important issues concerning the notion of a ‘domain of discourse’ which have to do with the criteria for the identification of a domain. For one thing we employ our (thin) normative and evaluative vocabulary – terms like ‘good’, ‘bad’, ‘ought’, ‘permissible’, etc. – in all the areas of discourse I am primarily concerned with – i.e., gustatory taste, moral and comedic. Moreover, we can use the very same term ‘ought’ in a variety of different ways, even within the context of a single atomic sentence. In fact, we might talk about the prudential ‘ought’, the moral ‘ought’, the merely teleological ‘ought’ for some end, and we can talk about a combination of these ‘oughts’ or an all things considered ‘ought’.²⁹ Thus questions concerning the unity of the normative become salient.³⁰ For example, if I say: “you ought to fight” – I might mean *morally*, or *prudentially*, or both. Thus it is unclear whether such an atomic judgment can be classified as a moral judgment or not.³¹ Given this fact one might be sceptical about the possibility of making out sharp distinctions between these various areas.

My line of thought in this respect is to concede some ground to this line of scepticism without thereby having to renounce to the general usefulness of the notion of a domain of discourse. For one thing, to the question “how do we know whether a certain judgment belongs to a certain domain?” we could answer by appealing to the notion of a

²⁹ On this issue, see Chrisman, M. (2012c).

³⁰ See Scanlon, T.M. (2011).

³¹ See Wyatt, J. (2013) on this issue.

judgment's subject matter (or *aboutness*). By looking at what a given (atomic) judgment is about (i.e. what is predicated to what object) we will generally have a good, albeit defeasible, indication of which domain of discourse the judgment belongs to. If, for instance, we predicate a certain gustatory property - e.g., *deliciousness* - to a certain food - e.g., sushi - we have good evidence that such a judgment - e.g., "sushi is delicious" - belongs to the domain of taste, rather than the moral or comedic domain. Of course, things are not always that easy and sometimes appealing to some factors concerning the situation in which the evaluation is carried out might be needed. Cases of atomic judgments belonging to more than one evaluative areas of discourse – such as the example with 'ought' above – are trickier. My inclination with respect to these cases is to endorse a form of speech-act pluralism. Given that we are using 'ought' in more than one sense within the context of an atomic judgment, what we are doing is just expressing a plurality of judgments each of which belongs to a single domain of discourse. Thus, even though the notion of a domain of discourse is not as sharp as we would hope it is nevertheless a useful notion for the purposes of my project in this thesis. In what follows I will continue to use the notion of a domain of discourse assuming that we have a good enough understanding of it.

Moreover, and more generally, it is important to bear in mind that the problem of demarcating 'domains of discourse' is actually a problem for a lot of traditional metaphysics, and not just for the thesis I will defend in what follows that truth has a different normative profile in different areas of discourse, or for the alethic pluralist thesis (e.g., that defended by Crispin Wright). It is, for example, a problem for the idea that different regions of discourse may display different realism-relevant characteristics (e.g., Dummett, Wright, Blackburn, et al), as for the idea that some but not all regions of discourse may be suitable for a relativist treatment (e.g., Macfarlane).

That said, there is another, and perhaps more serious, concern lurking in this neighbourhood. So far I have been talking about atomic judgments, namely judgments of the simple form *subject-predicate*. But surely we can form more complex judgments out of atomic ones, and among them there are judgments that result from the logical combination

of atomic judgments belonging to different domains of discourse. What should we say about them - and especially, what should we say about the truth (or falsity) of such judgments? I will return to this important issue at the end of Chapter 4 when dealing with the normative variability of truth (see § 4.7.5.3). I will here outline some general guidelines concerning how to conceive of the truth of mixed judgments. In the last few years, at least since Christine Tappolet's (1997) and (2000) papers, there has been a debate about how to deal with these mixed cases, especially among those who subscribe to some form of alethic pluralism.³² According to Tappolet (2000) these mixed judgments present a dilemma for alethic pluralists: either they deny the truth of mixed judgments or they need to appeal to a general notion of truth thus undermining the need of a plurality of truth properties.

Now, insofar as I am not advocating alethic pluralism for the purposes of this thesis, I can easily admit one general, deflationary, property of truth and thus dissolve the problem of mixed judgments: they are true (if true) in the same way in which their atomic constituents are true (if true). However, because I will defend a pluralistic conception of the normative role that truth exerts in different areas of enquiry, my proposal is exposed to a similar worry. Thus it might be useful to anticipate here some general strategies that a pluralist can adopt to address this issue in order to indicate in more concrete terms in (§4.7.5.3) how my proposal of the normativity of truth might deal with it.

Some philosophers (e.g., Cotnoir and Lynch) have argued that a generic truth property – in Lynch's terms, the higher order functional property *truth-as-such* – (see Lynch 2009) is not incompatible with a philosophically interesting pluralism about truth. On the contrary, in Lynch's functionalist framework, *truth-as-such* is essential to the mechanics of alethic pluralism. This would be an example of a successful solution to the problem of mixed judgments based on the admission of a generic truth property.³³ In this

³² One might see the Frege-Geach problem as intimately related to the issue discussed by Tappolet – as essentially about what to say concerning mixed inferences and mixed judgments.

³³ I believe that Lynch's model for alethic pluralism gives rise to another worry according to which a given true proposition will have more than one alethic property, the domain specific property and the general truth property. The thought is that such a proposition will have the generic truth property in virtue of its having the domain specific truth property. However it is not clear what is the role of this functional generic truth

respect, Tappolet's dilemma is shown to be a false dilemma. Other pluralist frameworks – in particular the one pioneered by Wright in several works – deny the existence of a general truth property (and express some scepticism about proposals that admit of one – see Wright 2013). These pluralisms cannot thus endorse the second horn of Tappolet's dilemma. However there are ways out. One possibility, suggested by Pedersen, (see Pedersen (2006)) is to conceive of the truth of mixed judgments in disjunctive terms: thus the truth of a conjunction of two judgments one of which is T_1 while the other is T_2 , will be a disjunctive property (T_1 or T_2). Alternatively, a pluralist à la Wright who does not like the idea of having disjunctive alethic properties can maintain that a mixed judgment (recursively) inherits the truth property of one of its compounds. Which one? An answer to this question will depend on what is the main logical operator governing the mixed judgment. Without going into unnecessary technical details, one option is to maintain that all the various truth properties can be ranked on a scale which goes from the less committal (both in terms of normativity and ontological commitments) truth to the more committal one. In this way a pluralist can maintain that if the main connective is a conjunction then the conjunctive judgment will inherit the more committal truth property whereas if it is a disjunction whose disjuncts are both true the compound judgment will inherit the less committal truth property (otherwise the truth property applicable to the true disjunct). One important drawback of adopting this solution is that it requires modifying the standard account of the truth-functionality of connectives, and in particular to renounce to what might be called the principle of truth-distribution. This is because the way in which the mixed judgment happens to be true might not be shared by all its components.

Another, perhaps more promising, way out for alethic pluralism is to agree with Edwards (2008), (2009) that Tappolet's second horn of the dilemma trades on a conflation between truth-property and truth-conditions. A conjunctive judgment, in the simplest case, is nothing more than a conjunction of two atomic judgments, and it is true *in virtue of* its conjuncts possessing the domain specific truth property that applies to them. Thus a

property – whether it is genuine truth property of propositions or rather a second-order kind of property of properties of propositions.

conjunctive judgment of the form “torturing causes pain and torturing is wrong” will be true in virtue of the fact that “torturing causes pain” corresponds to the facts, and “torturing is wrong” is, e.g., superassertible. Thus, the simple thought is that if you want to know how a complex judgment is true (meaning, what are its truth-conditions) just look at its components, and in the case they are atoms, just look at the truth property that applies to each atom, otherwise just keep the recursive machinery going. Thus atoms are true in virtue of their possessing a certain specific truth property while compounds are true in virtue of the fact that each atom (or just some of the atoms) that composes the compound possesses the domain specific truth property that applies to it. No need to postulate the existence of a generic truth property or of a hierarchy of truth-properties that apply to complexes of increasing complexity. Much more need to be said in order to have a fully worked out proposal. But I am confident that these briefs remarks do a decent enough work in the context of this thesis to highlight some promising ways of addressing the initial concerns.

§ 1.2.4 *Truth-aptness and Minimal Truth*

Truth-aptness is primarily a characteristic of (interpreted) declarative sentences, and consequently of those domains of discourse dealing with such sentences.³⁴ To a first approximation, a linguistic expression qualifies as truth-apt just in case the content it expresses can be evaluated for truth and falsity –or, equivalently for our purposes, just in case it is apt to express a proposition.³⁵ Elaborating on this, Wright provides the following characterization of truth-aptness:

“[1] That any discourse dealing in assertoric contents will permit the definition upon its sentences of a predicate which qualifies as a truth predicate in the light of the minimalist proposal about truth; and

³⁴ As Jackson, Smith and Oppy point out, propositions are semantic entities that by definition do not raise the question of truth-aptness. See Jackson, F., Smith, M. and Oppy, G. (1994).

³⁵ Propositions are generally taken to be essentially truth-evaluable.

[2a – *The Syntax Condition*] That a discourse should be reckoned to deal with suitable such contents just in case its ingredient sentences are subject to certain minimal constraints of syntax – embeddability within negation, the conditional, contexts of propositional attitude, etc. – and discipline [2b – *The Discipline Condition*]: their use must be governed by commonly-acknowledged standards of warrant.”³⁶

The first thing to notice, in order to avoid confusion, is that the question of what it takes for a certain item to be truth-apt is distinct from the question of what it takes for a certain item to play the role of truth-bearer. If we take propositions to be the semantic value of interpreted sentences, then propositions would be our truth-bearers (i.e., truth and falsity would be properties of propositions). On the other hand, truth-aptness is not a property of proposition but a feature of a certain class of syntactic constructions whose use is subject to some (minimal) constraint. Of course, if we opted for interpreted sentences to be our primary truth-bearers, then truth-aptness and truth-bearerness would both be features of the same kind of objects. However, this need not be the case.

The conditions stated in these two claims are taken by Wright to be both necessary and jointly sufficient for truth-aptness in a given domain of discourse. The first condition just makes explicit the connection between assertoric discourse and the definability within that discourse of a predicate functioning as a truth predicate according to the minimalist recipe. If a discourse is dealing with genuinely assertoric contents, then it must be possible to define within that discourse a truth predicate along the minimalist line. This first condition is fairly unproblematic, so, in what follows, I will concentrate on the second condition which needs a bit more spelling out. Call the conjunction of [1] and [2a] *Syntacticism*; and the conjunction of all the three conditions [1], [2a] and [2b], *Disciplined Syntacticism*.

The second condition is in fact a conjunction of two claims and brings together two different constraints. One constraint concerns the syntax of the sentence in question. The

³⁶ Wright, C. (2001b):53. See also Boghossian, P. (1990):163-4.

other regards its disciplined use within the assertoric discourse. According to the syntactic constraint, a condition for truth-aptness is that the linguistic item in question belongs to the syntactically demarcated category of indicative sentences. If the sentence can be significantly embedded in suitable syntactic constructions such as negation, antecedent and consequent of conditionals, propositional attitudes and truth-ascriptions, then that sentence passes the syntactic constraint.

The syntactic constraint, however, is not enough. We also need some other constraint regulating the use of such expressions within assertoric contexts. One reason why we need more is explained by Frank Jackson, Michael Smith and Graham Oppy (=JSO) in their joint paper “Minimalism and Truth Aptness”. If truth-aptness is a fancy way of expressing the thought that a given sentence has specific truth-conditions, and we endorse a view according to which truth-conditions are (at least partly) determined by pattern of use of the sentence within the assertoric discourse, then we have a problem. No amount of purely syntactical information is sufficient to determine that there is a rich enough pattern of usage to determine truth-conditions.³⁷ Thus, the syntactic constraint alone is not sufficient for granting truth-aptness to a syntactically well-behaved linguistic expression.

I do not think that JSO’s main argument for proving the inadequacy of pure Syntacticism is in fact the right one. One might try to resist this conclusion by objecting to the view about truth-conditions assumed in the argument. Alternatively, and more plausibly, one might accept this view about truth-conditions but try to relax the link between truth-aptness and truth-conditionality. As I understand them, JSO take it to be a conceptual truth that if a sentence is truth-apt there must be a set of truth-conditions it has.

³⁷ See Jackson, F., Smith, M., Oppy, G. (1994): 293. The argument they give in the paper runs as follow:

- (1) Enough by way of syntactical facts alone is sufficient for being truth apt. [For reductio]
- (2) It is impossible for a sentence to be truth apt without there being truth conditions it has. [Conceptual truth]
- (3) Enough by way of syntactical facts alone is sufficient for having one set of truth conditions rather than another. [From (1), (2)]
- (4) A necessary condition for having one set of truth conditions rather than another is having a rich enough pattern of usage to determine truth conditions. [Assumption about truth-conditions]
- (5) Enough by way of syntactical facts is sufficient for having a rich enough pattern of usage to determine truth conditions. [From (3), (4)]

Since (5) is clearly false, we should deny (1).

However, it is not clear in what sense this should be considered a conceptual truth.

One might take truth-aptness, in a fairly minimal sense, to be a sort of dispositional feature of sentences, as in fact the disposition to receive a specific set of truth conditions under the circumstances of appropriate usage within an assertoric context. Although truth-aptness is indeed aptness to express a truth-conditional content (or, more simply, aptness for *propositionality*), it does not require that the sentence in question actually possesses a specific set of truth conditions. We should also keep in mind that, given its conventional character, nothing forecloses the possibility that the assertoric practice, as it actually is, undergoes significant changes. This means that there is no assurance that the truth-conditions a truth-apt statement would have if used in certain future assertoric contexts would be the same as those it would have if it were used in the actual context of assertion within the actual practice.

In addition to this, JSO provide no argument for the thesis that a statement's being truth-apt entails that there actually are specific truth-conditions it has to have. It might well happen that such a sentence will never be used in any assertoric context and thus it will never receive an actual set of truth-conditions. However, granted the view on truth-conditions assumed in the argument, although this would be sufficient for the sentence lacking actual truth-conditions it would not deprive such a sentence of its potential to receive a specific set of truth conditions under appropriate circumstances of use. To this aim it is enough that the sentence has all the syntactic complexity required for its having indicative form. If this is correct then it puts considerable pressure on the idea that the link between truth-aptness and truth-conditionality assumed by JSO is indeed a conceptual truth about truth-aptness.

This is not, however, to say that the syntactic condition is by itself sufficient for granting truth-aptness. In fact, one might think that the bare syntactic criterion on truth-aptness makes it too easy for sentences to turn out to be truth-apt, and consequently too easy to generate seemingly meaningful complex sentences which are clearly not meaningful at all. Just saying that a given syntactic construction can be meaningfully embedded within the context of the truth predicate is not sufficient as a criterion for truth-

aptness.

James Dreier in his 1996 paper “Expressivist Embeddings and Minimal Truth” has expressed this concern forcefully. He introduces a new predicate, ‘hiyo’ such that the sentence ‘Bob is hiyo’ is used in very much the same way as ‘hey, Bob’ is used – namely, to accost Bob. However, ‘hiyo’ is grammatically an adjective, so ‘Bob is hiyo’ is an ordinary indicative sentence. Thus ‘it is true that Bob is hiyo’ is syntactically well formed. This means that, by the syntactic criterion, ‘Bob is hiyo’ counts as truth-apt, and so someone who is willing to accost Bob is licensed to say that ‘Bob is hiyo’ is true. Dreier elaborates the worry by noting that, under this account of truth-aptness, sentences like ‘if a dingo is near, then Bob is hiyo’ are also grammatically well formed and truth-apt, if ‘hiyo’ is an ordinary predicate. However, as Drier points out, the problem of such sentence is that it is unintelligible. We seem to understand it, but we actually do not. This is simply because the idea that someone might use that conditional to infer 'Bob is hiyo' from 'A dingo is near' makes no sense. What this shows, according to Drier, is that

“Not every combination of characterization of the speech act performed by an utterance and stipulation that the expression in question functions as a predicate is a consistent combination. We want some sort of guarantee that the stipulation makes sense.”³⁸

This guarantee comes from the second clause of the second condition for truth-aptness stated by Wright – namely, assertoric discipline. The idea is that for a sentence to be truth-apt it must not only respect the syntactic constraints mentioned above, but there must also be standards whereby the use of that sentence in a community are judged to be warranted or unwarranted. In other words, in addition to the syntactic constraint, we need also to ensure that any use of the sentence is appropriately disciplined by norms of correct assertion.

³⁸ Drier, J. (1996):43.

As Wright makes it very clear in reply to a criticism by Simon Blackburn,³⁹ this condition for truth-aptness by no means entails a commitment to the idea that the standard use of all indicative sentences in a truth-apt domain is assertoric.⁴⁰ On the contrary, it is open to there being other kinds of discipline different from the assertoric one governing other types of (non-doxastic) attitude towards the content of indicative sentences. Thus it is no objection to the adequacy of the constraint that there are uses of indicative sentences besides the assertoric one – like, for instance Austinian performatives – which are governed by non-truth-connected norms.⁴¹ Moreover, different kinds of assertion might be subject to different sorts of discipline – empirical assertions and mathematical assertions, assertions about the past and assertions about the future, etc. However, this fact has no bearing on their status as assertions.

A *prima facie* more pressing worry about the second condition for truth-aptness is discussed by JSO in the aforementioned paper. The basic shape of their concern is that, as a matter of fact, the criteria for truth-aptness are more demanding than those required by Disciplined Syntacticism, in that they involve what JSO call the platitudinous connection between truth-aptness and belief. Once this connection is brought into the picture, they argue, the characterization of truth-aptness proposed by Wright ceases to be minimal, in the way in which it was originally intended to be. The kind of connection they have in mind is the following: it is a necessary requirement for a sentence to be truth-apt that such a sentence can be used to give the content of a belief, specifically the belief of someone who asserts the sentence in question. Once this is accepted, insofar as it is not a metaphysically innocent matter whether or not a certain state is a belief, any characterization of truth-aptness based on this platitudinous connection would not be minimal. In their words:

“To show that a sentence is truth-apt [...] it needs also [in addition to syntax

³⁹ See Blackburn, S. (1998)

⁴⁰ See Wright, C. (1998) “Comrades against Quietism: Reply to Simon Blackburn on *Truth and Objectivity*”, *Mind*, 107 (425):183-203; especially §2:187-9.

⁴¹ Blackburn, S. (1998):159-161.

and discipline] to be shown that the state an agent is in when she is disposed to utter a sentence with the appropriate syntax and discipline bears the relation to information, action and rationality required for the state to count as a belief. This is a substantial matter.”⁴²

Consider, as an illustration, ethical statements. Disciplined Syntacticism deems ethical statements as truth-apt. If we grant the connection between truth-aptness and beliefs, it follows that ethical statements are apt for expressing the content of the belief the subject has in asserting such statement. However, according to JSO, a commitment to this view is not minimal. There are philosophical choices to be made in order – for instance – to address what Michael Smith has called *the moral problem*.⁴³ However, any such choice has its own theoretical commitments, and in this sense any endorsement of one specific view or another requires a commitment that goes far beyond any plausible kind of minimalism. For example, if we accept both the plausible thesis that an assertion of an ethical statement is inherently motivational together with the Humean thesis according to which no belief can be, in and of itself, a motivational state, we generate a tension that needs deep philosophical work to be solved. Thus, if we take into account the platitudinous connection with beliefs as they suggest, any prospect for a minimalist account of truth-aptness looks rather bleak. The lesson JSO want to take from this fact is that minimalism about truth does not enforce minimalism about truth-aptness.

Wright’s own response on this point is to agree that there is an analytical connection between truth-aptness and belief, but he disagrees with the way JSO understand it. What is

⁴² Jackson, F., Smith, M., Oppy, G. (1994):296.

⁴³ Smith, M. (1994) is an excellent example of how such a project can be carried out (and indeed an example of how much hard philosophical work is required). According to Smith, the moral problem can be stated in the form of three plausible, but apparently inconsistent, propositions:

1. Moral judgments express beliefs.
2. Moral judgments have a necessary connection of sorts with the will: that is, with being motivated.
3. Motivation is a matter of having, inter alia, suitable desires.

Smith’s project is that of showing how these three theses (or a slightly modified version of them) can be made compatible. See also Smith, M. (1994) "Why Expressivists should love Minimalism about Truth", *Analysis*, 54 (1): 8.

analytic is the following connection: bracketing paradoxical sentences,⁴⁴ if someone sincerely asserts a sentence *S*, then she has a belief whose content can be captured by means of *S*. However, 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].”⁴⁵ In these terms, there is no particular problem in admitting that a certain class of statements (ethical statements) used assertorically express a genuine belief. Insofar as ethical statements are minimally truth-apt, and thus express a content that can be evaluated for truth and falsity, there seems to be no obstacle in maintaining that there are genuine ethical beliefs. The *ur*-mistake is to think that genuine beliefs must be robustly representational in character. However, this is not the case.⁴⁶

In general, then, any mental state expressed by a sincere assertoric use of a declarative sentence, *P*, automatically, counts as a belief *that p*. There need not be any further tie that links together all of the states called “belief”, nothing over and above their being those states a subject entertains whenever she is willing to warrantably endorse or assert the corresponding declarative sentences. And this goes hand in hand with the fact that the folk unreflectively describe ethical convictions and aesthetic opinions as *beliefs*.

In the light of this discussion, for the purposes of the project of this thesis I can hold on to the Disciplined Syntacticism as the correct account of truth-aptness.

§ 1.3 Marks of Realism

§ 1.3.1 *The Philosophical Significance of the Realism/Anti-Realism Debate*

Wright takes the real philosophical impetus driving the project of *Truth and Objectivity* to

⁴⁴ On this point, see O’Leary-Hawthorne, J. & Price, H. (1996), “How to stand up for non-cognitivists”, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 74 (2):275–292

⁴⁵ Wright, C. (1994): 169-175.

⁴⁶ On this point, see also Lynch, M. (2009):149-153.

be that of metaphysical activism.⁴⁷ Accordingly, one of the main points on the philosophical agenda is to vindicate the substantiality of the debate between realism and anti-realism by providing some theoretical tools for framing, conducting and assessing that debate, both on a global and local scale.

Despite its metaphysical activism, the general methodological tenor driving the project is mainly deflationary, and that of ontological parsimony: rather than being the default position, realism has to be earned. If it can be shown that this project can be effectively carried out, this should be sufficient to discredit any radical quietist attitude towards the philosophical significance of the realist/anti-realist debate. The lesson is thus that from the stalemate generated by the failure of a global anti-realism and the inadequacy of a global realism, we should not embrace quietism. A more active stance is open which rehabilitates both views on a local scale and fills our philosophical agenda with many interesting philosophical questions. Whether or not quietist souls are fully satisfied with the project of *Truth and Objectivity*, I will here endorse its philosophical ‘activism’. In fact, I will try to make this stance even more effective, by highlighting and elaborating on some important details and distinctions left uncovered in Wright’s book.

In order to accomplish his project, Wright engages in a detailed discussion concerning the main marks along which the opposition between realist and anti-realist conceptions of truth should be framed. He individuates four marks, which I will briefly describe in this section. The underlying methodology is that a metaphysically minimal conception of truth and content should be the default position and therefore the starting point of the project. Realism then is something that needs to be gradually earned by means of philosophical investigation along the four marks individuated by Wright.

§ 1.3.2 *Four Marks of Realism*

⁴⁷ This expression can be translated in the current context as anti-quietism in metaphysics. See Wright, C. (2012):426.

The first mark, which Wright calls *the Dummettian point*,⁴⁸ is that the evidence-transcendent character of the truth of propositions in a domain of discourse is sufficient (but not necessary) condition for imposing a realist conception of truth in that domain. In other words, if we think that at least some of the propositions belonging to a given domain may have determinate truth-values regardless of our ability to determine what those truth-values are, or even to gather evidence in favor or against them, then we are conceiving of truth in that discourse in a realist way. This point requires that the source of truth is located in a mind-independent reality.⁴⁹ This constitutes the first step towards an earned realist conception.

The second mark has to do with what Wright takes to be the core feature of the contrast between Socrates and Euthyphro in Plato's *Euthyphro* – what he calls *the Euthyphro Contrast*.⁵⁰ This mark concerns the direction of explanatory priority of the two sides of the Equivalence Schema. Whether a certain proposition is true *only because* of the fact that things stand as it says they are; or, conversely, whether things are as they are (at least partly) *because* the proposition that says that things are as they are is true. In other words whether the truth of our judgment at least partly determines that things are as it says they are or whether the truth of our judgment is entirely determined by (responsive to) the fact that things are as it says they are.

The fact that the source of the truth-values of at least some propositions is located in a mind-independent reality does not require, by itself, that truth has to be conceived of as evidence-transcendent. The possibility is still open that even if the source of the truth of a certain class of propositions is in a mind-independent reality, there is no reason for thinking that the truth of some of these propositions might transcend our cognitive and technological capacities to gather evidence and recognize it as such. Admitting that there are domains of discourse in which best enquiry must lead us to the complete truth is

⁴⁸ See Wright, C. (2012):426. Cf. Dummett, M. (1973) “The Philosophical Basis of Intuitionistic Logic”, in his *Truth and Other Enigmas*, Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press (1978):215-217; and Tennant, N. (1997) *The Taming of the True*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; Ch.2.

⁴⁹ See Wright, C. (1992):3-7; 76-79; and Wright (2012):426.

entirely compatible with a realist conception. This means that the fact that the notion of truth in some domains is evidentially constrained is not sufficient for granting a non-realist notion of truth. The point is rather that, unless we can make sure that the method of enquiry through which we seek the truth in such domains is not one of pure detection and discovery – i.e., entirely responsive to the subject-matter of the discourse whose nature is completely mind-independent – we would not have sufficient grounds to dispel every worry about whether we should consider truth in such domains as realist. What we need for granting the presence of a non-realist notion of truth is not only that truth is evidentially constrained in the relevant domain but also that the method of enquiry in this domain is at least partially, but substantially, influenced by the judging subject – i.e., the reality of the subject matter is best conceived as at least partly mind-dependent.⁵¹

The kind of contrast suggested here concerns which factors go into the determination of the extension of the truth predicate in a given domain of discourse. Whether it is the (perhaps best) opinion of judging subjects that determines the extension of ‘true’ or whether its extension is merely reflexive of a judgment-independent state of affairs (regardless of whether it is epistemically accessible to us or not). This constitutes the second step towards realism.

The remaining two marks of realism, which together constitute the third step towards an understanding of an earned realism, concern the so-called *Correspondence Platitude*. The main thought behind it is that to tell the truth is “to tell it like it is” – i.e., to express a content which corresponds to, or represents, the facts. These two marks take issue respectively with the two key notions embedded within the platitude: the notions of fact and representation. They function as a sort of litmus paper for detecting whether a given domain of discourse has indeed the realist-friendly characteristics highlighted by the first two marks. In the ordinary philosophical jargon, the notion of fact and that of representation were immediately associated with full-blooded realism. That, presumably, was partly because of the popularity of a correspondence conception of truth with its entire

⁵¹ See Wright, C. (1992), Appendix to Chapter 3 for a discussion of the Euthyphro Contrast. See also Wright (2012):426-7.

heavy weight metaphysical load. One of the key intuitions of *Truth and Objectivity* is precisely that of detaching these two notions from a robust realist reading – to show that they are best understood in their broadest sense as ‘thin’ notions that can be appropriately inflated to a fully realist conception. In short, in accordance with the methodological point made earlier, the default understanding of ‘facts’ and ‘representational content’ should be deflationary – a realist, ‘thick’, conception of them is something that needs to be earned through non-trivial philosophical investigation.

That said the third mark is constituted by what Wright calls *cognitive command*. Since this principle is playing a major role in the project of this thesis, I will dedicate the next section of this Chapter to a detailed discussion of it. So I will be quick here in presenting the main idea. Roughly, this mark has to do with the notion of representationality of content. It establishes a bridge between the idea of genuine representation and the presence of a shortcoming grounded in some kind of cognitive failure. The thought is that if the proper function of two devices is genuinely representational – e.g., two copy machines – then if when presented with the same input they produce different outputs that difference (given some provisos we’ll discuss in the next section) is entirely due to some shortcoming concerning the execution of the proper function of at least one of the devices. Transposed to the case of cognitive systems, if the proper function of a cognitive device in certain areas of discourse is genuinely representational (i.e., to detect and report how things are ‘out there’), then if two people presented with the same input – e.g., the same perceptual evidence – disagree – i.e., produce divergent judgments – then (again, given some provisos) at least one of them is subject to some kind of cognitive shortcoming. Such a mistake might be the result of a misapplication of the adequate method of enquiry vis-à-vis the subject matter at issue, or of the application of an inadequate method of enquiry, or of a misprocessing of the available information. To put it in simple words, it is a mark of realism in a given discourse that if two people disagree about some judgment within that discourse, then at least one of them is making a cognitive kind of mistake. This said it is important to notice that although the failure of a given domain to exhibit cognitive command is *per se*

sufficient to qualify that discourse as apt for an anti-realist treatment, satisfaction of it is not *per se* sufficient for earning realism about the target domain. More is needed to assure that the domain in question is apt for a realist treatment.

The fourth, and final, mark of realism discussed in *Truth and Objectivity*, is what Wright calls *width of cosmological role*.⁵² This mark provides us with a set of considerations which, analogously to the case of cognitive command, give us the material to substantiate the correspondence feature of minimal truth taking issue, this time, with the notion of ‘the facts’ – the things that our thoughts are meant to represent. Wright introduces the notion of *width of cosmological role* as follows:

“Let the *width of cosmological role* of the subject matter of a discourse be measured by the extent to which citing the kinds of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to the explanation of things *other than*, or *other than via*, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object. [...] The crucial question is [...] of *what else* there is, other than our beliefs, of which the citation of such states of affairs can feature in *good enough* explanations.”⁵³

A subject matter possesses a wide cosmological role just in case citation of the states of affairs of which it is about can feature in some explanations of phenomena whose existence is not guaranteed merely by the minimal truth aptitude of the associated discourse. Wright indicates four kinds of phenomena or consequences that are relevant here: (i) the cognitive effects that a citation of these facts is responsible to explain; (ii) the precognitive-sensuous effects; (iii) the effects on us as physically interactive agents; and, finally (iv) certain brute effects on inanimate organisms and matter.

In order to show how this works, Wright compares two examples. The first concerns the explanatory roles(s) played by the state of affairs – *wetness of these rocks*. The second concerns the explanatory role played by the state of affairs – *wrongness of that*

⁵² See Wright, C. (1992):191-199.

⁵³ Wright, C. (1992):196-7. *Emphasis* in the original.

act. Citation of the wetness of the rocks serves to explain phenomena along all the four dimensions considered above: the perceiving and believing, truly, that the rocks are wet; a child's interests in his hand after he has touched the rocks; the slipping and falling of a person walking on them; the abundance of lichen growing on them.⁵⁴ On the other hand, Wright argues, citation of the wrongness of an act is explanatorily effective only with respect to phenomena concerning the first dimension on the list: it explains my believing, truly, that that act is wrong. And it is our believing that the act is wrong that explains certain characteristic behaviors such as our condemnation of the act and our attempt to prevent others to pursue it.

§ 1.4 Cognitive Command

§ 1.4.1 *Wright's Formulation of Cognitive Command*

As I pointed out in the previous section, Wright introduces the idea of cognitive command as a coarse-grained test to be passed for a discourse to count as more than minimally truth-apt. It is primarily intended as a means for determining whether characteristic judgments formed within a given discourse should be thought of to function as representational devices for tracking mind – or judgment – independent states of affairs. According to what Wright calls the *Representation Platitude*, genuine representation is a dyadic relation between a device of representation – e.g., language – and what is represented – i.e., objects, or states of affairs. Thus genuinely representational devices are such that it is part of their normal functioning to track reliably those things they are devised to depict. As a consequence, any two devices whose standard function is genuinely representational will provide us with convergent results, whenever presented with the same input (of the appropriate kind), provided that they are used according to their standard function and not

⁵⁴ See Wright, C. (1992):197.

in deviant ways, and that they operate in suitable conditions. As Wright puts it:

“If two devices each function to produce representations, then if conditions are suitable, and they function properly, they will produce divergent output if and only if presented with divergent input.”⁵⁵

The platitude is supposed to flesh out the intuitive difference between the purely cognitive and the non-purely cognitive, and thus between discourses (e.g., chemistry) for which realism is appropriate and others (e.g., taste) for which it is not.

Wright, then, introduces the cognitive command constraint as follows: A discourse exerts cognitive command if and only if

“It is a priori that differences of opinion formulated within the discourse, unless excusable as a result of vagueness in a disputed statement, or in the standards of acceptability, or variation in personal evidence thresholds, so to speak, will involve something which may properly be regarded as a cognitive shortcoming.”⁵⁶

This principle provides necessary and sufficient conditions for a discourse to satisfy cognitive command and thus for judgments within that discourse to count as genuinely representational. Take two thinkers dealing with the same question within a given domain of discourse. Take the question to be such that the correct answer to it involves beliefs obtained by genuinely representational methods responsive to a self-standing state of affairs. If the thinkers deliver discordant answers to the question then at least one of them is committing some cognitive mistake. Thus, genuinely representational cognitive systems, dealing with the same subject matter, can produce divergent outputs just in case they are working on different inputs or, given the same input, they function less than optimally.

Now, it is crucial to clarify that the fact that a discourse exhibits cognitive command,

⁵⁵ Wright, C. (1992):91.

⁵⁶ Wright, C. (1992):144.

although necessary, is not *per se* sufficient for granting a realist status to such discourse. In this respect, satisfaction of the constraint is one route, but not the only route, towards an earned realist conception of the truth of characteristic judgments within a discourse. Even if we grant full representationality to characteristic judgment within a given domain of discourse, this would not be enough for a full realism about that discourse, if the other *relatum* of the correspondence platitude – i.e., the facts – plays only a modest explanatory function (i.e., it has a narrow cosmological role).

Moreover, although satisfaction of cognitive command is a necessary condition for genuine representationality, it is not sufficient. As Wright himself points out, an illustration of this fact is given by judgments about basic arithmetic. Despite the content expressed by mathematical statements not being genuinely representational – or so one might argue – we still have that a disagreement concerning the result of a simple calculation in elementary arithmetic has to involve some mistake of a cognitive kind of at least one party to the disagreement. In Wright's words:

“[I]t seems impossible to understand how a disagreement about the status or result of an elementary calculation might be sustained without some cognitive shortcoming featuring in its explanation.”⁵⁷

This point shows the possibility of a discourse exerting cognitive command without having a robustly representational function. Insofar in this thesis I am not dealing with mathematical discourse, I do not want to commit to any particular thesis about the specific role of the content of mathematical statements, but just to flag a possible way to block realism even in the presence of cognitive command.

Thus, we have seen that within this framework there are two lines of resistance to full-blooded realism for a given domain of discourse which exhibits cognitive command. On the one hand, we can grant the command and the full representationality of the content of judgments within that domain and yet deny that the represented facts play a wide

⁵⁷ Wright, C. (1992):148

cosmological role. On the other hand, we could accept that a discourse is governed by cognitive command, but deny that the content of characteristic judgments within that discourse is representational.

Satisfaction of cognitive command is conjectured to be a necessary feature of any discourse that qualifies as fully realist. In other words, the claim is that all routes to an earned realist conception of a certain domain have to go through satisfaction of cognitive command. Equivalently, this means that a failure to exert cognitive command by a discourse is *per se* sufficient for that discourse to qualify as broadly anti-realist.

Common sense is generally quite hostile to the idea that disputes within certain discourses such as taste, humor and the moral, when sourced in genuine divergence of judgments, need to involve some sort of cognitive fault. The folk would surely accept that paradigmatic cases of disagreement in the taste, comic and moral domains are significantly different from paradigmatic cases of disagreement about physical reality. The folk might of course be confused, but there is no doubt that this thought is widespread and well entrenched in their ordinary conception of disputes in such domains. In any case, the burden of proof to show that folks are confused and that their proto-philosophical thoughts are nothing but a prejudice sourced in their philosophical naïveté is, at this point, on the realist's shoulders. Once again, the rules are that realism must be earned.⁵⁸ Accordingly, in this thesis I will assume a (qualified) version of the folk conception of disagreement as it occurs in the moral, comic and taste domains, and I will explore some of the philosophical consequences of such a conception. I will offer no direct argument for establishing the truth of the folk conception. However, if we can make sense of such a conception and show not only that it is a coherent position but also that it has some interesting philosophical upshots, we would have good enough reasons to take it seriously. I will deal with this issue extensively in the next Chapter.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ See Wright, C. (1992):149.

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2 §§2.4-2.6.

§ 1.4.2 Clarifications Concerning the Formulation of Cognitive Command

There are various elements in the formulation of cognitive command that need some clarification. Firstly, there is the question of what is exactly meant by the notion of *cognitive shortcoming*. Secondly, there are questions concerning the role of the provisos in the principle. Thirdly, and finally, there is the issue of the *apriority* of the requirement.

On the first point: What is a cognitive shortcoming? What makes it cognitive (rather than, e.g., attitudinal)? In a different formulation of the principle earlier in the book,⁶⁰ Wright cites three types of factors that might constitute the kind of shortcoming involved in the principle. On the one hand we can have a defective state of information, due to some error in the content of our beliefs about the matter in question (e.g., some false beliefs obtained via testimony from what we consider a reliable and informed source) or simply due to some ignorance. Alternatively, the shortcoming might be determined by some procedural error or fault in the method employed to answer the question (resulting in inattention or distraction leading to inferential error, or oversight of data). Thirdly, the source of the shortcoming might be located at the level of some mistaken or otherwise inadequate background assumptions that we presuppose in conducting our enquiry, such as prejudicial assessment of data or the endorsement of some dogma. Lastly, the shortcoming might consist in the application of a method of enquiry which is not (the most) adequate for the kind of subject matter at issue. Of course, all these categories of possible mistakes are not exclusive, and in fact the source of the shortcoming might be multiple and involving different types of mistakes. The important point is that all these are ways in which the shortcoming involved in the dispute is the result of some sort of cognitive fault.

Let us turn now to the second issue concerning the role of the provisos in the principle. As Wright states the command, there are three provisos specified in the principle. The first two have to do directly and explicitly with vagueness, whereas the third has to do with variation in personal evidence thresholds. The role of these provisos in the economy of the principle is mainly that of clarifying that there might be reasons other than

⁶⁰ Wright, C. (1992):92-3.

vagueness or related phenomena that are responsible for a situation of disagreement that does not need to involve any cognitive fault on either side.

According to most views about the phenomenon, vagueness is certainly a possible source of such kind of disagreement. If two subjects observing the very same patch of color form divergent beliefs – e.g., one believes that that patch is red and the other believes that it is orange – such disagreement need not be attributable to some sort of cognitive fault on either side, even admitting that the domain of color judgments is one in which we have fully representational content and also one in which all truths are, at least in principle, knowable. In fact, it might well be that the patch in question can be properly said a borderline case of red/orange even though both participants to the dispute do not take it to be so, and thus form definite judgments about the color of the patch which are both perfectly legitimate.

Analogously, if two subjects disagree about the explanatory significance of a piece of statistical evidence with respect to a certain phenomenon for the only reason that they endorse different thresholds for the acceptability of such evidence as explanatory for the phenomenon in question, then such disagreement need not involve any kind of cognitive fault on either side. As an example of this, take two doctors who disagree about whether to administer a certain treatment to a patient. They have the very same information about the patient's disease and on the basis of that information they come to the very same diagnosis. Moreover they have the same evidence concerning the effect of that specific treatment and the risks involved in administering it to the patient at hand. However, they come to different decisions about whether to administer the treatment to the patient: one doctor believes that it is the right thing to do, while the other believes that the risks are too great and thus that it is better not to proceed with the treatment. Thus it is clear that the case is not one in which the two doctors have a different assessment of the risks involved in the treatment, but rather one in which they have different dispositions towards administering the treatment on the basis of that assessment of the risks involved. In such a scenario one might think that, despite the disagreement, the judgments of both doctors are somehow perfectly legitimate.

All the factors involved in the cases just described might make a divergence in opinions between two subjects cognitively innocent, as it were. However they are not the only factors. Situations of 'innocent' divergence in judgments in certain domains of discourse might be generated, more specifically, by the very nature of the content of the judgments within those discourses.⁶¹ Wright suggests that there is a common explanation of the presence of disagreements which do not necessarily involve cognitive shortcoming. This explanation has to be found in what he calls the phenomenon of *quandary* – a peculiar kind of intellectual bafflement according to which "we do not know, do not know how we might come to know, and can produce no reason for thinking that there is any way of coming to know that to say or think, or who has the better of a difference of opinion."⁶² For the purpose of this project I take no view with respect to this important issue. Rather, I will leave the fascinating world of vagueness aside, and I will concentrate exclusively on the occurrence of such disagreements in domains of discourse beneath cognitive command.

The last clarification about the formulation concerns the requirement of *apriority* of the principle. The rough idea here is that our main interest in discussing cognitive command as a mark of realism has to do with the question whether a certain discourse, solely by virtue of the contents of characteristic judgments within it, is the product of a genuinely representational mode of expression. For this reason, the knowledge of whether the relevant conditions cited in the principle are met by the targeted discourse is a priori. As Wright notices, if it were to depend on some contingent features of our psychology or customs, discoverable through empirical investigation, it would have no bearing on the issue of the objectivity of the discourse in question. For instance, if it were a fact about our biological constituency that all human beings share a single taste sensibility with respect to food, then we would be in a position to conclude legitimately that for each case of genuine divergence in judgments, *as a matter of fact*, something close to a cognitive shortcoming would be involved. But if that were the case, and such a fact were adduced as the only

⁶¹ See Wright, C. (1992):144-5.

⁶² Wright, C. (2001):71.

demonstration that the taste domain does exert cognitive command, it would not have any consequence on the issue whether judgments within that domain are the product of a genuinely representational mode of expression.⁶³ After all, even with that discovery in place – i.e., even if we come to know that convergence in judgments about culinary taste is required by our shared biological constituency – cases of irreducible divergences in judgments of taste would be certainly intelligible, and the explanation of why this is possible would require some thoughts about the very nature of the content of such judgments.

One worry we might have at this point is that, because of this *a priori* feature of cognitive command, acceptance of the constraint would be hostage to an acceptance of a quite controversial claim within epistemology – namely that there is such a thing as a priori knowledge. Even though Wright himself is happy with endorsing such a claim because he believes in the *a priori*, many would be dissatisfied or at least skeptical with it and thus would refrain to accept cognitive command on the basis of the fact that it involves a commitment to such a controversial claim. Therefore, it would be better if we could skirt that commitment and thus avoid having many losing interest in our project so easily. In fact, I believe that such commitment is not really essential, and it could be avoided without falling prey to the worry discussed in the previous paragraph. One can, for instance, maintain that cognitive command has to be a genuine and intrinsic feature of the content of expressions within certain domains of discourse, and thus avoid the challenge from the contingency discussed earlier, without committing to the thesis that it must be so *a priori*.

§ 1.4.3 *Interpreting Cognitive Command*

I will now spend few words on the interpretation of cognitive command in connection with the aim of our project. In the recent debate concerning relativism, there has been copious discussion about the so-called phenomenon of *faultless disagreement*. There is no space

⁶³ Cf. Wright, C. (1992):94; 168-170.

here for a detailed discussion of the various formulations that have been given of this notion and of its significance for relativism. However, since the idea behind it is very close to Wright's own idea of cognitive command, it might be useful to spend a few words on comparing the two notions.

Max Kölbel is perhaps the philosopher who, more than others, has made a substantive use of the idea of faultless disagreement for defending a *moderate* version of relativism. In fact, he thinks that the best way to account for the commonsensical idea that certain divergences in judgments in some domains of discourse need not involve any fault is to endorse a relativistic view about the truth of judgments within these domains. The thought is, roughly, that the truth of a certain class of statements is relative to a perspective (which may include the moral/taste/comic standards of the judger).⁶⁴ The upshot is that the very same statement – e.g., that sushi is delicious – might be true relative to subject A's perspective but false relative to subject B's perspective. What is responsible for the change in the truth value of this statement is not a change in propositional content but rather a genuine change in the perspectival factors that govern the extension of the truth predicate in the targeted areas of discourse. Thus, in order to motivate his relativism, and assess its efficacy, it is crucial for Kölbel to defend the plausibility and reality of the phenomenon of faultless disagreement. He introduces the notion as follows:

“A faultless disagreement is a situation where there is a thinker A, a thinker B, and a proposition (content of judgment) p, such that:

(a) A believes (judges) that p and B believes (judges) that not-p

⁶⁴ The main difference between Kölbel's proposal and MacFarlane's concerns where the parameters which are relevant for the evaluation of the judgment in question get their values from – whether from the context in which the judgment is made (Kölbel) or from that in which the judgment is assessed (MacFarlane). The technical term used in this respect is that of *initialization*. Since in Kaplan's semantics the value of the parameters in the circumstance of evaluation can shift independently of each other and also independently of the information of the index of the context of use, it is important, for appreciating the differences between the two proposals, to know where, for each statement and situation of use or assessment, they get their *initial* (or default) value from – whether from the information of the index of the context of use or from that of the context of assessment. In Kölbel's view the value of the parameters are initialized to the information of the speaker, whereas for MacFarlane they are initialized to the information of the assessor.

(b) Neither A nor B has made a mistake (is at fault).”⁶⁵

The two key notions involved in Kölbel’s formulation of faultless disagreement are common ground, at least at a first glance, with Wright’s idea of the possibility of differences of opinions without cognitive shortcoming. On the one hand, what is in common is the idea that the kind of difference of opinions, or disagreement in judgments, which matters is one that involves (at least) a logical incompatibility between the propositions expressed by the two conflicting judgments. One party expresses the proposition *p*, while the other party expresses the proposition *not-p*. On the other hand, both principles contemplate the possibility, localized to some domains of discourse, of a disagreement in which neither party is somehow at fault in holding the judgments they do, despite the logical incompatibility of the propositions their respective judgments express.

However, the formulation of *faultless disagreement* provided by Kölbel is, in a way, less specific than Wright’s idea of a divergence in judgments involving no cognitive shortcoming. In fact, Kölbel is talking in general of a situation of disagreement in which no fault is involved. Such a fault need not be cognitive: it could be of a different nature. In the context of his writings, Kölbel seems to have in mind a specific kind of fault involved in the formulation of (FD). Such notion of fault is related to the normative dimension of beliefs. Beliefs are governed by various kinds of norms and rules. The kind of norms that are relevant here are what might be called ‘alethic norms’. As we will see in Chapter 3, the idea that truth is normative of beliefs and, more generally, of enquiry, itself involves various dimensions, as it were. But, for the time being, let us simplify the matter and paraphrase the idea that truth is normative by saying, with Kölbel, that it is a mistake to believe what is not true. Thus the corresponding notion of faultlessness is meant to target the absence of any violation of the local normative rules governing beliefs in a given domain of discourse. In other words, a situation of disagreement in judgments is fault-free just in case neither party is violating the local alethic norm governing enquiry.

It is quite easy to see that if there were a unique and general alethic norm governing

⁶⁵ Kölbel, M. (2003):53-54.

beliefs in all domains of discourse, cashed out in terms of a non-relative notion of truth, then the possibility of faultless disagreement in Kölbel's sense would be precluded, as a matter of logic. In fact if subject A believes *p* and subject B believes *not-p*, it follows that it is not the case that nobody is making a mistake – in particular it is not the case that nobody is violating the alethic norm governing the formation of beliefs. Assuming that *p* is the case, then B, in holding *not-p*, would believe something which is not true and thus would be violating the norm. Similarly, assuming *not-p*, A in holding *p* would believe something which is not true and thus would violate the norm governing beliefs. Either way, it is not true that the disagreement between A and B involves no (normative) fault. This reasoning is known under the label of 'Simple Deduction'.⁶⁶

In order to avoid this conclusion, Kölbel argues for two theses that he takes to be a priori of the domains of interest for a relativist: on the one hand, he endorses a relativized form of the alethic norm; and on the other hand he defends the idea of what he calls 'discretionary contents'. In order to introduce the idea of discretionary content, Kölbel starts with the thought that there are a priori norms and rules governing beliefs and assertions and that these rules and norms are intimately connected to our use of language in ordinary conversational situations. According to Kölbel,

“Sometimes the *a priori* constraints governing beliefs involve the rule that different thinkers ought to agree, sometimes they do not. That is, with some contents of belief (propositions) there is a presumption that if one thinker correctly believes them, then no other speaker can correctly believe the negation of that content. [...] With other contents, there is room for legitimate disagreement, and we learn that this is so when learning how to speak and think.[...] This does not mean that belief in such *discretionary contents* is entirely unconstrained. [...] Sometimes there are a priori constraints that tie a belief to certain features of its possessor. If these features then differ from

⁶⁶ The label is due to Crispin Wright (See Wright, C. (2001): 56. See also Wright, C. (2006):41). The idea driving this reasoning first appeared in a critical notice to *Truth and Objectivity* by Timothy Williamson (Williamson, T. (1994); see also, Williamson, T. (1996)). The argument is developed in a joint work by Stewart Shapiro and William Taschek (See Shapiro, S. and Taschek, W. (1996)).

thinker to thinker, then the content better be of the discretionary sort.”⁶⁷

The basic thought is that it is an a priori feature of the content of judgments that they might be subject to different normative constraints in different areas of discourse. Some contents in some areas are such that disagreements in judgments within that area mandate violation of the norm governing belief in force in those areas, whereas other contents, those that Kölbel labels *discretionary*, in other areas are such that divergences in judgment are compatible with a full observance of the norms operating in those areas. So far I am broadly sympathetic with the basic thought driving Kölbel’s strategy, and I believe that, once appropriately reformulated, it can be integrated within the framework adopted in this thesis.

Kölbel maintains that it is an essential feature of discretionary contents that they depend, for their truth-evaluation, on the perspective of the judger – where a perspective is a function that assigns truth-values to contents. In other words, the discretionary nature of these contents is cashed out in terms of the relativity of their truth-values on the perspective of the judging subject. Given this assumption, and the connection between truth and the normative architecture of beliefs endorsed by Kölbel, the natural move to make at this point is that of relativizing the norms governing such contents in the following way:

“It is a mistake to believe a discretionary proposition that is not true as evaluated from one’s own perspective.”⁶⁸

Thus, the upshot of this norm is that it may be correct for one person A to believe a given discretionary proposition p , while it is not correct for another person B to believe the same discretionary proposition. And this fact is explained in terms of a difference in perspective between A and B. A’s perspective elicits A to endorse p , and thus makes A’s believing p

⁶⁷ Kölbel, M. (2003):68-9 (*emphasis added*).

⁶⁸ Kölbel, M. (2003):70.

correct, while B's perspective does not. For reasons of uniformity, instead of having two alethic norms, one governing discretionary contents and the other governing non-discretionary contents, Kölbel opts for a single, relative norm that he formulates as follows: "It is a mistake to believe a proposition that is not true in one's own perspective."⁶⁹

With this relativized version of the alethic norm governing belief and assertion, together with the notion of discretionary content, Kölbel argues that we have all the theoretical tools we need for blocking the *simple deduction* and thus allowing for the possibility of disagreements that are fault-free in the relevant sense – i.e., disagreements involving no violation of the alethic norm governing judgments. In order to obtain this result, Kölbel must insist that, for any discretionary content p , we may no longer validly infer from the supposition that p that someone who holds that *not-p* is making a mistake (violating the alethic norm). A mistake will be implicated only if the judgment that *not-p* is held accountable from within the same perspective, or within a perspective from which it is supposed that p is true. Whether this strategy will succeed ultimately depends on whether relativists can make good sense of the idea of a relativized norm governing enquiry, precisely in the way required by a satisfactory reply to the concern raised by the simple deduction.

I will not pronounce on this important issue mainly because I think there is a more general concern we might have about relativistic strategies that has to do with the (philosophical) motivations of endorsing relativism. In fact, I think there are good reasons to suspect that the step from the insightful thought that judgments in different areas of discourse might be subject to different normative constraints to the idea that the normative constraints governing judgments must be formulated in explicitly relativistic terms is ungrounded. The main reason for this is that we can dispense with the notion of relative truth altogether while still preserving the idea that the kind of normative constraint that truth exerts in different areas of discourse might vary. As we will see, this is the key point of advantage that my proposal has over relativism: it explains variation in the normative

⁶⁹ Kölbel, M. (2003):70.

role that truth plays in different areas of enquiry, without the need of relative truth.

Thus, to conclude this brief excursus on relative truth, I think that relativists à la Kölbel are right in shaping the issue of the faultlessness of disagreement in terms of the normative significance of truth, but they are wrong in concluding that we need relative truth, and consequently a relativized norm of assertion and belief, to account for the phenomenon. If we can have a more economical theory with the same explanatory potential without committing to a relative notion of truth, that would certainly represent an advantage. As we will see, a proposal in line with a minimally inflated notion of deflationary truth provides exactly such a theory.

§ 1.5 The Functional Role of the *Objectified* Form of Judgment in Minimally Truth-apt Domains.

In this last section of the Chapter, I will discuss the functional role that the use of a certain form of judgment – what I am calling here *objectified judgment* - plays in enquiry and the assertoric practice in domains beneath cognitive command. It is in fact important for the project I am pursuing in this thesis to have some explanation of the function, and the pragmatic and epistemological legitimacy, of judgments of the form “This sushi is delicious”, “Stealing is wrong”, “This joke is very funny”, as opposed, for instance, to judgments consisting in the mere report of our subjective preferences.

The discussion in this section is not part of the framework of *Truth and Objectivity*, but part of my original contributions to the discussion I will pursue in the rest of my thesis. Since throughout the thesis I will rely on the fact that this objectified form of evaluative judgment represents a distinctive form of judgment which is not reducible to a more subjective one, it is important that we are clear about what is its function in the evaluative domain.

§ 1.5.1 *Ways of Expressing Evaluative Judgments*

According to the characterization of truth-aptness given in previous sections, many judgments in several areas of discourse would qualify as truth-apt, and thus as expressing a kind of content which is truth-conditional. In particular, judgments within the moral and aesthetic discourse, judgments about taste and about what is funny, would pass the test for truth-aptness.

However, in order to guarantee that the truth-aptness of these judgments is not a mere artifact of the way in which we set the minimum requirements for truth-aptness with no philosophical substance, we need to reflect on the particular functional role that a specific form of expression of such judgments – what I will call here *the objectified form of judgment* (or, for brevity, *o-judgments*) – i.e., judgments that take the form of an objective predication such as: “this joke is funny/ this risotto is delicious/ what you did is wrong” – plays in such areas of enquiry. In particular, we need to understand in what way such a form of judgment contrasts with more subjective one.

To cut a long story short, such a contrast has to do with the fact that the objectified idiom has conditions of defeasibility and appropriateness that are different from those associated with a more subjective form of discourse. In this section we will deal with this important issue.

Let us go through some of the way we characteristically express our evaluations in the various domains we are dealing with. For one thing, it is undeniable that we frequently tend to express our pleasure/displeasure, approval/disapproval, joy/misery as a response to a certain moral or aesthetic experience by means of exclamation or, sometimes, even more minimally, by means of certain facial or bodily expressions correlated with some kinds of gestures. So for instance, we may express our pleasure in eating a delicious asparagus risotto by saying “yum-yum”. We may respond to a funny joke simply by laughing. We may react to a scene of gratuitous disrespect for somebody just because of his ethnical background by yelling “boo!”, or by making an angry face. Alternatively, we may express

our delight in response to the magnificence of Giotto's frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel simply by saying "Wow!" This form of expression is clearly non-propositional and in fact is the expression of our gustatory/comic/moral feelings and reactions to a certain experience.

Alternatively, we might voice our positive or negative reactions to a certain experience by using a subjective form of judgment. I take it that there are two main ways in which we can express a subjective judgment, both of which take propositional form.

On the one hand we might use a kind of subjective judgment to report the reactions that we have in response to a certain experience. Examples from this category are judgments of the following form: "this joke amuses me"; "I am delighted by this risotto"; "I am disgusted by what you did". I will call this form of subjective expressions *a-judgments*. These judgments have the function of providing a structured verbal shape to the expression of our feelings and reactions to a given experience. Moreover they are characteristically first personal even though sometimes they might be used to report the fact that another person is positively/negatively disposed towards the object of the judgment.⁷⁰

On the other hand, we have judgments which might be properly conceived as a sort of 'subjectification' of the objectified idiom. The peculiar feature of these judgments is that the objective predication is actually embedded within the scope of some characteristic subjective expression such as, for instance, "I think that...". Examples of this form of subjective judgments are: "I think that this risotto is delicious" "I think that this joke is very funny"; "I think that what you did is morally wrong". I shall call this form of subjective judgment *s-judgments*.

It is plausible to conjecture that the function of this latter form of subjective judgment is somehow hybrid between the pure expression of the subject's response to a certain experience - which communicative intention is nothing over and above the voicing of a feeling - and that of the objectified judgment the expression of which encompasses a

⁷⁰ However, such judgments are frequently accompanied by some qualification, like, for instance, 'it seems to me that...?'.

broader spectrum of conversational commitments. In particular, the use of s-judgments seems particularly common in conversational situations where there is no high expectation of convergence among the participants. Also, and connected to this last point, such form of judgment is frequently used, in particular in the taste domain, as a mild expression of retreat from the corresponding o-judgment in response to a situation of disagreement, or to a challenge or to the appreciation that the conversational situation is not one in which a certain degree of convergence is to be expected.

All these are quite common ways of expressing our sentiments and emotions in reaction to moral or aesthetic experiences. However, on certain occasions, it is not uncommon that we use more sophisticated linguistic expressions that take the form of an objectified judgment. So, for instance, we may comment on the asparagus risotto by saying “this is really delicious”; we may respond to the racist offense by claiming “this is plainly wrong”; we may say of an amazing joke “this is really funny”; and we may claim in contemplating Giotto’s frescoes: “these are spectacular”. In other words, we may express our judgments in these various domains by means of an objectified form of statement which parallels the one we employ in paradigmatically non-evaluative domains of discourse.

Moreover, it is undeniable that we frequently make use of o-judgments in reasoning and deliberating about what to do. When we say, for instance, “that restaurant makes a delicious asparagus risotto, so we should go there if we all agree on having a risotto for dinner”; or “if in doing this you are breaking a promise, then you should not do it, because breaking promises is really bad”. In addition, it is important to notice that most of our everyday reasoning and deliberation involving evaluative judgments also contains descriptive judgments. Although not decisive, this mixture of judgments from different areas of discourse is nevertheless a very important element to take into consideration when reflecting on the use we make of the objectified form of judgments in the evaluative domain. In fact, if we take this kind of interaction between evaluative and descriptive judgments in reasoning in serious consideration it seems legitimate to conjecture that despite the important differences between judgments from evaluative and descriptive areas

of discourse, they all share some core features at the level of the content they express.⁷¹ Thus, in the light of these facts, it seems quite solid that, in the way we happen to conduct our enquiries in the moral, comic and taste domains, and from the way we are used to reasoning and deliberating within them, we make quite a substantive use of o-judgments.

Now, it might turn out that, at the end of the day, the folk are just confused in using language in this way, in extending patterns of reasoning to areas where, under philosophical scrutiny, the appearance of propositional surface is nothing more than a misleading projection due to the way we use language in other domains of discourse. Or, in a more modest and less error-theoretical fashion, we might argue that folk practice is not really doing what it seems to be doing – that there is a deep and philosophically significant mismatch between the surface grammar of our judgments in those domains and the use such surface grammar suggests, on the one hand, and their real content and use, on the other.

Both strategies need strong defense, and should not be taken as the default position – at least insofar as we think that our actual practice in these domains, when considered at face value with all its superficial aspects and assertoric trappings, is working perfectly fine.⁷² However, they put pressure on us to go beyond the surface, as it were, and to provide a detailed account of the role that such objectified form of discourse plays in the economy of enquiry.

⁷¹ There is an interesting literature on the topic of mixed inferences, focusing specifically on an objection that Christine Tappolet elaborated against alethic pluralism (see, Tappolet, C. (1997), 'Mixed Inferences: a Problem for Pluralism about Truth Predicates', *Analysis*, 57:209-10. Crispin Wright in reply to the Frege-Geach objection against expressivism has argued that there is no need to deny that judgments within the evaluative domain are genuinely truth-conditional; we can maintain that such judgments are truth-conditional but they are apt for a different kind of truth than descriptive judgments. This triggered the problem of the mixed inferences: what kind of truth is preserved across inferences which feature judgments from different domains of discourse, and thus apt for different kinds of truth? For a discussion of this problem see: Beall, J.C. (2000), "On Mixed Inferences and Pluralism about Truth Predicates", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 50 (200):380-382; Pedersen, N.J.L. (2006), "What can the problem of mixed inferences teach us about alethic pluralism?" *The Monist* 89 (1):102-117.

⁷² This is by no means to be taken as an objection to various forms of expressivism or irrealism (like, error-theories). The point I am making is rather that given the success that our actual practice in the contended domains has when taken at face value, we should take it seriously in all its aspects, and try to provide a comprehensive theory of *that* practice.

§ 1.5.2 *Some General Explanations*

We may adduce several considerations that speak in favor of the objectified idiom in evaluative domains. One very general thought has to do with the richness in expressive power that such idiom has, whether as self-standing judgment or embedded in some form of subjective expression. This seems in contrast both with the direct expression of our feelings and reaction and with a-judgments. As a matter of fact, natural languages have developed a quite impressive vocabulary with an extraordinary expressive power in the so-called evaluative domains such as the moral, aesthetic, comic and the domain of judgments of taste. Such vocabulary allows us to give expression to a wide range of sensations, emotions and reactions to a given experience in a detailed and fine-grained way, which would be hard to express otherwise. However, this general observation is not sufficient by itself for a full justification of the objectified idiom. This is because what we are looking for here is a functional story that explains the important semantic difference between the objectified idiom and the various subjective forms of discourse – a difference that concerns the kind of content these various judgments express.

Another general consideration we may adduce in this respect is a kind of genealogical reason, which has to do with the way we developed and extended our language from certain domains to others. It might well be that the kind of objectified idiom that we happen to adopt in domains such as the moral, the comic and taste has been originally imported from other, purely descriptive domains, and since then it has been established as the paradigm way of expressing evaluative judgments. One might then try to supplement this genealogical story by pointing to some features of the superficial phenomenology of moral/aesthetic/taste experiences. If we take our moral and aesthetic experience at face value, as we generally do, this may suggest that the relevant evaluative properties belong to the object or state of affairs that our judgment concerns. Indeed, abstracting from any philosophical sophistication, this is exactly what we are *prima facie* inclined to think. What I am experiencing in tasting a piece of sushi at Tomoe's bistro in

Greenwich Village is its deliciousness, and what I am experiencing in seeing an act of gratuitous violence towards a helpless person is its moral deplorability, in exactly an analogous way in which what I am perceiving in seeing a cube on the table, is the *cubicness* of its shape. The upshot is that the superficial features of the phenomenology of our moral and aesthetic experiences suggest an analogy with the phenomenology of our experiences of primary qualities. The conjecture is that this fact might have played a significant role in the development of a formally uniform way of talking across different domains of discourse.

Setting aside worries concerning the accuracy of this naïve phenomenological story, I think it may provide a plausible enough explanation, using only a quite rudimentary philosophical tool-kit, of why we came to use this objectified mode of discourse in the evaluative domain. However, such a story offers no philosophically interesting explanation of the distinctive function of the objectified form.

In fact, if we only had these kinds of explanation, it would be quite disappointing. Moreover, the main problem with them is simply that all these considerations are entirely compatible with the possibility that in using moral and aesthetic language in the way we do we might just have failed to make certain crucial distinctions between the various ways in which judgments from different domains actually work. As a result of this failure, we misleadingly adopted a uniform pattern of judging and reasoning across domains where, in fact, we should have developed different forms of expressions, which accurately track the relevant differences in the nature of the different subject matters.

To have a satisfactory philosophical explanation of why we adopt an objectified type of discourse in the domains in question, we need more. We need a functional story which, in marking the distinctions of judgments among the various domains, provides an account of what further purposes consistent with those distinctions such an objectified form is needed for. As Wittgenstein once said: “In philosophy, the question “What do we actually use this word or proposition for?” repeatedly leads to valuable insights.”⁷³ This is particularly true in our case. In fact, in order for the project to have solid foundations, we

⁷³ Wittgenstein, L. (1921/1922) *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, 6.211.

need a good explanation of what the role of the objectivist's talk in such domains is.

§ 1.5.3 *Objective Idiom and the Possibility of Error*

There is an important contrast between the applicability to any given statement of the truth predicate and that of the warrant predicate. Such a contrast is an essential component of the disquotational behavior of the truth predicate and it can be observed in terms of the possibility of ignorance and the conditions for error. How exactly this contrast is established and what follows from it will be one of the topics of study in Chapter 4. For the purposes of this Chapter it suffices to say that the conditions of the applicability of the truth predicate are in a sense stricter than the condition of applicability of the warrant predicate. The sense in which they are stricter has to do primarily with, on the one hand, the possibility of neutral states of information – states in which neither a given statement nor its negation are warranted – and, on the other hand, with differences in the conditions of defeasibility of the applications of the truth predicate and of the warrant predicate. The point about the neutrality of state of information can be directly derived from the fact that truth complies with the Equivalence Schema. Very roughly, whereas the lack of present warrant within a certain informational state of a given statement does not imply that the negated statement is itself warranted within that very state of information, the falsity of a statement does imply the truth of the negated statement.⁷⁴

The error part, on the contrary, is not automatically imposed by the Equivalence Schema as such. The thought here is that the operation of the truth predicate goes with the possibility of defeating conditions for the assertibility of the statement to which it applies. Such defeating conditions contrast with those proper of the operation of the warrant predicate. And this important contrasting feature cannot be obtained by the Equivalence Schema and the way in which truth and warrant differently interact with logical operators, in particular with negation. However if we reflect on the way in which truth and warrant

⁷⁴ See Chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of this point.

behave when embedded into temporal context, we can get enough grip on the notion of error to appreciate the asymmetry in terms of defeasibility conditions between truth and warrant.

As we have already noted, stability over time is one of the basic features of truth. What is true has always been true and will remain true – by appropriate transformation of mood, or tense – no matter how we or the world change. Thus starting from the Equivalence Schema, we introduce the temporal operator ‘It was the case that...’ which operates on propositional content and we obtain the following equivalence:

(ES_t) It was the case that *p* if, and only if, it was the case that *p* is true.

Now the operator ‘it was the case that...’ on the right hand side of (ES_t) can take narrow or wide scope, depending on whether it operates on *p* only or on <*p* is true>. However, it does not matter which interpretation we choose since the following equivalence can be easily proved: <<it was the case that *p*> is true> if, and only if, <it was the case that <*p* is true>>. ⁷⁵ Thus, the truth predicate fully complies with the Equivalence Schema even when embedded into temporal contexts.

This is certainly not true for warrant insofar as the right-to-left direction of (ES_t) when we substitute ‘warrant’ for ‘true’ does not hold. In fact it might well be that <it was the case that <*p* is warrantably assertible>> even though it was actually not the case that *p*. Thus a mistake occurred back then. This means that (ES_t) is not imposed on the notion of warrant. In other words, while the Equivalence Schema enforces the intersubstitutivity of <*p*> and <*it is true that p*> in temporal contexts, we cannot intersubstitute <*p*> and <*it is warranted that p*> in such contexts. This fact establishes a sharp contrast between truth and warranted assertibility in terms of conditions of defeasibility and, in particular, it shows that warrant, differently from truth, can be inconclusive. ⁷⁶

⁷⁵ A radical anti-realist about the past would probably find this equivalence highly objectionable. However, I shall leave this difficult discussion aside for present purposes.

⁷⁶ There is however the interesting case of how truth and negation behave in temporal contexts. Some philosophers, for instance Dummett in his *Truth and the Past*, has argued that truth and negation do not

That said, a strategy suggests itself for understanding why we have the objectified form of discourse. What we have to do is to look at the different role that objective and subjective forms of judgment have within the assertoric context. In fact, in order to grant the legitimacy of the objective form of discourse within the assertoric context it would be enough to spot important differences in the role that various forms of judgment play. As Crispin Wright suggests:

“[I]f a content is to be associated with the impersonal statement —‘Rhubarb is delicious’—contrasting with that of a subjective report, then something has to be said about how the contrast between the two is sustained. Presumably such an account will give central place to asymmetries in the conditions of defeat, with the assertibility of, for example, ‘I relish eating rhubarb,’ surviving in circumstances where that of ‘Rhubarb is delicious’ is lost.”⁷⁷

Thus, accordingly, the main kind of contrast between subjective and objective forms of discourse that I will discuss in this section has to do with the different defeasibility conditions that these forms of judgments have within the assertoric discourse.

§ 1.5.4 *O-Judgments, A-Judgments and Defeasibility Conditions*

In order to illustrate the functional contrast between the objective idiom and more subjective judgments, in this section I will consider some defeating considerations that might defeat the warrant a subject has for the objective idiom that seem relevant to that end. In particular, there are four main dimensions along which I shall contrast objective

always commute within temporal contexts. If we take the classic example from C.D. Broad (which is originally from Aristotle) of the statement: “There will be a sea battle tomorrow”, we can have doubt about whether truth and negation commute when embedded into the Equivalence Schema. One might in fact argue that from “It is not true that there will be a sea battle tomorrow” it does not follow that “It is true that there will be no sea battle tomorrow”. I will not discuss the issue here since it is not central to the purpose of this section.

⁷⁷ Wright (2006):57.

and subjective forms of discourse that give us some promise of differential defeat patterns of the different kinds of judgment. These patterns are not always clear-cut. Thus, it is important to highlight that the main claim of this section is not the bold one according to which all the following considerations apply always and with equal force to judgments from all the various domains we are interested in. There are many subtleties and complexities that might be relevant for the evaluation of particular cases. Some considerations might apply with full force to some cases but leave others intact. The claim is rather that o-judgments from all the areas we are dealing with are affected by at least some of the various defeating conditions we will discuss, which, nevertheless, might leave intact the more subjective judgments.

I will here focus on the contrast between o-judgments and one specific category of subjective judgment – that of a-judgments. The reason for this restriction of focus is simply that the other category of subjective judgments – s-judgments – is not particularly interesting for fully appreciating the force of the contrast insofar as such judgments, as we already noticed, embed the objectified idiom. In this respect it seems that an understanding of the functional role of the objectified idiom must be already in place if we want to grasp s-judgments and the way in which they contrast with the category of a-judgments.

This said the punch line is that a-judgments survive certain defeating conditions that affect the assertibility of the corresponding o-judgment. To put the point in more metaphorical terms, in opting for the objectified idiom we open ourselves to the possibility of criticism and defeat that would be precluded if we opted for the more subjective way of judgment. This means that whether or not the objectified judgment is viable to us does not affect the fact that I had a certain response to x , nor on the truth of the corresponding a-judgment.

§ 1.5.4.1 *Presupposition of Community*

The first set of defeating conditions for the assertibility of o-judgments that I consider has

to do with the sphere of community of values that they seem to presuppose. The thought here is that it is useful to have o-judgments because we can often justifiably assume some community of response. Thus, in using such judgments within the assertoric context we presuppose that there is a set of values shared by all, or the majority of, those people to whom the judgment is addressed. Moreover, there would be no point in asking you whether a certain restaurant makes good pizzas, unless I think I can get useful information from your judgment.

However, if we come to know that this presupposition is not met, that the assertibility of such a judgment responds to a very idiosyncratic point of view (sense of humor, gustatory taste or moral sensibility), we have reasons to retreat from the objectified form of judgment, without having also to desist from a more subjective form of expression. Suppose, for instance, that I have a very idiosyncratic sense of humor and that I judge a certain joke funny where almost nobody else judges it that way. Even though there is nothing in the situation that defeats my response of amusement or my assertion that I find the joke funny, and no moral or other kinds of considerations that trump my appreciation of the joke, the assertibility of the objectified form of judgment – “this is really funny” – would be defeated in the presence of the unsympathetic response of others. The reason is that such a judgment makes some conversational demands that are not met. Thus, a lack of convergence is *some* sort of defeating consideration for such claim.⁷⁸

Similar considerations apply to the taste case. If, while attending dinner with my football team mates at a local restaurant, I claim “this asparagus risotto is delicious” and everybody else judges it to be poorly cooked, this lack of consensus puts considerable pressure on the assertibility of such judgment even though, plausibly, it has no defeating efficacy on my positive gustatory experience. Perhaps, it might make me wonder about whether everything is fine with my taste, but this is another issue.

The moral case seems to be relevantly different in this respect. In fact, it is part of what a moral conviction is that it be immune to defeat from a lack of consensus. Of course, the extent to which this is the case will depend mostly on how strong you take your

⁷⁸ Wright, C. (1992):105.

reasons supporting your moral judgment to be, and perhaps partly on how radical and widespread such a lack of consensus might be. However, in general, it seems that this category of defeating conditions does not work in the case of moral judgment – at least not in the way it works in the taste and comedic domains. There might certainly be compelling pragmatic reasons not to persist in asserting an objectified form of judgment in a context where there is a radical lack of consensus on that, but this fact is completely irrelevant for our purposes. In fact, even persisting in asserting the corresponding judgment might be problematic, and for the very same reasons.

That said, it is important to notice that the kind of presupposition carried by the objectified form of judgment is not a matter of conversational implicature insofar as it does not seem to be explicitly cancellable.⁷⁹ It would be quite awkward to assert: “this joke is really funny, but I am not presupposing that we share sense of humor”. Moreover, such presuppositions should not be understood as suggesting that claims about evaluative matters are answerable to a community of response as part of their content.⁸⁰ The idea is rather that the presupposition is part of the conditions for the assertibility of evaluative judgments, in some domains, in their objectified form – it is appropriate to use the objectified form of judgment just in case the presupposition of community is met; inappropriate if not. Thus in this respect, the kind of inappropriateness at issue here is not a mere kind of pragmatic inappropriateness, as it is inappropriate, for instance, to use a certain informal vocabulary in a situation which requires formal speech. Rather, it is a kind of inappropriateness that has to do with the assertoric efficacy of a judgment made in a certain conversational situation. It is indeed part of the teleological aspect of the objectified form of evaluative judgments to be answerable to a certain degree of community of sentiments within the situation in which such judgments are issued. In this

⁷⁹ The cancellability test is perhaps the most effective test for determining whether a certain conversational implicature accompanies the assertion of a statement. In Grice’s own words: “[A] putative conversational implicature that p is explicitly cancellable if, to the form of words the utterance of which putatively implicates that p, it is admissible to add but not p, or I do not mean to imply that p, and it is contextually cancellable if one can find situations in which the utterance of the form of words would simply not carry the implicature.” (Grice, P. H. (1975), (1975), “Logic and conversation”, in P. Cole & J. Morgan (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics, 3: Speech Acts*, New York: Academic Press: p.44).

⁸⁰ See Wright, C. (1992):105.

respect, the impropriety of persisting with irreproachable but eccentric evaluative judgment in the objectified form is attributable to the lapsing of a shared standard which is aimed at.⁸¹

§ 1.5.4.2 *Stability*

A second element in the conditions for the assertibility of o-judgments concerns considerations about the stability of the judger's responses across different situations of evaluation. The use of expressions like "sushi is delicious" requires, in the absence of other kinds of defeaters, that the judger has similar reactions in relevantly similar situations of experience. If I come to know that my gustatory taste, or my sense of humor, are somehow random, changing unexpectedly from one situation to a relevantly similar one, then the use of the objectified form to express my judgment based on my occasional response would be inappropriate.

Suppose, for example, that I decide to go with my friend Luca to one of the Louis C.K. shows at the Comedy Cellar after I watched a couple of sketches on YouTube. Having enjoyed the first show quite a lot and having told Luca that Louis C.K. is really funny, a few days later he asks me to join him again at the Comedy Cellar for a new show by Louis C.K. This time, despite the fact that Luca enjoyed the show even more than the previous time, I get bored and I say to him that, after all, Louis C.K. is not funny. Rather than being simply a case of change of mind, this example is intended to be a case in which my sense of humor is unstable. This situation of instability would provide a sufficiently strong defeater for the assertibility of the objectified form of judgment while leaving the more subjective form of judgment intact. Similar considerations apply to the taste case. This fact is even stronger in the moral case where stability of response and judgment across relevantly similar situations is part and parcel of what we ordinarily call *moral convictions*.

⁸¹ See Wright, C. (1992):106.

An important clarification is needed to prevent a possible misunderstanding of the stability condition. What is in play here is stability of response and judgment across relevantly similar situations. However, this does not suggest that we should have always the very same response in experiencing the same thing (or the same type of thing) over time. First of all, our sense of humor, gustatory sensibility, or moral convictions may change from time to time. The point is rather that they need to be stable over a long enough period of time, and across a rich enough variety of different situations, to count as my sense of humor, my gustatory taste or my moral conviction. Moreover, and quite obviously, if we are amused by a joke or delighted by a certain food our positive response would not persist after an over-exposition to the joke or the food. Even if you really enjoy eating a certain food, you usually do not want to have it every day. Alternatively, if you are amused by a certain joke once, it is unlikely that you will be amused again and again – at least over a short period of time. It seems, in fact, to be part of the character of enjoyment itself that of requiring a certain degree of novelty. The kind of stability condition we are discussing must then be consistent with this fact. Note also that these are situations in which asserting the objectified form of judgment would still be totally fine even though I am temporarily lacking the kind of response supporting that judgment.

§ 1.5.4.3 *Atypical Conditions*

The third set of defeating conditions for the assertibility of the objectified form of judgment concerns the presence of elements that make your response to a certain experience, or your moral reaction to a certain situation, somehow atypical. In other words, considerations that suggest that your present state is one that destabilizes your reactions or makes them atypical in a certain way work as defeating conditions for the assertibility of the objectified form of judgment.

Suppose, for example, that you taste a certain food and on the basis of that experiential input, you judge it disgusting – in fact bitter to a point to give the impression

of being poisonous. Then you discover that that reaction might have been caused by the strong cough syrup you took a few minutes earlier, whose main side effect is to alter temporarily your taste. This bit of information certainly works as a defeater for the objectified judgment – “This is disgusting” – but it does not defeat your initial reaction in tasting the food nor, to a certain extent, does it defeat the more subjective judgment – “I was disgusted by that food”.

In the comic case, a very good example of atypical situation is that of laughing gas. Suppose that I enter a room saturated with nitrous oxide (also known as ‘laughing gas’) and I start laughing at all sorts of things that I would not certainly find funny under normal circumstances. Thus I am staring at the window-watching people outside the room talking on the street and, incredibly amused by that, I judge the situation to be very funny. The case is one in which I have a genuine response of laughing at certain things, phenomenologically indistinguishable from normal cases. However, suppose also that the effect of the gas is such that it does not alter my normal cognitive faculty, and in particular it does not alter my capacity of understanding and critically evaluating what people say. I just find everything people say funny too, but still I am perfectly able to understand other people’s judgments. Thus, one of the people on the street I was laughing at realizes my behavior and, knowing that the room is full of laughing gas, he says to me that nothing funny is going on out there and that I am under the narcotic effect of the gas. Despite finding what the man is saying extremely funny, I nevertheless fully appreciate that I am in atypical conditions of experience, and thus, still laughing, I reply to him that I understand that there is nothing funny about the situation and yet, because of the gas, I have that response and I am amused by those ordinary circumstances. Thus, as a matter of fact, the appreciation of the atypical conditions defeats my judgment that watching people talking on the street is very funny, even though my reaction is still there and with it the fact that I am amused by the situation.

In the moral case one might think of situations in which the presence of strong sentiments of aversion against or affection for somebody might interact with the process of moral judging, and thus generate atypical conditions that might defeat the assertibility of

the objectified form of judgment. Suppose, for example, that I am very angry at you because you are dating the person I am in love with. With this aversive sentiment on the background, I judge the punishment inflicted on you by the teacher, who alleges that you have plagiarized the class test, as just and deserved. Reflecting retrospectively about the case, and realizing that my judgment has been influenced by my aversive sentiment, which is completely unrelated to the case in question, I might retreat from the objectified judgment – “what the teacher did to you is just”. Thus, my aversive emotional status, the source of which is independent of the situation in question, has altered the impartiality of my judging, and thus works as a defeater for the objectified form of judgment. However, it is plausible to maintain that the presence of this defeating condition can coexist with my enduring attitude of approval of the teacher’s behavior and it might still be compatible with the more subjective judgment of approval and satisfaction about what the teacher did.⁸²

§ 1.5.4.4 *Trumping*

The fourth, and last, set of conditions I take into account concerns the fact that the assertibility conditions of evaluative judgments in the objectified form can be defeated by considerations from other areas of the evaluative discourse which do not nevertheless conflict with the original assertoric ground and, consequently, with the assertibility of a more subjective form of expression. Evaluative judgments about a specific subject matter – gustatory taste, for instance – are embedded within a wider schema of values which interact with each other – such as moral value, economic value, or more broadly aesthetic

⁸² Again, intuitions might differ here. One might think that the presence of such defeating conditions should be enough to defeat also the assertibility of the subjective form of expression. This might well be the case and it would show that the contrast between the objective and subjective form of discourse in the moral domain is less sharp than in the taste or comedic domain. My conjecture is that, contrary to the comic and taste cases, in the moral case it is much harder to understand what the role of the subjective form of discourse is – i.e., whether in expressing ourselves in the subjective mode we are doing something different and somehow less committal than we would do in using the objective judgment.

value, etc. Some of these values can trump other values. I cannot here provide a detailed discussion of all kinds of interactions between different values, but I will give some examples that I take to be sufficiently plausible to illustrate the point.

As a first example, consider the interaction between moral convictions and judgments about culinary taste. Take the o-judgment “Foie gras is delicious” expressed by Peter in a chic French restaurant. In response to Peter, Alice points out that the way in which this French delicacy is obtained involves serious maltreatment of geese. After having described in detail the way geese are treated for obtaining foie gras, Alice concludes that eating foie gras has bad moral consequences. Peter, fully convinced by Alice’s explanations, agrees with her that eating foie gras is actually a morally bad thing to do. Now, reflecting on this case, we can see how moral considerations can interfere with our judgments about taste. In fact, the sort of moral considerations concerning foie gras that Alice brought to the fore seem to have the force of defeating the assertibility of the judgment – “foie gras is delicious” – made by Peter. However, these moral considerations do not have any defeating efficacy with respect to Peter’s positive taste experience in eating foie gras. Consequently, they would not defeat the assertibility of the corresponding a-judgment – e.g., “Foie gras tastes delicious to me” – in the same way in which they defeat the objectified judgment. Presumably, Peter would still like foie gras even though, in the light of these moral considerations, he would have to retreat from asserting that foie gras is delicious.

In order to appreciate the force of this point, contrast this case with a situation involving something disgusting. Suppose I say to the chef: “this pâté is delicious”, and then I ask her what is in there. She replies by listing all the ingredients, and among them there are some which I find revolting (some might, for instance, find the idea of eating the entrails of some animal quite revolting). In such a scenario I would not only retreat from the objectified judgment, but also from the corresponding a-judgment. This is because my awareness that the pâté is made of some revolting ingredients conflicts with my assertoric ground, making my original aesthetic appreciation of the pâté completely irrelevant. In fact, the presence of a sentiment of disgust changes the phenomenology of aesthetic or

taste experience. In this respect, any olfactory, gustatory, or visual contact with the source of disgust will provoke a strong aversive response.

That said, one might think that it is not so clear that the presence of contrary moral considerations is in fact effective in defeating the use of the objectified form of judgment in the taste case. Thus, the criticism goes, the presence of a contrary moral consideration in the taste case seems to have quite a narrow normative reach. Not only does it not defeat my having a certain reaction in experiencing the food and with it the truth of the corresponding a-judgment, but it seems that it would leave also the objectified judgment intact.

Going back to our example: if you claim that foie gras is delicious and I explain to you all the bad moral things involved in the production of foie gras, then even assuming that you agree about that and completely appreciate the normative force of such moral considerations, you might still think that such considerations do not interfere with the assertibility conditions of the judgment that foie gras is delicious. In other words, the following seems a coherent thought that Peter might have: there is a regrettable fact about the way geese are treated for producing this delicious food; we should certainly stop producing it; despite all this foie gras is delicious. The very fact that this thought seems coherent suggests that the o-judgment that foie gras is delicious can coexist with a full appreciation of the morally bad things that are involved in the production of that food.

All this seems right to me. However, what it shows is not that the very assertibility conditions of the o-judgment rests undefeated by moral considerations, *tout court*, but only that in certain contexts, where not all of the standard commitments associated with the assertion of the o-judgment are fully operative, the use of such a judgment seems unproblematic. Let me unpack the thought. The kind of thought the criticism was describing as coherent is one that involves a situation in which the use of the o-judgment – “foie gras is delicious” – occurs in a context within which the subject is not fully endorsing the judgment, but rather she is using it to reflect on the propriety of expressing such judgment along the presence of some contrary moral considerations. A full endorsement of an o-judgment comes with a package of commitments and consequences, some of which

might be undercut by a full endorsement of the contrary moral considerations that concern the object of the o-judgment. Thus a full endorsement of the judgment that foie gras is delicious comes with a positive disposition to eat foie gras whenever one feels to; to rank high in one's top choice restaurants that make a particularly good foie gras; to make sure that one's precious recipe about how to produce the perfect foie gras does not get destroyed; etc. In other words, in asserting that foie grass is delicious the subject seems to issue, alongside with her positive reaction and disposition towards foie gras, some sort of qualified permission to the effect that it is actually fine to enjoy – and to a certain extent to promote – foie gras. A full endorsement of the moral judgment that producing foie gras is immoral undercuts most parts of the motivational force of the o-judgment that foie gras is delicious and thus it seems to put pressure on the assertibility of that judgment.

Let us discuss the case of judgments about what is funny. Suppose that someone tells a joke which amuses me and in reaction to the joke I assert: “this is really funny”. Immediately after my assertion someone else who heard the joke and also my appreciation of it, points out to me that the joke alludes to some historical fact involving discrimination of some ethnical minority and, for this reason, might be offensive to some people in the audience. Such considerations act as defeaters of the objectified form of judgment in that situation, and thus force me to retreat from that judgment, even though they would still be compatible with the original assertoric ground and my brute reaction to the joke.

However, as in the taste case, things are not so simple, but for reasons that point to the opposite direction than in the problematic taste case. There we noticed that a contrary moral consideration might not defeat the propriety of the o-judgment, along with that of the corresponding a-judgment. In the comic case the situation is somehow opposite. One might object that the asymmetry in the defeasibility condition between o-judgment and a-judgment in the presence of contrary moral considerations is not so clear precisely because such considerations seem to defeat both the propriety of the o-judgment as well as that of the corresponding a-judgment. The reason is that a further dimension of moral shame might be involved in the comic case. I may be ashamed by the fact that I had a reaction of amusement to the joke that I should not have had. I realize that my comic response is in

bad moral taste and thus that the appropriate thing to do here is to stop laughing and blame myself for having had that reaction. This explains why I feel embarrassed in going on in finding it funny. A contrary moral consideration in the comic case is implicitly targeting not only the propriety of the objectified idiom, but also the propriety of the very response the subject had, and with it the good standing of the corresponding a-judgment – e.g., “this joke amuses me”. This seems right. However, it might be that my full appreciation of the moral badness involved in the joke notwithstanding, I am still amused by it. I appreciate that I should not be amused, but I cannot help it. I might keep myself from laughing even though I would still probably feel the characteristic impulse to laugh at the joke.⁸³ In this sense if the only ground for the propriety of the a-judgment – “this jokes amuses me” – is having a positive comic reaction to the joke, there is a clear sense in which the a-judgment remains undefeated by the contrary moral consideration.

Even granting this, however, an important difference remains in the way contrary moral considerations interact in the case of taste and in that of comic judgments. There seems to be no good reason why I should feel ashamed in being delighted by foie gras after I come to know about all the morally bad things involved in the production of it. I might stop eating it and start a campaign against its production – but the fact that I like it still remains and it is totally legitimate. Moreover, there seems no sense of moral improvement in my changing my disposition towards the taste of foie gras in the light of the contrary moral considerations. Nobody would consider that I am morally better now if, as a result of such considerations, I find foie gras repulsive. On the contrary, if I come to know that the joke I am laughing at involves some very nasty thing there is a clear sense in which I feel uncomfortable in having that reaction. I would rather prefer not to have it. And indeed, we can make sense of the idea that in not having the positive comic response anymore I have morally improved.

Understanding what accounts for this difference between the comic and the taste case is no easy matter. One possibility is to investigate what is required in terms of

⁸³ For instance, I judge sexist and racial jokes morally deplorable. However, in hearing some of them, I might sometimes feel the impulse to laugh, and this coexists with my moral condemnation.

assertoric ground for the propriety of the a-judgment in the two cases. It might well be that more is involved in the comic case – especially if we focus on judgments concerning jokes. Some cognitive elements seem to be required as part of the grounds for the comic appreciation, which are not present in the ground for the propriety of the gustatory response. And this fact might play a role in the explanation of the difference in normative reach of contrary moral considerations in the two cases.

The cases discussed so far are cases of interaction between moral value, broadly construed, and judgments within the domains of taste and the comic. The other paradigmatic category of judgments in the evaluative domain is that of moral judgments themselves. It is important then that we have some examples that show the contrast in terms of defeasibility conditions between the objectified form of discourse and the subjective one. One possibility is to look at cases of interaction of judgments within the moral domain in which a certain judgment acts as a defeater of another o-judgment without defeating the affective response and thus the corresponding a-judgment.

To illustrate, consider the following scenario: Salvo is a very talented detective who is investigating some horrible crime that has been committed in a small town in Sicily. Following his very reliable instinct, he comes to believe that a local and very powerful mafia gang must be involved in the crime. As a matter of fact, his instinct is right. However, because his intelligence and reliable instinct are well known in town, Salvo is aware that if he makes manifest his intention of pursuing the mafia-path in his investigation then things would quickly degenerate to the point where the entire case would be compromised. In fact the mafia gang has a very strong influence on political authorities in that town and if they were to know that Salvo was pursuing an investigation against them, they would convince the local authorities to prevent Salvo from directing the investigation and to transfer him elsewhere. Thus the only way for Salvo to get enough evidence for showing that they are responsible for the crime and thus convict them is to stall and give them the impression that he thinks others are responsible of the crime. So he comes up with a brilliant idea. Some of the evidence that is already public knowledge seems to be compatible with, and indeed to suggest, the hypothesis that three youths who

happened to be around the crime scene that night might have been responsible for the crime. Salvo works very hard to make the strongest possible case against them, and thanks to his talent he succeeds. As a result the three youths are convicted and put into a local jail well-known for the nasty way in which prisoners are treated. Alice, a close friend of one of the convicted youths, and Salvo's best friend, is shocked when she comes to know about Salvo's decision. She is certain that the youths are innocent and thus she judges what Salvo did to them as deeply unjust and morally deplorable. However, after Salvo explains to her the situation and the strategy he decided to adopt for his investigation, she realizes that Salvo acted for the greater good and thus she retreats from her o-judgment that what Salvo did is wrong. However, Alice's profound feeling of injustice and the emotional shock that grounded her initial moral judgment are not defeated by Salvo's explanation, and with them the corresponding a-judgment rests undefeated.

This concludes our treatment of the last category of defeating conditions. Although the cases discussed here are certainly not conclusive, they are nevertheless strong enough to show how o-judgments and a-judgments interact differently with contrary moral considerations.

§ 1.5.5 *Objectified Judgment and the Possibility of Disagreement*

Now that we have the main four sets of defeating conditions for the objectified form of judgment on the table, a few general remarks are in order here. First, it is important to notice that all these sorts of considerations are themselves open to potential defeat, with reinstatement of the original claim as one possible consequence. In other words, other considerations might come to light that have the effect of undermining the various defeating conditions just discussed, with the consequence of nullifying their defeating efficacy. As a result, the original assertibility conditions for the objectified judgment might be reinstated, unless the circumstances are such that the original grounds for our judgment are lost for reasons independent of the defeating conditions under consideration.

Secondly, as we already said, some of these defeating conditions might apply to the objectified form of judgment in some domains but not in others. It is important to be clear that in order to make the point about the functional role of the objectified form of judgment in the various domains it suffices that they are subject to at least some of the conditions of defeasibility discussed here.

Finally, the fact that there is a certain uniformity in the general functional role that this objectified form of discourse plays in the various different evaluative domains does not exclude that there are interesting, local, differences between judgments in these various domains. On the contrary, as we will see in the next Chapter, uniformity in this respect goes hand in hand with a significant variability in terms of the normative requirements that a judge is subject to in trafficking with propositional contents from different domains. To borrow a nice comparison from Wittgenstein that can be used to make this point more vivid:

“It is like looking into the cabin of a locomotive. We see handles all looking more or less alike. (Naturally, since they are all supposed to be handled.) But one is the handle of a crank which can be moved continuously (it regulates the opening of a valve); another is the handle of a switch, which has only two effective positions, it is either off or on; a third is the handle of a brake-lever, the harder one pulls on it, the harder it brakes; a fourth, the handle of a pump: it has an effect only so long as it is moved to and fro.”⁸⁴

Once we have enough in terms of philosophical explanation to grant a functional role to the objectified form of judgment in the evaluative domain, broadly construed, we open ourselves to the possibility of a certain kind of disagreement involving evaluative judgment in this objectified form, in which one party judges that x is F while the other party judges that x is not- F (or whatever property the possession of which by x excludes x also having F).

⁸⁴ Wittgenstein, L. (1953):§12. I use this quote for illustrative purposes only. I do not mean to suggest any particular interpretation of Wittgenstein’s view on these issues.

These situations of disagreement are generated by a strong incompatibility in judgments between the disputants. Such incompatibility is manifested in the fact that they accept logically inconsistent propositions, or in the fact that one asserts/endorse while the other denies/rejects the very same proposition. This incompatibility is grounded (at least partly) in the common understanding of the propositional content expressed by objectified judgment, which constitutes the object of the disagreement. Such common understanding is based on two factors. The first factor is a shared conception of what it takes for a subject to assert or deny such a propositional content. This amounts to the fact that, absent the kind of defeating conditions discussed earlier, such a content is assertible just in case the subject has the appropriate kind of disposition and/or doxastic attitude towards the object of the judgment. The second factor is a shared conception of what follows, *ceteris paribus*, upon acceptance or denial of such a content, both in terms of action and in terms of those other judgments the subject would commit to.

Thus, for instance, suppose that you and I have a disagreement about whether sushi is delicious. I assert that sushi is delicious while you deny that. What grounds this disagreement is the presence of a single proposition – *that sushi is delicious* – of which we have a common understanding. Such commonality of understanding is based on a shared conception of both the defeasible assertibility conditions – e.g., the fact that I enjoy eating sushi and you do not – and of the consequence of asserting or denying it – e.g., that I will often go to sushi bistros for dinner while you will avoid going there, etc. This shared conception would constitute the background against which it seems plausible to say that you and I have genuinely conflicting judgments concerning the very same proposition. And this provides the sufficient, though defeasible, ground for our disagreement in judgments.

Now, the presence of this kind of disagreement in the evaluative domain poses some interesting questions and puzzles. Roughly, when taken at face value, such situations of disagreement with genuinely truth-apt contents, even if minimally so, seem to generate some tension with the common and very entrenched thought that at the end of the day, in most cases, everyone has his own right to judge the way he does, and so that the conflict

generated by such situation of disagreement need not involve the attribution of some objectively identifiable mistake by either parties to the disagreement. A proper discussion of this issue will be the focus of the next Chapter.

§ 1.6 Concluding Remarks

In this Chapter, I have outlined the basic features of the framework I will assume throughout this thesis, and I have put forward a specific proposal of what the functional role of what I have called the *objectified form of judgment* in the various domains beneath cognitive command amounts to. Thus we have all we need as a background for pursuing our project.

As I have already anticipated, the general aim of this thesis is an exploration, through a specific proposal, of what exactly we mean with the thought that two contrary judgments issued within the context of a disagreement are in a certain sense equally in good standing despite the fact that each party to the disagreement is committed to regard the opinion of the other as false. The sense of *good standing* which is relevant for our purposes here is connected with the issue of the normative role that truth plays in enquiry. Even assuming, as I will do in this thesis, that the three areas of discourse I am primarily concerned with are not constrained by cognitive command, the possibility of some distinctively alethic fault involved in situations of disagreement within these domains is still open.⁸⁵ Thus the hard work ahead us that constitutes the main contribution of this thesis to the debate, is precisely developing in some detail this insight.

Among the many issues that are relevant in connection with this proposal, three in particular are fundamental in that they constitute the groundwork for the project. The first issue has to do with the question – what do we exactly mean when we say that truth is normative of enquiry? I will dedicate to this important question the third Chapter where I

⁸⁵ I will discuss the contrast between the kind of fault in play in cognitive command and distinctively alethic fault(s) in the next Chapter: see §2.3.3 and §2.4.2.2.

will discuss different ways (or dimensions) in which truth might exert normative control on enquiry in various areas of discourse. This will in fact provide a useful framework for understanding the normativity of truth, and an extremely useful tool for the purposes of our project.

The second fundamental issue, which will be discussed in Chapter 4, deals with the question – What is the minimum we can get in terms of the normative control exerted by truth in a discourse? It is one of the most interesting features of the project canvassed in *Truth and Objectivity*, one never developed in its full potential, that the normative control that truth exerts in various areas of enquiry comes in different degrees – from a loose control in merely minimal truth-apt discourses to a strict control in those discourses that qualify as apt for a realist treatment. However, how far we can get in terms of the minimality of the normativity of truth is an important question in order to understand the idea of a variably normative notion of truth, and to appreciate the full range of normative shades, as it were, that different areas of enquiry can get. Notoriously, alethic deflationism, including Horwich's *Minimalism*, has problems in explaining the full range of the normative aspects of truth. Relying on the framework elaborated in the third Chapter, we will see which normative dimension(s) deflationism fails to explain, and why.

The third fundamental issue will be the object of investigation of Chapter 2. So far, the way we have presented and discussed the cognitive command constraint seems to suggest that all those areas of discourse in which the constraint fails are homogeneous. However, this is not a feature imposed by the architecture of cognitive command. In fact, in the very same way in which there are important differences between discourses that exhibit cognitive command, such as, e.g., the mathematical and physical discourses, the possibility of interesting differences between the various discourses that classify as merely minimal truth-apt is left entirely open. However, very little has been said about what these differences are and how they impact on the issue of disagreement and the normative significance of truth beneath cognitive command. This will be the focus of the next Chapter.

Chapter 2

Disagreement beneath Cognitive Command: a Comparative Analysis

§2.1 Introduction

Wittgenstein once said that ethics and aesthetics are one and the same.⁸⁶ There is a sense in which this is plainly true: they both deal with values and evaluative judgments. However, disposing of the ladder before using it – i.e., *sub specie hominis* –⁸⁷ there is at least one sense in which it is disputable whether they are one and the same.

The main thesis I defend in this Chapter is that even if we assume a broadly anti-realist conception about the domains of taste, moral and the comedic, there are important differences between them that reveal the need for a theoretic framework flexible enough to account for them. Once I endorse the thesis that judgments in domains beneath cognitive command are truth-apt, the pivotal question is whether truth plays the same normative role in all these domains. I will argue that the correct answer is no. There are many interesting differences that are manifested in important asymmetries between disagreements within such domains.

⁸⁶ Wittgenstein, L. (1921/2014) *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, 6.421.

⁸⁷ Cf. Wittgenstein's claim in the *Notebooks*, "The work of art is the object seen *sub specie aeternitatis*; and the good life is the world seen *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is the connection between art and ethics. The usual way of looking at things sees objects as it were from the midst of them, the view *sub specie aeternitatis* from outside". (p.83). In this project I am assuming a quite different point of view according to which ethics and aesthetics, *qua* practices, take their meaning from human activities. In this respect, the human point of view is immanent to ethics and aesthetics. Different degrees of impartiality of moral and aesthetic judgments are compatible with this picture. What seems to be excluded is the possibility of an ethical or aesthetical point of view completely detached from our interests as ethical and aesthetical agents. See Thomas Nagel's *The View from Nowhere*, Oxford: Oxford University Press (especially Chapters 8-9), for a discussion of this issue.

The plan is to pursue a comparative analysis of disagreements in some of the core areas of discourse beneath cognitive command. A comprehensive analysis would take into consideration many examples of disagreement in the full range of areas beneath cognitive command. However, such a task will not be possible in the limited space of this Chapter. For this reason my treatment of the issue will be only partial, but detailed enough, I hope, to delineate the rough geography of the territory and thus to give us enough points of reference to make navigation possible.

To use an analogy made by Gilbert Ryle, the work of the philosopher is similar to that of the (old) cartographer. By exploring the territory of the region, they both individuate certain characteristic elements and salient features from which they draw an approximate map of the region. Our territory is constituted by situations of disagreement in domains beneath cognitive command. The project is that of outlining a conceptual map of the normative role that truth plays in those domains.

Depending on the specific aim of the map the cartographer will leave out many details in order to avoid having too much information that would obstruct navigation. Analogously, the philosopher, in drawing the conceptual map of the phenomenon under study, is constantly making judgments about what to include, what to leave out and what to show, with a different degree of approximation.

Accordingly, I will not only omit some (doubtlessly important) details, but also I will put some restrictions on the range of discourses involved in my comparative analysis. I will deal exclusively with three main examples concerning judgments of taste, moral judgments and judgments about the comic (especially jokes). I believe that examples from these three areas are heterogeneous enough to give us a representative sample of the kind of distinctions we are interested in.

With *judgments of taste* in this Chapter, I mean only judgments concerning gustatory taste. I take these judgments to contrast in various ways with the category of aesthetic judgments broadly conceived. How judgments of taste are related to aesthetic judgments will not be addressed in this Chapter, but I take that the main contrast concerns, rather intuitively, the role that expertise plays in the two cases.

Before getting to the comparative analysis I need to discuss two sets of issues which are relevant for understanding the dialectic of this Chapter. First, it is important to get clear on a question concerning methodology. Second, I need to devote a few words on the notion of disagreement on which I am relying on in this Chapter.

§2.2 Some Reflections on the Methodology and Aim of the Project

§2.2.1 The Aim of the Project: two Explananda

The specific aim of this Chapter is to provide a framework for modeling and explaining two interrelated sets of issues. The first is a certain puzzle generated by two intuitive thoughts that seem to be part of what the folk think about ordinary disputes in the evaluative domains. Here by the *folk* I mean intelligent and reflective people who are not philosophically trained but yet fully competent speakers of one (or more) natural language(s). The second set of issues has to do with what I take to be important differences between disagreements in those areas where cognitive command fails.

The general strategy is to give a common *explanans* to both *explananda*. Such *explanans* is, roughly, the fact that the specific normative constraint that truth exerts in different areas of discourse varies as a function of the nature of the subject matter.

§2.2.2 First Explanandum: the Puzzle

There is a certain puzzle associated with the way in which folk think about ordinary situations of disagreement concerning issues of morality, taste or comic issues. The puzzle is generated by the coexistence of two natural, but apparently conflicting, thoughts.

On the one hand, the folk tend to think that many paradigmatic disputes about

matters of taste, morality or about what is funny involve a genuine conflict in judgments between participants to the dispute. On the other hand, they think that many of these disputes are such that no clear fault on either side needs to be involved. In particular, they think that, in many cases, both antagonists are within their right to persist in thinking what they think. In this respect, the folk tend to think that there is a sort of defectiveness associated with many instances of disputes in the taste, the comedic and the moral domain. This sense of defectiveness derives from the thought that after all there is no fact of the matter on the basis of which the dispute might be settled. As we will shortly see, once carefully scrutinized, these two thoughts amount to four different theses that constitute the (philosophical model of the) folk conception.⁸⁸

§2.2.3 *Second Explanandum: Asymmetries in Disagreement beneath Cognitive Command*

A second element of our investigation concerns some important differences in the way disagreement occurs in the various areas of discourse we are interested in. For instance, many are inclined to think that with respect to matter of taste, the old motto *de gustibus non est disputandum* has a certain appeal. Taken non-literally, it suggests that disagreements in this domain are relatively ‘soft’. We do not give much importance to them, except in special circumstances in which some co-ordination is required. In fact, we are generally fine with the presence of frequent and persistent disagreement concerning matters of taste. This does not exclude that we might, from time to time, engage in disputes about whether a certain food or wine is delicious or not. When this happens, we certainly tend to ask for motivations and back up our claims with some additional considerations, though without presuming that our opponent(s) must endorse the very same judgment that we do.

By contrast, we generally perceive a disagreement concerning a moral judgment as ‘hot’ and hard to live with. In many cases of moral disagreement we believe that our

⁸⁸ Chapter 2:§2.3.4.

opponent should drop her judgment and come to share our moral point of view. One might even suggest that it is a characteristic feature of a moral judgment that a commitment to endorse such judgment is a commitment to regard anybody holding an opposite judgment as violating some obligation associated with moral truth. In other words, with respect to moral matters, especially those that are important to us, we are inclined to think that anybody holding a judgment contrary to the one we endorse is judging in a way she ought not to judge. This seems, indeed, constitutive of what makes a judgment, a *moral* judgment. In virtue of this, we seem to be much less comfortable with the presence of moral disagreement.

Comic judgments present an interesting mixture of features, which differentiates it from both the taste and the moral case. Similar to the taste case, the assertoric ground for a comic judgment is partly determined by the subject's own affective reactions to the object of experience (e.g., a joke). In fact, our personal sense of humor, however that is spelled out, plays a crucial role in warranting comic judgments. Besides our sense of humor, there are important cognitive factors (such as, for instance, understanding the content of the joke as well as elements of the situation in which the joke is told) that need to be taken into account. For these reasons, although disagreements concerning comic matters do not present the characteristic 'heat' of moral disagreements, they might nevertheless license, on certain occasions, a negative evaluation of the opponent's intellectual skills. These are cases, for instance, in which one of the participants to the disagreement has reasons to think that the other party is not amused by the joke because he did not get it. In many situations of comic disagreement, there are things that need to be grasped, and in such situations it is always possible that the source of the disagreement resides in the fact that one of the disputants is not fully appreciating the joke or the situation. Or again, there are situations in which you might be amused by a very silly joke and your disagreement with your opponent might involve some elements of intellectual snobbery. Whenever such a possibility is salient in the context of the disagreement, it might license a reaction of intellectual superiority that is absent in the case of disputes about taste. We will shortly return to these important points.

§2.2.4 Methodological Remarks

Every investigation has to presuppose some – though, perhaps only superficial – understanding of the subject matter that is investigated. If we are investigating a concept or a phenomenon X , we already have to have an approximate understanding of what X is – a sort of proto-theory of X that allows us to talk about and investigate X rather than Y . Without this minimal understanding of X , no investigation can coherently take place, but only an illusion of investigation. Let us call this proto-theory *the folk conception*. What plays the role of the folk varies as a function of the nature of the subject matter. For example, in providing a philosophical analysis of the concept of *entanglement*, the relevant folk would be constituted by the broad community of physicists; whereas if we are interested in providing a philosophical account of the notion of *disagreement* the relevant folk would be constituted by ordinary, but fully competent and reflective, speakers of English.

In this respect, to make a parallel with what Michael Smith thinks in connection with moral issues, when it comes to questions about disagreement, “philosophers are just ordinary folk”:

“The important point [...] is that philosophers’ theories do not generate answers that are different in kind to the answers ordinary folk give to moral questions. They are *merely* more technical and more systematic.”⁸⁹

The point is not of course that philosophers cannot make any progress to the study of disagreement over what the non-philosophical folk can achieve. The point is rather that with respect to certain subject matters, philosophers cannot claim any privileged standpoint over ordinary folk from which begin their investigation. This point is not

⁸⁹ Smith, M. (1994):2. Emphasis in the original.

generalizable to all subject matters of philosophical investigation. Many philosophical questions are very technical and cannot be understood by ordinary folk who lack the relevant vocabulary and conceptual repertoire to frame the question. My claim is that questions concerning disagreement in evaluative domains are not of this kind.

In this respect, the folk conception of *disagreement* puts some constraints on the methodology of our theorizing about *disagreement*. For one thing, it is important that the resulting philosophical theory, if successful, will be a theory about *disagreement*, and not about something else. Simply put, we need to make sure that we do not lose the subject matter through our investigation.⁹⁰ This means that if in presenting the outcome of our philosophical theory of *disagreement* to the folk, they would not recognize that we were talking about *disagreement*, we should take this fact as an indication that something went wrong, that we have lost the subject matter.

A (successful) theory could have two main outcomes. First, philosophical analysis shows that the folk conception of *disagreement* is deeply incoherent or based on false presuppositions, and thus that what the folk thought was a unitary concept or phenomenon *disagreement* is in fact no such thing. Alternatively, the outcome could be a theory that preserves some core aspects of the folk conception of *disagreement*, to an extent sufficient for folk to recognize it as a philosophical theory of *disagreement*. If the latter is the case then, most probably, the analysis might reveal some local incoherence and thus demand revisions of some aspects or preconceptions included in the folk proto-theory. This is because what we want from our philosophical theory of *disagreement* is, to put it simply, an explanation of *disagreement*..

As a general methodological point, the fact that our project delivers a proposal that broadly chimes with actual folk practices and their proto-theory about disagreement should be considered an important virtue. However, a brief clarification is in order here. The point I am making is not that we should consider the folk conception of disagreement as a datum for our theory. Our philosophical question is about disagreement and the normative role of

⁹⁰ On this point, see Lynch, M. (2013):23. See also Lynch, M. (2009):13-19; and Wright, C. (1992): Chapter 2.

truth. It is not an empirical question about how to describe folk thought and speech. Nor should we take the folk conception as a repository of ultimate wisdom on the subject matter of our project. That would mean considering the folk a guide for philosophical reflection, which is surely to have things the wrong way around.

However, there is still a sense in which the folk conception of disagreement plays an important role in the economy of our project. We should take it, and the kind of appearances on which it is based, at face value, as in fact providing some indication of the kind of theory we would consider successful as a result of a philosophical investigation of the phenomenon in question. Thus, we should take the fact that the folk seem to gesture to some distinctions as at least some reason for exploring philosophically where these distinctions lead. If, as a result of my investigation in this Chapter, we end up with a deeply unstable proposal, then that might be a good *reductio* of the hypothesis that there are distinctions to be made.

§2.3 Varieties of Disagreement

People disagree in many ways, about many different things, and with different degrees of intensity. Because of its polyadic appearance, exploiting the notion of disagreement as a tool for our philosophical investigation might be particularly challenging. Thus, we need to be clear about what we mean by ‘disagreement’.

§2.3.1 *From Disagreement to Disagreements*

In recent years, there has been an intense discussion in the philosophy of language about disagreement.⁹¹ Many philosophers were convinced that rather than being a uniform

⁹¹ See especially MacFarlane, J. (2014), Huvenes, T. (2012), (2014), Richard, M. (2008) Cappelen, H. and

phenomenon, disagreement in fact encompasses a variety of different, though perhaps interestingly related, phenomena. The suggested conclusion is that talking of disagreement *tout court*, or of *real* disagreement, is uninformative, if not misleading. We need important qualifications. John MacFarlane suggests something along these lines when he claims:

“[When giving an account of disagreement], it is easy to ask the wrong question. If we ask, “What is real disagreement?”, instead of “what kinds of disagreement are there”, our question is unfair to both the contextualist and the relativist. It is unfair to the contextualist because, even if there are kinds of disagreement that contextualists accounts do not capture, there may be other kinds that it does capture. And it is unfair to the relativist because it makes it look as if the relativist needs to vindicate the very same kind of disagreement that is secured by objectivist accounts. Even those that are sympathetic to relativism may feel that disagreement about matters of taste is, though genuine, not quite the same kind of thing as disagreement about the age of the earth.”⁹²

I find this passage interesting, especially because of an implicit suggestion that one might read into it – namely that we have two different axes of variation concerning the notion of disagreement that together constitute an interesting matrix. On the one hand, we have the thought that a variety of different, though perhaps related, phenomena goes under the general umbrella of disagreement. Different theories can account for different disagreement-phenomena. This opens the door to a potential pluralism about the phenomenon of disagreement.

The other axis of variability concerns the manifestation of disagreement in various domains of discourse. Fixing our attention on a particular kind of disagreement, there might be interesting variations in the way that disagreement is manifested in different domains. MacFarlane’s quote focuses only on the contrast between factual discourse and those discourses for which a relativistic treatment seems, at least *prima facie*, appropriate

Hawthorne, J. (2009), Kölbel, M. (2003), (2004).

⁹² MacFarlane, J. (2014): chapter 6.

(like, e.g., the taste domain). However, as we will see, the point is more general than that: it applies also to disagreements in different areas beneath cognitive command.

§2.3.2 *Some Varieties of Disagreement*

Besides the distinction between disagreement as a state and disagreement as an activity,⁹³ we might distinguish between ways in which people can disagree (in the state sense). My aim here is not to dispute whether all the various kinds of disagreement we can think of are, in some way or another, genuine forms of disagreement. I am happy to grant that much. The aim is rather to argue that once certain theoretical commitments about the truth-aptness of the objectified form of judgments in the targeted areas of discourse are in play, one specific kind of disagreement – i.e., what I call *cognitive disagreement* – will be particularly relevant to our investigation concerning the normativity of truth.

The three main varieties of disagreement I will be considering are the following:

- (1) Propositional disagreement: disagreement involving logically incompatible propositions/judgments:
- (2) Doxastic disagreement: disagreement concerning our doxastic attitudes towards a propositional content.
- (3) Non-Doxastic disagreement: disagreement concerning our non-doxastic attitudes towards a certain object or state of affairs.

Propositional disagreement covers all those cases in which two logically incompatible propositions concerning the same subject matter are asserted or believed. Accordingly, A and B disagree about a subject matter S just in case there is a S-proposition p that A believes and there is an S-proposition q that B believes, and q entails not- p . What this

⁹³ See Cappelen and Hawthorne (2009):60-1. In this Chapter, I will focus exclusively on disagreement in the state sense, which does not require the presence of an actual dispute.

variety of disagreement requires is simply that there are two propositional contents, p and q , about the very same subject matter, such that they stand in the logical relation of exclusion (they entail each other's negation).

The second and third types of disagreement can both be seen as belonging to the broad category of attitudinal disagreement. Doxastic attitudes are attitudes towards propositional content that support the endorsement of a belief, whereas the non-doxastic ones are importantly distinct in that, although they can take as their object propositional contents (like, e.g., imagining, assuming, etc.) they do not support the endorsement of beliefs. In general, then, as Charles L. Stevenson explains, people disagree in attitude “when they have opposed attitudes to the same object [one for it, the other against it] and when at least one of them has a motive for altering or calling into question the attitude of the other”.⁹⁴ However, for our purposes it is useful to sharply distinguish between doxastic and non-doxastic disagreement since the differences between them matter more than their similarities.⁹⁵

Take the doxastic case first. These are cases in which two subjects, A and B, have incompatible doxastic attitudes towards the same propositional content p . There are three broad kinds of doxastic attitude, which are mutually incompatible:⁹⁶ accepting p , denying p and rejecting p . While denying p is doxastically equivalent to accepting *not-p*, rejecting p is a complex state in which, once all the p -relevant information available to a subject S is carefully scrutinized, on the basis of that information S has reasons for neither accepting p (*not-p*) nor denying p (*not-p*).⁹⁷ Thus, rejection is not grounded in a state of total ignorance

⁹⁴ Stevenson, C.L. (1944):3.

⁹⁵ Stevenson distinguishes between what he calls ‘disagreement in belief’ and what he calls ‘disagreement in attitude’. See Stevenson, C.L. (1948/1963), and Stevenson, C.L. (1937).

⁹⁶ How to characterize the sense of incompatibility at issue here is not straightforward. MacFarlane speaks in terms of noncotenability: “I disagree with someone’s attitude if I could not coherently adopt that same attitude (an attitude with the same content and force) without changing my mind – that is, without dropping some of my current attitudes.” [MacFarlane, J. (2014): Chapter 6.] Thus if I have an attitude of rejection towards p while you have an attitude of acceptance towards p , I cannot coherently adopt your attitude towards p without dropping mine. What MacFarlane means with ‘coherence’ in this context is not clear. Since it is not crucial for our purposes, I will not try to clarify this notion any further.

⁹⁷ Some philosophers, like for instance Frege, held that rejecting a proposition is equivalent to denying it and thus reducible to accepting its negation. However, more recently, others, e.g., Greg Restall and Graham Priest, have argued that the notion of rejection is *sui generis* and not reducible to denial or acceptance of

about p (due to the fact that the subject never raises the issue to herself as to whether p) nor it is grounded in a state of indifference (either p or $not-p$ are acceptable insofar as the subject does not care about p). To put it somewhat paradoxically, rejecting p is a kind of positive negative cognitive stance towards p . A cognitive stance has to be earned, as it were, by a subject through a process of gathering and assessing the subject's available evidence.

Some special cases of doxastic disagreement are reducible to cases of propositional disagreement: if A accepts p and B denies p then their doxastic disagreement amounts to nothing more than a case of propositional disagreement (where q is simply $not-p$). The label 'cognitive disagreement' is meant to encompass both the propositional kind of disagreement as well as the doxastic kind.

Let us now turn to non-doxastic disagreement. There are all sorts of non-doxastic attitudes (e.g., desiring, fearing, hating, loving, imagining, etc.). Thus, like the doxastic case, two subjects are in non-doxastic disagreement about X just in case neither of them can endorse the attitude of the other towards X without dropping his own. Thus if I love Jane and you hate her, we are in a clear situation of disagreement about Jane (and not about what we *believe* about Jane – we might believe exactly the same things about Jane and still disagree).

§2.3.3 *Cognitive Disagreement and co.*

There is no denying that all three categories represent genuine cases of disagreement. However, given the kind of semantic and epistemological commitments that go with the framework outlined in Chapter 1, it is clear that the notion of disagreement that is pivotal for our purposes is that of *cognitive disagreement*. The thought is simply that once we accept that judgments in the moral, taste and comedic domains are truth-apt, that not all of them are false, and that they are the expression of genuine beliefs, we have all the

negation. See Frege, G. (1917/1997); Priest, G. (2005); Restall, G. (2005).

ingredients for the possibility of cognitive disagreement. It is this kind of disagreement that, because of the intimate connection it bears with truth and falsity, is directly relevant for our project of understanding the variable normative control that truth exerts in these areas.

It is somehow surprising, one may think, that all these areas of discourse are those in which cognitive command fails but yet we have something that can be properly called a cognitive kind of disagreement. In fact, one may ask: how does this kind of disagreement manage to persist in areas beneath cognitive command? The reply to this question ultimately depends on a certain way of understanding the normative role that truth plays in enquiry. As we will see more in detail when discussing the issues of parity and faultlessness of disagreements in the evaluative domain, a discourse failing to exhibit cognitive command does not by itself exclude the possibility of a normative kind of fault. Although the kind of content expressed by evaluative judgments fails to meet the standard for robust representationality and thus lies outside the operational scope of cognitive command, it is nevertheless subject to the specific normative constraint that truth exerts in such areas. This much seems to be granted by the fact that content in these areas qualify as truth-apt (even though, minimally so).⁹⁸

With this in mind, I believe that all the various kinds of disagreement briefly discussed in the previous section are, in one way or another, interesting. Thus, I wish to be as ecumenical as possible with respect to the notion of disagreement. In this respect, a crucial question for us is the following: which of these disagreements can be co-instantiated within the very same situation of dispute and which exclude each other? More to the point, what other notions of disagreement does the occurrence of propositional disagreement exclude?

Concerning propositional and doxastic disagreement, as we have already observed, not only are the two compatible but, given certain assumptions, doxastic disagreement can be reduced to propositional disagreement. I do not advocate this reductive maneuver simply because it excludes certain theoretical possibilities that we have no good reasons

⁹⁸ More on this issue, later. See §2.4.2.2.

for excluding. For instance, if we adopt a framework in which we admit degrees of belief, or degrees of credence, there might be cases in which two subjects doxastically disagree without propositionally disagreeing.⁹⁹ In this respect, the notion of doxastic disagreement seems to be more fine-grained than that of propositional disagreement. Yet these two notions of disagreement are perfectly compatible in the sense that every case of propositional disagreement can be mapped onto a doxastic disagreement.

Given the fact that the notion of non-doxastic disagreement is, to a certain extent, independent of both the notions of propositional and doxastic disagreement, there is no reason to suspect any incompatibility here. In particular, if we focus on disagreements in those areas we are primarily concerned with, it is clear not only that the occurrence of doxastic (or propositional) disagreement is consistent with the occurrence of non-doxastic disagreement, but also that the two are frequently co-instantiated. Thus, for instance, my judging sushi to be delicious might be associated with a pleasure in eating it and a frequent desire to go to a sushi bar, while your judging it to be unpalatable might be associated with a displeasure in eating it and a desire to avoid sushi as much as you can.

In what follows, I will focus exclusively on the notion of cognitive disagreement. Thus, whenever the word ‘disagreement’ occurs in the text it has to be understood as shorthand for ‘cognitive disagreement’, unless otherwise specified.

§2.4 Cognitive Disagreement & the Folk Conception

In this section I will compare situations of disagreement in different areas of discourse beneath cognitive command. Reflecting on disagreement is a very useful tool for understanding the normative profile of truth. What normative role(s) truth plays in a given

⁹⁹ I might have a very high credence (0.9) that it will rain tomorrow in Aberdeen and thus accept that proposition to that degree, while you have a lower credence (0.8) that it will rain tomorrow in Aberdeen, thus accepting that proposition to that degree. Although we both believe that it will rain tomorrow in Aberdeen, neither of us can adopt the other’s attitude with the same degree of credence without dropping his own.

domain of discourse will presumably be reflected in aspects of the assertoric and cognitive practices of ordinary speakers engaging in them. The conjecture I will explore here is that the folk believe that there are important differences regarding disagreement about taste, about morality and about what is funny.

It is important to understand this claim properly. It is not part of it the idea that there is one specific direction of order of explanation that either goes from the normativity of truth to aspects of the practice, or vice versa. Rather, I take them to be two sides of the same coin and, as such, analytically interdependent. That is to say, the way in which the folk engage in, and conceive of, the cognitive and assertoric practices in various domains partly determines what normative profile truth takes in them, which, in turn, partly shapes the contour of such practices. In a slogan: no practice without norms and no norms without practice. They come together as a package deal.

We will discuss in detail the various ways in which truth can be normative of our cognitive and assertoric practices in the next Chapter. The main task of this section is to provide a philosophical model of the general folk conception of disagreement. Firstly, I will introduce some examples of disagreement involving judgments of gustatory taste, morality and humor. Secondly, I will discuss what I take to be some interesting asymmetries concerning the way the folk conceive of the various situation of disagreement in such domains. Finally, I will formulate a conjecture concerning how these asymmetries are related to the different normative role that truth plays in these domains.

§2.4.1 *Examples*

I will introduce three examples of cognitive disagreements: one about matters of taste, one about moral matters, and one about humor. These are all cases of cognitive disagreement between two subjects who, on the basis of some shared piece of evidence, come to opposite judgments, without necessarily having any actual dialectical confrontation. These examples will provide the material for our comparative analysis in subsequent sections.

§2.4.1.1 *Taste Disagreement*

Let us start with a case of cognitive disagreement about matter of gustatory taste. Suppose Ami and Bob are having dinner at Tomoe's sushi restaurant in New York:

Ami tastes the sushi and, on the basis of her satisfactory experience, she judges that this sushi is delicious.

Bob also tastes the sushi but because of his not fully satisfactory experience he judges that this sushi is not delicious.

§2.4.1.2 *Moral Disagreement*

The second case of cognitive disagreement is about some moral issue. Asia and Bill are both reading an Amnesty International report on the practice of torturing terrorist prisoners in order to obtain important information about possible civilian targets of terrorist action. In particular, the report discusses, through the personal experience of Q, some of the most recent and horrifying torture techniques adopted in a detention center for terrorist prisoners.

Reflecting on this piece of information and on the basis of her moral convictions about how human beings should be treated, Asia judges that torturing Q is morally wrong.

Also reflecting on that very piece of information, and on the basis of his own moral convictions about how important is the national safety issue for a democracy, Bill judges that torturing Q is, after all, morally right.

A quick note is in order before introducing an example of disagreement about comic

matters. In what follows I will restrict my attention only to those moral judgments that contain what some philosophers (e.g., Bernard Williams) have called *thin* moral terms – i.e., paradigmatically, terms like ‘right’ and ‘wrong’. I will not deal here with judgments employing *thick* moral terms – i.e., terms like ‘brutal’, ‘cruel’, ‘treacherous’.¹⁰⁰

The reason for this restriction is that, granting that we can make good use of such distinction, thick moral terms pose extra complications that are not directly relevant for the purposes of this thesis. In particular, I agree with Bernard Williams¹⁰¹ that whereas many thin moral terms are univocal and universally shared among all cultures (both diachronically and synchronically) because intimately and directly connected with questions of practical rationality, thick moral terms may vary to a great extent from one culture to another, depending, among other things, on a variety of non-moral beliefs that members of a certain culture or society generally hold. In this respect, it is a plausible conjecture that moral language is not as uniform as one might *prima facie* think. I will leave the discussion of this conjecture and its consequences for another occasion.

§2.4.1.3 *Disagreement about Comic Matters*

The last example of cognitive disagreement we will consider is about comic matters. The domain of judgments about what is funny is quite heterogeneous and difficult to circumscribe. We might be amused and find laughable a variety of different things: from the man who pours coffee on his shirt while looking at his watch to a sophisticated joke about a specific and technical subject matter. It would certainly require an entire thesis on its own to investigate the common root (if any) of our comic responses and judgments with

¹⁰⁰ See, for instance, Williams, B. (1995):227-236. The distinction between thin and thick moral terms is not taken to be exhaustive: there may be interesting concepts – like that of justice – that fall in the middle. This fact can be taken either as a refutation of the distinction between thin and thick or as evidence for the need of a third, distinct, category. See Scheffler, S. (1987).

¹⁰¹ Williams, B. (1995):233-4.

respect to such a variety of cases.¹⁰² Moreover, it is not even clear that this can be done, as some recent discussions among psychologists point out.¹⁰³

For the purposes of our project, we need to restrict the focus to only a few examples belonging to one specific category of comic matters. Given that jokes provide a paradigmatic and uncontroversial source of comic judgments, I will here focus on disagreements about jokes. This restriction is also motivated by the fact that judgments about the funniness of a joke are paradigmatic cases of judgments about the comic, as well as by the fact that jokes involve a variety of factors, from emotional to fully cognitive, that might not be present (at least not as manifestly as in the case of jokes) in comic judgments about different subject matters. An additional reason for focusing on jokes is that many of them can be appreciated in written form without requiring an actual performance, as is the case for most stand-up comedy. Because of this restriction, the conclusion I will reach by means of the comparative analysis will be only partial but representative enough, I hope, to provide interesting material for our investigation.

With this in mind, let us now introduce the example of comic disagreement I will focus on here:

Amanda and Ben are at a birthday party with some friends. At some point one of their friends, Ted, stands up and tells his mates the following joke (let us call it JOKE):

Abe and his friend Sol are out for a walk together in a part of town they have not been in. Passing a Christian church, they notice a curious sign in front saying “\$1,000 to anyone who will convert.” “I wonder what that’s about,” says Abe. “I think I will go in and have a look. I will be back in a minute; just wait for me.” Sol sits on a sidewalk bench and waits

¹⁰² Some philosophers lament the lack of a systematic philosophical work on humor and comic matters. There are in fact very few papers and books on this issue. See Shaw, J. (2010), Cohen, T. (1999); Morreall, J. (2013).

¹⁰³ Some psychologists explicitly deny that humor is a unified phenomenon. They claim that humor is more like a cluster of related phenomena with multiple functions across many domains of human life. See, for instance, the discussion at the following link: <<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/thats-what-she-said/201105/why-is-humor-so-hard-figure-out>>.

patiently for nearly half an hour, and then Abe reappears. “Well,” asks Sol, “what are they up to? Who are they trying to convert? Why do they care? Did you get the \$1,000?” Indignantly, Abe replies, “Money. That’s all you people care about!”

After Ted finished telling the joke, many start laughing and Amanda, very amused by the joke, judges the joke very funny, while Ben, not really impressed by the joke, judges it not funny.

§ 2.4.2 *Marks of the Folk Conception of Disagreement beneath Cognitive Command*

The various marks I will consider, are taken from Wright’s discussion of what he calls the *Ordinary View* of disputes of inclination.¹⁰⁴ Despite the many similarities, there are important differences between the way I discuss the issue and the way Wright does, especially in his 2006 paper “Intuitionism, Realism, Relativism and Rhubarb”. Such differences have to do on the one hand with some further distinctions I introduce, that are not present in Wright’s treatment of the issue, and on the other hand, with the degree of generality that the discussion aims at. In his 2006 paper, Wright restricts the focus to what he calls disputes of inclination, and the paradigmatic example he deals with there is a judgment of gustatory taste. However, no discussion is provided on two important issues. First, whether the various elements of the ordinary view representing the folk conception are also intended to cover cases of disagreement in other areas of discourse beneath cognitive command. Second, whether it applies equally in all areas beneath cognitive command, or whether there are significant differences – and what these differences amount to. In what follows, I will explore both issues.

Two brief caveats. The features listed in the ordinary view are taken to be features of disagreements in certain areas of discourse that the philosophically informed folk – i.e., the folk familiar with some basic philosophical jargon – would mostly converge on upon

¹⁰⁴ See Wright, C. (2006) and Wright, C. (2012).

reflection. As it stands, this has the status of a conjecture, albeit a quite reasonable one. Moreover, in describing the various features of disagreement I will talk in terms of folk reactions to actual disputes. However, this is only a rhetorical expedient, as it were. Nothing essential concerning the discussion of the various marks hinges on that. In fact, what we are trying to get at here are folk thoughts about disagreement, and not their thoughts about characteristics of actual disputes. Nevertheless, in doing so it is sometimes useful to imagine the folk engaging in some hypothetical dispute.

The four marks of the folk conception we will focus on are the following:

CONFLICT IN JUDGMENT: disagreements involve genuinely incompatible judgments.

FAULTLESSNESS: nobody need be mistaken or otherwise at fault.

RATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: participants to the disagreement may, perfectly rationally, stick to their respective views even after the disagreement comes to light and reveals itself as faultless.

PARITY: the characteristic faultlessness of the disagreement can be properly appreciated and endorsed within the committed perspectives of the antagonists.

§ 2.4.2.1 *Conflict in Judgment*

The first mark – conflict in judgment –¹⁰⁵ is the thought that many paradigmatic cases of disagreement beneath cognitive command involve a specific kind of conflict: an opposition in judgments. When two subjects disagree about whether sushi is delicious, or about whether torturing terrorist prisoners is a morally acceptable practice, or about whether JOKE is funny, they make conflicting judgments about the taste of sushi, about the morality of torturing terrorist prisoners, and about the funniness of JOKE. We called this

¹⁰⁵ Wright calls this requirement ‘contradiction’, which restricts the focus on those disagreements in which a logical incompatibility between the propositions expressed by the two judgments is involved. I am trying to be more liberal here and allow for the possibility of doxastic incompatibility to count as part of the folk understanding of the first mark.

particular kind of conflict cognitive disagreement.

Given that we have already discussed the issue of cognitive disagreement, we do not need to expand on this mark any further here. We just need to be clear about the fact that it applies with equal force to all different areas of discourse beneath cognitive command regardless of how we perceive of the intensity and persistency of disputes based on such disagreements.

§ 2.4.2.2 *Faultlessness*

The second distinctive mark of the folk conception is the *faultlessness* of disagreement.¹⁰⁶ The general thought that the folk seem to have is that disagreements in such domains are special because, although they involve a conflict in judgments, neither party need be in error in judging the way she does. Provided that both parties are sincere in judging in the ways they do and no appreciable defeating conditions are in place,¹⁰⁷ we are inclined to think not only that the way they judge is, in a certain sense, perfectly legitimate, but also that no specific fault or shortcoming can be detected in the disagreement.

Like disagreement, the notion of faultlessness is a general label subsuming a variety of different phenomena. It is hard to say what exactly folk have in mind with this thought. Nevertheless, as in the case of disagreement we can go through some candidates and make some reasonable conjectures.

We might characterize the notion of faultlessness in various ways. To begin with, there is what we might call a pragmatic notion of faultlessness. Such a notion can be understood in terms of compliance with the various *maxims*, as Grice called them, governing the pragmatics of a conversation. Thus, if we endorse a broadly Gricean framework of the pragmatics of conversation we can say that two subjects involved in a

¹⁰⁶ See Kölbel, M. (2002) and (2003), who, to the best of my knowledge, was the first to introduce the term ‘faultless disagreement’ in the relativism literature. Precursors of the idea might be traced back to some old discussion about moral disagreement in the ‘eroticist’ circles: see, e.g., Stevenson, C.L. (1944).

¹⁰⁷ See Chapter 1, §1.5.

dispute advancing incompatible judgments are pragmatically faultless just in case they both are fully cooperative and comply with the various maxims governing the pragmatics of the dispute. Although this sense of faultlessness is certainly interesting and worth investigating, it is not central to our project. Thus, we can leave it aside for the present discussion.

A second sense in which the notion of faultlessness can be spelled out is broadly epistemic. The basic idea is that two subjects involved in a disagreement are epistemically faultless if the evidence available to them adequately supports both of their claims at the time. Thus, the idea is that two subjects might have a disagreement about a subject matter *S* in which, as a matter of fact, they both hold judgments that are epistemically very well supported yet false. In such a situation, both of them would be epistemically faultless but yet in violation of the alethic norms governing assertion and belief.

Talking in terms of a non-technical notion of justification, this sense of faultlessness might well be part of the folk conception of disagreement in the evaluative discourse. The thought is that in the face of the disagreement it is plausible to suppose that both parties have equally adequate justification for their respective claims, or, equivalently, that both judgments seem equally well supported by whatever constitutes evidence in the relevant domain. However, this cannot be the end of the story, and my conjecture is that something else and more distinctive is part of the folk conception of disagreements beneath cognitive command. After all, this sense of faultlessness can be attached to disagreements in all areas of discourse in which it makes sense to talk in terms of epistemic justification, and thus it would not be a peculiar feature of disagreements occurring in domains beneath cognitive command.

The sense of faultlessness that most directly concerns the normative role that truth plays in areas beneath cognitive command is what I call *alethic faultlessness*. Given that the constraint imposed by cognitive command fails in these areas, the possibility is left open for there to be disagreements in which no cognitive kind of fault – no misconceptualization or misrepresentations by either party – is involved.

Yet, it is very important to observe that the absence of this particular kind of

cognitive shortcoming is not by itself a guarantee that no alethic fault needs to be involved in the disagreement. We should be careful to keep the notion of cognitive shortcoming and that of alethic fault distinct. An agent might be cognitively irreproachable in the process of forming a certain judgment by means of a method the characteristic function of which is not genuinely representational and yet be, to a certain, variable extent, in violation of the alethic norm(s) governing enquiry in that particular area. To emphasize an important point, the possibility of a disagreement that does not involve any cognitive shortcoming is guaranteed by the nature of the content we are dealing with in areas of discourse beneath cognitive command and by the characteristic function of the judgment-forming method in such areas. However, this is not sufficient for a guarantee of the possibility that no alethic fault is involved in a disagreement. This is because the possibility of such fault goes hand-in-hand with the operation of the truth predicate in a given area of discourse. Once we have truth-aptness, the possibility of some alethic shortcoming is open, regardless of whether the nature of the content and the judgment-forming method characteristic of that area are constrained by cognitive command.

In short, what we have here is a rather complex picture with two main axes of evaluation of the character of a disagreement in a specific area of discourse. On the one hand, we have the question of whether the content and the judgment-forming method are constrained by cognitive command. On the other hand, we have the question concerning the normative status of a disagreement in a certain domain of discourse, which depends on the specific operation of the truth predicate in that domain. A discourse exhibiting cognitive command is sufficient for granting that some kind of normative shortcoming is involved in a disagreement within that discourse. However, the converse does not hold. A disagreement involving some sort of alethic fault is, *per se*, not sufficient for granting cognitive command.

As we will shortly see, it seems very plausible to conjecture that there are important variations in the degree of normative faultlessness that might be open in various domains of discourse, even within the evaluative sphere. Disagreements about a certain subject matter might be *more* (or *less*) faultless than disagreement about a different subject

matter. I will suggest that a good way of modeling this thought is to maintain that such variations ultimately depend on the specific normative function that truth plays in a given domain. In fact, what is crucial in order to evaluate whether, and to what degree, a normative fault is involved in a disagreement is to understand what normative constraint(s) truth imposes. As we will see in the next Chapter, there are different ways in which truth can be normative of enquiry. Some of them might be present in some domains but not in other, depending on the specific function that truth plays in that domain. This fact, I shall argue, is what explains the variation in the degree of faultlessness of disagreements in the various domains beneath cognitive command.

§ 2.4.2.3 *Rational Sustainability*

Another important element of the folk conception is the rational sustainability of a judgment in the light of a disagreement that impresses as faultless and irresolvable on the basis of purely rational confrontation. In order to avoid a potential confusion, we should distinguish between two different questions that might be connected to the rational sustainability of a disagreement, depending on whether we are focusing on disagreement in the act sense or in the state sense.

There is, on the one hand, the question of whether to continue disagreeing is a sustainable activity after both disputants come to appreciate the presence of an intractable disagreement. This concerns whether the dialectical confrontation in itself is sustainable. We might call this element the *persistence* of a disagreement. An answer to this will be a function of two factors: the subject matter of the dispute and some contingent features of the situation of disagreement (e.g., whether and to what extent the disputants attach value to the subject matter of the dispute, or whether they have any common project/plan which is directly obstructed by their disagreement). Characterized in this way, persistence is a feature of the activity of disagreeing, and as such, it strictly requires the presence of an actual dispute.

On the second interpretation, sustainability has to do with the question whether the *thinking* itself is rationally sustainable – i.e., whether it is rational for both committed parties to stick to their respective judgments in the face of the disagreement. This question needs some qualification. In fact, the term ‘rationally’ as used in this question refers to two different elements: one is chiefly epistemic and the other is psychological. Without committing to any specific view about human rationality, there are two different questions at issue when we are asking whether it is rational to stick to one’s view in the face of disagreement. On the one hand, there is the issue of whether on the basis of the total evidence that we have (evidence for our judgment *plus* evidence of the disagreement) we are (epistemically) required to change our mind because we are not fully supported by that evidence anymore. This would be a case, for instance, in which the evidence provided by the disagreement makes it very likely that there is some actual defeater for the reliability of my judgment-forming method. On the other hand, there is the, broadly psychological, issue of whether, absent defeating conditions, the presence of the disagreement puts some pressure on our confidence in the correctness of our view.

I take these to be two distinct and, to a certain extent, independent elements. In particular, a subject, in the presence of a certain kind of disagreement, might lose (even a considerable amount of) confidence with respect to her view being the correct one, without the epistemic pedigree of her judgment being thereby compromised. This is to say that justification is one thing; confidence is another. If the distinction sketched here is a good one, an answer to the question of whether it is rational to stick to one’s judgment in the face of the disagreement will be a complex function that factors in both elements, perhaps assigning them a differential weight depending on the subject matter at issue in the disagreement and the specific judgment-forming method employed by the antagonists.

With these qualifications in place, it is important to highlight the fact that this second sense of sustainability does not require the presence of an actual dispute in the same way in which the persistency feature does. Strictly speaking, all that is required for the question of rational sustainability to arise is that there are two subjects, respectively committed to opposite judgments, who are both aware of the presence of such a state of

disagreement. In this respect, this sense of sustainability abstracts from all the contextual contingencies attributable to the presence of an actual dispute which play an important role in connection to the rational persistency of disagreeing. Given that our main interest in this project is that of modeling the folk conception of disagreement as a state, trying to abstract as much as possible from the various contingencies of actual disputes, we will focus primarily on the issue of rational sustainability, leaving the discussion of the persistency feature for another occasion.

§ 2.4.2.4 *Parity*

The last mark of the folk conception of disagreement is parity.¹⁰⁸ The basic idea is that the faultlessness of the disagreement is appreciable from within the committed perspectives of the two disputants. In other words, the thought is that both parties to a disagreement are in a position to appreciate, and to judge consistently with their own view on the matter, that the disagreement is one in which each party is within her rights, as it were, in judging the way she does. This is intended to capture the following idea that is conjectured to be part of the folk conception: even though I disagree with you as to whether, let us say, sushi is delicious, I nevertheless recognize that your opinion is, at least in a certain sense, on a par with mine. This seems mandated by the fact that, absent defeating considerations, the disagreement impresses as one where there is no sense in which I would be justified in claiming that your judgment must be inferior to mine.

Parity is significantly different from faultlessness in virtue of the different point of view that is at issue in the two marks. Whereas the evaluation of the faultlessness of a certain judgment in the presence of disagreement is made from within a sort of neutral point of view – i.e., from the point of view of a referee external to the disagreement who does not take a stand on the specific subject matter of the disagreement – the evaluation of parity is carried from within the committed perspectives of the judges involved in the

¹⁰⁸ See Wright, C. (2012).

disagreement. For this reason, accounting for this mark requires more resources from a theory than accounting for the mere possibility of the faultlessness of certain disagreements. In fact, what it asks for is to make space for the permissibility within a committed perspective of a judgment to the effect that the disagreement is one that does not necessarily involve fault and, consequently, that the opponent is in a certain sense (to be qualified) permitted to hold the judgment he does. Thus, whereas faultlessness is a characteristic of certain disagreements which is independent of the way in which both parties conceive of it, parity involves the mutual recognition by committed participants to the disagreement that no fault needs to be involved, and, consequently, that the opponent's judgment is somehow in good standing.

Parity presents a very interesting challenge for a theory of truth. What we need to account for is the, *prima facie* chimerical, possibility of the coexistence, within the same committed perspective, of a judgment attributing falsity to an opponent's opinion with a judgment of the permissibility of her judging that way. In other words, something along the following lines needs to be allowed for: "your judgment that *p* is false but it's (somehow) fine that you judge that way". The sense of permissibility at issue here is not simply a sign of epistemic clemency nor of pragmatic *laissez-faire*. Rather, it has to do with the fact that the normative profile of truth in the targeted area is thin enough to allow for the permissibility of a judging supporting a contrary proposition from within a committed perspective.

This is a very hard task. We need to take care of important distinctions concerning the way(s) truth normatively shapes enquiry in different domains. Once we have this on the table we will be able to account not only for the various marks of the ordinary view, but also for some important distinctions – that I shall introduce in a moment – concerning the extent to which these marks apply in the different areas of discourse we are interested in.

§2.5 Some Asymmetries in Disagreements beneath Cognitive Command

In this section, I aim to accomplish two things. First, to highlight and discuss systematically some important differences in the way the marks just illustrated apply in the domains of taste, morality and humor. Second, to provide an explanation of these differences in terms of the normative role that truth plays in these various domains. Accordingly, the overall dialectic of the section is the following: I discuss how the various marks of the folk conception apply to disagreement; in so doing I highlight some symptomatic differences and I provide what I take to be the best explanation of these differences. My main thesis is that what is doing the explanatory work is the fact that truth exerts a variable normative control on judgments in different areas.

Although some of the explanatory points made in this section rely on material that will be extensively discussed in the next Chapter, this should represent no impediment to a full understanding of the section. In case the reader has the desire to know more about these different ways in which truth normatively shapes enquiry, s/he can have a look at the relevant sections in the next Chapter and then return to this section later.

Granted that, *ex hypothesi*, the *conflict in judgment* feature is invariant from one domain to another – as long as the truth-aptness of judgments is guaranteed – I will leave this feature aside and begin by discussing how the folk conception differs with respect to parity.

§2.5.1 Parity

The first thing to observe is that there is a stark contrast in parity between disagreements about matters of taste and disagreements about moral issues. A disagreement in judgments of taste would often be taken by the antagonists to be one in which both participants would consider the opponent to be within her rights to judge the way she does. On the contrary, a disagreement in moral judgments would be generally considered to dig deeper than that

and, in fact, to put considerable pressure not only on the correctness of the opponent's judgment, but also on the good standing of his moral standpoint and thus on the very permissibility of that judgment.

§2.5.1.1 *Parity in the Moral Domain*

It is part of our ordinary conception of what constitutes a moral conviction that it is implicitly critical not only of any contrary judgment but also of any moral standpoint that issues such a contrary judgment.

To illustrate the point, consider again our example of moral disagreement between Asia and Bill. The fact that Asia judges that torturing people is always wrong, no matter what they did, is implicitly critical not only of Bill's judgment that torturing terrorist prisoners to obtain important information is an acceptable practice, but also of Bill's moral standpoint that elicits such judgment. Asia takes Bill's moral standpoint to be the wrong one to have, because it attributes a higher moral value to issues concerning homeland security than to issues concerning basic rights about human beings. This is unacceptable for Asia given the moral standpoint she endorses. Symmetrically, Bill judges Asia's ranking to be unacceptable given his moral standpoint.

Thus, what the disagreement between Asia and Bill ultimately brings to light is the fact that they have conflicting moral standpoints. Asia judges Bill's moral standpoint to be defective, and the same holds for Bill. More specifically, both subjects consider the judgment of their respective opponent as impermissible. The exact nature of this shortcoming is not something I will investigate here. Whatever it is going to be, it must be something deeply entrenched in our conception of a fully committed moral judgment. In fact, an unconditional commitment to a moral judgment is a commitment to judge any contrary judgment not only as wrong but also as a judgment that ought not to be endorsed.

However, it is pivotal to stress that this relatively strong reaction that disputants engaging in a moral disagreement generally have is not merely a *moral* reaction, but also

an *intellectual* reaction against the lack of truth of our opponent's judgment (as we see it). In other words, the kind of shortcoming that we attribute to our opponent for holding a judgment that we deem false (and, more generally, for endorsing a moral standpoint that we believe leads to some false judgments) is not merely (and not even necessarily) a moral shortcoming but also (and importantly) an *alethic* one, which is due to the fact that our opponent endorses a judgment which fails to be true (as we see it), and thus, in this respect, one she ought not to have. Notice also that what exactly is the relation between these two kinds of shortcoming is not easy matter. However, unless we have an argument to the contrary, we should consider them as distinct and, to a certain extent, explanatorily independent. In particular, we should not take the specific kind of alethic concern we have with respect to someone who endorses a moral belief we judge to be false as determined (or otherwise explained) by the moral concern we have with such a person. After all there are cases of moral disagreement in which, although we believe that our opponent ought to change her mind with respect to her judgment because it is false (as we see it), we do not automatically back such an intellectual criticism with a moral criticism of our opponent as a moral agent.¹⁰⁹ We should not automatically assume that just because we evaluate a certain moral judgment as false (and thus one that ought (alethically) not to be had) we are also committed to evaluate it as immoral (and thus that ought (morally) not to be had). In many cases these two evaluations go together, but it should not be assumed that they always do. After all, questions concerning the alethic status of a judgment and questions concerning its moral status are, and should be, two distinct sets of questions.

Although I take this to be a characteristic trait of many moral judgments, we should be wary of unsupported generalizations. The broad picture is not black and white, but it

¹⁰⁹ As an illustration of this, consider Putnam's description of the political disagreement between Nozick and himself: "But what of the fundamentals on which one cannot agree? It would be dishonest to pretend that one thinks that there are no better and worse views here. I don't think that it is just a matter of taste whether one thinks that the obligation of the community to treat its members with compassion takes precedence over property rights; nor does my co-disputant. Each of us regards the other as lacking, at this level, a certain kind of sensitivity and perception. To be perfectly honest, there is in each of us something akin to contempt, not for the other's mind—for we each have the highest regard for each other's minds—nor for the other as a person—, for I have more respect for my colleague's honesty, integrity, kindness, etc., than I do for that of many people who agree with my 'liberal' political views—but for a certain complex of emotions and judgments in the other." (Putnam, 1981:165 – From Kalderon, M.E. (2006):36).

has many grey areas. There are many judgments that are located at the periphery of the moral domain. There are two main borders, as it were, at the periphery of the moral domain. On the one hand that between morality and custom;¹¹⁰ on the other hand that between morality and the law. With respect to such peripheral judgments, the characteristic trait just discussed might not apply (at least not for the same reason, in the legal case). However, the important point is that a core set of moral judgments – what we might call *fundamental* moral judgments –¹¹¹ has such a feature.

It is worth pointing out that the feature of fundamental moral judgments that elicits a substantive criticism of an opponent's moral standpoint should not necessarily be taken as the manifestation of intolerance of the opponent's point of view. To say that a judgment is wrong, and indeed one that ought (alethically) not to be held, does not necessarily imply that we ought to be intolerant with respect to those who hold it. Nor does it entail that we should attach no moral value at all (or even negative moral value) to it. A commitment to consider the judgment as false and one that ought not to be held is perfectly compatible with attributing to it a certain value conditional on a different scale of values than that we endorse (at least so long as we consider the different scale of value as a viable alternative to our own).

Think, for instance, of the traditional Japanese honor culture of samurai. Even though we consider the ethics behind that culture as the wrong one to have in that it imposes some moral obligations about what a man ought to do in certain situations that we deem unacceptably demanding by the standards of our culture, we might nevertheless understand how a certain culture can attribute positive moral value to such ethics. We can appreciate the moral reasons that support that judgment because such an ethical system is

¹¹⁰ What is the relation between principles of etiquette and moral principles is hard to say. One might argue that there is no boundary between the two categories. Principles of etiquette are moral principles. Being rude is a trait of a bad moral character, while being polite is a trait of a good moral character. This is, for instance, the thesis defended by Stohr, K. (2012). Although I sympathize with Stohr's view that there is no sharp boundary between morality and manners, I nevertheless believe that there is a sharp contrast between some fundamental moral issues and matters of etiquette especially in terms of the issue of the permissibility of a contrary judgment.

¹¹¹ We should not put much weight on the word 'fundamental' here: what I mean is basically judgments that are paradigmatically moral such as, for instance, that murdering innocent people is morally deplorable, that abortion is generally a morally acceptable practice, etc.

within the boundaries of our moral reasons. Thus while in the light of our own ethical system we are committed to judge (some of the) moral judgments that follow from an endorsement of samurai ethics as wrong, we are not committed to consider samurai ethics on the whole as devoid of any moral value. In fact we are in a position to appreciate how some people might reasonably endorse such an ethical system, presumably on the basis of some partial overlapping between our own scale of fundamental values and the one required by (some varieties of) samurai ethics.¹¹² This is certainly not true for other ethical systems, such as that underlying some racist ideologies that are committed to some fundamental principles that we would deem as ethically abhorrent under any reasonable stretch of our moral standpoint.

In order to understand this contrast it is useful to distinguish between three levels of moral evaluation. Firstly, there is the evaluation of what we might call a first-order moral judgment. For instance, we (e.g., XXI century Europeans) evaluate a Bushido Samurai's judgment that the practice of seppuku is morally required whenever they are dishonored, as wrong and one that ought not to be held. It is a judgment that is not permitted by the moral code we endorse.

Secondly, there is the appraisal of what first-order judgments *morally follow* from an endorsement of a certain moral code. We can, for instance, appreciate that the aforementioned judgment follows from the importance Samurai gave to honor in Samurai societies.

Thirdly, there is the evaluation of the moral code as a whole and the general ethical principles it relies on. This kind of evaluation is a rather complex one and it might involve significant knowledge of some salient cultural and sociological aspects of the society in question. Whether we would find a certain moral code on the whole as morally reasonable in the light of our own moral standpoint will be a function of the ethical distance that there is between such code and the code we actually endorse. How to characterize this notion of

¹¹² In reflecting about the Bushido Samurai Code, we can appreciate that there are some fundamental values that are shared with a kind of Western ethics, common to many of the liberal societies we live in. See, for instance, Cleary, T. (1999), *Code of the Samurai: A Modern Translation of the Bushido Shoshinshu of Taira Shigesuke*, North Clarendon (VT): Tuttle Publishing.

ethical distance might be a rather difficult issue that I will not try to address here. The intuitive thought is that how far apart, ethically, two codes are depends on how much they share in terms of fundamental values and ethical principles. When we reflect on the Bushido code, although we evaluate it as inappropriate in the light of our moral standpoint, we are nevertheless in a position to appreciate the reasons that might have led to the adoption of such code. This is because the ethical distance between our code and the Bushido code is not too extreme. In fact, we can appreciate some local value in it and we can see how adopting such code might be conducive to a form of moral integrity that we partially share. This is certainly not the case when we reflect on some racist ideologies. Because the ethical distance between the kind of values and ethical principles we endorse and those endorsed by racists is so extreme, we would reject and deem as ethically repugnant the whole system of principles they take on board. In that case we would consider an attitude of intolerance and active intervention against such ideologies as the appropriate moral response.

In the light of these considerations, there is a strong sense in which parity seems to fail in the moral domain. Although, absent defeating conditions, neither party to the disagreement would necessarily judge the opposite party as subject to some kind of cognitive shortcoming, they would both judge their respective opponent as faulty in holding a belief that she ought not to have. This fact is certainly sufficient to put pressure on the idea that a moral disagreement is one in which parity holds.

§2.5.1.2 *Parity in the Taste Domain*

Let us now turn to the case of disagreement about taste. Our example features Ami and Bob disagreeing about whether a certain sushi is delicious. Here it seems very plausible to conjecture that neither Ami nor Bob would take such disagreement to be a very deep one, and in particular not one that casts doubt on the permissibility of their respective opponent's taste. This is because neither Ami nor Bob would take their judgments to be in any substantive sense critical of the opponent's taste sensibility. It is certainly part of the

game that each party would judge her own opinion to be the right one. This is part and parcel of what it is to make an evaluative judgment, regardless of the specific subject matter it is about. It would not be an evaluation, certainly not a committed one, if it did not have this element built in it.

However, this favorable attitude towards one's own judgment should not be taken, in the taste case, to be implicitly disqualifying of the opponent's point of view (or taste sensibility). Surely a commitment to the correctness of one's judgment is *ipso facto* a commitment to the incorrectness of any contrary judgment. However, this fact alone in the taste domain does not provide sufficient reasons to take any contrary judgment as one that ought not to be held. More specifically, absent manifest defeating conditions, neither party to the disagreement has any reason to think that the opponent should drop her own judgment and endorse the contrary one.

Hence, we can think of the taste-example as going like this. Ami judges a certain sushi to be delicious whereas Bob judges it not delicious. Both Ami and Bob regard their own judgment to be the correct one. In addition, they are both committed to regard their respective opponent's judgment as false. This much is required by the functioning of the truth predicate as operating in any domain of discourse. However, in contrast with the moral case, other things being equal, both Bob and Ami will consider their opponent as being within his/her own right in judging the way s/he does. Ami (Bob) would consider Bob's (Ami's) judgment as false but yet a fully legitimate one to have.

One might object to this point that it is not so unusual to hear people saying things like – “You have such bad taste!” – in response to a disagreement about a specific matter of gustatory taste that we particularly care about. Thus, the criticism goes, it is not true that the folk would always consider disagreements about taste to be as innocent as I presented them to be. There are cases in which a first-order judgment about taste issued in reply to a contrary opinion leads the judging subject to a criticism of her opponent's taste sensibility.

My reply to this point is to concede that as far as the folk are concerned they might fail to see the contrast between the moral and the taste case in certain situations where, for example, they contingently attribute particular importance to a certain dispute about taste.

There are in fact some manifest tensions in the folk conception about these issues, which suggest that they are not fully aware of the correct distinctions between cases of disagreement in various domains. This granted, the question is whether folk have any right to be critical of the way an opponent judges merely on the basis of the presence of the disagreement. The case just described does not seem to license such criticism. However, one might worry about other cases that seem, at least *prima facie*, more problematic under this respect.

In fact, it is not hard to imagine some, perhaps extreme, cases in which we would consider a certain judgment of taste one that ought not to be had. Suppose that young Tom does not know the poisonous effects of the *amanita muscaria* mushroom and, because of its sweetish taste, he judges it delicious.¹¹³ In this case, there is a clear sense in which we would consider Tom's judgment as one that ought not to be had. Thus, it seems as if the contrast I was trying to illustrate between the moral and the taste case is not as sharp as I take it to be.

My reply is that we should be careful about where to locate the source of the fault in question. It seems clear that in the example just discussed the source has nothing to do with the fact that we are committed to evaluate his judgment as false. Rather, the reason why we think that Tom ought not to judge the way he does is because if he were to act upon such judgment quite bad consequences for his health would follow. In other words, the reason for why we attribute fault to Tom judging the way he does has primarily to do with the bad consequences that would result in acting upon such judgments, and not in the fact that we are committed to regard his judgment as false. After all, the reasons why we think Tom ought not to judge the way he does are clearly not reasons concerning gustatory taste. What we should say is that although Tom's judging that way is perfectly permissible, what he ought not to do is to act upon that judgment and keep eating the mushroom.

To sum up, the considerations of this section provide a good case for the thesis that parity holds for ordinary disagreements about matters of taste. Participants to a taste disagreement would not generally consider a contrary judgment as impermissible (i.e., one

¹¹³ Thanks to Jinho Kang for this example.

that ought not to be made), even though they would naturally judge it as false.

§2.5.1.3 Parity in the Comedic Domain

Let us now consider the case of disagreement about comic matters. There is a sense in which the disagreement between Amanda and Ben would be much like a disagreement about matter of taste. Assuming that there are no defeating conditions operating in the context and they both understand the content of the joke perfectly well, we would expect that both Amanda and Ben consider the fact that their respective opponent judges the way s/he does as in good standing. They would not take their contrary judgment to be implicitly critical of their opponent's sense of humor – at least not in the strong sense in which we would take a contrary moral judgment to be critical of our opponent's moral standpoint. In this respect, it is plausible to conjecture that we have a similar conception of disagreements occurring in the taste domain and in the comedic domain.

However, in the comic case there might be an extra element that is absent in the taste case. This element has to do with a certain kind of intellectual achievement associated with judgments about funniness. Humor, and in particular jokes, are generally thought of as possessing a kind of intellectual value the enjoyment of which requires certain intellectual virtues such as ready wit and liveliness.¹¹⁴ In this respect, a judgment about whether a certain thing is funny frequently involves cognitively synthesizing the material we receive. Although it might be that this element of intellectual achievement is not a universal characteristic of comic judgments, intended in its broadest sense, it is nevertheless a very common trait of many of them. This is certainly true of judgments concerning whether a certain joke is funny or not. The fact that a joke amuses us surely involves a variety of different factors some of which are psychological, others emotional.

¹¹⁴ Aristotle, for instance, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* attributes a particular virtue to humor and jokes which he calls *eutrapelia* (εὐτραπλία). He writes: “Concerning what is pleasant in amusement, the person in the middle is witty and the disposition is wit, the excess is buffoonery and its possessor a buffoon, while the deficient person is a kind of boor and the disposition is boorishness”. (Aristotle, *Eth. nic.* II 7, 1108a 23-24).

However, most characteristically, it involves, to a variable degree, a particular kind of understanding concerning not only the literal content of the joke (which, in turn might require substantial knowledge of the subject matter the joke is about) but also of other factors, e.g., the point of the joke as the joke-teller conceive of it. We express this element of intellectual achievement in response to a joke by saying things like: “you got the joke”. From a first personal perspective, there is usually a sense of self-congratulation when we have a response of amusement in relation to a joke. We think we have achieved something.

As before, we should be careful in drawing generalizations from these brief remarks. For one thing the category of comic judgments is incredibly vast and heterogeneous. Moreover, we sometimes judge things funny that we might consider insignificant or even silly. For instance, we might be amused and judge funny things like – to use a classic example, – a man slipping on a banana peel on the street, or the unexpectedly bizarre behavior of a usually orderly colleague at a formal meeting. These are cases in which no particular intellectual achievement seems to be associated with our judgment of funniness.

It is certainly an interesting question why we tend (almost universally) to judge these things funny. According to a popular view on the philosophy of humor – known under the label *the incongruity theory*¹¹⁵ – the common source of all these different varieties of judgments of funniness is the realization of an incongruity, something that violates our mental patterns and expectations, like, for instance, in the banana example, the recognizable frustration of an intention.¹¹⁶ We expect certain things to happen – e.g., that the man accomplishes his intention of getting to his car – but then something unexpected occurs that frustrates that intention. In such a situation, we perceive the slipping of the man

¹¹⁵ The *locus classicus* is Beattie, J., (1779), “Essay on Laughter and Ludicrous Composition,” in *Essays*, 3rd ed., London; also Kant, Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard can be counted among the advocates of this view. See Morreall, J. (2009):9-15.

¹¹⁶ What exactly this notion of *incongruity* amounts too, is something very hard to pin down, especially if we want it to be general enough to subsume all cases we would intuitively find amusing without at the same time collapsing into a rather vague concept. I think Michael Clark has given perhaps the sharpest characterization of incongruity I have come across. Following Schopenhauer, he elucidates it as incongruous subsumption under a concept which amounts to a striking discrepancy between the object subsumed and the standard instances with which it is thereby brought into relation. (See Clark, M. (1970)). Far from being satisfactory, it is nevertheless a first attempt towards a useful definition.

qua frustration of his intention and thus somehow incongruous with our expectations in similar situations. According to the incongruity theory, this fact is, at least partly, responsible for our comic reaction.¹¹⁷ This might be common to other cases of comic judgments. For instance, in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says that one way for a speaker to get a laugh is to set up an expectation in the audience and then violate it. Analogously, Cicero, in *On the Orator*, claims that, “The most common kind of joke is that in which we expect one thing and another is said; here our own disappointed expectation makes us laugh.”¹¹⁸

The incongruity component might well be common source of comic judgments in a variety of different cases. However, we should not take it as sufficient for the presence of a comic response to a situation. There are many situations that feature a kind of incongruity that we would not judge funny (e.g., contrast the slipping on a banana case with an old woman falling down in a bus while trying to reach a seat – despite the similarity of the situation we certainly would not find it funny).¹¹⁹

Moreover, it is hardly a necessary condition. We might be amused by things that do not exhibit any particular incongruity but rather follow a regular pattern and display a quite expected development. These are cases in which we are amused precisely because our expectations of something absurd or unusual that is going to happen matches the development of the real (or fictional) situation. We are in a position to predict what is going to happen and we are amused by the fact that this is exactly what happens at the end. There are also cases of comic situations in which a certain process is set off, which is in retrospect perfectly intelligible (i.e., retrospectively the audience appreciates that that had to happened at the end of the process), but such that the audience does not see in advance that that is what is going to happen. These are cases in which we might have an initial, unreflective feeling of incongruity, which is overridden by our appreciation of the fact that

¹¹⁷ However, see Scruton, R. (1982) for a criticism of the Incongruity Theory. He proposes a theory of amusement in terms of de-valuing and subsumption under the aesthetic point of view, where both are understood as a particular mode of thought, thus still involving some substantial elements of cognitive sophistication.

¹¹⁸ Cicero, *On the Orator*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham. Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942), Book II, ch.63.

¹¹⁹ Perhaps a child would find it funny because not able to conceptualize properly the situation as one in which something probably harmful for the old woman has happened.

nothing else could have plausibly happened given the way in which the situation was set up.¹²⁰ Although it is easier to find examples of the cases just described in comedies than in jokes, I think that many jokes with a rich narrative structure might offer excellent examples.

That said, I nevertheless think that the main intuition behind the incongruity theory is a good one and it is common to many cases of comic judgments. This gives credit to our conjecture that, in contrast with the taste case, comic judgments involve a more complex level of cognitive sophistication which might be seen, in most cases, as an intellectual achievement. This fact might have an impact on the issue of parity in the folk conception of comic disagreement. Let us then focus on judgments about the funniness of jokes, since they, more than other types of comic judgments, might be thought to exhibit the particular kind of intellectual achievement I have been discussing. For example, it is plausible to think that a disagreement like the one between Amanda and Ben about whether Ted's joke is funny involves a perception of some sort of intellectual shortcoming. Although both Amanda and Ben would consider each other's judgment as an acceptable one to have, they might nevertheless think that their opponent is not at his/her intellectual best.

The kind of intellectual failure I have in mind here needs to be carefully distinguished both from the kind of cognitive shortcoming involved in the formulation of cognitive command and from the lack of a positive comic response to the joke (the case in which we are simply not amused by the joke). I think there are two main points of contrast.

Cases of cognitive shortcoming may involve, among other things, a failure in understanding the content of the joke, or a failure in perceiving some features of the joke or of the situation in which it is told that are relevant for the comic evaluation. For example, in the case of JOKE, we might fail to notice that the church in question is a Christian church, or that the two characters are Jews. These are all paradigmatic cases of cognitive shortcoming that would make our disagreement about JOKE faulty in the

¹²⁰ Stan & Ollie's comedies offer many examples of both cases: for an illustration of the second kind of cases, I recommend the reader to watch the following sketch (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKzLUX2qHKQ>).

relevant sense in play in the cognitive command.

Intellectual failures are of a different kind. Genuine cases of intellectual failure presuppose that the subject fully understands the content of the joke and he is attentive to all comically relevant features in play in the narrative of the joke. However, there still is something he fails to get. What is it exactly that he fails to get? On the one hand, he might fail to appreciate the salience of some comically relevant features of the joke. This is a failure to see the contours – as it were – to appreciate the difference in importance of the various features that compose the joke. In fact, there are all kinds of features involved in a joke. Some of them are directly relevant to the comic evaluation. The subject may be well aware of such features (e.g., the fact that the church in question in JOKE is a Christian church). However, he might fail to appreciate their salience, attributing more importance to other features that are of secondary importance for comically evaluating the joke. What we have here is a kind of failure in comic salience appreciation.

On the other hand, the subject might fail to get what is the point of the joke, what is the moral that the joke-teller wants to convey in telling the joke. This is a case in which the subject is fully attentive to all the comically relevant features in play in the joke and he fully appreciates the comic salience of those features but fails to get the point or the moral of the joke. There might be various sources of this failure. For instance, it might be a bad performance on the part of the joke-teller. In this case, it would not be an intellectual failure. Alternatively, it might be a failure on the part of the subject to synthesize the various comically salient elements. One might take this case to be just a case of cognitive shortcoming. However, it is not clear that it is. There is no misperceiving or misunderstanding of the content of the joke. The subject cognitive faculties are working perfectly fine. He is attentive to all the relevant features of the joke and fully appreciates their salience. Moreover, it is not a case involving a brute error in the cognitive processing of the relevant information in the way in which one might miscalculate the sum of the restaurant bill. It is rather more similar to the case in which a mathematician fails to ‘see’ the truth of a certain theorem once he has a proof of all the relevant sub-lemmas. Although having a proof of all the relevant sub-lemmas is sufficient to establish the truth of the

theorem, the mathematician still needs to synthesize all the information he has and make an extra-step in order to appreciate the truth of the theorem. This extra-step is not immediate and it might require a significant amount of creativity. In this respect, bracketing Carroll-style worries, it is not like failing to deduce q from the premises p and *if p then q* where the agent, solely on the basis of his knowledge of the meaning of *if...then...* cannot fail to conclude q unless some cognitive shortcoming is involved. It seems that a failure on the part of the mathematician to see the truth of the theorem is a quite different kind of failure and, importantly, one that does not necessarily involve a cognitive shortcoming in the sense in play in cognitive command. If the parallel between the failure in getting the point of a joke and the failure to ‘see’ the truth of a theorem as described is a good one, we have a second respect under which an intellectual failure might contrast with a cognitive shortcoming.

Thus, a disagreement about comic matters might elicit a kind of criticism of a genuinely intellectual nature, which is not elicited in the case of disagreements about taste where no intellectual achievement seems to be in place. This is the main point of contrast between the comic and the taste case. However, this intellectual kind of failure is not a peculiar trait of judgments about comic matters. It is shared with, at least, the moral domain where a subject, who is cognitively functioning perfectly fine, might fail to appreciate the salience of certain morally relevant factors involved in the evaluation of a moral judgment. Thus in the moral domain too we can have certain kind of failures, of an intellectual sort, that do not classify as cognitive shortcomings.

To sum up the discussion of this section: I have shown that the contrast between the moral case on the one hand and the comic and the taste case on the other hand is quite sharp. I have illustrated what I think might be a contrast between disagreements about the comic and those about gustatory taste in terms of the possibility, in the former but not in the latter, of genuinely intellectual kind of failures. Here, however, the contrast is not as sharp as the previous one. There are many grey areas, especially because of the heterogeneity of judgments in the comedic domain. Thus, it might well be that rather than a contrast, what we have here are scattered differences that are very hard to systematize.

Nevertheless, I think that, especially if we focus on the case of judgments about jokes, such differences give us enough evidence for the plausibility of such a contrast.

§2.5.1.4 *Parity and Alethic Suberogation: a Diagnosis*

I will now provide a diagnosis of the symptomatic differences with respect to the parity of disagreement in the cases discussed. The thought I want to explore is that what is responsible for such differences is the normative role that truth plays in the areas we are interested in.

As we will see in detail in the next Chapter, there are various ways (or dimensions) in which truth constrains enquiry. One of these ways, what I call the deontic dimension, is especially useful for understanding the sharp contrast in terms of parity between cases of disagreement concerning morality and taste.

It is generally thought, among those that accept that truth is a norm of enquiry, that the truth and the falsity of a judgment line up with the issue of the permissibility and impermissibility of the judgment. The idea is roughly that, other things being equal, a judgment is permissible to have just in case it is true; impermissible just in case it is false.

However, this need not be the case. As we have seen in discussing parity in the taste domain, the mere presence of a disagreement about ordinary matters of taste does not seem to license a subject to judge any contrary opinion as impermissible. And this is the case despite his commitment to judge such opinions as false. In this sense, absent defeating conditions, neither party to the disagreement has the right to claim that the opponent ought not to judge in the way she does merely because of the presence of disagreement.

The (best) explanation of why this is the case is that truth does not exert any deontic constraint in the taste domain. In other words, it is not the case that, in the taste domain, a subject ought to believe what is true and disbelieve what is false.¹²¹ The upshot

¹²¹ The notion of disbelief here encompasses both the notion of believing the negation and to suspend judgment. How to formulate this deontic principle will be discussed in the next Chapter.

is that the falsity of a judgment does not entail that such judgment is impermissible, and thus one that ought not to be had. This guarantees the possibility of the parity of disagreement in the taste domain.

In contrast, in the moral case we have that truth exerts a more robust normative control, and in particular one that imposes substantive deontic constraints. As we have seen, it is plausible to conjecture that in the case of a moral disagreement, a commitment to evaluate a judgment as false is a commitment to evaluate it not only as incorrect but also as impermissible – as one that ought not to be had. Thus in the moral domain we have that the falsity of a judgment is by itself sufficient to license an attribution of the impermissibility of such judgment. Because I evaluate that judgment as false, and because truth in the moral domain exerts a deontic constraint, I am committed to evaluate that judgment as one that ought not to be had. In this respect, I am committed to evaluate everybody who endorses a false judgment as being deontically at fault.

A perhaps better way to appreciate the point just made in connection to parity in the taste domain is by employing the notion of *suberogation* – as contrasting with that of *supererogation*.

Philosophers sometimes claim that supererogatory acts are those that are good to do but that go beyond the call of duty. More precisely we might say that an act is supererogatory just in case (i) it is morally permissible, (ii) it is not morally obligatory, (iii) it constitutes a live option for the agent, (iv) doing it is extremely worthy because it brings about some significant moral good, and (v) not doing it is not necessarily of moral disvalue.¹²²

As it appears clear from this characterization, the category of supererogatory acts is not purely deontic. It is also partially axiological. It concerns not only what is morally required/forbidden/permitted but also what is morally valuable/worth doing. In this respect, this notion is hybrid. It is more than just a permission – it is a permissible act which is valuable to do. As Chisholm puts it, supererogatory acts are “non-obligatory well-

¹²² Cf. Heyd, D. (1982):115.

doing”.¹²³ Therefore, because supererogatory acts are good but not obligatory, they are generally highly praised, and, plausibly, the degree of admiration is proportional to the magnitude of the moral good they bring about.

Heroic acts and philanthropic acts epitomize the supererogatory. Sacrificing our own life for the sake of saving many others innocent lives is clearly a supererogatory act in that it exceeds what any sensible ethical system would deem as morally obligatory while bringing about something of great moral value. Similarly the act of donating all our frills for, e.g., the construction of a hospital in an indigent area of Africa would clearly be a supererogatory act.

The notion of *suberogation* is a cousin of that of supererogation. A suberogatory act is an act that is not morally forbidden (nor obligatory) and yet undesirable in that doing it brings about some moral disvalue. A rough characterization of the suberogatory shares the first three conditions of the supererogatory. However, it differs in the last two conditions since (iv) doing a suberogatory act would be morally discreditable because it brings about something morally bad and (v) not doing such an act is not necessarily of moral value.

It is not a feature that follows from this characterization that supererogatory and suberogatory are contrary notions. This means that it is not necessarily the case that not doing something supererogatory is suberogatory, and not doing something suberogatory is supererogatory. There might be supererogatory acts such that not doing them would be axiologically neutral. The same holds for suberogatory acts.

Good examples of suberogatory acts would be acts of cowardice or indifference that are not morally forbidden but morally bad. As a concrete example, consider the following one from John Turri:

“You enter some shabby government office to take care of some annoying paperwork for some irritating responsibility. The room is packed. A sign yellowing with age greets you as you enter, ‘Please take a number and we will

¹²³ Chisholm, R.M. (1963):3.

be happy to assist you shortly.’ You take a number, 117, note with disgust that they are presently serving number 9, sit down in one of the cheap, small plastic chairs crammed along the wall, and patiently wait your turn. Hours slowly pass. Finally, your turn approaches. ‘Now serving number 114,’ the electronic display reads. You welcome the thought of soon being done with this unpleasant and aggravating experience. But you are also somewhat concerned about the older woman sitting across from you. As difficult as this long wait in cramped, uncomfortable quarters has been for you, it’s clearly been more difficult for her. It is essential that she stay and resolve an urgent matter regarding her pension, she tells you, but her aching hip is not making it easy. She continues in earnest, ‘I see that you have number 117. I have number 122. Would you mind trading numbers with me, please? I could manage either way, of course, but extending me this favor would be a relief.’ Granting her request would require you to wait in line about an extra 10 minutes.’¹²⁴

Refusing the request of the old lady would be a suberogatory act in that it would be a morally disvaluable thing to do and yet a morally permissible one insofar as we would be within our rights to refuse her request.¹²⁵

So far, I have briefly discussed the notion of the super- and sub-erogatory in their moral connotation. However, the two categories need not apply strictly to moral actions. In their very general meaning, they can be applied to the discussion of disagreement to shed light on some of its features in connection with the normative function of truth. In particular, the notion of the suberogatory might be useful to understand the issue of parity in the domain of taste. With that aim in mind, we can introduce the notion of *alethic suberogation* as follows:

(Alethic Suberogation): An act of judging performed within a domain of discourse D is alethically suberogatory just in case, although conducive to a false judgment and for that

¹²⁴ Turri, J. (2013):7.

¹²⁵ See Driver, J. (1992):286-95, for more examples and a more accurate characterization of the suberogatory.

reason incorrect, it is nevertheless not impermissible (i.e., not forbidden by the norms constraining D-enquiry).

Because the kind of normative control that truth exerts in the domain of taste lacks deontic force, the possibility of alethically suberogatory judgments is left open. By contrast, such a possibility is precluded in the moral domain where truth exerts deontic control. The source of this difference in the normativity of truth is something we will explore in the last Chapter. The thesis I will defend is that what is ultimately responsible for the difference are features belonging to the characteristic way we value getting things right, alethically speaking, with respect to different subject matters. Concisely, the fact that we value true judgments in the moral domain much more than we do in the taste domain contributes to an explanation of why truth in the moral domain exerts a deontic constraint whereas truth in the taste domain does not.

The details concerning how this works will become clear once the full framework for understanding the normativity of truth is in place. For the purposes of this Chapter the characterization just outlined should suffice for a rough understanding of the thought that in the domain of taste if two subjects who have a committed view about sushi disagree about whether a certain sushi is delicious they would judge the opinion of their respective opponent as alethically suberogatory. In this way we allow for the possibility of parity in disagreements about taste.

Now, it is important to notice that the specific ways in which we value having true beliefs (and, more in general, the project of achieving the truth) in the moral, the comedic and the taste domain need not be explicitly articulated and obeyed. On the contrary, it might be a merely implicit aspect of our practice of disagreeing in those domains. Moreover, the thesis that we value having true beliefs differently in the moral and taste domain should not necessarily be understood as offering an *explanation* of the different ways we react to the presence of disagreement in those domains. On the contrary, the suggested strategy is open to the possibility that the specific way in which we value having

true beliefs in a domain is (at least partially) constituted by the specific way in which we react to disagreements in that domain.

Thus, in order to be clear about the explanatory strategy adopted in this work, the claim is that what allows us to give a philosophical account of why parity holds in the taste (and comedic) domain but not in the moral domain is that truth is deontically silent in the taste (and comedic) domain but it exerts some deontic control in the moral domain (see §4.7.5.1 and §4.7.5.2). Moreover, what is ultimately responsible for this variation in the normative character of truth is the fact that we attribute a different value to the project of achieving the truth (and only the truth) in these different domains. However, it is not part of the strategy I am elaborating here to maintain that the different ways we value truth in different domain is something we do explicitly. Thus it is no objection to my strategy to maintain that our caring about truth differently in different domains is simply an implicit aspect of our practice of enquiry.

That said it is important to bear in mind that when we are providing a theory of the different normative significance of disagreement in a philosophically idealized environment, we need to make certain explanatory connections manifest, even though in the real practice they are not manifest. Thus, the theory I will propose and defend predicts that truth's playing a variable normative role in different domains of enquiry in virtue of the different value that enquirers attach to the project of achieving the truth in such domains is what explains the variability in normative significance of disagreement.

§2.5.2 *Faultlessness*

The discussion of the faultlessness feature runs somehow parallel to that of the parity feature. The main thought is that once the thesis that morality, taste and humor are all domains in which cognitive command fails has been established, we may still have a significant variation in the degree of fault involved in disputes in these domains. In fact, since there are various ways in which truth can be normative of enquiry, the notion of

normative fault fragments accordingly.

Differently from the case of parity, considerations of faultlessness are made from within a neutral (i.e., non-committed) standpoint. From this standpoint, the question is whether a disagreement between two committed parties holding contrary judgments is one that may involve no substantive normative fault. My thesis is that we have different answers in different domains. Absent defeating conditions, the degree of substantiality of the fault involved in different situations of disagreement is a function of the kind of normative role that truth plays in a specific domain.

In the domain of taste where the normative role of truth is very minimal, we would only have a very thin sense of fault involved in the disagreement – paradigmatically, one that needs not involve the violation of any deontic requirement on the part of either subjects. This vindicates the folk idea that generally in disputes about matters of taste both disputants are within their own rights in judging the way they do. This is in sharp contrast with the case of moral disagreements where a substantive sense of fault is at issue – precisely one that involves the violation of a deontic requirement imposed by the functioning of truth in moral discourse. In this respect, it is never the case that both disputants are within their own rights in judging the way they do. At least one of them is judging in a way in which she ought not to judge.

The case of comic judgments about jokes would appear to find itself in the middle. Insofar as many paradigmatic cases of comic judgments involve some element of intellectual achievement, the sense of fault that is at issue in many cases of comic disagreement is more robust than the one at issue in disagreements about taste. In fact, it is plausible to maintain that a disagreement concerning whether a certain joke is funny may involve some kind of intellectual failure, the possibility of which seems to be excluded in the taste case.

Once again, it is important to be clear that this sense of failure is distinct from the cognitive failure associated with disagreements in domains constrained by cognitive command. The claim is not that some kind of cognitive shortcoming is involved in the execution of a purely representational method of gathering and assessing evidence. Rather

it is that, granted that two subjects involved in a disagreement about whether a certain joke is funny are working perceptually and cognitively at their best, the possibility of some intellectual failing cannot be ruled out a priori. Such intellectual failure might be due, for instance, to a failure to appreciate the salience of certain aspects of the joke (or to excessive boorishness or naiveté).

§2.5.3 *Rational Sustainability*

Let us now discuss RATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY. It is part of the folk conception to think that disagreements in the various areas we are interested in are such that both parties to them are perfectly reasonable in sticking to their respective opinions, even in the face of an intractable disagreement. Absent defeating conditions, and other things being equal, the mere presence of a disagreement in such domains puts no rational pressure on either participant to drop his/her own judgment or lose confidence in it.

Whether an attitude of rational sustainability in the face of a disagreement is admissible is importantly connected with two related issues. On the one hand, we have the issue of whether the domain of discourse in question is one in which the folk recognize the possibility of significant expertise. On the other hand, we have the issue of whether testimony has any role to play there. In the three domains we are focusing on, both the notion of expertise and, especially, that of testimonial knowledge are generally considered problematic, but for slightly different reasons.

That said, it is plausible to suppose that the degree to which one's opinion is rationally sustainable in the light of a disagreement may vary from one domain to another and sometimes even from one situation of disagreement to another within the same domain. In what follows, I will first briefly discuss some general issues about expertise and testimony in evaluative discourse, and then highlight some of the main differences amongst the three domains that are my concern here: viz., morality, taste and humor.

§2.5.3.1 *Testimony and Expertise in the Evaluative Domain: Some General Remarks*

The presence of expertise in a disagreement may make all the difference with respect to our perception of it *vis-à-vis* RATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY. If the subject matter of the disagreement belongs to a domain for which there is commonly recognized expertise and we consider our opponent to be an expert on that subject matter, then, regardless of whether we take ourselves to have expertise on that issue as well, we think that the presence of such disagreement puts some pressure on the rational sustainability of our judgment.¹²⁶

Giving a precise characterization of what expertise amounts to is a difficult task. I have no illuminating theory of expertise to propose. According to our everyday conception, an expert about a subject matter S is a person who is recognized widely, and perhaps institutionally, as an authority in the field because possessing outstanding knowledge (or skills) about S.

The issue I am interested in is whether there is such outstanding knowledge in those domains I am primarily concerned with. In a minimal sense, there should be no problem in admitting the possibility of knowledge about matters of taste, humor, or morality. If we take knowledge to be justified true belief (plus whatever anti-Gettier condition is appropriate), then it appears clear that there is no reason to deny that there can be knowledge in such domains. We certainly have truth. We would also appear to have justification and belief (with respect to the anti-Gettier condition, things are less clear: and this is because it is not obvious to me that we can effectively construct Gettier-style cases in the taste/moral/comedic domains, primarily because of the idiosyncratic character of

¹²⁶ This claim is contested by some philosophers who have written about the epistemic significance of peer disagreement. See for instance Kelly, T. (2005) who maintains that even in the case of a disagreement with someone who you consider an epistemic peer on the subject matter of the dispute, you are rationally required to stick to your view and consider your peer to be the one who made a mistake. This is certainly not the place for a critical discussion of the various proposals in the peer disagreement debate. See Elga, A. (2007) for a criticism of Kelly's view.

justification involved in judgments within such domains).¹²⁷ Thus, in this minimal sense, we might think that there are things to know about gustatory taste (especially about wines), about the comic (especially about jokes) and about moral issues.¹²⁸

Even granting knowledge in this minimal sense, the interesting question is: what exactly is the role of such knowledge in these domains? Here, the issue of testimony becomes extremely relevant. Interestingly, despite the fact that we generally think that there are things to know, we do not give too much credit to the opinions of others as an effective source of knowledge about gustatory taste, the comic and the moral – and this is so regardless of whether we judge the source to be generally trustworthy on all other matters. This fact generates an interesting puzzle: once we have accepted that there can be moral/taste/comic knowledge, why could you not pass it on through testimony?¹²⁹

There is an ongoing debate about the possibility and epistemic relevance of testimony in the evaluative domain, broadly conceived. The territory is divided into two broad groups: on the one side, there are those called *pessimists* who think that there cannot be any purely testimonial knowledge (or even justification) in the evaluative domain. On the other side, there are those called *optimists* who think that we can make sense of the possibility of purely testimonial knowledge even in the evaluative domain. As usual in philosophy, there are people who defend a more moderate position according to which we can make sense of the idea of purely testimonial knowledge *in some* areas of the evaluative

¹²⁷ If you are a deontologist, you might think that there are Gettier-Style puzzles concerning moral worthiness. According to a deontologist, it is possible to perform the right act but for the wrong moral reason (e.g., for mere self-interest rather than duty). Kant in his *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, famously compared two shopkeepers both of whom give the right change to their customer; but while the first is motivated by duty, the second is motivated by mere self-interest (to keep the job, for instance). Thus, only the first is motivated by the right reason and thus his action is morally worthy. The second is motivated by the wrong reason and thus his action has no moral worth.

¹²⁸ There is a controversy whether we should think that there might be any knowledge in these areas. One might think that it does not even make sense to talk of knowledge in these domains. The worry can be put in terms of receptivity as a requirement for knowledge. In this sense, knowledge is a matter of receiving or tracking facts. If these are domains in which we are projecting and not receiving facts, even though we are allowed to talk in terms of (minimal) truth and derivatively in terms of (minimal) belief, there is no sense in which we can grant knowledge here. That would require an extra step. Making truth minimal does not quite give you the right to make knowledge minimal. This is a difficult issue that I will not explore here because orthogonal to the main purpose of this section. For a defense of the claim that we can have minimal knowledge, see Blackburn, S. (1993):35-51.

¹²⁹ I borrowed this formulation of the puzzle from Driver, J (2006):619-644.

domain, but not in all.¹³⁰

Thus, there are different proposals that can be distinguished on the basis of which areas of the evaluative domain they take to be open to the possibility of purely testimonial knowledge. Due to limits of space, I will not go through all different positions and scrutinize the various arguments that can be given in favor or against each of them. What I am going to do rather is to endorse a kind of moderate pessimism as applied to the domains of morality, taste, and humor. I will provide some considerations in favor of this position with the ultimate aim of defending the rational sustainability feature of (some) evaluative disagreements, while, at the same time, highlighting some differences in the three areas we are primarily interested in.¹³¹

§2.5.3.2 *Rational Sustainability in the Domain of Taste*

There is a well entrenched presumption that when it comes to matters of taste, moral judgments, or judgments about what is funny, absent manifest defeating conditions, nobody can tell better than ourselves what the truth is with respect to a certain moral, taste or comic judgment. It is difficult to know the precise nature of this element of presumption towards the deliveries of our own faculty of judgment. It is plausible to take it to be part of our ordinary understanding of what counts as an evaluative judgment.

To express it rather naively, an evaluative judgment is a judgment which contains an evaluation by the judging subject of the object/state of affairs the judgment is about. It is constitutive of an evaluative judgment that it expresses the outcome of the judger's evaluating process. Of course, we can *report* the evaluation of someone else. We can say things like: "Ami said that this sushi is delicious". However, in so doing we are not putting forward an evaluation of that particular sushi, but merely reporting Ami's point of view on

¹³⁰ For an overview (and references) of the debate between optimists, pessimists and moderates in relation to aesthetic testimony, see Robson, J. (2012).

¹³¹ The literature on testimony is growing quickly. Many proposals have been put forward and scrutinized as to how to conceive of testimonial knowledge or justification. What I am going to say here might be plausible under certain views but less plausible under others.

the matter. Alternatively, we can agree with Ami and say: “I agree with what Ami said”, where ‘what Ami said’ is that sushi is delicious. In this respect, even if the form of our judgment is not explicitly evaluative, it nevertheless contains an evaluation. Thus, what is crucial for a judgment to count as an evaluative judgment is that it expresses the deliverances of the subject who is making it.

As Kant pointed out, one important aspect of such judgments is that they are made by the subject in full autonomy. It is certainly not my intention to give a characterization of Kant’s principle of autonomy. This is surely a difficult interpretative issue, especially because Kant has not provided any explicit formulation of such a principle. However, I am interested in the general thought motivating this principle. A proper evaluative judgment has to be the product of a fully autonomous faculty of judgment – crucially, a faculty the deliverances of which do not epistemically depend on the deliverances of the faculty of judgments of other judges and also one that relies entirely on the judging subject’s rational capacities.¹³²

A full commitment to an evaluative judgment – regardless of whether it is a moral, taste or a comic judgment – is one that requires autonomy in roughly this sense: it is, at least, partly constitutive of *our judging that p* that we arrive at this judgment by way of our own reasoning and on the basis of our own experiences. If this is right, then we can understand why there is a widespread scepticism toward testimonial knowledge in these various domains. Endorsing an evaluative judgment on purely testimonial grounds would be in direct violation of the autonomy principle.

This is particularly evident with respect to judgments of gustatory taste where the justificatory grounds for the evaluation depend for the most part on the subject’s own perceptual experience of the object the judgment is about. This peculiar feature of judgments of taste is what Kant has called the *subjectivity* of judgments of taste. He writes:

“If someone does not find a building, a view, or a poem beautiful, then, first, he

¹³² As Kant puts the point: “To make the judgments of others into the determining ground of one’s own would be heteronomy” Kant (1790/2000):§32:163.

does not allow approval to be internally imposed upon himself by a hundred of voices who all praise it highly. He may of course behave as if it is pleased him as well, in order not to be regarded as lacking in taste [...] But what he does see clearly is this: that the approval of others provides no valid proof for the judging of beauty [...] that what has pleased others can never serve as the ground of an aesthetic judgment. [...] For someone may list all the ingredients of a dish for me, and remark about each one that it is otherwise agreeable to me, and moreover even rightly praise the healthiness of this food; yet I am deaf to all these grounds, I try the dish with my tongue and my palate, and on that basis (not on the basis of general principles) do I make my judgment.”¹³³

Kant’s notion of judgment of taste in the *Third Critique* is broader than the one I have been using here. It encompasses aesthetic judgments about a variety of different objects and it is not restricted to judgment of gustatory taste. Apart from this difference, and leaving aside Kant’s own idiosyncratic language, I think this quote does a good job of illustrating both the autonomous and the subjective features of judgments of taste. I also think that it captures an important element of the folk conception: that you cannot tell whether a certain sushi tastes delicious if you have not tried it yourself. As Roger Scruton puts the point:

“If *f* is a visual property, say, then it is not true that I *have* to see *f* for myself in order to know that an object possesses it: there are circumstances where the opinion of others can give me a logically conclusive reason for saying that *f* is there [...] In aesthetics you have to see for yourself.”¹³⁴

This Kantian line of thought has led some philosophers to adhere to the so-called *Acquaintance Principle*.¹³⁵ According to this principle, aesthetic knowledge must be

¹³³ Kant (1790/2000):§33.

¹³⁴ Scruton, R. (1974):54.

¹³⁵ Richard Wollheim (1980) was the first to enunciate this principle. For a defense of the Acquaintance Principle (and various formulations of it), see, for instance, Robson, J. (2013):237-245. For some recent

acquired through first-hand experience of the object of knowledge and cannot be transmitted from person to person. In this rough form the principle generates a number of important questions, and taken as a general principle applying unrestrictedly to the aesthetic domain broadly construed, it might sound problematic. However, for our purposes we can take it as an illustrative principle in the domain of taste. Restricted to this domain, the principle looks quite solid, and many of the good objections that can be raised against it when applied to the full range of aesthetic judgments lose their force.

Thus, it seems that in the domain of taste scepticism about testimonial knowledge is well justified, and indeed in line with the folk conception of judgments of taste. This of course should not be taken as a proof that we never rely on the word of others in order to take certain decisions concerning taste. For instance, we tend to trust our friend's suggestion to try a new pizzeria where, she claims, they make a delicious pizza. Or, wandering around in a new city during lunchtime, we might trust the suggestion of a perfect stranger to go to a nearby sushi bistro where, according to him, they have excellent sushi.

In this sense, we do sometimes rely on the judgments of others, and let ourselves be guided by their suggestions. However, this does not mean that we thereby come to know that the pizza that our friend judges to be delicious is in fact delicious, or that the sushi that the stranger judges excellent is in fact excellent. We reserve our judgment until after having tried the pizza and the sushi. The reason why we are inclined to follow the friend's advice is, plausibly, that we assume that our taste is significantly similar. However, no implication concerning our knowledge follows from doing so.

One might argue that if a case can be made for the possibility of expertise in taste, then claim that disagreement in the taste domain is rationally sustainable might have important exceptions. In fact, the vast majority of cases of disagreement concerning gustatory taste are those in which there is no expertise about the subject matter of the dispute. There is no recognized expertise about rhubarb and no expertise about asparagus

criticisms of the Acquaintance Principle, see for instance: Konigsberg, A. (2012):153-168; Meskin, A. (2004):65-91.

risotto.¹³⁶

Now, two questions seem relevant in this respect. One question is whether the lack of any expertise for most of our taste disagreements is something that has to do with the nature of the subject matter, or rather whether it is a contingent fact that has to do primarily with our interests. The second question is whether the presence of an established and recognized expertise should change our conception of disagreement *vis-à-vis* the issue of rational sustainability.

Concerning the first question, the right answer is that the presence of a recognized expertise has to do with historical and sociological facts about us and what we happen to value. After all, it seems an accidental, or at least contingent, fact that we have developed a rich tradition of oenology. It is easily conceivable how a different society might have developed an expertise for rhubarb as well.

For instance, consider the case of Tim, a professional farmer, who in the past few years has decided to specialize in the cultivation of rhubarb. Because of his specialization he comes to know everything that can be possibly known about this vegetable. He knows how to prepare the soil, how to plant, harvest and conserve it, all its nutritional and gustatory properties, etc. In a few years, his business grows considerably in virtue of the perfection he has reached in the cultivation of rhubarb. Consequently, he becomes a very rich and influential person in his town. Given his devotion to the vegetable, Tim decides to set up a training program that aims at training people in appreciating all the gustatory and nutritional virtues of rhubarb. The vast majority of his fellow citizens take part in the training program, and forthwith this activity becomes the main hobby in the town. In fact, an official committee for the evaluation of rhubarb is established, which counts among its members world's finest experts concerning rhubarb.

Should the presence of an actual expertise about rhubarb and thus the concrete possibility of a significant refinement of gustatory sensibilities with respect to the

¹³⁶ There, of course, is expertise concerning how to prepare an excellent asparagus risotto, in the very same way in which there is expertise about how to execute an excellent portrait. There is a substantive know-how involved in these activities. Any disagreement in that respect might be resolved in favor of the party who has more expertise on the matter. However, this is a separate issue from that concerning whether asparagus risotto is delicious. Here the notion of expertise looks much more problematic.

vegetable change our conception of disagreements about whether rhubarb is delicious? The answer is quite clear. There is no straightforward connection between the presence of expertise concerning X (together with the possibility of refinement of X -sensibilities) and the kind of judgments of taste we are focusing on. There is nothing that guarantees the fact that, because of my refined gustatory sensibilities concerning rhubarb, I should be considered a better judge of whether rhubarb tastes delicious.

To return to our story, Tim knows that his best friend Anna believes that rhubarb is unpalatable so he decides to test the efficacy of his training program with Anna, who, for the sake of their friendship, decides to accept. Tim teaches her all that there is to know about rhubarb, and how to discriminate certain aspects of her gustatory experience from others. At the end of the training, Anna has learnt a lot about rhubarb, and she is able to discriminate between different aspects of her gustatory experience of rhubarb. In fact, she is now an expert about rhubarb. Nevertheless, she continues to have unpleasant experiences every time she tastes rhubarb. Thus, she continues to believe that rhubarb is unpalatable.

This is a possible scenario in which, an accurate training notwithstanding, the subject does not change her mind about the taste of rhubarb. It is certainly true that Anna would be in a position to appreciate a wider set of aspects of her gustatory experience in tasting rhubarb than she was before the training. She is in fact able to make fine distinctions about different kinds of rhubarb, and to give recommendations about which combinations with other foods or wines are good for emphasizing certain aspects of the flavor of rhubarb. This is indeed the result of the fact that she developed much more sophisticated discriminatory abilities which enrich the quality of her perceptual information in tasting rhubarb. However, all this surplus of information does not necessarily affect her unpleasant response (even though she might be in a much better position to appreciate what makes rhubarb unpleasant). Thus, a refinement in the subject's gustatory sensibilities need not bring about a change in her basic judgment of taste. In this respect, we can appreciate why, even admitting the presence of some kind of expertise in the domain of taste, this fact would have no direct bearing on the issue of the rational sustainability of

one's opinion in the face of a taste disagreement.¹³⁷

If what I have said so far is on the right track, we have a good explanation of why the rational sustainability feature holds in the case of judgments of taste – an explanation which I take to be in line with the folk conception of disagreements about matters of taste.

To sum things up, the thought is that the rational sustainability of one's opinion in the light of a taste disagreement is granted by the conjunction of two theses: on the one hand, the indispensability of direct experience of the object of evaluation as a crucial feature of the justificatory ground for a judgment of taste; and, on the other hand, the idiosyncratic character of such an experience which explains what Kant has called the *subjective* feature of judgments of taste.

§2.5.3.3 *Rational Sustainability in the Moral Domain*

The moral case is significantly different from the taste case. Although the conclusion I want to defend is that rational sustainability is justified in the moral case as well, the strategy has to be different from that followed in the taste case. What is similar in the two cases is, on the one hand, a general scepticism about the notion of expertise on matters of morality, taste and humor; and, on the other hand, the importance of the principle of autonomy for evaluative judgments. However, the reason why autonomy matters in the moral case is different from the reason why it matters in the taste case. I will discuss the issue of autonomy first, and then I will return to the question about moral expertise.

One key move for defending rational sustainability with respect to disagreements about taste was the Kantian line of thought that led some philosophers to adhere to the acquaintance principle which is quite plausible in the taste case. However, as Wollheim

¹³⁷ Things are different when it comes to judgments concerning some specific aspect of the gustatory object in question – e.g., judgments concerning whether a certain wine is more tannic than another. These judgments involve a more substantive notion of knowledge and are taken to aim at tracking certain characteristics of the gustatory object that it has or lacks independently of our judging so. Thus, with respect to this category of judgments – which I take to be outside the sphere of taste judgments – the points I am making in this section do not apply.

observed in introducing the principle for the aesthetic domain, there is a sharp contrast in this respect with the moral case.¹³⁸ This contrast has to do, primarily, with the different role that experience plays in the two domains. The main difference is that in the case of judgments about gustatory taste direct experience of the object of evaluation is an essential and indispensable feature of the justificatory ground for the taste evaluation. This is not so with respect to moral evaluations, where the role that experience plays in the justificatory grounds for a moral judgment is generally more marginal if not dispensable.

Now this sounds *prima facie* quite a controversial claim. Some qualification is needed. The thought is *not* that direct experience of the object of moral evaluation (a certain act, behavior, decision, etc.) is never relevant for moral evaluation. If I see an act of robbery which involves some gratuitous violence I would certainly evaluate it as a morally deplorable act partly on the basis of my having experienced that act and the kind of emotions that such experience caused in me. This is certainly undeniable. The thought is rather that direct experience of the object of moral evaluation can be, in most cases, replaced by an accurate description, or an accurate act of imagination, of the scene of robbery, without losing our justificatory ground for the judgment that such-and-such an act is morally deplorable.¹³⁹ Such a description, or our imagining a robbery with such-and-such features, would provide surrogates that are generally epistemically as good as direct experience of the act *vis-à-vis* the justificatory ground for our moral evaluation. Whereas we can make sense of the idea of armchair moral evaluation, there is no sense in which we can do armchair taste evaluation.^{140,141}

¹³⁸ See Wollheim, R. (1980):233.

¹³⁹ Just to remind the reader that I am here focusing only on judgments involving thin moral concepts. What I am claiming might be quite different when considering thick moral concepts.

¹⁴⁰ From what I know, this is a relatively unexplored issue in the ethics literature. We always test our moral intuitions against hypothetical cases. However, suppose in actual trolley cases, we would act completely the opposite of how we judge in hypothetical cases. Which judgment should we say is the correct one? Which intuition should play a role in our theorizing? Many would say that we should follow the hypothetical cases on the grounds that our actual judgments and reactions are distorted by emotions. However, why think that emotions are distortions rather than valuable inputs? Although those points are worth exploring, since they are not part of my main point here I will leave them aside for present purposes. Thanks to Alex Plakias for a discussion on this point.

¹⁴¹ In opposition to sentimentalists, one might even go further on this point and maintain that in some cases the description or the imagination is better than first-hand experience *vis-a-vis* the issue of forming the best

I am aware that this claim touches on a much contested territory in moral philosophy. Some philosophers¹⁴² have in fact defended the idea that there are experiences with a genuinely moral character and that such experiences provides the right justificatory ground for our moral evaluations. A careful and comprehensive investigation of this issue would require a work on its own, and thus it is not something I can carry out in the space of this project.

Without committing myself to any particular view in moral philosophy, the only thing I need in order to get my point through is the fact that a fully legitimate and justified moral evaluation can be obtained through the exercise of moral reasoning, independently of any particular direct experience of the object of evaluation the subject might have. This claim, restricted to thin moral judgments, could, at least in principle, be accepted by philosophers who think that there are distinctively moral experiences, which play a distinctive justificatory role and access to which provide the subject with a richer justificatory ground for her moral evaluation. In fact, my claim is not to deny that experience can, and perhaps generally does, play a justificatory role with respect to our moral judgments. My point is rather that there is an alternative way to justify our moral judgments involving merely an abstract recognition of the character of the case in its morally relevant respects, and thus independent of experience, and which provides a fully adequate justificatory ground.

If this much can be accepted, then we are in a position to appreciate why the route for a defense of the rational sustainability of moral disagreement cannot go through something analogous to the acquaintance principle for the moral domain.

That said there are three points I want to discuss that are relevant to the project of defending the rational sustainability of one's moral opinion in the face of a disagreement. The first has to do with the autonomy feature of moral evaluations; the second has to do

moral judgment. In fact, one might think that the emotions and various complications that affect us in the heat of the moment when we have a first-hand experience actually cloud our judgment, rather than improving it. However, I will not argue for this point here, since it is not directly relevant with respect to my purposes. The aim here is to present the contrast between the moral and the taste case with respect to the justificatory role of experience in a way which is as neutral as possible on larger issues in moral philosophy.

¹⁴² See, for instance, Audi, R. (2013).

with moral testimony and moral responsibility; the third reason has to do with the lack of expertise with respect to moral matters.

Following a Kantian line of thought, any genuine evaluation needs to be fully autonomous, and this applies also to the case of moral evaluations. We want our moral judgments to be the product of our own thinking about and evaluation of the specific subject matter at issue. Only in this way would a moral judgment reflect the subject's moral point of view. This connects to the question of whether it is possible to gain moral knowledge on the basis of purely testimonial grounds. A belief based on purely testimonial ground would not count as *moral* knowledge insofar as it would not be the product of an autonomous process of thinking and evaluating. It would in fact be morally, as opposed to merely epistemically, irresponsible to hold a certain belief on the basis of the fact that someone else told you so.

To drive the point home, consider the following contrast. If Joel's brother tells me that Joel cannot attend the meeting because he is sick, and I tell that to my colleagues at the meeting, then if someone asks me how I know, I would tell him that his brother told me so. Absent antecedent reasons to doubt the reliability of my testimonial source, that would be taken as a perfectly appropriate justification on my part for that claim, even in a formal context of a business meeting. However, if someone points out that she has just seen Joel drinking a coffee in a bar two blocks away from work, then the person who has to be blamed as insincere, other things being equal, is Joel's brother, not me.

If, on the other hand, Joel's brother tells me that slavery is a perfectly acceptable social practice and I express to you that very judgment, then if you ask me why and I reply that Joel's brother told me so, you would not take *that* as a good reason. Doubtlessly you would react by inviting me to explain *my* reasons for that judgment. Moreover, assuming that you take me as believing so, you would blame me both for having that opinion and also for being such a morally irresponsible person.

This moral irresponsibility stems from the intuition that for a moral agent there is something wrong with relying purely on testimony for one's moral beliefs even if one knows that the source is reliable and trustworthy. This is certainly not denying that there is

a sensible and morally acceptable practice of asking for advice with respect to what we perceive as difficult moral issues. We might ask for advice because, e.g., we suspect that our judgment might not be impartial or simply because we think that others might have interesting considerations to offer about the case at issue that we have not thought about. Whatever the reason, it is clear that asking for advice is still part of a fully autonomous and responsible process of moral thinking that leads a subject to form a proper moral evaluation. Asking for advice is asking for reasons to scrutinize on an issue about which we find particularly difficult to make up our mind. In other words, there is an important distinction between relying on someone else's advice as part of the process of forming a properly informed moral judgment, and forming a belief purely on testimonial ground. To put it sharply: asking for advice is not unreflectively borrowing moral knowledge from someone else but rather bringing another person's point of view on the matter into the array of relevant considerations and scrutinizing it as part of the process that conduces to the formation of a moral judgment.

At this point, one might try to rescue the possibility of genuine moral knowledge based on purely testimonial ground by defending the idea that there are persons who can be properly judged moral experts. If our testimonial source is a moral expert then the possibility of obtaining moral knowledge from testimony might be less problematic. There are two main problems with this proposal. One problem is that it is very hard to pin down criteria for establishing whether a certain person would count as an expert on a particular moral issue which are independent of our own moral opinions about that very subject matter. In other words, as Sarah McGrath expresses it,¹⁴³ we do not have any independent check (and presumably we do not even know whether there could be any) to effectively establish whether a certain person would count as a moral expert with respect to a certain moral issue. Any method we can think of would rely at a certain point on our moral view on the subject matter at issue. And this is because telling whether a person counts as a moral expert is in part a moral judgment itself – it involves an evaluation of her moral beliefs which is essentially a *moral* evaluation – and, as such, open to controversy as much

¹⁴³ See McGrath, S. (2007):§5.

as any other moral judgment.

Granted that the notion of moral expertise is problematic, there is no denying that there are many things to know about the subject matter of a moral disagreement that might be relevant to the issue of rational sustainability. For instance, suppose that we are having a disagreement about whether it was the morally right thing to do to prosecute Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem by a district court rather than in front of an international court.¹⁴⁴ If I discover that you are a world's expert about that particular topic, this fact might put some pressure on me to reconsider my judgment. It might well be that I am not aware of some important historical events and juridical facts that are relevant for an accurate moral evaluation of the fact in question. Thus, knowledge, and indeed expertise, about some non-moral facts (in this case, about historical and juridical facts), might be relevant for the issue of sustainability in the moral domain. This aspect is not present in the taste domain, but, as we will shortly see, it is a common trait with the case of judgments about jokes. This said, however, the point still holds that, other things being equal (i.e., we are epistemic peers with respect to the subject matter of the disagreement and there are no manifest defeaters in play), the rational sustainability of my moral judgment is not jeopardized by the mere fact that you hold a contrary judgment.

If all these considerations are on the right track, we have a *prima facie* good reason for the claim that the rational sustainability of one's moral opinion in the face of a disagreement is indeed a feature of disagreements in the moral domain.

§2.5.3.4 *Rational Sustainability in the Comedic Case*

As for the discussion of the other features of disagreement, the case of rational sustainability in the comedic domain presents an interesting mixture of elements. The issue of expertise is worth thinking about, especially if we focus on jokes. With respect to jokes

¹⁴⁴ See for instance Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: Viking Press, 1963.

there might be many things that a subject has to know in order to fully appreciate it and, thus, to be in a position to have a properly informed judgment. In this respect, jokes are, to a variable extent, conditional on some background knowledge. The success of the joke will depend on, among other things, whether and the extent to which that condition is met. Such conditions might be hard to achieve, depending on how much knowledge is required, how specific such knowledge is, and on whether the hearer is able to draw the necessary connections among her background knowledge, some relevant factors of the situation in which the joke occurs, and the actual content of the joke.

This feature is not generalizable to the full range of comic judgments. For instance, the propriety of a judgment about whether the slipping of a man on a banana peel is funny typically does not require any background. Absent defeating conditions merely seeing a man inadvertently slipping on a banana peel would in most cases provide a sufficient ground for the judgment that it is indeed a funny thing.¹⁴⁵ With respect to this kind of comic judgments the question of rational sustainability would be answered in the same way in which we answered it for judgments of taste.

That said, what is the kind of knowledge that might be involved in comic judgments about jokes? In standard cases – i.e., those in which the joke is not a sort of meta-joke about joke-telling – it will not be knowledge specifically about the comic, but rather knowledge about the subject matter the joke is about. If, for example, you judge a certain joke about Italian attitudes towards food quite funny, and I do not, then in realizing that you know much more about Italians than I do, I might consider the hypothesis that I have not fully appreciated the joke and thus that my judgment about it is not a fully informed one. In such a scenario, the rational sustainability of my judgment might be

¹⁴⁵ It is of course required that the judging subject properly conceptualizes his perceptual input as being such that of a man inadvertently slipping on a banana peel. In this respect, it seems plausible to conjecture that the degree of conceptualization and cognitive complexity required by the propriety of a comic judgment, even of this *basic* sort, is higher than that required by a *basic* judgment of taste such as ‘this is delicious’. As Scruton puts it, “amusement is a mode of thought”, while deliciousness is not. The point is a subtle one, and difficult to formulate. However, the idea is that every fully competent comic judgment involves at least a certain degree of interpretation of the perceptual material that constitutes part of the ground for the judgment. This does not seem to hold for judgments of taste. No interpretation of the perceptual material is required for judgments like ‘this rhubarb is disgusting’ besides, perhaps, the ability to conceptually discriminate between rhubarb and other vegetables.

compromised.

However, it is interesting to reflect on the peculiar character of the knowledge at issue in comic disagreements. Typically, when two subjects, A and B, disagree about some mundane non-evaluative matter *s* and one of them, let us say A, possesses a substantive piece of knowledge about *s* that the other lacks, what happens is that B, if rational, in recognizing the epistemic superiority of A about *s* would not only endorse the bit of extra knowledge about *s* that A made available in the situation of disagreement, but would also change his mind about his judgment. All this, of course, is bracketing possible defeating considerations that might cast doubt on the reliability of A as an epistemic agent. In other words, *ceteris paribus*, A's extra knowledge about *s* would generally be taken by B as (perhaps sufficient) ground for changing his mind about *s* and thus endorsing A's judgment.

Now consider a case of comic disagreement involving a joke that requires some substantive knowledge in order to be fully appreciated. Take, for instance, the following joke:

To tell a mathematician from a physicist, it is enough to administer this test. Send the person into a cabin in the woods, telling him his problem is to boil water. If you have previously put a pot in the cabin, and arranged for the stove to be hooked up and for there to be a working sink, then both a mathematician and a physicist will proceed to run water into the pot, put the pot on the stove, turn on the gas, and bring the water to a boil. You cannot tell them apart. But if you fill the pot with water beforehand, then you can tell. The physicist will carry the pot to the stove, turn on the gas, and bring the water to a boil. The mathematician will empty the pot in the sink, thereby reducing this to the first problem, which has already been solved.

Tim, a mathematician, judges this joke funny while his friend Tom, who does not know much about mathematicians, judges it to be quite boring. The scenario is one where Tim knows much more than Tom about mathematicians and their strange habits. Tom is

nevertheless in a position to understand what we might call *the literal content* of the joke. There is nothing in such content that Tom does not understand. However, because he lacks the substantive piece of knowledge about mathematicians that Tim has, he is not in a position to grasp fully the joke. When Tim tells him about certain stereotypical traits of mathematicians, one thing that might happen is that Tom realizes that there is something to know about mathematicians he did not know. In this way, he comes to appreciate Tim's reaction of amusement to the joke and he starts doubting whether his judgment that the joke is not funny is a fully legitimate one.

However, it is not so clear that Tom can use this piece of extra knowledge about mathematicians' habits as a ground for changing his mind and thus endorsing Tim's judgment, as typically happens in cases concerning purely factual matters. Whether Tom endorses Tim's judgment will depend on whether in coming to know the extra bit of information required for fully appreciating the joke he will in fact be amused by it. There is no guarantee that in knowing more about mathematicians and thus fully appreciating the comic potential of the joke Tom would be amused.

As Jonathan Dancy pointed out in connection with jokes,¹⁴⁶ it is important to distinguish between two different ways in which factors belonging to the background conditions work. On the one hand, we have factors that enter into the grounds of the comic judgment. On the other hand, we have factors that work as enabling conditions for a certain comic response without being part of the ground for the corresponding judgment. For instance, there are some jokes about people that it would be cruel to tell in their presence, but funny to tell in their absence. In these cases, their presence is part of the ground for the cruelty; it is part of what makes telling the joke cruel rather than funny. There are other jokes that are only funny in the presence of their victim, and which, in that case, are funny to everyone present, to the victim as much as to everyone else; if the victim of the joke were not there, that would take all the fun away. However, that the victim of the joke is present is not part of what makes the joke amusing. It is a feature in the absence of which the joke would lose its comic potential.

¹⁴⁶ Dancy, J. (2004):172.

If we endorse this distinction, then the kind of knowledge that is required in order to appreciate a joke would typically work as an enabling factor rather than being part of the grounds of what makes a certain joke funny. It is important that such knowledge is present as a background condition before the joke is experienced. We all know very well that, in many cases, explaining a joke to a person who does not fully grasp it by providing the required information has the effect of spoiling the joke. As a result of this process, even though the subject would now be in a position to grasp fully the joke he would not be amused by it.

This is a familiar feature of jokes. In order to properly judge a certain joke to be funny we do not only have to know a bunch of stuff which is relevant for fully grasping the joke, but we also have to have a genuine response of amusement. The point is that there seems to be no straightforward logical connection between the two. If after Tim's explanation of some peculiar traits of mathematician, Tom does not judge the joke to be amusing that should not lead us to think that there must be something wrong either with Tim's explaining the joke or with Tom's cognitive faculties. What we may have is rather a basic difference in sense of humor between Tim and Tom.¹⁴⁷ In this case, both would be perfectly rational to sustain their respective judgments in the light of the disagreement.

§2.6 Concluding Remarks

In this Chapter I hope to have accomplished two things. On the one hand, I have outlined and critically discussed some important features concerning disagreement in various areas of the evaluative discourse and how they are manifested differently in different areas as a function of the subject matter at issue. These features are taken to be part of what Wright has called the *Ordinary View* of disagreement – and as such they give us a set of desiderata

¹⁴⁷ I have used a subjunctive 'may' rather than an indicative mood here because one possible outcome is that Tom does not judge the joke to be amusing simply because Tim's explanation had the effect of ruin the comic potential of the joke and not because is sense of humor is actually such that

for our account of disagreement. On the other hand, I have provided what I take to be the best explanation of these differences in terms of the different normative role that truth plays in the various areas of the evaluative domain. This explanation gives us some motivations for the framework for the normativity of truth I will discuss in the next Chapter. Once the framework is worked out in all its detail, we will be in a position to appreciate the full explanatory potential of the proposal of this Chapter.

In this Chapter, I have focused in particular on three categories of evaluative judgment: judgments of taste, moral judgments and comic judgments. The sample of examples discussed here is limited. Many other examples should be considered in order to have a more comprehensive and systematic account of disagreement in the evaluative sphere. Nevertheless, I think that the examples I considered are representative enough to pin down some structural differences in terms of the normative role that truth plays in various areas of the evaluative domain. Here is a chart that summarizes the results of our comparative analysis:

	Cognitive Disagreement	Parity	Faultlessness	Rational Sustainability
Taste	YES	YES	Deontic	YES
Moral	YES	NO	NO	YES
Comic	YES	YES	Deontic	YES

The main contrast I have highlighted is that between moral judgments, on the one hand, and taste and comic judgments on the other. Truth in the moral discourse exerts a *sui generis* deontic constraint: the truth of a moral judgment commits anybody holding that judgment to consider anyone holding a contrary judgment not only as wrong but as judging in a way that she ought not to. There is a *sui generis* kind of deontic fault associated with substantive moral disagreement. This normative feature of truth seems to be lacking both in the domain of taste and humor. Here a disagreement does not

necessarily involve any deontic fault on the part of either party. In disagreeing with you about whether sushi is delicious, I am not licensed to think that you are endorsing a judgment that you ought not to have.

The contrast in the deontic constraint that truth exerts in these domains results in a difference in the way in which the parity and faultlessness features are manifested. Although disagreements in all the three domains I consider are such that they do not need to involve any cognitive shortcoming – they are domains where cognitive command fails – moral disagreements may involve a kind a fault (what I called *deontic fault*) that comic and taste disagreements are immune to.

This gives us a sharp contrast between moral disagreements, on the one hand, and comic and taste disagreements on the other. However, what should we say about the comparison between disagreements in taste and humor? Here I have noted that the contrast is less sharp. I have conjectured that it might be captured by reflecting on the fact that disagreements about whether a certain joke is funny may involve an element of intellectual evaluation that is absent in the taste case. In disagreeing with you about whether JOKE is funny, I might be licensed in thinking that you did not get the point of the joke (even assuming that you fully grasped the literal content of it). On the other hand, you might judge me as being silly in being amused by such a childish joke. Thus, there might be an element of intellectual snobbery associated with comedic judgments which seems absent in the case of judgments of taste where no substantive cognitive or intellectual elements are involved in the making of the judgment.

How exactly ought we to model these differences in terms of the normative profile of truth will become clear after we have discussed the framework for understanding the normativity of truth that I intend to adopt in this work. I will provide an outline of this framework in the next Chapter. In Chapter 4 I will fully elaborate my proposal and discuss which account of truth best suits our purposes.

Chapter 3

Dimensions of the Normativity of Truth

§3.1 Introduction

In this Chapter, I will outline a framework for conducting my investigation of the normative aspects of enquiry. For reasons that have to do with the main interests of this thesis, I will elaborate the framework using the notion of truth. However, I intend the framework to be fully general and neutral with respect to which notion (truth, justification or knowledge) we take to play the primary normative role in enquiry.

§3.1.1 *Dimensions of Normativity*

There is a widespread consensus among philosophers that beliefs, and more generally the practice of enquiry are governed by norms, even though they disagree about what these norms are. Four proposals have been prominent in the recent debate: one says that enquiry is normatively constrained by truth; another proposal takes justification to play that role, a third one takes knowledge, and another one takes understanding to be normative of enquiry. Regardless of which of these notions we take as the primary norm of enquiry, there is a more general and fundamental question that we need to deal with – namely, what do we mean when we claim that enquiry is governed by norms? Let us X be one of the notions listed above. It is common to hear philosophers saying one (or more) of the following things:

- (G) Beliefs aim at X (or X is the aim of enquiry).
- (N) A belief is correct if, and only if, it is X.
- (D) A subject ought to believe what, and only what, has X.
- (A) It is valuable to have beliefs that are X (and only beliefs that are X).

These claims are about different aspects of what we might call in general the normativity of beliefs and enquiry. What the list above suggests is that we have a set of interrelated but distinct concerns: i. What is the *telos* of beliefs (or, more generally what we aim at in engaging in enquiry)? ii. What counts as a *correct* belief? iii. What ought we to do in order to engage correctly in enquiry? iv. What is the "good in the way of beliefs"?¹⁴⁸ These various concerns are formulated specifically in terms of belief and enquiry, but they can be thought as applying more generally to practices of a certain kind. Thus, on the basis of these questions, we can individuate the following four dimensions of the normativity of practices:

- TELEOLOGICAL The teleological dimension concerns what is the characteristic objective of the practice and what people are aiming at in taking part to the practice.
- EVALUATIVE The evaluative dimension consists of the set of criteria for the good standing (or, more specifically, the correctness) of a move – the standard for what counts as a correct move.
- DEONTIC The deontic dimension concerns which moves a subject ought to make and which she ought to avoid in order to be correctly taking part to the practice.
- AXIOLOGICAL The axiological dimension concerns questions of the value of a practice and the value of its characteristic aim.

In this chapter, I will discuss these different aspects of the normativity of practices in the

¹⁴⁸ See James, W. (1975).

order they appear in the list. But before proceeding, some preliminary clarifications are in order. Firstly, the list presented here is not meant to be exhaustive. I take it to be fairly representative of the kind of things philosophers generally claim when they discuss the issue of the normativity of belief and enquiry, even though there might be other factors relevant to the discussion.

Secondly, I am here attempting to provide a framework for discussing the norms governing enquiry under the assumption that all the various dimensions discussed here are relevant to that issue. However, some philosophers may contest the relevance of one or more of these dimensions.

Lastly, in my discussion I will exploit the rather familiar analogy with the activity of playing a competitive game.¹⁴⁹ I think that the analogy is instructive in many ways and it helps in sharpening some important distinctions.

In the rest of this introductory section I will say few things about judgments, beliefs and enquiry and how they relate to competitive games and practices in general.

§3.1.2 *Some Preliminary Clarifications*

To avoid possible confusion and ambiguity, let us first state some elementary facts. The word 'belief' is subject to the process-product ambiguity. In the philosophical jargon, the verb 'to believe' may in fact be used, in its progressive form, to refer to the mental act of believing (or coming to believe) a certain propositional content, as well as, in its static form, to refer to the mental state with the corresponding propositional content.¹⁵⁰ In relation to the act-sense of 'belief' we might also speak of the *activity* of believing as that kind of activity which characteristic acts are acts of believing a certain content *p*. I propose to use the term 'judging' for the mental act of forming a belief with a certain propositional

¹⁴⁹ See Dummett, M. (1959), (1973), Williamson, T. (2000), and Wittgenstein, L. (1953).

¹⁵⁰ The distinction between progressive use and static uses of the verb 'to believe' does not seem to apply to ordinary English where there is linguistic evidence for claiming that belief ascriptions are classified aspectually as state descriptions – see Chrisman, M. (2012a) on this point.

content, and use 'belief' and 'judgment' for the mental state which is the product of the judging process.¹⁵¹ Judging that p is more than mere mentally affirming that p , given that affirming does not entail that the subject believes that p while judging does.

Moreover, 'belief' is also subject to a state-content ambiguity. By 'belief' one might mean the propositional content which is believed; or one might mean the token mental state of being in a belief relation with a certain propositional content. A and B might both believe that A won the race and so believe the very same propositional content, even though their mental states are numerically distinct and might have different cognitive and emotional effects (such as for instance causing pleasure in A and distress in B). In what follows I will use 'belief' indiscriminately between the content and state senses, unless the distinction is significant for our discussion, in which case I will distinguish between the two senses.

Judging is just one canonical way of forming beliefs in the sense that if I am judging that p is the case then I believe that p . There are other processes that are typically conducive to the formation of beliefs and do not require nor presuppose an act of judging – for instance, perception and, more controversially, testimony.¹⁵² With this clarification at hand, when we are talking of the norms governing beliefs, what we have in mind are the various norms and rules that govern both the *activity* of judging and the state of belief. Thus, more ecumenically, we can talk in terms of norms governing enquiry. I take it that beliefs, judging and enquiry are related in the following way: we can think of enquiry as that kind of cognitive practice whose characteristic acts are acts of judging. More specifically, enquiry into a subject matter M can be thought of as the general practice of gathering and assessing relevant evidence for M -propositions, eventually resulting in one

¹⁵¹ The idea that judging that p is the mental act that conduces to the formation of the belief state that p is endorsed, among others, by Peacocke, Crane and Williamson. See Peacocke, C. (1998), 'Conscious Attitudes, Attention, and Self-Knowledge', in Wright, C., Smith, B., and Macdonald, C. (eds.) *Knowing Our Own Minds*, Oxford: Clarendon Press: 88; Crane, T. (2001), *Elements of Mind*, Oxford: Oxford University Press: 104; Williamson, T. (2000):35. For a critical discussion of this thesis, see Cassim, Q. (2010) "Judging, Believing and Thinking", *Philosophical Issues* 20: 80-95.

¹⁵² The question whether testimony presupposes some sort of judging concerning the reliability of the testimonial source is one of the core disagreements between reductionists and anti-reductionists. For a recent reductionist proposal see Fricker, E. (2006); for an anti-reductionist account of testimony, see Coady, C.A.J. (1992); Burge, T. (1993).

of the following mental states towards *M*-propositions: belief, disbelief or suspension.

In what follows I will primarily focus on the norms governing the activity of judging and its characteristic products, namely beliefs. However, I will sometimes talk in terms of norms governing enquiry and norms governing beliefs interchangeably.

§3.1.3 *Norms and Rules of Purposeful Practices*

Judging, enquiring, as well as playing a competitive game, are all activities governed by rules that constrain both the shape of the activity – what the activity is like – and the correct execution of the activity – what counts as a correct move within it. There are at least two general conceptions associated with the word ‘rule’. Under one conception of ‘rule’, rules *regulate* the execution of a pre-existing practice in the sense that by establishing what counts as a correct execution of the practice they prescribe which moves to make to achieve that aim. In order to avoid confusion I will use the term ‘norms’ to refer to this conception of rules, and I am going to discuss norms later on in the Chapter.

Under a second conception, and I will reserve the term 'rule' for this conception, rules *determine* a practice both in the sense that they determine what counts as a move of the practice, and in the sense that they constitute the set of admissible moves that a participant is allowed to make, for any particular state of the game or practice. In other words, they jointly constitute the conditions under which a pattern of movements is an admissible move of the practice and they settle what the rights of each player are. They do not strictly speaking prescribe what to do, but they proscribe what it should not be done. They *rule out* all patterns of actions that are not allowed.

Although, formally, a pattern of movement that is not admissible by the rules of the practice would not count as a move of the practice, performing an inadmissible move must be intelligible in the context of the practice if we do not want to exclude the possibility of cheating or other forms of malpractice. Rules might be breached occasionally and this fact does not represent any serious danger to the integrity of the practice. The practice still goes

on and if the irregularity is noticed then, if possible, the pattern of movement that led to such irregularity has to be undone. However, persistent malpractice and frequent disregard of rules poses a serious threat to the practice and cannot be tolerated on pain of impracticability – i.e., of precluding the very possibility of successfully performing the practice. Participants to a practice need to conform to rules, by and large; and in order to satisfy this condition they need to be sensitive to the distinction between complying with a rule and breaching a rule.

One consequence of the fact that a certain practice is determined by a set of rules is, as John Rawls has pointed out, that the practice is prior to its characteristic moves:

[G]iven any rule which specifies a form of action (a move), a particular action which would be taken as falling under this rule given that there is the practice would not be described as that sort of action unless there was the practice.¹⁵³

The thought is that certain patterns of movements count as moves of a certain practice – and so they would fall under the set of rules determining the practice – only once the practice, with all its rules and objective(s), is in place. But, what kind of priority are we talking about here – temporal, metaphysical or conceptual? If what we mean is temporal priority the claim does not seem right. In fact, it is plausible to maintain that the practice and its characteristic moves come to exist at the very same time. In determining the practice by specifying rules and objective(s) we also determine the set of characteristic moves of the practice. The priority in question here is not metaphysical either because the counterfactual – if the practice with its set of constitutive rules and its objective(s) were not in place then such-and-such a move would not exist – is false. The existence of a certain pattern of movements that corresponds to what, once the practice is in play, we would call *move-such-and-such*, is independent of the existence of the practice. Perhaps such a pattern of movements would hardly be performed given that most of the time it would result in a purposeless action. Thus the priority in question has to be conceptual, if

¹⁵³ Rawls, J. (1955):24.

any. A certain move, *qua* that move, presupposes that the practice of which it is a characteristic move is already in place. To illustrate: it is only once the rules of soccer are in play, that the pattern of movements consisting in kicking a ball inside a pair of posts linked by a crossbar in a regular position of attack constitutes an action of *scoring a goal*.

However, not all activities are like that. There are activities that do not have rules as we have specified them – in their practice-determining sense. Take for instance the activity of cutting the grass. It is certainly a purposeful activity whose characteristic aim is that of cutting the grass as one likes it. Moreover, it has a certain aesthetic and perhaps social value and it is constrained by norms of correct execution which are determined by the specific aim in play. There are good and bad ways of cutting the grass, according to how one likes it. But it does not seem that there is a set of rules that determines the shape of such activity in the very same way in which, e.g., the rules of chess determine the activity of playing chess. In other words, there are no strict rules that determine what counts as an admissible move within the activity of cutting the grass – but just a bunch of conventional ways in which people normally pursue such activity. You might, for instance, cut the grass with a mower for the sake of convenience, or you might use a scythe for the sake of being environmentally friendly, or alternatively you might want to cut each blade of grass with scissors for the sake of maniacal precision. All these are ways in which you might accomplish the aim of your practice of cutting the grass in your lawn. Whatever means you use for achieving that aim, insofar as it achieves the aim, it would count as a way of cutting the grass. In other words, there are no moves that are made within the context of this type of practice with the aim of achieving the goal of the practice, but which are not permitted by the very structure of the practice. As a consequence of this fact, we might think that the very category of permissibility (or admissibility) is not applicable here, and for the simple reason that there are no rules which determine what is permissible and what not. However, we could talk instead in terms of ways *versus* non-ways of cutting the grass. For instance, singing a song is not a way of cutting the grass. It is not just that it is a bad or prohibited way, but rather it is not a way of cutting the grass at all. Thus the activity of cutting the grass, like other similar activities such as, e.g., fishing or cleaning house,

although they manifest patterns of regularities and conventions, are not constrained by a set of rules determining the very identity of the practice.

For the purpose of our discussion here I propose to reserve the term ‘practice’¹⁵⁴ for the kind of purposeful and normative activities that are determined by a network of rules. In other words, these kinds of practices are identified in terms of patterns of characteristic moves which are constrained by a characteristic objective that orientates participants to the practice (the magnetic pole towards which they tend in pursuing the practice), a set of rules which determines the ‘geography’ of the practice – i.e., which are the various paths that can be taken given a certain situation within the practice – and a set of norms that settle the criteria for the good standing of a move. In this sense of ‘practice’, playing a game, judging, enquiring into a certain subject matter, qualify as practices.

§3.1.4 *Asserting, Judging, Believing and the Question of Intentionality*

Assertions are always the product of an intentional and voluntary activity – in the most straightforward case, that of communicating a certain content to an audience with the aim of informing or persuading it of the truth of a certain proposition. Beliefs are not intentional in this way and, in general, they are not under our direct voluntary control. Some beliefs arise spontaneously as a result of our perceptual interaction with the external environment. No substantial intention is involved in these cases, other than the minimal kind of intention required by our being perceptually attentive to particular elements of the visual field. I may, for example, be intellectually absorbed by a hard philosophical problem while looking outside the window and not forming any specific belief about the weather. In such a case I might *visually perceive* sunny weather without forming the belief that today it is sunny. This suggests that being perceptually ‘connected’ with a certain state

¹⁵⁴ This is not meant as either a descriptively adequate or a prescriptively illuminating thesis about the concept of a practice, but just as a stipulation, a piece of terminology, that is going to be useful for our purposes.

of affairs is not by itself sufficient for triggering in the subject the belief that things are so-and-so with respect to that state of affairs. Endorsing a certain proposition as a belief requires (at least) that the subject is attentive to those perceptual elements the proposition is about. And this seems plausibly something on which we can exert some, albeit minimal, control.

Besides perception, there are other processes of belief formation, which require a more substantial form of intention by the subject. For instance, there is what Shah and Velleman call *doxastic deliberation*. There are various kinds of deliberation – i.e., deliberating on what to desire, what to do, etc. The kind of deliberation they (and I) are interested in is that type of cognitive practice we engage in when we ask whether to believe that *p*. To deliberate about whether to believe a certain proposition *p*, Shah and Velleman tell us, is to engage “in reasoning that is aimed at issuing or not issuing in one’s believing that *p* in accordance with the norm for believing that *p*.”¹⁵⁵ Thus, given a certain proposition *p*, in deciding whether to endorse it as a belief we are guided by the question whether that proposition is true. In this respect, doxastic deliberation is a cognitive activity that involves a kind of intention close to that involved in other purposeful activities like playing a game and asserting. For proving whether a certain proposition is true, or solving a certain theoretical problem, we devise solving-strategies and employ counterfactual reasoning. Also, depending on the specific subject matter of enquiry, we select what we take to be the most appropriate method of enquiry in order to maximize true beliefs and minimize false ones. I will here use the term ‘judging’ in this technical sense as deliberating about whether *p* is the case. Thus, when I am asking questions concerning the normative role that truth exerts in different areas of enquiry what I have in mind are specifically questions concerning the normative guidance (*latu sensu*) that truth provides with respect to the activity of judging (or, more generally, the activity of doxastic deliberating about whether *p*). For easiness of exposition, I will sometimes talk in terms of

¹⁵⁵ Shah, N. and Velleman, D. (2005):502. According to Shah and Velleman, in this kind of practice, the only thing that matters is whether *p* is true – or, equivalently, whether it is the case that *p*. Establishing that *p* is true is *ipso facto* believing that *p*; whereas establishing that *p* is false is *ipso facto* believing *not-p* (or some proposition *q* which entails *not-p*). More on this, later.

norms governing beliefs and judgments, having in mind, more specifically, norms governing our activity of judging.

Moreover, I take acts of judging to be the primary and core acts of enquiry, and as such those to which norms of enquiry apply. In this respect, following Shah and Velleman, I consider judging a cognitive mental act of affirming a proposition that involves mentally presenting a proposition to oneself *as true*. [see: Shah, N. and Velleman (2005):503]. However, since it is not possible to judge arbitrarily, and thus to pursue enquiry while forming arbitrary beliefs, one might think that after all acts of judging are not the primary and core acts of enquiry – in fact they are not mental acts at all. But as, Shah and Velleman point out:

“The obstacle to arbitrarily judging that *p* is that one can judge that *p* only by making an affirmation aimed at giving the right answer to the question *whether p*, and an affirmation cannot be made arbitrarily if it is to have that aim. Having a non-arbitrary aim doesn't prevent the judgment that *p* from being an object of deliberation: it merely entails that the only way to deliberate about this judgment is to reason toward an affirmation aimed at correctly answering the question *whether p*. [...] There being only one way of deliberating about judgment cannot entail that there is no way at all.”¹⁵⁶

Thus it can surely be granted that there is no arbitrarily judging without thereby having to conclude that there is no deliberating involved in judging and thus that judging itself cannot be a mental activity governed by norms. However one might still object that it is acts of gathering and weighing evidence that are the core acts of enquiry, and the ones to which norms of enquiry apply, rather than judgments. This worry is particularly pressing if we consider that the phenomenon of judging is present outside contexts plausibly construed as enquiry – such as judgments directly formed on the basis of perception and all sorts of implicit judgments that we never explicitly consider. It seems correct to point out

¹⁵⁶ Shah, N. and Velleman, D. (2005):505.

that not all instances of judging are the result of a conscious deliberation by the judging subject in the way suggested by Shah and Velleman. However, I think that this is not sufficient for concluding that judging as to whether p in general cannot be a kind of mental activity constrained by (truth) norms. The presence of some form of direct awareness in the process of conducting an activity in observation of norms governing such an activity is not a necessary condition for such an activity to be properly thought of as constrained by norms. An experienced driver might certainly be driving in full compliance with the various norms constraining the activity of driving without necessarily being aware all the time of such norms and of the fact that she is complying with them. Also, concerning acts of judging, as I have already pointed out, even in cases of judgments based on direct perception, such as, for instance, my judging that there is a pen in front of me on the basis of the direct perception that I have of a pen on the table, it is required that I focus my perceptual attention on the presence of the pen and its spatial location and do that in such a way as to be responsive to the possible presence of defeaters. In other words, an act of judging whether p is the case is not merely a brute fact of perceptual responsiveness to a cluster of stimuli from the external environment, but it involves some non-trivial, albeit not always conscious, cognitive processing the criteria for the good-execution of which are given by the truth norm. Thus taking perceptual evidence at face value and forming a certain judgment on the basis of such evidence is not as innocent and automatic matter as it might seem. But these are difficult issues in the philosophy of mind and phenomenology that cannot be satisfactorily dealt with in the context of this thesis.

More importantly, though, acts of gathering and weighing evidence are not by themselves sufficient for the advancement of enquiry. We need in addition proper acts of judging and reasoning based on judgments in order to actually contribute to enquiry with respect to a certain subject matter. This is because acts of gathering and weighing evidence, taken in isolation from the process of judging are ateleological. A subject might simply go around and gather evidence concerning the number of books in a library, do that many times, and compare the various results of the counting, all this just for the sake of storing that information without aiming at forming any definitive view about the exact

number of books in the library. It is only when these acts are executed as part of the process of judging within the context of enquiry that they acquire a teleological aspect, namely that of contributing to the advancement of enquiry. In this sense I am inclined to endorse a kind of Fregean context principle as applied to enquiry according to which it is only in the context of an act of judging that acts of gathering and weighing evidence get their teleological character. It is in particular for this reason that I take it that acts of judging, and not simply acts of gathering and weighing evidence independently of the activity of judging, are the core acts of enquiry and are those to which norms apply.

However, even granting this substantive form of intention involved in judging, an asymmetry remains concerning the nature and extent of voluntary control that a subject might exert on assertions and judgments. Thus, for instance, we could certainly refrain from asserting something which is true, and which we know to be true, as well as assert a statement which we know to be false, in both cases on the basis of, e.g., purely pragmatic reasons. However, no analogous moves can be made in the case of judging. While asserting can be insincere, judging cannot. This contrast is not a contingent fact, but rather something which has to do with the very nature of judging and belief.¹⁵⁷ We cannot decide, or be commanded, to believe right now that the man running in the field over there is Alexander the Great, even if it is the Ministry of Truth that is commanding us to do so. We can certainly imagine, hallucinate or daydream that Alexander the Great is running in the field over there, but there is no way we can decide to believe that proposition *vis-à-vis* our knowledge that it false.¹⁵⁸ This is so regardless of whether we are under some serious

¹⁵⁷ According to Bernard Williams, the main explanation of this fact has to do with “the characteristic of beliefs that they aim at truth. If I could acquire a belief at will, I could acquire it whether it was true or not; moreover I would know that I could acquire it whether it was true or not”. Williams, B. (1973):148.

¹⁵⁸ I do not want to take any stance in the debate between doxastic involuntarists and epistemic deontologists but just notice the relatively uncontentious point that we cannot decide to believe what we know to be false. On the issue of deliberating or believing at will see Bennett, J. (1990); see also Scott-Kakures, D. “On Belief and the Captivity of the Will,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 54:4 (1993):77-103; Radcliffe, D. (1997) “Scott-Kakures on Believing at Will,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 57(1):145-151; Chuard, P. and Southwood, N. (2009) “Epistemic norms without voluntary control” *Noûs* 43(4):599-632. Matthew Chrisman in his (2008), offers an interesting suggestion, based on the Sellarsian distinction between rules of criticism and rules of action, of how to integrate the main intuition behind doxastic involuntarism with the possibility of a non-trivial form of doxastic rule over our beliefs (see, especially, sections 4 and 5).

threat or whether we know we would be recompensed with a precious reward to believe so.¹⁵⁹ This is not meant to deny that there are cases of self-deception, delusion, convictions based on dogmas, opinions formed on the basis of hallucinations, illusions, prejudices, superstitions or wishful thinking. These are difficult psychological phenomena and in any event rather different from the cases discussed earlier. In fact, there are significant issues about whether to call the products of these cognitive processes genuine beliefs.¹⁶⁰ Despite the undeniable fact that beliefs are not the product of a voluntary process in the very same way in which assertions are, I nevertheless think that we can make good sense of the idea that, at least in some areas of discourse, in engaging in enquiry, a subject ought to believe what (and only what) is true. I will make this point more precise in §3.4 of this Chapter.

§3.1.5 *The Analogy between Enquiry and Competitive Games and its Limits*

Although I believe that the analogy with playing a competitive game might be useful to highlight certain normative aspects of the practice of enquiry, it is important to make clear that this is supposed to be *just* an analogy, and, as such, it should not be taken as playing any significant explanatory role with respect to the normativity of enquiry. The only function it has in the dialectic of this Chapter is thus more illustrative than explanatory. It is meant to show how certain normative aspects of enquiry work in an analogous way to certain normative aspects of the practice of playing a competitive game. But, of course, there are also significant disanalogies which, nevertheless, do not make the analogy completely inapt.

Perhaps the most significant difference is that whereas in the case of the practice of playing a competitive game there is always a way external to the engaging in the practice

¹⁵⁹ Many, in fact, find the so-called *no reward principle* to be intuitively very appealing: that no matter how large a reward a subject can get in believing a certain proposition *p*, she cannot simply decide to believe *p* in order to collect that reward. See Chrisman, M. (2008):346.

¹⁶⁰ On delusions see: Stone, T. & Young, A. (1997) "Delusion and Brain Injury: the Philosophy and Psychology of Belief", *Mind and Language* 12:327-64. For a defense of the idea that there is continuity between delusions and what we might call ordinary beliefs, see Bortolotti, L. (2009) *Delusions and Other Irrational Beliefs*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

itself to know whether its goal has been reached, and so to evaluate which moves are most conducive to it, this does not seem to be the case with respect to enquiry. As Davidson, Rorty and other philosophers (see in particular Rosenberg (2002)) have pointed out, for the practice of enquiry there is no Archimedean point independent of the practice itself from which we can know whether truth has been reached and evaluate which moves are more conducive to it. In order to check whether the goal has been achieved the only thing we can do is to engage in more enquiry. In this respect it seems clear that the way the practice of enquiry relates to its putative aim of truth is different from the way, e.g., making chess moves relates to the aim of checkmate. From this fact, both Davidson and Rorty conclude that truth cannot be a goal in enquiry – surely not in the same sense in which checkmating is the goal of playing chess. They write:

“We know many things, and will learn more; what we will never know for certain is which of the things we believe is true. Since it is neither a visible target, nor recognizable when achieved, there is no point in calling truth a goal.”¹⁶¹

“[Truth] is not what common sense would call a goal. For it is neither something we might realize we had reached, nor something to which we might get closer.”¹⁶²

The underlying thought is that in order for truth to be a goal we need to be in a position to tell whether we have achieved it or not, but, since we are fallible and we always rely on the truth of some other belief in order to do so, this is not possible. This means – according to both Davidson and Rorty – that truth cannot be a goal. By contrast, in other kinds of goal-oriented activities, like for instance playing chess, it is always the case that we are in a position to know whether we have achieved the goal of the activity or not (e.g., we are

¹⁶¹ Davidson, 2000:67. Quote from Chrisman, M. (2010).

¹⁶² Rorty, 1995:39. Quote from Chrisman, M. (2010).

always in a position to tell whether we have in fact checkmated our opponent and thus won the game).

That said, whether Davidson and Rorty are right in concluding that “there is no point in calling truth a goal” of enquiry is debatable. In general, what conclusion to draw from the observation that there is no Archimedean point from which to assess whether the aim of enquiry has been achieved is highly a controversial matter. But even granting that there is no such Archimedean point, this is not sufficient for denying that enquiry is a kind of cognitive and intellectual activity that is teleologically regulated by the aim of truth. One might in fact contest whether any legitimate aim of any purposeful activity must be such that participants to such an activity must be able to tell whether the aim has been achieved with methods whose success can be tested independently of the method of the practice itself. For instance, one might think that the following sense in which truth constitutes the chief *telos* of enquiry is left untouched by these Davidsonian considerations: we want to engage in enquiry in such a way as to maximize true beliefs and minimize false ones. We do that by employing methods which we take to be the ones which are maximally conducive to truth. If we discover that our preferred method of enquiry leads us away from truth, other things being equal, we stop using it and replace it with a different one which we take to be better suited to achieve the truth aim.

Now, the point is that it is not required that we are in a position to check, for any given belief, whether it is *in fact* true, and objectively so, beyond any reasonable doubt, and thus whether the method we have employed are *in fact* truth-conducive, and objectively so, using methods which are independent of those we employed in such an enquiry. All that is required in order to make sense of the idea that our cognitive activity of judging in enquiry aims at truth is that enquirers in general tend to use a certain method of enquiry until they have reasons to suspect that such method leads astray from the truth. Thus we can maintain that truth is our main criterion for the selection of effective method of enquiry. Enquiry is teleologically regulated by the aim of truth – i.e., truth functions as an end capable of constraining our policies and procedures in enquiry. In this respect truth in enquiry and winning in a game work analogously as *telos* toward which people

engaging in the respective practices aim. What we aim at in judging that p is the truth of p , in an analogous way in which what we aim at in making a certain move in game G is winning at G .¹⁶³ However, as Davidson and Rorty rightly notice, one important difference is that in enquiry we have no means to check whether the aim has been achieved beside that of engaging in further enquiry. And this is indeed a crucial difference in the two cases. There are of course many cases in which the result of a given enquiry can be assessed by means of further enquiries of different kind – e.g., perception, testimony, a priori reflection, etc – but the correctness of all these depend upon the reliability of some other method of enquiry. So we cannot check the absolute reliability of a method of enquiry but only the reliability of such a method relative to another method of enquiry. By contrast, we are always in a position to check the reliability (winning-conduciveness) a certain method in a competitive game, e.g. chess, using method the reliability of which is totally independent of the reliability of chess methods. Thus, the analogy between truth in enquiry and winning in a game does not extend that far. However it is substantive enough to give us some guidance towards a better understanding of some of the normative aspects regulating enquiry and the activity of judging.

§3.2 The Teleological Dimension

Like many other activities, playing a game and engaging in enquiry have a characteristic

¹⁶³ Matthew Chrisman argues against this kind of Rorty-Davidson line of argument by employing a distinction (inspired by Wilfrid Sellars) between ends that function as a regulative goal of an activity and ends that function as a constitutive aim of a particular activity. According to Chrisman truth functions as a constitutive aim of enquiry without functioning also as a regulative goal of that activity. The idea is that truth is not a goal that enquirers are trying to achieve in pursuing enquiry (as winning is in the case of a competitive game), but rather it is the constitutive aim of the practice of enquiry in that it partially defines the very practice. In this way, according to Chrisman (2010), “we open up conceptual space for the possibility that truth is an end capable of constraining epistemic policies and procedures even if it is not a *goal*, in the sense of being a possible first premise in a practical syllogism which turns on the efficacy of certain actions vis-à-vis that goal.” I sympathize with Chrisman’s proposal and I see no obstacle to put such a distinction into play in the framework I am proposing in this thesis.

aim. This aim is generally taken by philosophers to be an integral element of the practice in the following sense: a subject acting within the context of the practice but without the intention of achieving its characteristic aim, would not qualify as taking part to that practice. What plays this teleological role in the case of enquiry is a matter of philosophical discussion. I will state the teleological principle in terms of truth. I will begin the discussion by making some general observations concerning the teleological aspect of competitive games.

§3.2.1 *Winning as the Telos of Competitive Games*

Competitive games are typically associated with a unique final aim – i.e., that of winning. Playing a competitive game is playing to win. Of course there are plenty of reasons, other than winning itself, why people engage in the practice of playing competitive games, the most common of which is, presumably, that they enjoy competition. However, we should keep the issue of why people are motivated in taking part in such activities and, relatedly, the issue of the value of pursuing such activities, separated from the teleological issue. This last issue concerns what constitutes the goal of such activities – what is the point of engaging in them, regardless of the motivation people have or the value they attach to the activity. In fact, the source of our motivation for engaging in a practice might be external to the purpose of the practice. For instance, I might be motivated in playing this game of chess with you because I know you strongly desire it and I want to make you happy. However, the aim in playing chess is still that of winning, not that of fulfilling your desire. Also I might value playing chess and winning at chess for reasons external to winning itself – e.g., because I believe that playing chess enhances my skills in reasoning.

The fact that winning is the general and characteristic aim of competitive games is compatible with admitting a certain degree of variability at the teleological level which has to do with what constitutes the specific aim of the practice. What people have to do in order to win in a certain game varies from one game to another. Winning in soccer for a

team consists in scoring more goals than the opponent's team within the regular period of time; winning in backgammon consists in being the first to bear off all of their checkers, etc. These are different ways, relative to different games, of achieving the very same kind of thing – i.e., *winning*. As Dummett pointed out:

“What makes us use the same term ‘winning’ for each of these various activities is that the point of every game is that each player tries to do what for that game constitutes winning, i.e., what constitutes winning always plays the same part in determining what playing the game consists in.”¹⁶⁴

There is an interesting interplay between invariance and variability associated with the notion of *winning*. On the one hand *winning* is the point of playing a competitive game, and it remains invariant from one game to another. On the other hand, what winning amounts to – i.e., the property that a performance needs to have in order to qualify as the winning performance – varies from one game to another. This suggests that we can distinguish between the objective of a particular game – i.e., the formal definition of what *winning-in-that-game* consists in – and the aim of the activity of playing a competitive game – i.e., that of trying to achieve what constitutes the winning position for that game. Thus when we say that Jules and Jack both won, when Jules played chess while Jack played backgammon, what we are saying is that they both achieved the objective of their respective games. In chess, for instance, winning consists in the achievement of the following objective:

[*Chess-objective*] To place the opponent's king ‘under attack’ in such a way that the opponent has no legal move. The player who achieves this goal is said to have ‘checkmated’ the opponent's king and to have won the game.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁴ Dummett, M. (1959):149.

¹⁶⁵ <http://www.fide.com/component/handbook/?id=124&view=article>.

A subject with no familiarity with competitive games might know both the rules of chess and what the objective of the game is. In this respect, he might be able to make legal moves and to recognize both when a game of chess ends and who qualifies as the winner of the match. However, he might still fail to grasp what is the point of the practice, the point of playing the game – i.e., that of trying to achieve the objective before one's opponent by means of legal moves. The thought is that a subject engaging in a playing-like activity who does not know that the point of the activity is that of achieving the objective before one's opponent, would not be playing the game, but rather performing some other activity. The rationale behind this thought is that performing random but admissible moves rather than selecting which moves to perform on the basis of the aim of achieving the objective of the game does not count as a way of *playing* that game. This point is not just terminological, about whether we would describe such performance as a way of playing the game. It might be that the player is incredibly lucky and performs moves that, although totally random, appear as moves made on the basis of a winning-conducive criterion. The point is, rather, definitional of the activity of playing a competitive game. Playing a competitive game is playing in accordance with the overall aim of winning the game.

One might protest that a player can consistently play a competitive game with a different aim to that of winning. An interesting case is one in which a player plays with the aim of improving his own previous performance.¹⁶⁶ Such an aim, although compatible with the aim of winning, would trump in certain circumstances the aim of winning and would constitute a genuine alternative to it. In following such an aim, a subject might select some moves he would not necessarily have chosen if he were aiming merely at winning. There might be particular situations in which a subject selects a certain move because he has justification for thinking that that move would increase the chances of improving on his previous performance, even though he might also have justification for thinking that such a move might decrease the chances of winning in the end.¹⁶⁷ However,

¹⁶⁶ Thanks to Carl Baker for this suggestion.

¹⁶⁷ In the abstract, there might be cases in which making a certain move would gain you a lot of points on the spot, thus reaching your aim of improving on your previous performance, even though it exposes you to a series of counter-attacks by your opponent that, given his superiority in the game, you have justification for

these cases are the exception rather than the rule. They presuppose that the subject selects his moves in the large majority of cases aiming at winning the game.

Another problematic case is one in which a subject is playing a competitive game knowing that there are no chances of winning. Plausibly, the challenge goes, one cannot be aiming at achieving something he has very good reasons to believe he is no position to achieve. Despite this fact, we want to say that the subject is still playing the game properly. However, if aiming at winning is partly constitutive of what it is playing a competitive game, then we should conclude that such a subject is not playing the game.

This is the place for making explicit a distinction that has been implicitly assumed all along, namely that between the aim of playing the game, which results in playing as if we are to achieve the objective of the game, regardless of whether we believe we are in a position to achieve the objective, and the aim that the subject has in mind in playing the game which is sensitive to questions whether such aim is actually achievable. The subject's activity of playing the game is teleologically constrained by what constitute winning for that game, even though what the subject has in mind in playing the game might be something different. The point, again, is that in selecting certain moves rather than others the subject is teleologically constrained by the winning goal – he is playing as if he were to achieve that goal – regardless whether he believes that goal to be something actually achievable. Thus regardless of whether winning is actually achievable for the subject, and of whether the subject has any other aim in mind, playing a competitive game is always teleologically constrained by the winning goal. Let us now turn to the teleological norm governing enquiry.

§3.2.2 *Truth as the Telos of Enquiry*

One thesis on which there seems to be a wide consensus is that there is an intimate connection between judging and truth, which is not shared by other cognitive attitudes that

thinking that in the long run would lead your opponent to win the game.

we generally employ in enquiry. Conjecturing, assuming and supposing, for instance, like judging, are all cognitive attitudes, and as such they are somehow connected with truth. What is common between them is that having one of these cognitive attitudes towards a proposition p presupposes, at least in a wide range of cases, that the subject *regards* or *accepts* p as true. There are, of course, notable exceptions to this claim as, for instance, when we assume a proposition for *conditional proof*. In such proofs we infer a conditional of the form *if p then q* from a derivation whose assumption is p , and which terminates at q , without caring about whether p is true. Despite these localized exceptions, the thought is that talking in terms of *regarding as true* is not sufficient for fully distinguishing judging from other cognitive attitudes. We could qualify the claim and say that in judging we *always* regard the proposition in question as true, whereas with respect to other cognitive attitudes we *generally* regard it as true. But this is of course not sufficient for an explanation of why the connection between truth and judging is different from that between truth and other cognitive attitudes.

The difference consists precisely in the aim with which a certain proposition is regarded as true. For instance, in conjecturing that p , assuming that p , and supposing that p , the proposition p is generally regarded as true for the sake of the argument or for the sake of the proof. What is distinctive of the judging-attitude is that judging that p is regarding p as true for the sake of getting its truth value right. This is what Velleman has called the *truth-directedness* of judging.¹⁶⁸

Such difference can be appreciated more effectively by considering the following contrast between judging and other cognitive attitudes. Whereas no fault is associated with assuming or conjecturing a false proposition (in the case of assumption for *Reductio*, not even in assuming a proposition which we know to be false), endorsing a false proposition as a belief always constitutes some distinctively alethic kind of fault.¹⁶⁹

Concerning the teleological aspect of the normativity of truth, we have the following

¹⁶⁸ See Velleman, D. (2000):ch.11.

¹⁶⁹ This point connects with the evaluative dimension of the normativity of truth. We will discuss this issue in Chapter 4; Cf. Boghossian, P. (2003) and Lynch, M. (2009):10-11.

principle:

AIM In judging about a subject matter *S*, a subject aims at having true and only true beliefs about *S*.

Thus, AIM shows how truth teleologically constraints enquiry. In judging about a subject matter *S* we aim at having true beliefs that are relevant to *S* and no false belief. As in the case of the practice of playing competitive games, we can distinguish between the objective of enquiry and the aim that subjects characteristically have in pursuing enquiry. As in the case of playing competitive games we aim at winning, in pursuing enquiry we aim at having true (and only true) beliefs – i.e., we aim at *true-ing*, as it were.

However what constitutes the objective of our enquiry in a given domain of discourse may vary, according to whether we take a monistic or a pluralistic approach to the nature of truth. If we endorse a monistic view – for instance, we take some sort of correspondence to the facts as the right account of truth – then we might say that for every (truth-apt) domain of discourse *D* and subject matter *S*, the objective of enquiry is to have beliefs that correspond to facts. If we, on the other hand, assume a pluralistic conception of truth, then we might say that with respect to domain *D*, the objective of *D*-enquiry is to believe all and only those propositions that have the property of *D*-truth (superassertibility, let us say); with respect to domain *D'* the objective of *D'*-enquiry is to believe all and only those propositions that have the property of *D'*-truth (correspondence, let us say); and with respect to domain *D''*, the objective of *D''*-enquiry is to believe all and only those propositions that have the property of *D''*-truth (say, coherence). Thus, in the light of this distinction, we might slightly rephrase AIM in the following way:

AIM * For any domain *D* and subject matter *S* belonging to *D*, in pursuing enquiry about *S*, a subject aims at believing all those and only those propositions that are *D*-true.

This is quite a sophisticated aim to have, and an immediate concern is that it would hardly

be an aim that ordinary enquirers could consciously entertain while enquiring into S.

Indeed there seems to be an interesting disanalogy between competitive games and enquiry in this respect. In order to be able to play a competitive game properly a subject needs to know specific things about the game. For instance, playing chess properly requires that a subject knows what is the specific objective of the game, the rules of the game and perhaps some other things concerning 'chess-etiquette'. Without this knowledge, or at least a fairly substantial amount of this knowledge, a subject would not be able to play properly. However, with respect to enquiry things seem quite different. In order to judge about whether p , it is not required that the subject knows what is the specific objective of her S-enquiry. Especially if we assume a pluralistic framework, it is not required that in order to enquire properly into S in domain D a subject knows what property plays the truth role in that domain. The upshot of this discussion is that it might not be the case that to competently judge you need to know as much as you are required to know in order to be in a position to play a competitive game. This tells us that we cannot stretch the analogy that far. However, the general point of the analogy is still in place.

To sum up, in this section I have argued that there are two main thoughts behind the metaphoric expression that beliefs aim at truth. One is the intimate and exclusive connection between truth and belief (and judging), in contrast with other kinds of cognitive attitudes. The other is the idea that enquiry is that kind of cognitive activity which is essentially teleologically constrained by truth. In this respect, to say that D-truth is the objective of the practice of enquiry into D is to say that D-truth-conduciveness is a normative requirement on the methods whereby the practice is pursued, in an analogous way to that in which (whatever notion constitutes winning in game G) saying that G-winning is the objective of playing a competitive game G is saying that G-winning-conduciveness is a normative requirement on the method of playing a competitive game. This means that the norms of the correct execution of a practice should be norms compliance with which leads to the achievement of the objective of the practice (or at least increases the chance of achieving it). This leads us directly to the next section, which will focus on the issue of the evaluative and deontological aspects of normativity.

§3.3 The Evaluative Dimension

Let us now turn to the issue concerning the correctness of a move made within a practice. Questions of correctness should not be conflated with questions concerning what is preferable, in a given context. As Alan Gibbard observes:

“Whether a belief is correct is a different question from whether it is advantageous or whether it is desirable. In the stock case of the spouse who may be having an affair, the comforting belief may not be the correct one— and if comfort is not the first desideratum, that’s not a matter of the logic of belief. What, then, does it mean to say that a belief is correct?”¹⁷⁰

In this section, I am going to deal with this question. To begin with, norms of correctness are generally relative to a practice, with its characteristic objective in place. Thus, correctness, in the sense relevant for our discussion here, is correctness of a characteristic move within a practice, in the light of the objective of that practice. If comfort were the primary objective of enquiry, then the comforting belief would be the correct one to have. Secondly, it is customary to distinguish between two kinds of norms. On the one hand, we have what I call here *evaluative correctness* that provide criteria for the evaluation of the good standing of a move *vis-à-vis* the characteristic aim of that practice. In this sense, a move within a practice is correct just in case it achieves, or leads to the achievement of, the characteristic goal of the practice. On the other hand we have what I call *deontic norms* whose function is that of prescribing what move(s) a subject ought to (or ought not to) do in order to achieve the aim of the practice. The general idea is that a subject in engaging in a certain practice ought to do what is correct (in the evaluative sense), and avoid doing what is incorrect.

¹⁷⁰ Gibbard, A. (2005):339.

I take it that evaluative correctness and deontic correctness are two distinct notions that can come apart in the context of certain practices. As we have seen in Chapter 2, the explanation I offered for the asymmetry in moral and taste disagreements relies on the fact that the deontic and the evaluative aspects of the normativity of truth can come apart. Whereas in the moral domain both the evaluative and the deontic aspects of truth are operating, in the taste domain the deontic aspect is silent.

In order to avoid confusion, I will use the term 'evaluative norm' to refer to evaluative correctness and the term 'deontic norm' to refer to deontic correctness. In this section I will deal with evaluative correctness, whereas in the next section I will deal with deontic correctness.

In contrast with the constitutive rules of a practice, norms of correctness can be violated without posing any threat to the general consistency of the practice. An incorrect move – i.e., a move that violates norms of evaluative correctness of the practice in question – is still an admissible move – i.e., a move that is made in accordance with the constitutive rules that shape the practice. In this respect, a subject that performs a move that violated the norm of correctness of the practice is still engaging in that practice, even though she is doing it incorrectly.

§3.3.1 *Evaluative Correctness in Competitive Games*

In the light of these general remarks, let us dig deeper into the issue of what the correctness of a move amounts to in the practices of playing a competitive game. The activity of playing a game is typically structured in a network of local strategies. On the one hand, players have a unique and characteristic aim of the game. With respect to some games – e.g., in particular, some board games – there is a clear distinction between *the* winning move – e.g., in chess, the move that corresponds to the actual checkmating of the opponent's king – and *a* winning move – i.e., a move which is more likely to conduce to the achievement of the characteristic aim of the game.

On the other hand, besides the main goal of the game there is a plurality of intermediate aims which collectively constitute the strategy according to which a certain player intends to play the game. Whether a certain strategy is a good strategy or not will depend on whether the chain of moves and countermoves that constitutes the actual execution of the strategy, in accordance with the intended plan, is winning-conducive. Thus, besides winning moves, there is also what we might call strategically good moves. These are moves that are likely to conduce to the achievement of a more local, intermediate, aim. Whether a strategically good move is a winning move will depend on whether the intermediate aim that a player is pursuing will be in the long run a winning-conducive aim, or not. If the strategy is not a winning one, then a strategically good move can be a bad move *vis-à-vis* the final aim of the game. Conversely, a strategically bad move can be a winning move. In fact, a move may be such that it leads astray from the achievement of a non-winning-conducive intermediate aim but, for whatever reasons, as a matter of fact, it is the move which, relative to the situation of the game in which it is made, has (or is among those moves that have) the highest objective probability of achieving the objective of the game, and so classifies as a winning move.

Suppose for instance that in a game of chess, given the actual stage of the game, player A thinks that the best strategy to pursue is to try to put B's king under attack by forcing B's rook to move forward in such a way as to open the diagonal to A's bishop to get the king under attack. However, this strategy, if executed properly, would have the effect of making A's queen vulnerable to an easy capture by B's left rook with the consequence of leading A to a quick defeat. In executing his planned strategy, A makes a move that actually precludes the possibility of carrying out his planned strategy but it has the effect of making B's queen vulnerable to an easy capture. From there, it would be quite straightforward for A to win the game. This is a move made in the light of a non-winning-conducive strategy which is strategically incorrect because leading astray from an accomplishment of the planned strategy, but nevertheless a winning-conducive one (because, in fact, increasing considerably the objective chances for A to win the game).

In the light of these considerations, we might introduce two notions of correctness of a

move in a game. One notion is relative to the general aim of the game – i.e., winning. We can call this *correctness* tout court. The other is relative to some strategic aim that the subject endorses in order to win. We can call this *strategic-correctness*.

C-Norm (G): in any competitive game G, a move is correct if, and only if, it has, or it is among those moves that have, the highest objective probability¹⁷¹ to lead to the winning of G.

SC-Norm (G): in any competitive game G, a move is strategically correct if, and only if, it has, or it is among those moves that have, the highest objective probability to lead to the intermediate strategic goal.¹⁷²

Here, both C-Norm (G) and SC-Norm (G) are taken to be an ‘on-off’ kind of notion – in the sense that, either a move is correct or it is not. One might want to use, especially when it comes to SC-Norm, a gradable version of these principles and allow for degrees of correctness. Although I have nothing against this proposal, for the sake of our discussion here I am going to assume that both C-Norm and SC-Norm define absolute notions of correctness.

§3.3.2 *Evaluative Correctness in Enquiry and Assertoric Practice*

¹⁷¹ Of course, this will depend in part on what moves our opponent is going to make and this might not be completely determinate for each particular situation of the game. However, assuming, as it is generally done in these cases, that the two players are ideally rational and both know the basic laws of Bayesian probabilistic calculus and deliberate on the basis of such laws, this objective interpretation of C-Norm will give quite accurate, yet still approximate, prediction concerning what are the most correct moves to make.

¹⁷² This notion of strategic correctness cashed out in objective terms may be too strong. The best a very good chess player can do is to give an approximate figure of the likelihood of the success of certain moves *vis-à-vis* the strategic aim and conditional on the likelihood of certain countermoves that are open to the opponent. And, of course, this is not just a matter of brute probability: there are psychological as well as contextual factors that come into the picture here and which are essential for figuring out what is the best move to make given a certain situation of the game.

Let us now extend this framework to the case of judgments within the practice of enquiry. As already anticipated at the beginning of this section, we are going to assume that truth plays the role that winning has in the activity of playing competitive games. One important difference between competitive games and enquiry is that whether in the case of games, as we have seen, there is an interesting and sharp distinction between the general aim of the game and the kind of intermediate aims that a player has in pursuing a certain strategy, in the case of enquiry we do not have such a sharp distinction. Thus, I will consider only the following general norm of correctness governing beliefs:

C-Norm For any proposition p , judging that p is correct if, and only if, p is true.¹⁷³

Here, both the notions of *judging* and *correctness* are taken in their plain - i.e., non-gradable – meaning.¹⁷⁴ Note that C-Norm has the form of a bi-conditional in which ‘correct’ takes narrow scope – i.e., it attaches directly to ‘judging that p ’ rather than governing the entire bi-conditional. The propositional variable ‘ p ’ ranges over any proposition whatsoever, be it trivial or completely uninteresting.

The reason why I take *correct* to have narrow scope is that it is desirable that it be detachable. In particular, from the truth of p we want to conclude that judging that p is unconditionally correct. I take it that here using the bi-conditional form without any restriction on the domain of propositions that can be plugged into it is relatively unproblematic. The left-to-right direction of the bi-conditional is incontestable. If my judging that p is correct, then p has to be true. Whenever p is not true and I am judging that p , then I am doing something incorrect. The right-to-left direction might generate some worry to the effect that it might appear a little odd to evaluate as correct a subject who

¹⁷³ See, for instance, Boghossian, P. (2003); Engel, P. (2001); Gibbard, A. (2005); Shah, N., (2003); Velleman, D., (2000); Velleman, D. & Shah, N., (2005); Wedgwood, R. (2002), (2013).

¹⁷⁴ See Wedgwood (2013) for a discussion of a gradable notion of correctness. According to his framework, maximum belief in p when p is true and maximum disbelief in p when p is false have the highest degree of correctness (1), whereas maximum belief in p when p is false and maximum disbelief in p when p is true, have the highest degree of incorrectness. All the other situations in the middle have an intermediate degree of correctness. This seems to entail that agnosticism, as justified suspension of belief in the light of evidence is never the *correct* cognitive attitude to have towards a proposition.

actually forms the belief in a completely trivial and uninteresting proposition. But this worry is misplaced and it seems to conflate the issue of the correctness of judging and that of the value of having true beliefs. We are going to deal with the issue of the value of truth later on in the Chapter. For the time being I want just to observe that we should not read into the correctness of judging any specific congratulatory status (either intellectual or epistemic) except for that of being such that it leads to the achievement of the objective of enquiry. In fact, the correctness of my judging that p is not necessarily connected with the question of whether my belief has any epistemic or intellectual merit. We would certainly consider someone who believes all sorts of trivial and uninteresting truths as not worthy of intellectual consideration, but we would not deny that what he is doing in judging that p is on the right track *vis-à-vis* the issue of achieving the objective of the practice. After all, he is doing (uninterestingly) well.

In addition to this point, there is a worry in accepting only the left-to-right direction of C-Norm. In fact, if C-Norm amounted to nothing more than the left-to-right direction the only thing that would matter would be that of avoiding incorrect beliefs. But this is compatible with a subject having no (or very few true) beliefs and would have as a consequence that of discouraging a subject in enquiring rather than encouraging him in pursuing enquiry in the name of truth. I take this consequence to be undesirable. However, since this point is of secondary importance, I will not try to make it more plausible than this. Just notice that so far we have no convincing reason for denying the bi-conditional form.

§3.4 The Deontic Dimension

§3.4.1 The Deontic Norm in Competitive Games

Beside the evaluative aspect of correctness norms, there may be a deontic norm governing goal-directed practices which indicates what moves a subject ought to make and what she ought to avoid, in any given situation of the game. Thus, in competitive games, the general deontic principle associated with the aim of the game would be, roughly, the following:

D-Norm (G): in playing a game G, for any move M , a subject [ought to make M] if, and only if M is a winning move.

Here the operator 'playing a game G' takes the widest scope and the domain of quantification is restricted to all and only those moves that are admissible (relative to a situation of the game). Without going into details, the general guidance that this principle offers to a subject playing a competitive game is that of performing in such a way as to make only winning moves.

In this bi-conditional form, D-Norm (G) has two parts. On the one hand it says that for any move M , within the set of all the admissible moves relative to a given situation of the game, if M is a winning move then the player ought to perform M . If there is more than one correct move, then the normative requirement takes a disjunctive form – the subject ought to perform (m_1 or m_2 or ... m_n) where the disjunction here is typically exclusive.

On the other hand, D-Norm (G) also says that if a player ought to perform a certain move M then M is a winning move. In other words, she is under requirement of performing only those moves that are winning moves. Given the strict normative requirement it imposes on the execution of the practice, such a norm would be breached very often and also, it would deem as impermissible a great number of moves that we intuitively would consider good moves, because strategically good moves.

The conception of *ought* employed in this principle is objective – it has to do with what a subject is required to do in the light of all the relevant facts concerning the game. There is also a subjective conception of *ought* (we might call it *s-ought*) which concerns the issue of what a subject is required to do in a certain situation of the game in the light of all the information available to her, at that point of the game. Thus, there is another version

of D-Norm (G) that employs the subjective conception of *ought* (*s-ought*). According to such a conception a subject *s*-ought to perform a move *m* if, and only if, among the various moves she should consider, *m* is the one that, relative to her informational state and cognitive abilities, is taken to have the highest chances to lead to the winning of the game. The prescriptions given by these two conceptions of ‘ought’ may conflict. If our interests in the kind of prescriptions in play in the deontic norm concern their applicability in the actual performing of a practice – i.e., deliberating which moves to make in a given situation of the game – then the objective ‘ought’ would be of little use since it generally requires access to facts the agent is generally in no position to ascertaining. From the point of view of the actual deliberation, all that really matters is to act in the light of information we actually possess. However, reasoning from an idealized perspective, we are interested in what we objectively ought to do – which is what we would do if we were to know all relevant facts. From this perspective the normative requirement expressed by the subjective ‘ought’ is superseded by that expressed by the objective ‘ought’. Putting the point in teleological terms, as idealized subjects we aim at following the prescriptions of the objective ‘ought’ and making the best possible move for achieving the objective of the game.¹⁷⁵

§3.4.2 *Deontic Norm in Enquiry*

Let us now extend this framework to the case of judgments within the practice of enquiry. To begin with, let us consider the following formulation of D-Norm:

D-Norm For any proposition *p*, a subject ought to judge that *p* if, and only if, *p* is true.

¹⁷⁵ I do not want to commit myself to any specific view about the relation between objective and subjective *ought*. I personally find quite interesting and reasonable Gibbard’s project of taking subjective ‘ought’ as basic and trying to explain objective ‘ought’ in terms of subjective ‘ought’. See Gibbard, A. (2005).

This principle prescribes to the subject what to believe. The general guidance is that a subject in pursuing enquiry should select which propositions he ought to believe and which he ought not to believe, solely on the basis of whether such propositions are true.

There are three sets of issues concerning the proper formulation of D-Norm. Firstly, there is the question whether ‘ought’ takes narrow or wide scope. Secondly, there is the question whether the left-to-right direction is to be preferred to the bi-conditional form. And thirdly, there is the issue whether we should put any restriction on the domain of quantification (I am taking the quantifier always having the widest scope over the entire formula). In what follows I will sketch a roadmap that highlights main defects and virtues of the various formulations we could give of D-norm. In so doing I will defend a specific formulation which I argue to be the least problematic among the various options on the table.

§3.4.3 *Narrow-Scope Readings of the Deontic Norm*

Let us focus first on those options that take ‘ought’ to have narrow scope. Under this understanding, ‘ought’ can be detached, and a conditional obligation turned into an unconditional one: given the truth of p , the agent ought (unconditionally) to judge that p ; and given that the subject is under the relevant normative requirement to judge that p , it follows that it is true that p . If we take the bi-conditional form with domain-unrestricted quantification we would have the following principle:

(DN1) For any proposition p , (a subject ought to judge that p) if, and only if, p is true.

One implausible consequence of (DN1) is that the truth of a certain proposition would suffice to impose a normative requirement on the subject to judge that p . Whenever a certain proposition p is true, the subject unconditionally ought to believe that proposition. Besides the, perhaps in this context negligible, problem posed by trivial and uninteresting truths, there are also those true propositions that are too complicated or too long to be

computed by any cognitive system. We are certainly under no normative requirement to believe those propositions.¹⁷⁶

Moreover, there are (infinitely) many true propositions with which we are not in a belief relation. As Krister Bykvist and Anandi Hattiangadi have observed, this apparently innocuous fact might generate Moore-paradoxical beliefs when we endorse deontic principles like D-Norm, in this formulation. Consider for instance the proposition (call it p) expressed by the sentence: “There are 14 people on the 6th floor of the Sir Duncan Rice Library right now”, and the proposition expressed by the sentence “I do not believe that there are 14 people on the 6th floor of the Sir Duncan Rice Library right now”. This latter sentence is a description of my actual doxastic situation in relation to p , which, when conjoined with p , generates a Moore-paradoxical proposition. Suppose that it is true that there are 14 people on the sixth floor of the Sir Duncan Rice Library right now, and also that it is true that I do not believe that proposition. Since both propositions are true, their conjunction must be true as well. Given (DN1), I unconditionally ought to believe this conjunction. However, this means that I unconditionally ought to believe a Moore-paradoxical proposition – i.e., a proposition of the form, p and I do not believe that p .

There are two ways one may go to avoid these difficulties while taking ‘ought’ to have narrow scope: either rejecting the right-to-left direction of D-Norm or restricting somehow the domain of propositional quantification. Under the first option D-Norm is taken to be a permissive rather than injunctive principle:

(DN2) For any proposition p , (a subject ought to judge that p) only if p is true.¹⁷⁷

This principle says that the truth of a proposition p is only a necessary condition for enforcing the normative requirement of judging that p – or, equivalently, the falsity of p

¹⁷⁶ I am here assuming the principle according to which ‘ought’ implies ‘can’, at least in the following qualification: the ‘ought’ of cognitive and practical deliberation implies the ‘can’ of cognitive and practical viability (or satisfiability). This principle is still accepted by the majority of the philosophers, but there are some contrary opinions such as Engel, P. (2007); Graham, P. (2011).

¹⁷⁷ Boghossian, P. (2003):37.

would be sufficient for discharging your obligation to judge that p .

This principle does indeed solve all problems affecting the bi-conditional version of D-Norm, but it has a crucial problem of its own. In fact, according to it a thinker is under no obligation either to believe p in case p is true, or to disbelieve p in case p is false. This version of the principle just claims that the subject is under no obligation to judge that *not* p whenever p is false (which is different, of course, from claiming that the subject ought not to judge that p whenever p is false). Thus the upshot is that regardless of whether p is true or false, the subject is under no requirement either to believe or to disbelieve p : she is permitted to do whatever she likes. But for a deontological principle governing beliefs, this is rather too weak.

On the other hand, we could maintain the bi-conditional form but restrict the domain of quantification. There are various ways in which we can restrict the domain. The one I favor is to restrict the domain to those propositions that the subject actually considers:¹⁷⁸

(DN3) For any proposition p that a subject S actually considers: (S ought to judge that p) if, and only if, p is true.

According to this formulation given that p is a proposition the subject actually considers and that p is true, it follows that the subject is unconditionally required to judge that p . Actually considering a proposition means taking the quest for its truth as the focal concern of enquiry. This requires much more cognitive effort than that involved in merely consciously entertaining such a proposition in one's mind without really being interested in whether it is true or not. In other words, it requires that the subject has a positive disposition toward gathering and assessing evidence relevant to p with the intention of solving the question as to whether p is true. In this sense considering p as opposed to merely entertaining p in one's mind constitutes a precondition for enquiring. With this in mind we can see that the kind of restriction we imposed on D-Norm is quite substantive

¹⁷⁸ See Wedgwood, R. (2013).

and has the effect of restricting considerably the scope of its normative control.

One important limitation of (DN3) is that it seems too weak when it comes to its predictions concerning false propositions. In fact, what (DN3) says is that if p is false then a subject is not required to judge that p . But what we would expect from a deontic norm governing belief is that if a proposition we are considering for enquiry is false then we ought to disbelieve it. Fortunately, this worry can be easily amended by adding some complexity to (DN3) in the following way:

(DN3*) For any proposition p a subject S actually considers: $\{[(S \text{ ought to judge that } p) \text{ if, and only if, } p \text{ is true}] \& [(S \text{ ought to judge that } \textit{not-p}) \text{ if, and only if, } p \text{ is false}]\}$.

Despite the complexity in formulation, this principle matches our expectations concerning the prediction that a deontic principle governing judging should make. By restricting the domain of quantification to those propositions the subject considers for enquiry, D-Norm seems to ask for a much more plausible request than that made by the unrestricted version of the principle.

However, as Bykvist & Hattiangadi have argued, this version of the principle does not fare better than the unrestricted version in dealing with Moore-paradoxical situations. Just restricting the domain to those propositions that the subject actually considers is not sufficient – they claim – for avoiding this problem. According to Bykvist & Hattiangadi I might well be in the cognitive state of considering both the propositions p and *I do not believe that p* . Assuming that they are both true, the principle predicts that I ought to believe both propositions, as well as to believe their conjunction.¹⁷⁹

One might try to resist this objection in the following way. First, notice that the problem is generated by the presence of these two normative requirements is at the level of conflicting doxastic attitudes that the same subject entertains with respect to such propositions, rather than in a conflict concerning the content of first order beliefs. In other words, there is no conflict between the proposition that p and the proposition that the

¹⁷⁹ See Bykvist & Hattiangadi (2007), and Wedgwood (2013) for a reply to this problem.

proposition that p is not among Filippo's beliefs. These are propositions that another subject, Joel, can perfectly and consistently believe. The conflict is generated by Filippo having to believe p and also having to believe that he does not believe that p . It is also clear that the right verdict we would expect is that a subject ought to disbelieve Moorean-paradoxical propositions.

As we have already seen, actually considering a proposition means reflecting on whether the proposition in question is true – i.e., engaging in enquiry about that proposition. Thus we have three cognitive projects here: reflecting on whether the proposition that p is true; reflecting on whether it is true that *I do not believe p* ; and, finally, reflecting on whether the proposition that *p and I do not believe p* is true.

If we consider the first two cognitive projects independently of each other, then we have that since p is true, D-Norm requires me to believe p , and since it is true that I do not believe p , D-Norm requires me to believe that I do not believe p . However, *ex hypothesis*, these are two entirely separated cognitive projects, and even if the same individual pursues them but in different circumstances, they generates no doxastic conflict and thus no paradox. If Filippo at t_0 considers the proposition that *Filippo does not believe that p* , when in fact p is not among his beliefs, then, because that proposition is true, he ought to believe it. But no doxastic tension is generated given that, although p is true, Filippo is not considering p , and p , by hypothesis, is not among Filippo's beliefs. And if at t_1 Filippo considers p , then since p is true Filippo ought to believe p ; and assuming that the truth of p is within Filippo's epistemic reach, if he carries out the investigation properly he would end up believing p and thus being in a doxastic state in which p is among his beliefs. In that case the proposition that *Filippo does not believe p* would be false, and thus something Filippo has no obligation to believe. Again, no doxastic tension would be in place.

Let us take now the case where we consider both propositions individually but in the context of the same cognitive project. Then, insofar as I consider p (again, assuming that I am in a position to appreciate the fact that p is true), the principle prescribes me to judge that p and thus to believe p . Assuming that I am doxastically aware of this cognitive process, I will also believe that I believe that p . Since in this situation it is going to be false

that I do not believe p , I am under no obligation to judge that I do not believe that p . If, on the other hand, I consider the proposition that *I do not believe that p* , since via introspection I can easily ascertain that that proposition is true, then following the deontic norm I ought to believe that I do not believe that p . At this point, being fully doxastically responsible, I will consider the question whether p is in fact true. Assuming, again, that I am in a position to ascertain the truth of p , the deontic norm will prescribe me to judge that p is true and thus to believe p . But once the investigation about p is carried out, given my actual doxastic state, the deontic principle will require me to believe that I believe p . Introspecting on my current doxastic state I will ascertain that I believe p and consequently I will believe that I believe p . Either way, I avoid the paradox.

This discussion requires some idealization, and in particular it requires that the proposition p in question be within our (idealized) epistemic reach. If, however, p is one of those propositions whose truth we are in no position to ascertain, then things get more difficult. One way to solve the problem would be to assume, as it is fairly standard among philosophers, that ought implies can. Since we cannot have access to the truth of p we are thereby discharged from any obligation to believe p .

One might rejoin at this point that still it is the case that according to our norm I ought to believe p , given that p is true, and also I ought to believe *that I do not believe that p* , given that *that I do not believe that p* is true. Is not this enough to conclude that I ought to believe their conjunction (M)? No, it is not. And the reason is that what is called the *agglomeration principle* fails for 'ought'. If we endorse the principle that 'ought' implies 'can', this is very easy to prove since 'can' does not agglomerate.¹⁸⁰ From the fact that a judge can absolve you and can convict you it does not follow that she can both absolve and convict you. Thus from the fact that I ought to believe that p and that I ought to believe *that I do not believe that p* , it does not follow that I ought to believe their conjunction.

The last case to consider is when I am engaging in the cognitive project of

¹⁸⁰ See Marcus, R.B. (1980):134. If we reject the principle that 'ought' implies 'can' we can still tell a story why 'ought' does not agglomerate over conjunction that relies on interpreting 'ought' as an all thing considered and unconditional obligation. See Sinnott-Armstrong, W. (1987):137-9.

reflecting about the proposition *p* and *I do not believe p*. Let us call this proposition M. In this case, since M is true in virtue of the fact that both conjuncts are true, D-Norm requires us to believe M. Since believing a conjunction means believing both conjuncts, assuming the doxastic transparency of beliefs, this normative requirement would require me to believe, in the very same circumstance, both that I believe *p* and that I do not believe *p*.

However – we need to ask – what does reflecting on such a proposition mean? In reflecting about M, I engage in enquiry aiming at ascertaining the truth of *p* together with the truth of *I do not believe p*. It is immediate to see that as soon as we consider M for investigation – again assuming that we are in a position to ascertain the truth of *p* – we realize that no properly executed investigation will result in a doxastic state in which both *p* and *I do not believe that p* are true. In other words, in reflecting on the conjunctive statement we can appreciate its paradoxical consequences and thus we would not consider it as an appropriate object of investigation.

If what has been suggested here is on the right track, it shows that restricting the domain of quantification to those propositions the subject actually considers, where 'consider' here is understood in terms of reflecting and conducting investigation as to whether the proposition in question is true, seems to be an effective strategy to solve the main problems troubling the unrestricted version of D-Norm, including the problem posed by Moore-paradoxical sentences.

§3.4.4 *Wide-Scope Readings of the Deontic Norm*

Let us now turn to the set of formulations which take 'ought' to have wide scope – i.e., to govern the entire bi-conditional. Under this understanding of the principle, the obligation cannot be detached. What this principle requires is simply that the bi-conditional be true, and it is indifferent to how this is accomplished. Thus, understood in this way it specifies a relation that ought to hold between the mental state of the subject (her believing that *p*) and the truth of the proposition. In this respect, D-Norm would be immune to some of the

problems afflicting the narrow-scope formulation. One option is to take the propositional quantification unrestricted and the bi-conditional form:

(DW1) For every proposition p , a subject ought to [judge that p if, and only if it is true that p]

According to this option the subject is under the following obligation: to believe whatever is true and only what is true. Not believing a true proposition would be a way of breaching the requirement as well as believing a false proposition. This seems to be unreasonably demanding. Nobody would ever be able to satisfy this requirement. And one of the reasons has to do, again, with those propositions that are too complex to be entertained by any human mind.

As before, we have two options here: either restricting the domain of quantification to those propositions that are actually considered by the subject, or dropping the bi-conditional formulation in favor of the left-to-right conditional formulation. Let us consider the latter option first:

(DW2) For every proposition p , a subject ought to [judge that p only if it is true that p]

According to this formulation, the normative requirement is breached just in case the subject judges that p and p is false. On the contrary, there are two ways in which the requirement expressed by this principle can be discharged: either the condition contained in the consequent is satisfied – p is true, regardless of whether the subject judges that p or not – or the condition expressed by the antecedent is not satisfied. It is sufficient for not satisfying the antecedent that the subject refrains from judging that p . This suggests that the most effective way to fulfill the requirement would be that of believing as few propositions as possible, in order to minimize the possibility of breaching the requirement. For a normative requirement, this seems an inconvenient drawback.

Lastly, we have the option of restricting the domain of propositional quantification

to those propositions the subject actually considers:

(DW3) For any proposition p the subject actually considers, the subject ought to [judge that p if, and only if, p is true].

According to (DW3) the subject is under the following requirement: for every proposition p she actually considers, to judge p when and only when p is true. Thus there are two ways in which this requirement can be breached: either the subject believes a proposition she actually considers and which is false or she does not believe a proposition she actually considers and which is true. And, accordingly, there are two ways in which the requirement can be discharged: either the subject does not believe all those propositions that she consider and that are not true, or she believes all propositions she considers that are true. Among the various versions in which *ought* takes wide scope, this seems the least problematic one and in fact the only which is immune to all the sorts of problems that beset the other formulations of D-Norm.

However there are two general concerns about formulations of the D-Norm in which 'ought' takes wide scope. The first has to do with our intuitions regarding the guidance that a deontic norm of this sort is supposed to provide. This formulation of D-Norm, because the requirement cannot be detached, does not capture the idea that, in conducting investigation, truth is what one ought to believe and that falsehood is what one ought to avoid. In other words, it does not capture the intuition that having true beliefs is praiseworthy (in some sense of 'praiseworthy'), while having false beliefs is blameworthy. The only thing it says is that in having true beliefs things are as they ought to be for the subject; and that in having false beliefs things are not as they ought to be for the subject. However, it does not follow that the subject is doing something praiseworthy in having true beliefs, or that she is faulty in having false beliefs. No merit on the part of the subject for actually doing what he is required to do and no fault for not doing what he is required to do. And this is because we want the 'ought' in play in the principle to be reason-involving in the following sense: the truth of a proposition considered by the subject

provides sufficient reason for the subject to believe that proposition and the falsity of a proposition provides sufficient reason for the subject to abstain from believing it.

The second concern is that wide scope deontic principles are intuitively symmetrical in that they draw no normative distinctions between the different ways we might satisfy them. If a subject breaches a wide scope principle that predicts that there is something bad in her believing that p and p being false then there are multiple ways to get out of that state and into compliance with the deontic requirement. On the one hand, she can come into compliance by dropping her p -belief. Alternatively, she can satisfy the requirement by making it the case that p (whenever she is in a position to do that). The point is that the principles themselves do not enjoin her to adopt a particular one of these methods. For all that is said they are on a par. However, most of us would share the intuition that the right (or at least most sensible) thing to do in this case is to conform our beliefs to how things are rather than change the way things are in order to make it fit our actual belief. If there are three books on the shelf and you believe there are four, then, once you realize that there are three books, most of us would expect D-Norm to require you to change your belief rather than adding a book to the shelf.

In the light of this discussion, the version of the D-Norm that seems least objectionable is (DN3) – that in which ‘ought’ takes narrow scope, the logical form is that of a bi-conditional, and the domain of quantification is restricted to those propositions that the subject actually considers for enquiry.

§3.4.5 *Objective and Subjective ‘Ought’ in Enquiry*

When discussing deontic norms governing enquiry, we might want to distinguish between (at least) two senses of ‘ought’ – what are generally called *subjective* and *objective* ‘ought’. The general characterization of the deontic norm governing enquiry I have discussed in previous sections is cashed out using the objective interpretation of ‘ought’. But surely, one might protest, in general the norms that are most immediately regulative,

and tied to motivation and criticism, are those formulated with the *subjective* ‘ought’. So why do I not use directly the subjective kind of ought?

How to characterize these two senses of ‘ought’ and the exact relation between them is not an easy task, and in particular not one that can be satisfactorily carried out in the space of this work. I personally find Gibbard’s proposal¹⁸¹ on this topic quite compelling and persuasive, so I will follow his guide in this brief characterization of the two senses of ‘ought’. Roughly, the main difference between them is that the normative guidance given by the subjective ‘ought’ is subjectively applicable — that is, applicable in light of information the thinker possesses. By contrast, the kind of guidance given by the objective ‘ought’ is (at least in most cases) not subjectively applicable. It is objectively applicable in the sense that its application may require access to facts the thinker does not know (and, in certain cases, is in no position to know). Gibbard illustrates such a difference by means of the following example:

“You flip a coin and hide the result from both of us. If in fact the coin landed heads, then in the objective sense, I ought to believe that it landed heads. Believing the coin landed heads would be, we might say, epistemically fortunate. In the subjective sense, though, I ought neither to believe that it landed heads nor believe that it landed tails. I ought to give equal credence to its having landed heads and to its having landed tails. The coin in fact landed heads, imagine, and so the correct belief for me to have is that the coin landed heads. Such a full belief would be silly, but it would be correct. The correct belief, then, we can try inferring, is the belief one ought to have, where this cost-ignoring ought is in the objective sense. The correct belief that the coin landed heads, though, is not the one I ought in the subjective sense to have; I ought subjectively to give equal credence to its landing heads and its landing tails.”¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ See especially Gibbard, A. (2005), but also Gibbard, A. (2003), part III.

¹⁸² Gibbard, A. (2005): 340-1.

The upshot of this example is that the most rational thing to do for the subject in the example is to attribute equal credence to its landing heads and its landing tails. But suppose that for some reason the subject is obliged to make a choice and she makes the wrong one – namely that the coin landed tails. Her belief is the wrong one to have because it is false. Under the subjective interpretation of ‘ought’ there is no sense in which the subject is blameworthy for having a belief she ought not to have. The thought is that she could not have done better, epistemically, than what she did. She could have been lucky by picking the right belief (the true one), but no epistemic merit would have been granted to the subject in believing that the coin landed heads. On the contrary, if we assume the objective interpretation of ‘ought’ we would have to conclude that the subject in judging that the coin landed tails has a belief she ought not to have.

Thus assuming an objective interpretation of ‘ought’ has consequences that might sound implausible, especially given the nature of the example which involves a judgment based on a pure guess with a 50% (objective) chance of accuracy (assuming that we can actually form genuine beliefs in such cases). However, even sticking with this example, one might insist that there is a sense in which things are not alethically as they ought to be for the judging subject if she ends up having a belief which is not true. Things are in such a way that they require the subject to endorse a different belief. This is precisely the kind of normative divergence that there is between truth and justification. Even though, given the epistemic limitation of the subject (or, more precisely her being epistemically situated in such-and-such a way), she cannot but follow, in practice, the guidance of justification (what she has most reasons to believe to be true), if the justification available to her leads her astray from what is actually the case, it does not seem crazy to maintain that she ought not to have that belief (regardless of how epistemically responsible she was in endorsing such a belief). More in general, the kind of normative guidance peculiar to the more objective interpretation of ‘ought’ – the one tied to the notion of truth – can be seen in one important normative aspect of enquiry – that of belief revision. Other things being equal, we ought to drop a certain belief if that belief is untrue – regardless of how strong the justification we have for such a belief might be. We revise our belief in the light of truth

(and falsity-avoidance). This line of thought might acquire an even greater degree of plausibility once we remind to ourselves that the kind of domains of primary interest in this work is such that there are no evidence transcendent truths. In such domains it is never the case that the subject might be epistemically situated so that she has no access (even in principle) to the truth of a certain proposition. In such cases there is no violation of the dictum ‘ought’ implies ‘can’, and thus this cannot be adduced as a reason to undermine the possibility of an objective interpretation of the alethic ‘ought’.

For these reasons I believe it might be useful to keep the subjective interpretation of ‘ought’ – which is tied to the notion of epistemic justification – distinct from a more objective interpretation – tied to the notion of truth – and to maintain that we can actually make sense of the more objective interpretation of ‘ought’ in connection with the normative aspects of enquiry. That said nothing really crucial for the main purposes of this thesis hinges on adopting an objective instead of a subjective interpretation of ‘ought’, even though the full force of some considerations I defend in this work can be appreciated only assuming an objective interpretation of ‘ought’.

§3.5 The Axiological Dimension

In this section I will focus on the axiological dimension of the normativity of enquiry. It seems relatively uncontroversial that in some sense truth is valuable or as William James has famously put it, truth ‘is the good in the way of belief’.¹⁸³ In a 1904 paper about Meinong's theory of complexes and assumptions, Bertrand Russell wrote:

“As to the preference which most people as long as they are not annoyed by instances feel in favour of true propositions, this must be based, apparently,

¹⁸³ James, W. (1975):42.

upon an ultimate ethical proposition: 'It is good to believe true propositions, and bad to believe false ones.' This proposition, it is to be hoped, is true; but if it is not, there is no reason to think that we do ill in believing it."¹⁸⁴

So far we have discussed some of the various ways in which truth normatively constrains enquiry, but none of these by themselves explains why we tend most of the time to prefer to believe what is true to what is false. For Russell there is a simple reason why this is so: it is good to believe what is true, and thus it is valuable to have true beliefs, whereas it is bad to believe what is false, and thus it is of disvalue to have false beliefs. The question whether this is ultimately an ethical proposition, as Russell suggests, will depend specifically on what kind of value is at issue here. I will suggest that the value in play in the axiological principle is not moral value but rather a broadly intellectual value. In this respect I disagree with Russell's ethical interpretation of the principle.

That said, the apparently innocent thought that it is of value to believe what is true and of disvalue to believe what is false needs to be carefully scrutinized and, as we will see, once fully spelled out it reveals a number of interesting and thorny issues.

§3.5.1 *The Object of Value*

To begin with, we should ask: What is exactly the bearer of value of truth? One obvious candidate is that the object of value is the mere fact of a certain proposition being true. What is of value, are true propositions. But this seems excessively general and disconnected from our intellectual activity of enquiry. It seems in fact plausible to maintain that what is of value for us as cognizers is something importantly related to our cognitive projects and activities. However, among the infinitely many propositions there are many that outweigh our cognitive capacities, and presumably also those of an idealized thinker.

¹⁸⁴ Russell, B. (1904):524.

We could modify the thought by saying that the objects of value are true propositions *qua* believable – i.e., true proposition *qua* potential object of belief for us. This would certainly alleviate some worries. However, getting clear about what modality is involved in this expression might be a difficult task. Does believable mean 'cognitively accessible', or 'epistemically accessible', or both?¹⁸⁵ And what is the other *relatum* of the accessibility in question? Us *qua* ordinary thinkers? Or some cognitively and epistemically idealized counterpart of us?

In order to avoid these concerns, we could say instead that it is our believing a true proposition as a result of enquiry which is of value. In other words, what we value is not the truth of a proposition which is a potential belief-candidate for us, but the fact that we believe what is true, and perhaps only what is true. For instance, we certainly do not value the truth of the proposition that we are seriously ill. However, we value, with certain important qualifications which will be discussed later, that we are in a cognitive state which has among its beliefs the belief that we are seriously ill whenever we are, in fact, seriously ill and consider the proposition that we are seriously ill. What is of disvalue in this example is not our having a true belief but the fact that we are seriously ill (and thus that the corresponding proposition is true). Having true beliefs might perfectly be of value even though the truth of what we believe is something inconvenient for us.

Surely, one might object, we can rationally prefer not to know ourselves to be seriously ill (especially if the kind of disease at issue here is incurable) because such knowledge might make our life much more miserable. This is undeniable, but it is not an objection to the claim that having true beliefs is valuable in the way truth is taken to be valuable, but only to the stronger claim that having true beliefs is an overall and *all things considered* value. I will return to this point later.

What this shows is that it is important to keep two issues sharply separated – i.e., on

¹⁸⁵ By 'cognitively accessible' I mean, roughly, a proposition whose logical complexity does not outsource the cognitive capacity of a (idealized) human thinker. For 'epistemically accessible' I mean, roughly, a proposition the evidence for (or against) which is within the epistemic range of an idealized subject. There are propositions that are cognitively inaccessible but epistemically accessible – e.g., very complicated tautologies; and there are propositions that are cognitively accessible but not epistemically accessible (perhaps, certain propositions about the past).

the one hand, the value and desirability of having doxastic attitudes that are fitting with respect to what is the case and, on the other hand, our desires concerning what we would like to be the case. We are dealing here with the former.

An important point of clarification before proceeding is in order. In what follows I will use expressions such as ‘the value of truth’ or ‘the valuability of truth’ as shorthand for ‘the value of having true beliefs’.

With this clarification in mind, we can reformulate our initial thought by saying that having true beliefs about the subject matter of our enquiry is valuable (i.e., it has positive value), whereas having false beliefs is disvaluable (i.e., it has negative value). Accordingly, we can give a first formulation of the general thought that truth is valuable in the following way:

VALUE It is valuable to have true beliefs and only true beliefs.¹⁸⁶

This represents only a first approximation of what we are looking for, and one that aims at being fairly neutral with respect to the different formulations philosophers have given in the literature. In what follows I will discuss various ways in which this principle can be refined, and then argue for one particular interpretation of it.

There are two specific sets of issues that concern the formulation of VALUE. On the one hand there is the question of how VALUE should be read – what is the intended logical form. On the other hand we might ask what we mean exactly by ‘valuable’ – what kind of value is in play in this principle. I will deal with both sets of issues in this order.

§3.5.2 *The Logical Form of VALUE*

As in our previous discussion about the deontic norm governing judging, we might ask analogous questions concerning on the one hand whether the domain of quantification is

¹⁸⁶ See Horwich, P. (2006), Lynch, M. (2009), David, M. (2005).

somehow restricted and, on the other hand, whether 'valuable' takes narrow or wide scope in the principle.

Concerning the first issue, one might feel that the problem of trivial and uninteresting truths is much more salient in discussing the axiological principle than it was for the evaluative and deontic principles. This is because, intuitively, there seems to be nothing particularly valuable, even *prima facie* valuable, in the fact that a subject believes a trivial and totally uninteresting true proposition. To overcome this difficulty, we could restrict the scope of VALUE to those propositions that are somehow cognitively significant, or of importance to us. Alvin Goldman suggests something along these lines:

“[I]nterest does play a role in evaluating cognitive practices and establishing cognitive virtues. [...] Admittedly, the dimension of interest does complicate our story. We can no longer suggest that higher degrees of truth-possession are all that count in matters of inquiry. But cannot we incorporate the element of interest by a slight revision in our theory? Let us just say that the core epistemic value is a high degree of truth-possession *on topics of interest*.”¹⁸⁷

However, imposing such a restriction helps only in part with the triviality concern. What counts as a topic of interest presumably will vary from subject to subject, and from context to context. There is nothing in principle preventing a subject to investigate into whether the number of knots of his carpet is even or odd. And given the subject matter of his investigation, the proposition that the number of knots of his carpet is odd would be highly significant and of interest, despite the fact that the vast majority of people who do not have such an idiosyncratic project, would not consider such a proposition worth a minute of their time.¹⁸⁸ The most effective way to get around the triviality issue is to reflect on what the proper object of value should be. If we take single true beliefs, or even all true beliefs that a subject has with respect to the subject matter of her investigation, we would have a

¹⁸⁷ Goldman, A. (2002):61.

¹⁸⁸ On this issue, see Brady, M.S. (2009).

version of the triviality worry occurring at some point. However, if we take the proper object of value to be the fact that a subject is in a cognitive state with only true beliefs (or, more realistically, with mostly true beliefs), we would have an effective way of addressing (or, at least, mitigating) the triviality concern. In fact, I take it that being in such a state is (*prima facie*) of value regardless of the idiosyncratic cognitive projects that we might end up pursuing. This, I think, provides us with some *prima facie* reason to take the proper object of value the holistic state of having true and only true beliefs.

Let us now turn to discuss the issue concerning whether 'valuable' has wide or narrow scope in the principle. I take it that the most significant difference in the two formulations has to do with what is taken to be the proper object of value: whether it is the complex state including both S judging that *p* and *p* being true (wide scope), or just S judging that *p*, conditional on *p* being true (narrow scope). The first option I would like to consider is to take 'valuable' to have wide scope, governing the entire bi-conditional:

VALUE-W For any proposition *p* and for any subject S, it is valuable that: [S judges *p* if and only if *p* is true]

According to VALUE-W, what is valuable is the fact that the subject judges that *p* when and only when *p* is true or, equivalently, he does not judge that *p* when and only when *p* is not true. In other words, the thing which is of value according to this principle is not that the subject is judging that *p* under the condition that *p* is true, but the complex state of affairs encompassing both S being in the belief state with content *p* and *p* being true. One consequence of the wide-scope reading of VALUE is that we cannot detach the consequent of the right-to-left direction of the bi-conditional given the truth of the antecedent. This means that we cannot infer that S judging that *p* is valuable whenever *p* is in fact true. And moreover that we cannot account for the intuition one might have that the subject *is doing* or *has done* something valuable (and thus praiseworthy) in judging that *p* when and only when *p* is true.

However I take this to be a fairly innocuous limitation of the wide scope reading of

VALUE, much in line with our original intuition about the proper object of value. The target of the principle is not our *doing* something of value, but rather the fact that we are in a certain cognitive state, that of believing what is true. We could have acquired a belief in a true proposition without having done any cognitive work – e.g., some demon has inserted such a belief in our cognitive web. Still, having such belief in a true proposition would have contributory value within the economy of our overall cognitive state of believing what is true and only what is true.

Alternatively, we could take 'valuable' to have narrow scope, attaching to 'believe' rather than governing the entire bi-conditional:

VALUE-N For any proposition p , and any subject S : (it is valuable that S judges that p) if and only if p is true.

What is of value according to VALUE-N is that the subject has the belief that p , under the condition that p is true. The main contrast with VALUE-N is that in the narrow reading of 'valuable', given that p is true, we can detach the consequent and conclude that the fact that S judging that p is valuable.

However, one important limitation of this principle is that, contrary to the wide-scope reading, it breaks the symmetry between the value of believing the truth and the disvalue of believing the false. In particular, VALUE-N does not predict that in believing a false proposition there is something of disvalue in the subject's cognitive state, insofar as not being valuable does not entail disvaluable. Plausibly, there are things that have no value without thereby having negative value (disvalue). But we want that our axiological principle deems as disvaluable that the subject has a false belief. One easy way to address this problem is by transforming VALUE-N into a conjunction of two bi-conditionals, one for the positive clause, and the other for the negative one:

VALUE-N* For any proposition p , and any subject S : $\{[(\text{it is valuable that } S \text{ judges that } p) \text{ if, and only if, } p \text{ is true}] \& [(\text{it is disvaluable that } S \text{ judges that } p) \text{ if, and only if, } p \text{ is false}]\}$.

In this way we re-gain the symmetry that we expected at the expense of making the principle more cumbersome. However, there is a caveat worth discussing. It concerns a disambiguation of the expression “having no value (disvalue)”. The first conjunct predicts that if p is not true then it is of no value to believe p , whereas the second conjunct says that if p is false then it is of disvalue to believe p . *Mutatis mutandis* in case p is true. But saying that something is of disvalue and saying that it is of no value (or saying that something is of value and saying that it is of no disvalue) might not be the same thing. There is a reading of the expression “having no value (disvalue)” which suggests that the item in question does not fit in the value/disvalue scale. However, there is another reading in which “having no value” simply means having no *positive* value (and “having no disvalue” simply means having no *negative* value). I take that the most natural interpretation of “having no value (disvalue)” in this context is “having no positive value (no negative value)”. Under the plausible assumption that being disvaluable trumps having no positive value, we can see that VALUE-N* gives perfectly consistent and univocal predictions.

With these clarifications at hand we can now appreciate that this revised version of the principle addresses the concerns that apply to VALUE-N. That said, I think there is a more general consideration why we should prefer the wide scope interpretation of VALUE over the narrow scope one and this has to do with the fact that the primary objects of value are not single true beliefs but rather the cognitive state in which a subject has true and only true beliefs. Only the wide-scope interpretation seems to be well suited to capture this holistic point about the object of value. Thus, in what follows, we are going to take VALUE to have the logical form highlighted by VALUE-W. This concludes our discussion concerning the first set of issues on how to read VALUE.

§3.5.3 *What Kind of Value?*

Another crucial question for the interpretation of VALUE is the following: What kind of

value are we talking about when we say that truth is valuable? There are several issues related to this question that are worth discussing.

To begin with, the kind of value we are primarily interested in discussing about true beliefs is, adopting the label from Michael Lynch, a broadly intellectual value,¹⁸⁹ as distinct from other kinds of value, such as pragmatic, economic, moral, aesthetic, etc. Thus when we say that having true beliefs is valuable what we mean is that believing the truth is an intellectual good. The notion of intellectual value I have in mind here is very broad and it encompasses a wide variety of goods associated with our intellectual practices such as, for instance, pursuing enquiry and research, creative writing, performing arts, etc. In this respect, there are various intellectual values besides truth, such as, for instance, knowledge, creativity, curiosity, understanding, certain kinds of artistry, etc. With respect to enquiry and research, we can certainly take truth to be an important, if not the chief, intellectual value. This is simply because in pursuing enquiry one important intellectual desire that we have is to come to believe the truth and avoid the false.

Secondly, there is the issue of how these various kinds of value interact. Even though having true beliefs is an intellectual good, it is not always valuable to believe the truth, for reasons other than intellectual ones. For instance, there are cases in which having a true belief might lead to disastrous consequences and a person may be better off having a false belief instead. One well-known example is that discussed by Stephen Stich of a person, Harry, who has a morning flight which departs at eight, but he falsely believes that it departs at nine. However the flight is destined to crash. Hearing about the accident after he arrives late at the airport Harry is thankful that he had a false belief.¹⁹⁰ Sometimes having a false belief can literally save your life. Also, we might come to believe something true and important but for the wrong kind of reason (or for no reason at all – just a lucky guess). Despite the truth of such a belief, which is sufficient for its being intellectually valuable, given the epistemically irresponsible way in which we acquired such belief, we would not consider our believing such propositions of epistemic value.

¹⁸⁹ See Lynch, M. (2004):130; and also Kvanvig, J. (2003):54.

¹⁹⁰ Stich, S. (1993).

These and other cases show that the value of having true beliefs and only true beliefs is a *prima facie*, rather than an all things considered, value. When we are reflecting on a broader scale about the value of truth and the way in which intellectual value interacts with other kinds of value we recognize that it is not the case that believing the truth is an *all things considered* kind of value.

A third issue concerns whether we should conceive of the value of truth as an instrumental value to the achievement of some other thing which is of value. From the fact that the value of truth is only *prima facie* – i.e., that in certain circumstances it can be outweighed by other kinds of value – we should not conclude that the value of having true and only true beliefs is instrumental. Many things that we value non-instrumentally have a *prima facie* rather than an *all things considered* value. For instance, we value Michelangelo's *La Pietà*, for its own sake, but it is plausible to maintain that its value would be outweighed by the value of saving human lives, if we were forced in a situation of choosing between saving Michelangelo's sculpture and saving several human lives.

Indeed, those philosophers that subscribe to the thesis that truth is valuable generally take such value to be non-instrumental. There are two main reasons for taking the value of having true beliefs as more than merely instrumental.¹⁹¹ Firstly, it is of value to believe certain true propositions regardless of whether they serve any other specific purpose. My believing that the Diet of Worms was in 1521 is certainly valuable even though such belief is hardly useful for any purpose other than that of historical knowledge. Secondly, without such an assumption our pursuit of truth in fields of enquiry with no expected pragmatic payoff would be hard to motivate. How do we explain our enthusiasm and dedication to seek for truth in domains such as theoretical philosophy or glottochronology if not by the fact that we value believing the truth for its own sake? These reasons are certainly not conclusive, but they make a quite plausible case for the thought that the value of having true beliefs is non-instrumental.

Claiming that we value truth non-instrumentally, of course, does not amount to strictly excluding that true beliefs could sometimes have *also* instrumental value. For

¹⁹¹ See, for instance, Horwich (2006):351. See also Lynch (2004):501-505.

instance, having true beliefs about whether cars are approaching while crossing the road might be of value for driving yourself safely to the other side of the road. Indeed, as Alvin Goldman pointed out:

“Our interest in information has two sources: curiosity and practical concerns. The dinosaur extinction fascinates us, although knowing its cause would have no material impact on our lives. We also seek knowledge for practical reasons, as when we solicit a physician’s diagnosis or compare prices at automobile dealerships.”¹⁹²

Paraphrasing a little bit, and talking of truth rather than knowledge, Goldman's point is that our reasons for valuing true beliefs have (at least) two broad sources: pure intellectual curiosity and practical utility. I take it that these two sources do not necessarily exclude each other. In particular, it is coherent to think of a case in which we value having a belief in a true proposition for the sake of truth itself but we also discover that having such true belief might have some practical utility. In this case we would value it for additional, instrumental, reasons. With this important clarification at hand, I suggest that the appropriate way of expressing the thought that we value truth non-instrumentally is by saying that truth has value regardless of whether it serves some other purpose.

§3.5.4 *A Distinction in Value*

An important issue at this point is how exactly to conceive of the idea that the value of truth is not merely instrumental. In fact, claiming that truth is non-instrumentally valuable is just saying what kind of value truth is not, but we need to say something in positive terms concerning what kind of value truth *amounts to* if we want to have a concrete and informative proposal on the table. Unfortunately, in the recent debate concerning the value

¹⁹² Goldman, A. (1999):3. See also Alston, W. (2005):31 and Lynch, M. (2004):15–16.

of truth the (few) things that are said in this respect are by no means clear and exhaustive. As far as I know, Michael Lynch, in a series of recent works, has provided the most extensive treatment of the issue concerning the value of truth. He is well aware of the importance of getting clear about what *kind* of value (or of good) we are talking about when we claim that truth is valuable. However on this fundamental issue, he is not as clear as one might hope. For instance, he writes:

“[T]he more tangled thread running through the common thought that truth is good [...] concerns *why or in what sense* truth is good, in particular whether a belief’s being true is only instrumentally good, or whether it is good in a deeper sense, for instance by being intrinsically good or a constituent part of a whole that is intrinsically good, or both.”¹⁹³

According to this quote, one way in which a thing might possess a kind of value other than just instrumental is by possessing intrinsic value. Another way for a thing to have more than merely instrumental value is to be part of a whole that has intrinsic value. This second thought is not very clear and indeed quite uninformative.¹⁹⁴ Some commentators, like Marian David, have taken Lynch to mean that what is part of an intrinsic good is itself intrinsically good, because it is not merely instrumentally good.¹⁹⁵ Lynch has explicitly denied this claim,¹⁹⁶ introducing the notion of ‘constitutive good’ which he takes to be different from, but compatible with, intrinsically good and also something *more* than instrumentally good. For something possessing constitutive good means "always being

¹⁹³ Lynch, M. (2004):501. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁹⁴ In his ‘Summary’ of “True to Life” for the symposium in *Philosophical Books* (Volume 46, Issue 4) Lynch puts the point in the following terms: “[S]omething is more than instrumentally good just when it is either (a) intrinsically good or (b) a constituent part of a greater whole that is more than instrumentally good.” (290). This formulation might avoid some worries, but it is still pretty uninformative and open to different interpretations. Moreover it suffers of the same general defect of the quote in the main text, namely that of suggesting that there is a homogeneous axiological scale that goes from a rather superficial value to a rather deep value.

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Lynch, M. (2005):127.

¹⁹⁶ Cf. Lynch, M. (2005) “Replies to Critics”: 334. There he says in footnote 7: “David, for example, takes me to assume that “what is constitutive of an intrinsic good . . . is itself intrinsically good” (fn. 5). Not so.”

good *qua* its being a part of a larger whole".¹⁹⁷ More precisely:

[B]eing constitutively good, like being an intrinsic good, makes something worth caring about for its own sake, as opposed to caring about it for what it leads to. You care about it in these cases for what it is or what it is an essential part of, not for its effects.¹⁹⁸

Thus, according to Lynch, intrinsic good and constitutive good are similar in that they are responsible for making something good for its own sake and not merely for the sake of something else. He then proceeds by arguing that insofar as truth is a constitutive part of a whole that is valuable for its own sake, it is itself valuable for its own sake:

"I argue that truth is worth caring about for its own sake partly because caring about truth is itself a constituent part of the virtues of intellectual integrity and sincerity, and that these in turn are elements of a flourishing human life."¹⁹⁹

Lynch bases this conclusion on the following argument:

- (1) If intellectual integrity is a constitutive good, then so is caring about truth as such.
- (2) Intellectual integrity is a constitutive good.
- (3) Therefore, caring about truth as such is a constitutive good.
- (4) If caring about truth as such is a constitutive good, then truth as such is worth caring about for its own sake.
- (5) Therefore, truth as such is worth caring about for its own sake.²⁰⁰

Then, insofar as caring about truth is good for its own sake, truth itself is good for its own sake, or in other words, believing the truth is finally good.

¹⁹⁷ Lynch, M. (2005):336.

¹⁹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ Lynch, M. (2005a):290.

²⁰⁰ See Lynch, M. (2004):136.

I am genuinely puzzled about this argument, mainly because I have no clear idea of what the notion of “constitutive good” exactly means. This sense of puzzlement is made even stronger by the following statement that Lynch makes elsewhere: "Constituent goods are extrinsic but non-instrumental goods".²⁰¹ I am not sure what Lynch means exactly with the expression “constituent good”. My conjecture is that from the context such an expression is used as synonymous with “constitutive good”. If this is right, “constitutive good” might be taken to have conflicting meanings. Indeed, a variety of different things can be said about what kind of value a constitutive part of a whole which is intrinsically valuable might have, which are all compatible with the various things Lynch says concerning 'constitutive good'. Firstly, Lynch's first quote seems to suggest that a constituent part of an intrinsically valuable whole can have intrinsic value. At the end of that quote in fact he says that something might be more than instrumentally valuable by being *either* intrinsically valuable *or* a constitutive part of a whole that is intrinsically valuable (where the ‘or’ employed in that quote seems to be used in its inclusive sense). Thus having value in virtue of being constitutive part of a whole which is intrinsically good is compatible with having intrinsic value. However, it seems that it is also compatible with extrinsic value as the last passage mentioned in this paragraph suggests. This fact makes the notion of constitutive good quite unclear.

Secondly, it is possible that a constitutive part of a whole which is valuable for its own sake has only contributory value, and it would not possess any value if taken in isolation. The value of such a thing would be entirely derivative from the value of the whole and thus an instrumental kind of value.²⁰² Take, for instance, the case of a beautiful puzzle. Assume that we value the puzzle for its own sake – i.e., only in virtue of the fact that it is beautiful. Certainly each single piece is a constituent part of the puzzle and equally contributes to the aesthetic value of the puzzle. However, this does not make a single piece valuable for its own sake. In fact, taken in isolation, we would not value that

²⁰¹ Lynch, M. (2005b):334. This is the only place I am aware of in which Lynch uses the expression ‘extrinsic good’, without really clarifying what he has in mind with it, and how it contrasts with the other axiological notions employed there and in other works.

²⁰² See, for instance, Olson, J. (2004):35.

piece. This casts doubt on the truth of premise 4 of Lynch's argument. If my remarks are on the right track, then Lynch's argument is unsound and his notion of “constitutive good” not well defined.

The upshot of this discussion is that, although I am generally sympathetic with many things Lynch says about the value of having true beliefs, his way of making the taxonomy is not very helpful for understanding what kind of value truth possesses once we agreed that it is a non-instrumental kind of value. More to the point, the very way in which the comparison is introduced “only instrumentally good” *versus* “good in a deeper sense” is quite misleading. In fact, it seems to suggest that there is a sort of homogeneous axiological scale that goes from a rather superficial value to a rather deep value, instrumental value being located near to the superficial end of the scale. However, it is not clear in what sense intrinsic value should be deeper than instrumental value rather than simply a different *kind* of value. In the next section I will show how we can do better by introducing a proposal made by Christine Korsgaard.

§3.5.5 Korsgaard's Framework for Understanding Value

Christine Korsgaard in her paper "Two distinction in goodness" was the first to clearly point out that questions concerning whether the value of a certain thing²⁰³ is intrinsic or extrinsic are distinct from questions concerning whether it is merely instrumental or non-instrumental value (i.e., leaving unnecessary complications aside, final value). I will not here take issue with the question whether this distinction is in fact a distinction without a difference. I find the arguments in favor of it quite compelling.²⁰⁴ My impression is that in the debate concerning the value of truth such distinction has been largely overlooked, with the result of muddling the whole discussion up.

²⁰³ Possible candidates for being value bearers include objects, events, state of affairs and actions. I will remain neutral about what the value bearers are and will simply speak of 'things' possessing the property of being valuable.

²⁰⁴ See in particular Rabinowicz, W. and Rønnow-Rasmussen, T. (2000).

Part of the project in this section is then that of recasting the issue of the value of truth within the framework introduced by Korsgaard with the hope of making the discussion clearer and more productive. Thus, on the one hand we have questions concerning the mode of valuing – i.e., how a certain thing is valued. We may value some thing as a means to something else which is of value; e.g., we value regular physical activity as a means to being healthy, or as a means to win a certain competition. Alternatively, we may value a thing for its own sake, regardless of whether it is a means to achieve something else which is of value. For instance, we usually value being healthy for its own sake. On the other hand, we have questions concerning the source of value – where and how a certain value is grounded in the thing which is valuable. Thus, the value of a thing might be extrinsic and this is when it is sourced in features of the thing that are external to it. For instance, the value of a ten pounds bill is sourced in something external to the piece of paper which constitutes the banknote, presumably in its purchasing power which in turns is grounded in a very complex network of factors concerning financial markets, social conventions and psychological features of consumers. Alternatively, the value of a thing might be intrinsic when the source of its value is entirely internal to the thing – i.e., either a fundamental intrinsic property of the thing or entirely grounded in some intrinsic property of the thing. For instance, it is generally contended that happiness is intrinsically valuable in that the value of the state of being happy is entirely grounded in features that are intrinsic to the state itself. Thus, to sum up: the distinction between instrumental and final value is not a distinction between sources of value but between ways of valuing something, whereas the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic concerns the source of value, rather than the way it is valued.²⁰⁵

With this framework at hand we can appreciate that there is space for the following possibility: a thing which is valued for its own sake and the source of its value is external

²⁰⁵ Admitting this distinction is compatible with the thesis that all final value is intrinsic value, as many philosophers maintain. Moore represents the locus classicus of this: in his (1959 [1932], p. 94) he wrote: “An expression [of ‘intrinsically good’] which is fairly commonly used, and which is, I think, intelligible to everybody, is that which we use when we say of an experience which we have had that it ‘was worth having for its own sake’

or (partly) grounded in external features of the thing. As an example of such a combination consider a rare, or unique, object – e.g., a Gutenberg Bible, which is considered the first book of movable type ever printed. We value such a thing (and, note, not the mere possession of such a thing) for its own sake, and not as a means to something else of value. So a Gutenberg Bible has final value. However, the source of its value is partly constituted by relational properties of the object such as its rarity, and so is partly extrinsic to those features that the Bible possesses intrinsically. In conclusion, we have that the value of a Gutenberg Bible is final but extrinsic.

It goes without saying that the taxonomy of value sketched here is far from being complete. In fact there are a number of crucial issues that need to be discussed, and in particular how this basic distinction in kinds of value integrates with other types of value such as contributory value, conditional value, subjective value, relative value, etc, to make a complete axiological theory. A discussion of these issues would lead us far astray. All that really matters for the purpose of this section is the very basic distinction between questions concerning the mode of value *versus* questions concerning the source of value.

§3.5.6 *Is the Value of Having True Beliefs an Intrinsic Feature of Truth?*

What we got so far is that the value of truth is a *prima facie*, final value. If we endorse Korsgaard's framework and thus agree with the thought that questions of instrumentality are distinct from, and more importantly do not settle, questions concerning the source of value, we need to understand whether the source of the value of truth is intrinsic to some features belonging to the nature of truth, or whether it is extrinsic and grounded in some facts that are external to the nature of truth. I will take this task on in the next chapter, when discussing the axiological challenge to deflationary accounts of truth.

§3.6 Concluding Remarks

In this Chapter I have outlined a framework for understanding the normative function that truth might play in enquiry. Although such a framework does not aim at being exhaustive, I think it provides a minimal, but valuable, model for conducting investigation about questions concerning the normativity of enquiry. The hope is that of contributing to make the discussion about the normativity of enquiry clearer and more systematic.

In the light of the discussion of this Chapter, I have endorsed the following formulations of the four dimensions of the normativity of truth I have considered:

TELEOLOGICAL: In judging about a subject matter *S*, a subject aims at having true and only true beliefs about *S*.

EVALUATIVE: For any proposition *p*, judging that *p* is correct if, and only if, *p* is true.

DEONTIC: For any proposition *p* a subject *S* actually considers: $\{[(S \text{ ought to judge that } p) \text{ if, and only if, } p \text{ is true}] \& [(S \text{ ought to judge that } \textit{not-p}) \text{ if, and only if, } p \text{ is false}]\}$.

AXIOLOGICAL: For any proposition *p* and for any subject *S*, it is valuable that: $[S \text{ judges } p \text{ if, and only if, } p \text{ is true}]$

In this Chapter I outlined the framework specifically in terms of the notion of truth. However, there seems to be no reason to exclude the possibility to extend this framework to the notions of justification, knowledge or understanding (indeed, whatever notion we take to be normative of enquiry). In this respect, it aims at providing a fully general model for conducting investigation concerning various normative aspects of enquiry. Concerning epistemic justification, for instance, it is undeniable that it plays a normative role in enquiry which is distinct, as we will shortly see, from that of truth. In this respect we can think of the normativity of justification in terms of its evaluative function (as providing a standard of correctness of judgments); or in terms of its deontic function (as telling us what we ought to believe in the light of available evidence); we can also ask questions

concerning the value of having justified beliefs. How exactly to extend the framework to justification, or knowledge, is not something I will pursue in this thesis. There are many interesting questions concerning how the normative profiles of these three notions are related and what are the prospects for a unified account of the normativity of enquiry and the assertoric practice. As far as I know, no systematic work in this direction has been done so far. Thus this constitutes a natural and, I believe, promising extension of the work I have done in this thesis. I hope to investigate all these important issues in future research.

Chapter 4

Deflationism, Minimalism and the Normativity of Truth

§4.1 Introduction

In this Chapter I discuss how to conceive of truth in the light of our investigation so far. The aim is not the overly ambitious one of providing a comprehensive theory of truth, but rather that of understanding how to integrate the thesis of the variable normative constraint that truth exerts in different areas of enquiry with a broadly minimalist conception of truth. To this end, it is important to be clear about the desiderata that my discussion imposes on an account of truth. I will carry this task out in this introductory section.

The thesis I will defend is that a standard version of deflationism cannot accommodate the normative dimension(s) of truth, but I will propose an amended version – *minimally inflated deflationism* – which I argue can do so. Minimally inflated deflationism (henceforth=MID) differs importantly from the version defended by Horwich in particular in that, in subscribing to the thesis that truth is a *sui generis* norm of enquiry, it maintains that the property of truth has an underlying nature which is explanatorily relevant. Thus, it rejects the insubstantiality commitment of Horwich-style deflationism. However, it maintains that, its normative character notwithstanding, the underlying nature of truth is metaphysically minimal and it can be reconciled with a broadly deflationary conception of truth. The suggestion is, in brief, that all that is required in order to make Horwich-style deflationism explanatorily adequate with respect to the various normative

challenges is to mitigate the insubstantiality thesis, and that this can be done without renouncing the insights behind the deflationary conception.

That said it is important to be clear about the main line of thought I will defend in this Chapter. My principal proposal here is that truth has an important *explanatory role* (in a sense which will be clarified shortly) – and in that sense it has a nature which is more substantive than that postulated by militant deflationists like Horwich. However, because I will work with a notion of *insubstantiality* which is especially tied to the notion of explanatory role (in the specific way I conceive of it in §§4.3.3-4.3.4), the line of argument defended in this Chapter may not be in direct conflict with the militant deflationist position held by Horwich whereby truth has “no substantial nature”, since questions of substantiality/insubstantiality are understood by Horwich in a quite different sense (tied to the possibility of providing a theory of the constitution of truth).²⁰⁶

§4.1.1 *Résumé*

In Chapter 2, focusing on the comparison between three domains beneath cognitive command – i.e., the moral, the taste and the comedic – I have argued that there are important differences in the way cognitive disagreement occurs in them. I have also argued that the best way to account for such differences is in terms of variation in the normative constraint that truth exerts in these domains. In this respect, one important observation I made is that there is a striking contrast between disagreements as they occur in the comedic domain and in the domain of taste, on the one hand, and in the moral domain, on the other. This contrast concerns primarily the parity and faultlessness features of disagreement. The taste domain, in allowing for the possibility of judging a contrary opinion within a committed perspective as alethically permissible, allows for a kind of faultless disagreement that is precluded in the moral domain. I have argued that the best explanation of this contrast has to do with the fact that whereas truth in the taste domain

²⁰⁶ More on this later – §4.3.5.

plays a very weak normative role (most importantly it does not exert any deontic control), in the moral domain it plays a more substantive normative role, and in particular a deontic one. I have also illustrated how we can model this difference in behaviour by means of the notion of alethic suberogation. The strategy was to show how a judgment of the incorrectness of a contrary opinion could coexist in some domains (e.g., the domain of taste) with a judgment of the permissibility of such opinion.

In Chapter 3, I introduced a general framework for studying the normativity of truth which distinguishes four ways in which truth can be a norm of enquiry – evaluative, teleological, deontic and axiological. Following up Dummett’s instructive analogy between the concept of winning in a game and the concept of truth, I have extended the analogy to all four distinct alethic norms and I have provided a systematic discussion suggesting what I take to be the best formulation for each norm. This makes clear that when we are talking about the normativity of a practice, we might have in mind at least four different questions that require independent investigation, thus revealing interesting aspects and differences that would be overlooked otherwise. This happens, I have argued, in the case of truth – especially if we look at the issue through the diagnostic tool of cognitive disagreement in the evaluative discourse. Moreover, with respect to the specific purpose of this Chapter, this framework allows us to make some fine-grained distinctions on the basis of which to evaluate more accurately the explanatory adequacy of an account of truth vis-à-vis the normative questions.

§4.1.2 *Two Desiderata*

What our discussion so far suggests is that there are two important desiderata for a conception of truth adequate to explaining the phenomena discussed in this thesis.

First, our conception of truth must be able to account for the fact that in some domains (paradigmatically, the domain of taste) the normative control exerted by truth must be very minimal, and in particular it must be compatible with the possibility of

deontic faultlessness and parity in disagreement. Call this the *normative lightness* requirement.

Second, our conception of truth must be able to account for the fact that the normative control that truth exerts in enquiry varies from domain to domain in tandem with aspects of the subject matter at issue. Call this the *normative variability* requirement.

Lastly, as a corollary of *normative variability*: in specifying the basic principles (or platitudes) characterizing truth we should not be too committal with respect to the normative issue. In other words, we should avoid including specific constraints on the normative profile of truth in the basic principles characterizing the concept of truth in such a way as to preclude the possibility of normative variation.

§4.1.3 *Deflationism, Pluralism, and Explanation: What are the Options?*

In endorsing these desiderata, we might be excluding some important accounts of truth from the start. These are all those accounts that, because of their monistic and substantive nature, force uniformity upon the normative role that truth plays in enquiry. Clear examples of accounts that seem ill suited to satisfy our desiderata are (monistic)²⁰⁷ versions of the correspondence theory of truth. Because these theories take truth to be a substantive and uniform notion across the various domains of discourse they seem to force an inflexible account of the normativity of truth. As a consequence, they seem unable to account for our desiderata.

With respect to *normative lightness*, it is in the very nature of the correspondence relation to preclude the possibility of disagreements not involving any *cognitive* kind of error. There are, of course, various ways in which the correspondence relation might be

²⁰⁷ Although there are a variety of versions of the correspondence theory of truth, they typically assume a monistic account of the nature of truth. However, very recently, Gila Sher and Robert Barnard and Terence Horgan have developed a pluralistic version of the correspondence theory of truth according to which different correspondence principles are at work in different areas of truth. See Sher, G. (2013) and Barnard, R. and Horgan, T. (2013).

cashed out,²⁰⁸ but all of them have to be much more substantive than the kind of notion in play in the correspondence platitude that both pluralists and deflationists are happy to endorse. This is because *correspondence* is not just a matter of 'getting things right' or of 'telling it like it is'; it is rather a question of some sort of structural and systematic matching between our judgments and portions of reality whose existence is taken to be (largely and significantly) independent of our thoughts and beliefs. Because the truth of a judgment is a matter of *corresponding* to the facts, in judging falsely a subject must be incurring in some cognitive error (perhaps because she is misperceiving the facts, or because she is processing the perceptual information in a faulty way). In other words, a commitment to the thesis that truth is uniformly a matter of correspondence is a commitment to the thesis that the primary function of truth-apt judgments is uniformly (robustly) representational. The latter is, in turn, a commitment to the thesis that every disagreement occurring in a domain of discourse whose characteristic judgments are truth-apt, must involve some cognitive error.

With respect to the second desiderata – *normative variability* – correspondence theorists can certainly endorse my framework for the normativity of truth and say that, although every disagreement necessarily involves some cognitive shortcoming, some disagreements – e.g., disagreements concerning moral issues – might involve other dimensions of reproach (i.e., a deontic one) as well. This is certainly an open possibility that, incidentally, shows that the framework presented in this thesis is fully general. However, I think correspondence theorists would have a very hard time distinguishing between the various kinds of shortcoming. In fact, if every cognitive disagreement is one that necessarily involves a cognitive shortcoming, then there is a strong sense that in every disagreement things are not as they (alethically) ought to be with respect to at least one party to the disagreement. Perhaps there are ways to resist this thought, but I will not explore this possibility in this Chapter.

These remarks should not be taken as a refutation of correspondence theories. I

²⁰⁸ For instance, the picture theory of correspondence of *Tractarian* inspiration, the so-called 'museum' metaphor of correspondence, structural isomorphism or homomorphism views of correspondence, etc.

offer no argument to back that conclusion. However if correspondence theorists have some sympathies for the kind of phenomena illustrated in this thesis, they surely have to say something to show how their preferred account of truth can explain such phenomena.

That said, I nevertheless think that there are various accounts of truth that are compatible with the framework developed in this thesis and that seem to be well equipped to satisfy the aforementioned desiderata. In particular, I take it that both some versions of deflationism and some versions of pluralism look very promising in that respect. They both seem to have the right kind of flexibility to account for the variable normative role of truth and to allow for the possibility of a normatively lightweight notion of truth.

With respect to pluralism, things are, at least *prima facie*, straightforward. In fact, I take it that the thesis that what normative constraint truth exerts varies from domain to domain can be thought of as one of the main insights at the core of the pluralistic conception of truth. One important motivation for pluralism – regardless of what specific form it takes – is that there are differences to be explained concerning how truth behaves in various domains of discourse. I have argued that, reflecting on such differences through the diagnostic tool of disagreement, we can appreciate that they have to do, at least partly, with a variation in the normative constraints that truth exerts in different areas of enquiry. One simple explanation of our desiderata – although not the only one – that is available to pluralists is to say that there are different properties of truth in different domains each of which has a *sui generis* normative character and some of which – e.g., truth-in-the-taste-domain – would exert a rather weak normative control on our judgments. According to this proposal, the normative variability of truth would be explained in terms of a difference in the nature of the local truth properties operating in various discourses. This is an elegant and fully effective way of accounting for our desiderata.²⁰⁹ However, it comes with some metaphysical costs – those typically associated with a pluralistic account of truth – namely a plurality of *properties* of truth.

²⁰⁹ How the proposal works in detail is something that, for limits of space, I cannot develop in this thesis. I try to address this issue in my (still work-in-progress) paper “Alethic Pluralism and the Normativity of Truth: A Reply to Engel’s Dilemma”.

The line of thought I will defend in this Chapter is that we can provide an account of truth which is explanatorily adequate with respect to our desiderata without the need to postulate a plurality of alethic properties. The main rationale behind this is that a commitment to pluralism would follow from a commitment to the variable normative character of truth only if we have an argument that shows that this variation must be accounted for in terms of a difference in the *nature* of the various truth properties postulated by pluralists. If no such argument is forthcoming then any attempt to establish the truth of pluralism has to be based on considerations other than the satisfaction of the aforementioned desiderata. In this Chapter, I will not try to provide such an argument. One important caveat is to remember that throughout this thesis I have focused only on disagreement and the normativity of truth in domains of discourse *beneath* Cognitive Command. Thus, also the strategy I am pursuing in this Chapter has to be understood keeping that restriction in mind. Whether we should endorse pluralism in order to account for the differences in the truth of judgments in domains *above* Cognitive Command is not something I will deal with in this Chapter.

That said, my aim is not that of criticizing pluralism – a view towards which I am sympathetic – but rather that of getting clear about how far we can get in terms of an explanation of our desiderata with a deflationary conception of truth. The main reason for adopting this strategy is twofold. On the one hand, as a general methodological point I think it is advisable to be as metaphysically parsimonious as possible and thus to follow the advice of what Hartry Field has called 'methodological deflationism' with respect to metaphysical issues. According to Field

“[M]ethodological deflationism is simply a methodological policy, which if pursued could lead to the discovery that deflationism in the original sense ("metaphysical deflationism") is workable or could lead to the discovery that inflationism is inevitable.”²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Field, H. (1994):263. The point Field is making concerns both a deflationary account of truth and meaning. Thus, his methodological deflationism extends also to issues concerning meaning. The way in

On the other hand, I think that arguing for the hardest case (that which involves the least theoretical and metaphysical resources) has the important advantage of showing what are exactly the essential features that an account of truth has to have in order to be explanatorily adequate with respect to our desiderata. Moreover, should our considerations show that inflationism is inevitable, we will know exactly what aspects of the deflationary conception has to be inflated in order to have an account of truth which is explanatorily adequate. In this respect, even a negative result would be important.

So, I will try show that a suitably amended version of deflationism can account for our desiderata. If I am successful, this will establish that – at least with respect to the purposes of my thesis – deflationists and pluralists are both well placed in terms of explanatory adequacy, even though, on general grounds, deflationism, once amended, would have the advantage of being metaphysically more economical than pluralism.

In outline what a deflationist can say is that (i) truth has a uniform nature; (ii) such a nature has an essential normative core; (iii) such a normative core is however very thin – and this allows for the possibility of *normative lightness*; (iv) because the normative core of truth is very thin, it is compatible with the fact that the normative role that truth plays in enquiry may vary; (v) what determines such variations are not facts about truth's nature but rather aspects concerning the way enquiry is pursued in the various domains; (vi) and these must be aspects that are not directly explained by appealing to facts about the nature of truth. This is roughly the plan I will try to carry through in this Chapter.

Thus, just to be clear about issues concerning the explanatory order in this Chapter: It is not part of the argumentative strategy I am pursuing here to maintain that both *normative lightness* and *normative variability* have to be explained by features concerning the nature of the truth property. What I claim is that the normative lightness requirement is indeed directly accounted for by the fact that the deflationary truth property has a very thin nature (albeit a normative one). However, what accounts for the normative variability requirement are not directly features concerning the nature of truth but rather aspects

which I am advocating such a policy is restricted to the case of truth.

concerning enquiry that are explanatorily independent of facts concerning the nature of truth. This is crucial to bear in mind if we want to remain neutral with respect to a commitment to alethic pluralism. In fact, if the *normative variability* requirement were to be explained directly by features belonging to the nature of the truth property, this would commit us to an endorsement of alethic pluralism – namely the idea that there are different truth properties with different normative natures. But this is not the case. Surely, the nature of truth does play a role in the explanation of the two requirements, but, especially with respect to *normative variability* it plays only an auxiliary and indirect role. One might at this point dispute the idea that truth plays even such a minimal explanatory role with respect to the two requirements. In fact, a militant deflationist like Horwich would probably object to that. However, as we will see shortly (§4.5) once it is postulated that ‘true’ denotes a genuine property (in whatever sense of ‘genuine property’ we may want to work with) and it is argued that in virtue of its being essentially governed by the equivalence schema ‘true’ denotes a property the possession of which marks a kind of normative good standing which sharply contrasts with justification, it should be admitted that such a property has a (minimal) normative character. Such a normative character certainly plays a role in a full account of the *normative lightness* and *normative variability* requirements – but only a narrow one and in the case of *normative variability* a very indirect one.

§4.1.4 *What’s Wrong with Deflationism?*

In order to show that deflationism can be an option for our purposes, we need to deal with an important worry, or, more precisely, a cluster of interrelated challenges to deflationism as ordinarily conceived. Such a worry concerns the ability of deflationism to account for the normative aspect(s) of truth. Some philosophers, such as, e.g., Michael Dummett, Michael Lynch, Huw Price, Bernard Williams and Crispin Wright, have argued, in different ways, that deflationism fails to provide an adequate explanation of the

normativity of truth. What they purported to show is that deflationary truth is too minimal to be explanatorily adequate with respect to all facts concerning truth.

One important thing to notice, as we will shortly see, is that these various challenges target different aspects of the normativity of truth. Thus, working within the framework outlined in Chapter 3 may be helpful in order to get clear about what the various criticisms amount to, and how deflationism can accommodate them. In order to evaluate the potential of deflationism with respect to our desiderata it is crucial that we deal with these various challenges and show that deflationists have some options. For this reason most of the Chapter will be a detailed and critical discussion of these challenges. The main thesis I will argue for is that a suitably amended version of deflationism can address the challenges and in a way which does not preclude the possibility of variability in truth's normative profile.

The plan is to first present what I take to be the most promising version of alethic deflationism, namely that elaborated in several works by Paul Horwich. I will then discuss the various challenges to deflationism concerning the normativity of truth. The upshot of that discussion will be that deflationists *à la* Horwich need to relax some of their core theoretical commitments in order to provide an adequate explanation of the normative aspect(s) of truth. However, the kind of revision required will not jeopardize the spirit and the main insights behind the deflationary conception of truth. In other words, although we should abandon the austere form of metaphysical deflation advocated by Horwich, which is in tension with certain important aspects of truth, we can still remain deflationist *au fond* and conceive of truth in a fairly minimal fashion.

I take it that the version of deflationism proposed here – *minimally inflated deflationism* – has some distinctive points of advantage over the version proposed by Horwich even though it agrees with some core insights of his deflationary conception of truth. Because it takes the fact that truth is *sui generis* normative it denies that truth has no underlying nature. In my view, as we will shortly see, the distinctive normative role that truth plays in enquiry is not a mere epiphenomenon of the logical function of the truth predicate, which tell us nothing about the nature of the truth property. On the contrary,

MID maintains that truth has an irreducibly normative nature. This fact, I will argue, contributes to an explanation of the various dimensions of the normativity of truth and to an explanation of the thesis that truth has a variable normative profile. Moreover, I will argue that this irreducibly normative aspect of the nature of truth does not make truth substantive – at least in the sense in which I will understand the notion of *substantiality* here. On the contrary, the distinctive thesis of MID is that although truth has an underlying normative nature, it is metaphysically minimal.

For all these reasons, I take it that the account I will defend in this Chapter is an original one and it represents an improvement (although a *minimal* one) on Horwich's.

§ 4.2 Alethic Deflationism

Deflationism has received many different formulations. As a result, there is not so much a deflationary theory of truth as a plurality of them. Throughout the Chapter, unless specified otherwise, I will restrict the use of the term ‘deflationism’ only to those views that endorse the following core principles and commitments.

To begin with, deflationists maintain that ‘is true’ is a genuine predicate. Moreover, they do not maintain that the truth predicate is redundant and thus that we should or could dispense with it. On the contrary, they recognize that it has an important logical function as a device of endorsement of a certain claim or collection of claims. In general, endorsement can be achieved just by asserting, or assenting to a particular statement without using the truth predicate. If I want to endorse your claim that Russell is a great philosopher, I can assent to it or just assert myself that claim. With respect to such ordinary endorsements the truth predicate is not needed (at least, in its function as a device of endorsement). However, it is required in cases in which endorsement is not of this ordinary kind. For instance, endorsement can sometimes be indefinite: if I want to express my endorsement of some of the claims made by Tom without specifying which ones, we need the truth

predicate that allows us to say, “Something Tom said is true”. Moreover, endorsement can sometime be generalized: if we believe that Plato is the best philosopher of all time and we want to fully endorse all his philosophical doctrines we need the truth predicate that allows us to say things like “everything Plato said is true”. In addition, the truth predicate is needed because we sometimes may want to endorse a certain statement by name – like, for instance, when we say, “Gödel’s second incompleteness theorem is true”. Although the brand of deflationism we are interested in here maintains that the truth predicate exists solely for the sake of the aforementioned logical functions, it does not maintain that we can dispense of it.²¹¹

Some deflationists acknowledge that the expression ‘being true’ designates a property, whereas others have denied that. Quine, for instance, maintains that ‘true’ designates no property but is a syncategorematic expression that enables us to ‘ascend semantically’ and to talk about sentences instead of about objects.²¹² In this respect, all there is about the truth predicate is its function as a device for semantic ascent/descent within the assertoric context.

Other deflationists – like Horwich – think that ‘being true’ denotes a property which is attributed to propositions, regardless of how or whether they are expressed.²¹³ The reason why truth should be regarded as a property is, according to Horwich, that “is true” should be formalized in logic as a predicate.²¹⁴ In this respect, the truth predicate refers to a (purely semantic or logical) property in the minimal sense in which every meaningful expression that functions logically as a predicate stands for a property. This concession – Horwich claims – does not commit one to the thesis that ‘true’ designates a substantive property – i.e., a property with a metaphysical nature worthy of philosophical

²¹¹ Contra ‘redundantist’ theorist à la Ramsey (See Ramsey, P.F. (1927). ‘Facts and Propositions’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 7 (Supplementary): 153–170). See Horwich, P. (1998):2.

²¹² See Quine, W.V.O. (1986), *Philosophy of Logic* (2nd), Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

²¹³ Horwich, P. (1998):28; 142 and (1996):879.

²¹⁴ According to Horwich, it is a vital feature of truth that we can argue as follows:

x is true

x =the proposition *that p*;

Therefore: The proposition *that p* is true

Therefore: p .

See Horwich, P. (1998):141.

investigation. The truth of a proposition explains nothing over and above our disposition to assert or endorse it as a belief under appropriate circumstances. Thus, truth does not figure indispensably in the explanation of other notions (such as belief, assertion, meaning, interpretation), beyond its role as an expressive device. Accordingly, the only function that truth has is entirely expressive and not explanatory²¹⁵. In this respect deflationism stands in opposition also to *primitivist* projects à la Davidson in that it maintains that there is no explanatory project that requires us to take on board the notion of truth as a theoretical primitive. In what follows, I will focus only on those strands of deflationism that allow for truth being a kind of property.

The third feature of deflationism amounts to the thesis that all that is required for ‘true’ to play its logical and expressive role is that it satisfies the following schema:

EQUIVALENCE SCHEMA The proposition that *p* is true if and only if *p*.²¹⁶

The instances of the Equivalence Schema are epistemologically fundamental in that we do not seek to justify them on the basis of anything more obvious or basic. In virtue of being competent language users, we are disposed to accept any (non-pathological)²¹⁷ instance of the schema. Moreover, the given equivalences are taken to be explanatorily basic in the sense that our truth-talk is fully explained by them. In these respects, the various equivalences are taken as axioms of the theory of truth.

The deflationists’ project, then, is that of providing a theory of truth that amounts to nothing more than the totality of propositions expressed by (non-pathological) instances of

²¹⁵ Williams, M. (1999):547.

²¹⁶ I follow Horwich here in understanding the biconditional in the Equivalence Schema as a *material* biconditional. Typically the schema is formulated in the following way:

<*p*> is true if, and only if, *p*.

Here, surrounding an expression, *p*, by angled brackets yields an expression that refers to the propositional constituent expressed by what *p* says. So, <grass is green> (within angled brackets) is to be read as the proposition that grass is green.

²¹⁷ For a discussion of whether semantic paradoxes pose a special problem to deflationism and how deflationists can account for the presence of semantic paradoxes in natural languages, see Beall, J.C. and Armour-Grab, B. (Eds.) (2005), *Deflationism and Paradoxes*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

the Equivalence Schema, which are taken as axioms of the theory.²¹⁸

With these qualifications in mind, I take it that there are four main commitments that the kind of deflationism under scrutiny here undertakes:

EQUIVALENCE To ascribe the truth predicate to a propositional content is equivalent to just endorsing that content.²¹⁹

SUFFICIENT Appealing to the Equivalence Schema is sufficient for a complete analysis of the concept of truth.²²⁰

EXHAUSTION Having an account of truth in terms of the Equivalence Schema gives a complete explanation of the nature of the corresponding property – i.e., of all facts about the truth property.²²¹

INSUBSTANTIALITY That the property denoted by 'is true' is not *substantive* – i.e., truth is a property with no underlying metaphysical nature.

²¹⁸ In the second edition of *Truth*, Horwich distinguished between ‘the minimal theory as such’ and ‘the minimalist conception’. He then writes: “the theory of truth [that the minimalist’s account] proposes involves nothing more than the Equivalence Schema” (1998:7,11). Presumably, what he meant is that Equivalence Schema presents the structure of the minimal theory’s principles without remainder. However, strictly speaking, Horwich’s minimal theory is an infinite unordered list of non-paradoxical T-biconditional propositions expressed by their corresponding instances of Equivalence Schema. I owe this point to Cory D. Wright.

²¹⁹ There are various ways of understanding the notion of equivalence. Some deflationists, like Horwich, take ‘equivalent’ to mean ‘logically equivalent’; others take it to mean ‘semantically equivalent’ (intersubstitutability of <True(p)> and <p> in all non-opaque contexts); Field (1994) take it to mean ‘cognitively equivalent’ (for two sentences to be cognitively equivalent for a given person is for that person’s inferential rules to license the inference from either one to the other). Other ways of understanding the equivalence are possible – e.g., analytic equivalence, meaning equivalence, pragmatic equivalence, etc. Since nothing important hinges on this, in what follows I will adopt Horwich’s understanding of it

²²⁰ Following Horwich, one might rephrase the point by saying that the Equivalence Schema implicitly defines truth. See Horwich, P. (1998).

²²¹ EXHAUSTION and SUFFICIENT are sometimes put together under the *Adequacy Thesis* according to which the minimal theory is sufficient for explaining all the facts involving truth. See Gupta, A. (1993) and David, M. (2002). As Horwich puts it, “Indeed every fact about truth can be naturally derived from those biconditionals [instances of the Equivalence Schema]. Therefore it is they that should constitute our basic theory of truth”. (1998:11–12).

These four theses constitute the core commitments to which our deflationists subscribe. EQUIVALENCE is a thesis about the truth predicate – it just highlights the main logico-expressive function of the truth predicate as a device of endorsement. SUFFICIENT is a thesis about the concept of truth and it says that there is nothing more to an analysis of the truth concept than the fact that it obeys to the Equivalence Schema. EXHAUSTION is a thesis concerning the relation between the concept of truth and the truth-property and it says that the nature of the truth property is exhausted by an analysis of the concept in terms of the Equivalence Schema. In other words, an account of the concept gives a complete account of the property. INSUBSTANTIALITY is a thesis about the metaphysical credentials of the truth property saying that it is a shallow property.

I take it that Horwich's *Minimalism* is the most representative version of the kind of deflationism sketched here. For this reason, I will take it as the paradigm throughout the Chapter.

§4.3 Insubstantiality & the Sparse/Abundant conception of properties

§4.3.1 Insubstantiality

Before proceeding, it might be useful to make a brief digression to clarify what the insubstantiality thesis amounts to since this notion is going to play an important role in what follows. First, insubstantiality is meant to be a thesis *about the property of truth*, as distinct both from the concept of truth and the truth-predicate.²²² Despite the reluctance generally displayed by deflationists concerning metaphysical talk, admitting that 'is true' denotes a property (of propositions) brings some important questions about its nature to the fore. In particular, the issue of whether the truth property really is metaphysically

²²² The distinction between property and concept in the theory of truth has gained a certain momentum: Cf. Wright, C. (2001), Künne W. (2003): 2, Lynch, M. (2006) and Damnjanovic, N. (2010).

insubstantive, and what indeed that means, becomes pressing.

Several proposals have been advanced about how to understand the notion of a substantive property – whether in terms of the transparency/opacity of the property with respect to the associated concept,²²³ or in terms of a constitution theory,²²⁴ or by means of the distinction between sparse and abundant properties.²²⁵

Following a suggestion recently made by Douglas Edwards,²²⁶ I will assume that the most promising way of understanding the distinction between substantive and non-substantive properties is in terms of that between sparseness and abundance within a framework that allows for both sparse and abundant properties and where the distinction is conceived as a matter of degree, from the most sparse properties to the most abundant ones.²²⁷ Accordingly, the core of the disagreement between deflationists and anti-deflationists would be where to locate the truth-property on this scale – whether closer to the abundant-end (deflationism) or to the sparse-end (anti-deflationism) of the spectrum.

Many interpretations of sparseness have been advanced over recent decades. David Lewis, for instance, has proposed to understand the notion of sparseness in terms of that of the *naturalness* of a property. The idea is roughly that somewhat natural properties are those that "can be reached by not-too-complicated chains of definability from the perfectly natural properties."²²⁸ Jonathan Schaffer, on the other hand, opted for a scientific conception of sparseness according to which sparse properties ground objective similarities and carve out causal powers.²²⁹ Theodore Sider identifies those properties that are at the sparse-end of the spectrum as those that "carve nature at its joints" better, and thus are part of the objective structure of the world.²³⁰

²²³ For instance, Lynch, M. (2009):116, and Wright, C. (2001).

²²⁴ Horwich (1998):141-144.

²²⁵ Lewis, D.K. (1986), Schaffer, J. (2004), Edwards, D. (2012).

²²⁶ Edwards, D. (2012):5,8-9. See also, Edwards, D. (2014): Chapter 6; and Lewis, D.K. (1983).

²²⁷ See Lewis, D.K. (1983).

²²⁸ Lewis, D.K. (1986):61. See also his (1983):351-5, for an alternative picture.

²²⁹ Schaffer, J. (2004).

²³⁰ The way Sider does this is by positing (p. 92) a primitive "structural" operator, which maps portions of the language to truth just in case that portion of the language "carves at the joints" (it fits "the fundamental structure of reality"). Given that a fundamental theory of reality has to be expressed in all and only joint carving terms (pp. 106-09), what Sider provides us with is a device for querying whether a given portion of

One immediate worry is that unless we can make sense of the idea that truth could be a reasonably sparse property – i.e., a property which is relatively close to a purely sparse property – it is hard to see how to shape the deflationism/anti-deflationism opposition. One might think that any attempt to establish that truth is a sparse property looks questionable if we understand *sparseness* in terms of perfectly natural or physically fundamental properties. Truth, *qua* property of propositions, does not seem the right *kind* of property to be found at (or near to) the sparse-end of the spectrum.

However, this concern can be easily answered. One suggestion is to extend the abundant/sparse picture in such a way that it encompasses different *spectra*, so to speak, one for each *kind* of properties. Thus, we would have one spectrum for the natural properties, broadly understood, one for the semantic properties, and so on. An anti-deflationist would argue that truth qualifies as a purely sparse property in the semantic abundant/sparse scale whereas the deflationist would deny this.

An alternative and perhaps more promising suggestion would be to maintain the single gradable spectrum framework and conceive of the sparse-end spectrum as populated by those properties essentially required by our best overall theory of the world (whatever that might be). Call this the *cosmological conception of sparseness*.²³¹ Such a theory is taken to be much broader in scope than our best theory of physical reality, including all sorts of semantic properties, and, importantly that of truth. Therefore, there would be no tension between truth being a semantic property and a maximally sparse property.²³²

Both ways are fine for our purposes, so I will not commit myself to any specific framework for modelling sparseness insofar as it is compatible with the possibility of truth being eligible for sparseness. I will however assume, for the sake of simplicity and

the language should appear in “the book of the world.” In this respect, (pure) sparse properties would be those and only those that appear in such book.

²³¹ Cf. with Schaffer’s *scientific conception* of sparseness. I take that what I am calling the cosmological conception is substantially the same as Schaffer’s, except for the fact that Schaffer’s way of characterizing it seems to be restricted only to scientific theories. What I have in mind here is something broader in scope than that.

²³² One way of developing this response is Frank Jackson’s ‘entry by entailment thesis’, according to which “The semantic gets a place in the scientific account of our world by being entailed by it”. See Jackson, F. (1998):3.

uniformity, the *cosmological* model for understanding sparseness.

§4.3.2 *Sparseness*

A second question concerns what are the criteria for sparseness – i.e., what are the features that a property has to possess in order to count as sparse. As I have already mentioned, from a methodological point of view, I think it is advisable to be as parsimonious as possible when admitting properties in the sparse region of the spectrum in order to avoid unnecessary redundancies.²³³ However, to follow this advice we need to have some criteria for determining whether and to what extent a certain property qualifies as sparse. Some features are widely considered characteristic of sparse properties:²³⁴

(i) *Similarity*: sparse properties ground objective similarities.²³⁵ The thought is that all instances of a reasonably sparse property *F* share something in their natures. Thus, if object A is *F* and object B is *F*, where *F* is a sparse property, then A's nature and B's nature are objectively similar with respect to *F*. Contrast this kind of property with disjunctive properties such as “being either round or five meters long” which do not insure objective similarity between their instances – both A and B might be either round or five meters long but be objectively dissimilar in that A is round and one meter long while B is triangular and five meters long.

(ii) *Causal power*: sparse properties have a certain degree of causal power – they are responsible for the causal interaction of the things that possess them. If two things causally interact in a certain way, they do so in virtue of (some) of the sparse properties they possess.

²³³ As Armstrong pointed out, some redundancy (in terms of conjunctive properties and analyzable structured properties) might be allowed in this basic set if we admit the possibility of the world being infinitely complex. See Armstrong, D.M. (1978) *Universals and Scientific Realism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: II, pp.30-42; 67-71 (reference taken from Lewis, D.K. (1983):346.

²³⁴ See, for instance: Schaffer, J. (2004); Lewis, D.K. (1983)

²³⁵ Cf. Armstrong, D. (1978): II, pp.19-29.

(iii) *Explanatory role*: sparse properties play an indispensable role in explaining a variety of different and interrelated phenomena. This feature concerns the question: what is the range of things that the possessing of a certain property by an object helps explaining?

(iv) *Basicness or fundamentality*: sparse properties represent the minimal indispensable ontological commitment of our best theory of the world and they cannot be reduced (either analytically or synthetically) to other more basic properties. This feature is meant to suggest the idea that sparse properties are those that can be admitted in our minimal ontology – that which is strictly required by our best theory of the world – without any unnecessary redundancy.²³⁶

A few comments are in order here. Firstly, this list is not meant to be comprehensive. Other features can be added or substituted to those already in the list. Secondly, those features included in the list should not be taken as jointly necessary (nor sufficient) for sparseness. Some properties might have some of these features but lack others and still qualify as reasonably sparse. Thirdly, possessing some of these features might turn out to be in tension with possessing some of the other features in the list. For instance, an object having the property of being superconductive has more causal power than an object having the property of being a neutron, even though the latter is more fundamental than the former.^{237,238}

§4.3.3 *Substantiality, Sparseness and Explanation*

²³⁶ Some philosophers, as for instance Schaffer, are sceptical about the fundamentality criterion for sparseness, mainly because it excludes without a proof the possibility of reality being infinitely and irreducibly complex. Although I sympathize with Schaffer's concern, for the purpose of this Chapter we can leave this issue aside. See Schaffer, J. (2004): 99.

²³⁷ I am here sharply distinguishing between causal power and explanatory power, the former having to do primarily with the range of causal efficacy of an object in virtue of possessing a specific property, while the latter having to do mostly with the network of explanations that is generated by the fact that a certain object has a certain property.

²³⁸ To use an example from Jaegwon Kim: "Having a mass of 1 kilogram has causal powers that no smaller masses have, and water molecules, or the property of being water, have causal powers not had by individual hydrogen or oxygen atoms." See Kim, J. (1998) *Mind in a Physical World*, Cambridge (MA): MIT Press:108. On this issue, see Schaffer, J. (2004).

It is important to be clear about the connection between the discussion in this section and the primary aim of the present Chapter. The sense in which I interpret the expression “truth as substantive property” is by means of a gradable notion of sparseness. To say that the property denoted by ‘is true’ is substantive is to say that it is sparse to a significant degree.²³⁹ The extent to which a property counts as more (or less) sparse is determined by the degree to which that property satisfies some of the criteria listed above.

How to model the relations between the various features of sparseness is an important but very hard task. I will not explore this issue here given that it is not central to my main purpose. However, throughout the Chapter in order to understand the degree of sparseness possessed by truth in relation with its (variable) normative profile, I will focus in particular on issues concerning the explanatory potential of truth in enquiry – thus, on feature (iii) in the above list.

There are two main reasons why I focus on this mark of sparseness. The first is that questions concerning *explanatory role* seem the most relevant and directly connected to a discussion of the nature of truth in relation to normativity. Concerning *causal power* there is an interesting argument – known as *the success argument* –²⁴⁰ that aims at showing that the truth property has causal efficacy with respect to practical success. Although I think the issue is an important one I will not deal with questions concerning the *causal efficacy* of truth. Arguably, under a fairly standard conception of causal efficacy, whatever is the connection between truth and the various normative aspects it exhibits in enquiry, it is not a causal one. Since my focus in this Chapter is only on question concerning the normativity of truth I will leave question concerning the causal efficacy of truth for

²³⁹ I am using the words ‘sparse’ and ‘abundant’ in a slightly unconventional sense as applying to individual properties. In the way most philosophers use these terms there is not really a sense in which some individual property can be more or less sparse. The realm of properties as a whole can be sparse, in that there are fewer properties than predicates. Alternatively, it can be abundant, in that there are about as many properties as predicates.

²⁴⁰ See Putnam, H. (1978) *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul lectures I and II, and Field, H. (1986). See also Damnjanovic, N. (2005). See Horwich, P. (1998):44-49 and 140-141 for a discussion of the causal role of truth with respect to practical and empirical success.

another occasion.²⁴¹

With respect to *basicness* and *similarity*, things are rather complicated and it seems as though deflationists are committed to truth failing those marks for sparseness. However, given that the various marks in the list are not jointly necessary for sparseness, even granting to deflationists that truth fails to exhibit *causal power*, *basicness*, and *similarity*, it is not clear how things fall with regard to deflationism and *explanatory role* in connection with the issue of the normativity of truth. Therefore, I set myself the task of investigating truth's explanatory role in this Chapter. The thought is that if truth plays a rather significant explanatory role, this might be sufficient for attributing a degree of sparseness to the property of truth that is unacceptable for deflationists of any sort. And this is regardless of how deflationism scores with respect to the other marks of sparseness. The second reason for focusing on *explanatory role* is that we want our best theory of truth to be explanatorily adequate with respect to all facts about truth. This seems a quite important theoretical desideratum. To this end, we need to understand what the explanatory potential of the truth property is *vis-à-vis* the various phenomena concerning enquiry that involve truth.

§4.3.4 *Explanatory Role and Wright's Width of Cosmological Role*

How should we interpret (iii) in the light of our project? In order to measure the explanatory potential of truth I suggest using a test introduced by Wright in *Truth and Objectivity* – what he calls the Width of Cosmological Role. I have already discussed the role of this test within Wright's discussion of the Realism–Anti-Realism debate in Chapter 1,²⁴² so I will not go into much detail here. However, a brief reminder of the main thought behind the Width of Cosmological Role test might be useful in connection to our discussion in this Chapter.

²⁴¹ Here I am following Kim's standard account as presented in his (1984) "Epiphenomenal and Supervenient Causation", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, 9:257-70.

²⁴² See Chapter 1, §1.3.

Wright devised this test as a means to detect whether those facts and properties that we are committed to in certain domains of discourse in virtue of the (successful) referential function of predicative expressions occurring in these domains are ontologically robust, as it were, and thus commit us to a form of metaphysical realism. He writes:

Let the width of cosmological role of the subject matter of a discourse be measured by the extent to which citing the kinds of states of affairs with which it deals is potentially contributive to the explanation of things *other than*, or *other than via*, our being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object.²⁴³

If citing the state of affairs that a certain object O has a property P occurs in explanations of a wide range of phenomena other than (and other than *via*) the fact that we believe O to be P, then that state of affairs would be rather substantive (i.e., within the framework I am adopting here, we can say that P would be located within the sparse section of the sparse/abundant scale). If, on the other hand, citing that state of affairs plays no explanatory role other than (or other than *via*) our believing that O is P, then such state of affairs would qualify, other things being equal, as insubstantial.

To illustrate, compare the following two states of affairs:²⁴⁴ the wetness of these rocks and the deliciousness of this sushi. Citing the fact that these rocks are wet contributes in explaining a range of phenomena other than (and other than *via*) my believing that these rocks are wet. For instance, it can be cited in explaining my slipping and falling, the abundance of lichen growing on them, the particular way in which they reflect sunlight, etc.

What does the fact that this sushi is delicious help explaining? Surely, my believing that sushi is delicious. It might also be cited to explain, for instance, my general preference for sushi over burgers and the fact that I frequently go to sushi bars. However, all these

²⁴³ Wright, C. (1992):196. Emphasis in the original.

²⁴⁴ The example is a slight modification of Wright's own example. See Wright, C. (1992):197.

other facts are explained *via* my believing that sushi is delicious rather than being directly explained by the fact that sushi is delicious. It is because *I believe that* sushi is delicious that I prefer sushi to burgers and I frequently go to sushi bars. Contrary to the rocks example, it seems that there are no belief-independent states of affairs that can be explained by citing the fact that sushi is delicious.

Leaving questions concerning Realism and Anti-Realism aside for present purposes, I will take Width of Cosmological Role as an effective test for determining the degree of sparseness of a property.²⁴⁵ Applying the test to the case of truth, the thought is that if truth, in virtue of its nature, turns out to play an indispensable and direct role in our explanation of a wide range of phenomena concerning enquiry, then we would have to locate truth in the sparse section of our sparse/abundant scale. This would be incompatible with the spirit of deflationism which takes truth to be a shallow property.

Thus, to sum up our discussion in this section, I have claimed that the most promising way to understand questions concerning the substantiality of truth is in terms of truth possessing a certain degree of sparseness. We can think of the degree of sparseness of a property primarily as a function of the explanatory potential associated with truth. The proposal is then to use Wright's notion of width of cosmological role as a model for the explanatory potential of a property. With all this in mind, the deflationists' distinctive claim with respect to the metaphysics of truth is that truth is insubstantial, and thus a rather abundant property whose explanatory potential is very minimal. In this respect, I will understand questions of inflation of the deflationary conception of truth in connection with the degree of sparseness that truth has. Therefore, showing that truth has to be inflated is to show that truth has a degree of sparseness which is significantly greater than that allowed by the deflationary conception of truth under scrutiny in this Chapter. The magnitude of the inflation will then be simply a function of the width of cosmological role associated with truth.

²⁴⁵ Just to be very clear about this point: the way I will use Wright's notion of Width of Cosmological Role is significantly different from the way Wright himself uses this notion in the context of his discussion of Realism and Anti-Realism in *Truth and Objectivity*.

§4.3.5 *Insubstantiality, Explanation & Militant Deflationists*

Now that we have a better sense of the notion of *substantiality* in play in this Chapter, it is important to be very clear about the argumentative strategy underlying the rest of the Chapter. As I have already mentioned, some militant deflationists – especially Horwich – work with a different conception of what it is for a certain property to be substantive which does not take issue with questions concerning the explanatory role that the truth property plays with respect to normative aspects of enquiry. According to Horwich a *substantive property* is “the sort of property for which there might well be a constitution theory of the form: x is true = x is F .”²⁴⁶ If we work with such a conception of *substantive property* then Horwich is right in claiming that “it surely does not follow, from the normative character of truth, that truth is [substantive] in that sense.”²⁴⁷ Thus, conceding that truth is a normative notion poses no special metaphysical challenge to Horwich-style deflationism if we understand the notion of *substantive property* in the way Horwich does. However, without putting into question the legitimacy of Horwich’s preferred notion of *substantive property*, one might think that there are other, equally legitimate, notions of *substantive property* according to which truth being normative in the way it is entails a certain minimal degree of *metaphysical inflation* to the truth property.²⁴⁸ I have just discussed one such a conception which is connected to the kind of explanatory role that the possessing the truth property by a proposition plays. The principal proposal

²⁴⁶ Horwich, P. (1998):143.

²⁴⁷ Horwich, P. (1998):143.

²⁴⁸ The question – What determines whether a notion of substantiality is legitimate? – is certainly an hard one, and I do not have a set of criteria jointly sufficient to address the issue. My conjecture is that there is more than one legitimate conception of substantiality and, depending on what is the aim of our theoretical project, one particular notion might be more useful than the others. My project here is to understand the explanatory role that truth plays with respect to issues concerning the normativity of enquiry. Notoriously, question concerning the explanatory potential of a certain notion are importantly connected to questions concerning the substantiality of the property denoted by that notion – and this is precisely the kind of project I am running here. With respect to this project I believe that the notion of substantiality I am employing in this Chapter is more useful than the one employed by Horwich.

defended in this Chapter is then that truth has an important explanatory role, and in that sense (and only in that sense) it has a (minimally) substantive nature.

Once all that has been clarified, I do not see any a priori reason for disputing the legitimacy and the philosophical interest of the notion I have introduced in the previous sections. If militant deflationists do not think that this conception of *substantive property* is a legitimate one they need to provide some argument to back that conclusion. If no argument is forthcoming, then there is a sense of *substantive property* according to which truth would count as substantive to a degree which is incompatible with the radical insubstantiality thesis defended by militant deflationists. Note, moreover, that any accusation of *changing the subject* would be beside the point in this dialectical context. It is not an essential requirement imposed by the militant conception of deflationary truth to understand the notion of *substantive property* in the way Horwich does. That is a merely a stipulation, though a perfectly legitimate one. My preferred way of understanding such a notion is a stipulation as well – but, again, a totally legitimate one. The upshot of this discussion in terms of the dialectic of the Chapter is then the following: it is argued that truth being normative in the way it is requires some minimal degree of metaphysical inflation if my preferred understanding of the notion of *substantive property* is in play. A militant deflationist can avoid such a conclusion by rejecting the way I understand the notion of *substantive property* and endorse Horwich's preferred way of understanding it. However, it seems fair to say that the burden of proof is on militant deflationists to show the illegitimacy of the way of understanding the notion of *substantive property* utilised in previous sections.

§4.4 The Normative Challenge(s) to Deflationism

In this section, I introduce the discussion, which will occupy us for the greater part of the Chapter, of some challenges that have been raised against deflationism.²⁴⁹ The general tenor of such challenges is that deflating truth in the way deflationists wish to do is in conflict with the normative role that truth plays in enquiry.

In particular, opponents to deflationism contend that a fully committed deflationary conception of truth is incompatible with the idea that truth carries a proper normative dimension, distinct and not reducible to that of other normative notions such as that of warranted assertibility. In fact, they argue, attributing a *sui generis* normative dimension to truth is sufficient for granting a degree of substantiality to the associated property which is unacceptable for a deflationist. As McGrath has pointed out, “This is one of the more promising, if also more elusive, objections to deflationism.”²⁵⁰ One of the aims of this Chapter is to make this objection less elusive.

Deflationists are generally well aware of such a challenge. Part of their project in defending a deflationary account of truth is that of showing how to make compatible such an account with the normativity of truth. Both Paul Horwich and Hartry Field, two prominent deflationists, are very explicit on this issue. Horwich, for instance, writes:

I am not going to deny that there are correct norms concerning truth and meaning - we rightly value true belief, and we rightly take it that the meaning of a word determines what it ought, and ought not, to be applied to. But I want to argue that these normative facts can easily be reconciled with complete accounts of truth and meaning that are wholly non-normative.²⁵¹

And, in a similar vein, Hartry Field writes:

²⁴⁹ Given its popularity, the deflationary conception of truth has been widely criticized under many aspects. In this Chapter, I will focus only on one specific set of challenges concerning the issue of the normativity of truth. Among others, see Dummett, M. (1959); Wright, C. (1992), (1999), (2001); Gupta, A. (1993); Lynch, M. (2006), (forthcoming), Price, H. (1998). For (a selection of) other challenges to deflationism see: Davidson, D. (1967); Davidson, D. (1996); Gupta, A. (1993); Field, H. (1992); (1994); Richard, M. (1997).

²⁵⁰ McGrath, M. (2003):37.

²⁵¹ Horwich, P. (2000):19.

It is sometimes claimed that a deflationist cannot grant that there is any “substantial norm” of assertion beyond warranted assertibility. This seems to me a serious mistake [...] There is no difficulty in desiring that all one’s beliefs be disquotationally true; and not only can each of us desire such things, there can be a general practice of badgering others into having such desires. Isn’t this enough for there being a “norm” of asserting and believing the truth?²⁵²

Thus according to Horwich and Field, deflationists should have no problem in accounting for the normativity of truth. Indeed, one could even argue that this normative aspect of truth amounts to nothing more substantive than an illustration of the kind of generalization function associated with the truth predicate.²⁵³

In what follows, I will discuss whether the general optimism underlying these quotes is indeed justified. In order to address this question I will put the framework outlined in Chapter 3 into use. The aim is to show that the general challenge concerning the normativity of truth in fact encompasses four different challenges – one for each way in which truth can be normative of enquiry. I will adopt the terminology used in Chapter 3 and I will call these various challenges accordingly: the evaluative challenge; the teleological challenge; the axiological challenge and the deontic challenge.

Note, *en passant*, that there is a tendency in the debate to blur these distinctions with the result of generating some possible confusion concerning what the challenge amounts to and what the best strategy for addressing it might be. For instance, Horwich takes the general normative principle about truth to be the following:

"(T) It is desirable (i.e., our aim ought to be) to believe only what is true."²⁵⁴

This principle makes clear that he is running together axiological, teleological and deontic considerations. Thus, in reading Horwich on the question concerning the normativity of

²⁵² Field, H. (1994):265.

²⁵³ Horwich, P. (1993):28.

²⁵⁴ See Horwich, P. (2005):108.

truth, the reader is left with the impression that he does not distinguish these different aspects (or that, if he does, he thinks they are reducible to one single principle).²⁵⁵ However, he does not provide an explanation of why this should be so. It might turn out that a deflationist can adopt a similar strategy in addressing all the various challenges concerning the different normative aspects of truth. However, unless we have an argument to the contrary, it might be useful to keep these distinctions in mind when considering the normative challenge to deflationism in order to appreciate its full force and to understand what can be said on behalf of deflationists to address it. Therefore, one of the aims of this Chapter is to try to clarify this important issue.

As we will see, Horwich's view is ultimately unable to account for the full range of the normative aspects of truth, because in holding fast to *INSUBSTANTIALITY* it is committed to denying that truth's nature has a distinctive normative character. However, in so doing it closes off what I take to be a promising explanatory route that, despite requiring some amendment to Horwich-style deflationism, it is very much in the spirit of a deflationary conception of truth.

I will show that MID offers interesting prospects of success in dealing with the various challenges to the normativity of truth, in a way that does not invite any substantive inflation (at least as I am understanding questions of metaphysical inflation in this Chapter). The basic strategy I will adopt is to agree with Wright that truth is a *sui generis* norm of assertion and thus that the truth property has a distinctively normative nature. This fact alone is sufficient for requiring a mitigation of the austere metaphysical deflationism imposed by *INSUBSTANTIALITY*. However, rather than presenting a serious threat to a broadly deflationary conception, this feature is what allows MID to satisfactorily account for the full range of the normative aspects of truth together with our desiderata. The

²⁵⁵ Another example is from his 2006 paper "The Value of Truth" in which he interprets the axiological principle "VT It is desirable to believe what is true and only what is true" (p.347) explicitly in deontic terms "The intended logical form of VT is as follows: (x) [One should desire that (one believe x ↔ x is true)]" (footnote 1 p.357). Moreover, in his 2005 book *Reflections on Meaning*, Horwich takes Dummett's challenge in the 1959 paper 'Truth' to be about the axiological aspect rather than the teleological one. He says: "Dummett has argued that the redundancy picture of truth is incomplete, since it misses out the value of having true beliefs and of our making true assertions [...] [deflationary accounts, according to Dummett] leave out the vital fact that we want our beliefs to be true." See Horwich, P. (2005):106-7.

mechanics of this contrivance will become apparent while discussing the details of the various challenges.

§ 4.5 The Evaluative Challenge

§ 4.5.1 *Wright's Inflationary Argument*

Truth and Objectivity begins with an argument against Horwich's deflationary account of truth.²⁵⁶ What this argument purports to show is that deflationism is ultimately unstable because it is committed to a set of jointly incompatible theses.

§4.5.1.1 *Truth and Warrant Coincide in Positive Normative Force*

The first part of Wright's argument establishes the coincidence in positive normative force between warranted assertibility and truth. In general, two predicates M and N coincide in (positive) normative force with respect to a practice if and only if both M and N are regulative within the practice and, for all x , x is a reason to believe that a particular move has M just in case x is a reason to believe that the same move has N.²⁵⁷

Before proceeding to outline the argument, it might be useful to mention two important features of the notion of warranted assertibility.²⁵⁸ The first is that warranted assertibility is always relative to a certain informational state. A proposition p is warrantably assertible for an epistemic agent S only relative to what information S

²⁵⁶ Wright discusses and amends the argument in other works: See Wright, C. (2001), (1998), (1996).

²⁵⁷ See Wright (1992):18 and Smith, D.C. (2005):208.

²⁵⁸ A brief reminder that the modality involved in the expression "warrantably assertible" is on "assertible" and not on "warrant"; it is meant to capture the idea of an agent possessing actual warrant for a potential assertion.

possesses at a certain time. Moreover, warrant is defeasible. The warrant a subject possesses in a given state of information i for the proposition p might be lost in an expansion i^* of i in which some p -relevant defeating information is acquired by the subject in i^* . Given these two features of warrant, it is easy to see that there might be informational states that are neutral as to whether p is true. What neutrality amounts to is simply the absence of epistemic support sufficient for warranting either p or its negation. Thus, if a subject is in a p -neutral state of information she lacks warrant for p and she lacks warrant for $not-p$.

That said, the first step for establishing the normative coincidence between truth and warranted assertibility is to notice that truth-apt contents demand a distinction between those circumstances under which asserting them is warranted and those under which it is not. This fact is by itself sufficient for granting a dimension of evaluative normativity associated with the notion of warranted assertibility. Those assertions that have the property of being warrantably assertible are in (epistemic) good standing, and those that lack it are not. Moreover, we can safely assume for the sake of the argument what we might call a transparency condition on the practice of asserting, namely that competent talk requires that the subject is able to tell which assertions she is warranted in making in a given state of information and which she is not. Therefore, if I am warranted in asserting that snow is white, this fact will be recognizable to me, and thus I will be warranted in claiming that I am so warranted.²⁵⁹ Conversely, if I am warranted in thinking that the assertion that snow is white is warranted then I will be beyond (epistemic) criticism if I assert that snow is white. Thus, we have established the following bi-conditional:

There is warrant for thinking that it is warrantably assertible that p if, and only if, there is warrant for thinking that p .

Given the Equivalence Schema we can substitute $\langle p \rangle$ with $\langle \text{it is true that } p \rangle$ and we

²⁵⁹ See Williamson (2000):114-119 and 178-181 for a criticism of the transparency thesis in terms of knowledge and rationality.

obtain:

There is warrant for thinking that it is warrantably assertible that p if, and only if, there is warrant for thinking that it is true that p .

From this, it follows that the normative dimension associated with warranted assertibility is inherited by the notion of truth – i.e., "to be warranted in thinking that p is true has exactly the same normative payload as being warranted in thinking that it is warrantably assertible."²⁶⁰ In other words, we have established that from within a certain informational state – e.g., that of the judging subject – there is substantial normative coincidence between warranted assertibility and truth. Following the warrant rule is *ipso facto* following the truth rule, and vice versa.

One might wonder at this point whether similar considerations can be adduced to establish the coincidence between truth and warranted assertibility with respect to their negative normative force. Besides norms that positively regulate the assertoric moves that a subject makes within a certain assertoric practice, as for instance – it is correct to assert what you have good reasons to believe it is true – there are also norms that negatively regulate the assertoric practice of a subject, such as, for instance – it is correct to refrain from asserting what you have good reasons to believe is not true or what you do not have good enough reasons to believe it is true. It is easy to see that there is an important asymmetry with respect to negative normative force between truth and warrant. In fact, while the following holds:

There is warrant for thinking that it is warrantably assertible that *not-p* if, and only if, there is warrant for thinking that it is not true that p .

We do not have the following:

²⁶⁰ Wright (2001):755.

There is warrant for thinking that it is not warrantably assertible that p if, and only if, there is warrant for thinking that it is not true that p .

In fact, whereas the right-to-left direction holds, the left-to-right direction does not. My having warrant to believe that the proposition that the tree in front of me has exactly 734 leaves is not warrantably assertible is not a warrant to believe that the proposition that the tree in front of me has exactly 734 leaves is not true. In other words, while any reason to believe that p is not true (or equivalently, that $not-p$ is true) is a reason to believe that $not-p$ is warrantably assertible (and vice versa), it is not the case that any reason to believe that p is not warrantably assertible is a reason to believe that p is not true (or equivalently, that $not-p$ is true).²⁶¹ This fact is a consequence of the potential extensional divergence between ‘is true’ and ‘is warrantably assertible’ the proof of which constitutes the second step of Wright’s Inflationary Argument.

§4.5.1.2 *Truth and Warrant are Potentially Divergent in Extension*

The proof of the potential extensional divergence between truth and warranted assertibility is relatively straightforward. All we need to know is that any truth-apt content has a meaningful negation that preserves truth-aptness, and that truth is essentially governed by the Equivalence Schema. From these two facts, it follows immediately that:

NEGATION EQUIVALENCE It is true that $not p$ if, and only if, it is not true that p .

This equivalence is derivable from the Equivalence Schema plus standard rules for negation:

²⁶¹ See Rumfitt’s discussion of Wright’s argument below.

1	It is true that p if, and only if, p	Equivalence Schema
2	It is not true that p if, and only if, not p	From 1 by negating both sides
3	It is true that $not\ p$ if, and only if, $not\ p$	From 1 by substituting p with $not\ p$
4	It is not true that p if, and only if, $not\ p$ is true	From 2,3 by transitivity

Now, given the possibility of neutral states of information we cannot substitute "is warrantedly assertible" for "is true" in (Negation Equivalence), obtaining the following principle:

(NE*) It is warrantedly assertible that $not\ p$ if, and only if, it is not warrantedly assertible that p .

precisely because, as we have already seen, that right-to-left direction

(NE* \leftarrow) it is warrantedly assertible that $not\ p$ if it is not warrantedly assertible that p

is not valid for all those p that admit of neutral states of information. We thus have a proof that truth and warranted assertibility, even though coincident in positive normative force, are potentially divergent in extension.

As a corollary, for any assertoric practice governed by a truth predicate that satisfies the Equivalence Schema, there must be a further kind of distinction between circumstances in which making these moves is (alethically) in good standing and circumstances in which it is not. And this distinction needs not to coincide with the distinction between circumstances in which such a move can be warrantedly made and those in which it cannot.

What does all this leave us with respect to the deflationist project? The main point of the Inflationary Argument, concisely, is to show that a commitment to the Equivalence Schema is inseparable from a commitment to the thesis that truth represents a *sui generis* evaluative norm. When 'true' is used in its function as a device of endorsement, in virtue of

being governed by the Equivalence Schema, it commends a proposition for its satisfaction of *some distinctive norm* that contrasts with warrant. This means that the *sui generis* normative constraint that truth exerts has to be a real characteristic of truth – i.e., a characteristic that cannot be reduced to those normative features possessed by warranted assertibility. However, this seems in contrast with the thesis that truth has no underlying nature. If there are two properties, truth and warrant, that both apply to propositions but they are such that not possessing the one (truth) marks a kind of deficiency that is different from that marked by lack of warrant, then it looks like the two properties are different in this normative respect and they are different, at least in part, in virtue of their different normative natures. This seems enough to grant that truth has a distinctive underlying nature. In the next section I will discuss some replies to Wright's argument and show why they are not satisfactory.

§ 4.5.2 *Some Replies to the Inflationary Argument*

Many philosophers²⁶² have discussed the Inflationary Argument and have tried to resist it by pointing to different steps of the argument that may be contested. In what follows I will discuss only some of the attempts that have been made to address the challenge – those that I think are the most promising.

§4.5.2.1 *First Attempt – Ian Rumfitt*

Ian Rumfitt²⁶³ begins the discussion of Wright's Inflationary Argument by noticing that alongside the positive normative coincidence between norms that govern the application of

²⁶² Among others, Paul Horwich, Ian Rumfitt, Alexander Miller, Max Kölbel, James van Cleve, Huw Price, and Simon Blackburn.

²⁶³ Rumfitt, I. (1995).

the predicates 'is warrantably assertible' and 'is true' there is also an interesting negative connection:

Positive normative coincidence:

(T+) The predicate 'is true' may be applied to any sentence for which one has a warrant.

(Wa+) The predicate 'is warrantably assertible' may be applied to any sentence for which one has a warrant.

Negative normative connection:

(T-) The predicate 'is true' may not be applied to any sentence for which one lacks a warrant.

(Wa-) The predicate 'is warrantably assertible' may not be applied to any sentence for which one lacks a warrant.

However, following Wright's reasoning, Rumfitt also shows that we do not have normative coincidence with respect to those norms that govern the application of the negation of such predicates – i.e., 'is not warrantably assertible' and 'is not true'. In fact, while we have:

(¬Wa+) The predicate 'is not warrantably assertible' may be applied to any sentence for which one lacks warrant.

we do not have:

(¬T+) The predicate 'is not true' may be applied to any sentence for which one lacks

warrant.

The reasons for this failure are the very same reasons that support the second step of Wright's argument – i.e., the potential divergence in extension between truth and warranted assertibility.

With this distinction in hand, Rumfitt's reply to Wright is based on the thought that the notion of affirming has a cognate, that of denying. This fact might help in closing the extensional gap between truth and warrant. The proposal is to extend the deflationist account not only to 'is true', which is understood in terms of warranted assertibility, as a device for endorsing assertions, but also to 'is not true', which is understood in terms of warranted denial, as a device of rejecting assertions. On the basis of this, he notes that there is also an analogous correlation between the notions of having a warrant for affirming something and having a warrant for denying it, which Rumfitt calls *anti-warrant*. In this way, we can replace ($\neg T+$) with the following:

($\neg T+$)* The predicate 'is not true' may be applied to any sentence for which one possesses an anti-warrant.

From which we can derive the following norm:

($T\neg+$) The predicate 'is true' may be applied to the negation of any sentence for which one possesses an anti-warrant.

thereby allegedly re-establishing the full normative coincidence between (i) 'is true' and 'is warrantably assertible' and (ii) 'is not true' and 'is warrantably deniable'.²⁶⁴

Moreover, concerning the extensional-divergence problem, Rumfitt argues that the potential gap between 'is true' and 'is warranted assertible' can be closed by exploiting the

²⁶⁴ See Dummett, M. (1981), *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 2nd Edition: 316-17 for a discussion of denial used as an indicator of negatory force (as opposed to assertion).

same reasoning. Since an anti-warrant for affirming p is *ipso facto* a warrant for asserting the negation of p , and *via* (ES) a warrant for asserting that it is true that $not-p$, we can secure the problematic direction of the negation equivalence. Recall (NEGATION EQUIVALENCE) for truth:

(NE) It is not true that p if, and only if, it is true that $not-p$.

If we substitute for 'not true', 'warranted deniability', and for 'true', 'warranted assertibility', we obtain

(NE**) It is warrantably deniable that p if, and only if, it is warrantably assertible that $not-p$.

Thus we can see that, contrary to (NE*), both directions of (NE**) are unproblematic:

(NE** \rightarrow) If it is warrantably deniable that p then it is warrantably assertible that $not-p$.

(NE** \leftarrow) If it is warrantably assertible that $not-p$ then it is warrantably deniable that p .

Arguably, however, this reply is not sufficient. The problem of the potential divergence in extension recurs at a different level.²⁶⁵ Consider (NE) again and the result of negating both sides of it:

(NE \neg) It is not not true that p if, and only if, it is not true that $not-p$.

Now, as before, substitute 'warranted denial' for 'not true' and we obtain:

(NE** \neg) It is not warrantably deniable that p if, and only if, it is warrantably deniable

²⁶⁵ See Wright (1999), p.213 footnote 16.

that *not-p*.

It is easy to see that (NE** \neg) is unacceptable since the left-to-right direction is not generally true (again, it is not true in all cases in which the proposition in question admits of the possibility of neutral states of information):

(NE** $\neg \rightarrow$) If it is not warrantably deniable that *p* then it is warrantably deniable that *not-p*.

Of course, (NE** $\neg \rightarrow$) is not less problematic than the right-to-left direction of (NE).

In fact, even though it is not warrantably deniable that the tree in front of me has 734 leaves, it does not follow that it is warrantably deniable that the tree in front of me does not have 734 leaves. In conclusion, what the Inflationary Argument establishes is that if a discourse admits the possibility of neutral states of information then the Equivalence Schema, plus some uncontroversial assumptions about negation, imposes a contrast not only between 'true' and 'assertible' but also between 'not true' and 'warrantably deniable'.²⁶⁶ Thus, Rumfitt's attempt to block the Inflationary Argument fails.

§4.5.2.2 *Second Attempt – Huw Price*

A second line of criticism takes issue with the role that the Equivalence Schema plays in the Inflationary Argument. In his paper "Three Norms of Assertibility, or How the Moa became Extinct",²⁶⁷ Huw Price argues that the conclusion that deflationism cannot account for the characteristic dimension of normativity carried by the notion of truth is indeed correct, but not for the reasons Wright gave. Price agrees with the conclusion of Wright's

²⁶⁶ See Wright (1999):214 footnote 16.

²⁶⁷ Price, H. (1998).

argument according to which truth and warranted assertibility (potentially) differ in extension. However, he disagrees with the claim that establishing the extensional divergence suffices for granting that truth is a *sui generis* norm governing our assertoric practice. What we need in addition is to appeal to the utility within a speech community of the distinctive kind of norm that truth provides. Truth is needed precisely because it enables us to express a kind of disagreement (what, following Price's terminology, we might call *hyper-objective disagreement*) that we would not be able to express otherwise.

The main point of Price's criticism is that having a disquotational notion of truth²⁶⁸ is not sufficient for explaining why truth operates as a norm of assertion. According to Price all that the Equivalence Schema does is simply to reveal the formal role of the truth predicate without providing any explanation of where the normative dimension associated with the notion of truth comes from. Thus, according to Price "Wright's argument is invalid as it stands [...] The intuitions to which Wright appeals reveal nothing more than the formal role of the truth predicate, as embodied in [the Equivalence Schema]."²⁶⁹

Let us have a brief look at the argument. Price takes Wright to endorse the following norm of assertoric practice (or belief endorsement):

(AN) Any reason to believe that p is true is a reason to believe (and hence to allow the assertion) that p .²⁷⁰

According to Price, what (AN) tells us is the mere truism that a reason to believe that p is a reason to believe that p . In order to show why (AN) is trivial under the disquotational conception of truth, Price constructs what he takes to be a parallel argument to Wright's, defining a new operator that works disquotationally. The operator is 'Twice' and it is defined as follows:

²⁶⁸ Or, more properly, as McGrath (2003) points out, *denominalizing* notion of truth – given that we are focusing on propositional truth rather than on sentence truth.

²⁶⁹ Price, H. (1998):244.

²⁷⁰ Price, H. (1998):243.

Twice(p)=_{df} *p* and *p*.

From this definition immediately follows that

Twice(p) if, and only if, *p*.

Once we have established this, following Wright's reasoning, we can conclude that "Twiceness" appears to be operating as a norm of assertion in the following way:

(AN*) Any reason to believe that Twice(p) provides a reason for believing (or being prepared to assert) that *p*.

To complete the parallel with Wright's argument we need to show that Twiceness cannot amount to warranted assertibility. All we have to do is to note that "the issue as to whether it is the case that Twice(p) is not the same as the issue as to whether we are warranted in asserting that *p*, for just the same reason that the issue as to whether *p* (or whether "p" is true) is not the same issue as to whether *p* is warrantably assertible."²⁷¹

Thus, on the one hand, we have that 'Twice(p)' and 'True(p)' are extensionally equivalent. Having established that truth and warranted assertibility potentially diverge in extension, we have thereby established that also 'Twice(p)' and 'Warranted-Assertible(p)' potentially diverge in extension. On the other hand, the coincidence in positive normative force between 'Twice(p)' and 'Warranted-Assertible(p)' can be established by reflecting on the fact that whenever we have reasons to claim 'Twice(p)' we have thereby reasons to claim 'Warranted-Assertible(p)', and vice versa.

The moral that Price draws from the considerations above is that endorsing Wright's argument seems to commit us to the claim that any predicative expression (or sentential operator) that functions logically in the same way as the disquotational truth predicate would thereby operate as a norm of assertoric practice. However, there are certain

²⁷¹ Price, H. (1998):244.

predicative expressions that function in accordance with the Equivalence Schema which do not carry any intuitive normative dimension – like ‘is Twice’. What we should conclude from this failure, according to Price, is not that truth is not a norm of assertion, but that principles like (AN) do not entail that truth is a norm of assertion.²⁷²

A first reaction one might have in reading Price’s argument is to question the legitimacy of the parallel between ‘true’ and ‘Twice’. Although Price is surely right in claiming that ‘twice’, in virtue of the way he defines it, works disquotationally, he is wrong in assuming that it represents a good model of how the truth predicate works. This is because Twice(p) does not work as a device of generalization and endorsement.²⁷³ Consider the following contrast between ‘true’ and ‘twice’: “everything Plato said is true” *versus* “everything Plato said is twice”; or the contrast between “both John and Mary said the truth about what happened” (where John and Mary said different things, but both true about what happened) and “both John and Mary said the Twice about what happened.” From these contrasts it appears that ‘Twice(p)’ has no analogous function to that of ‘true(p)’.

However, this reply misses an important point about Price’s argument. The issue is not whether we actually use ‘Twice’ as a device of endorsement and generalization. ‘Twice’ is of course a philosophers’ artefact, and the folk does not use that word in their assertoric practice. The question is whether ‘Twice’ *could* be used as a device of endorsement in a way analogous to the way the folk actually use ‘true’. It might appear that it could. However, admitting this point does not defang Wright’s argument. Wright would concede that as far as the Equivalence Schema is concerned, all that it does is to mark a placeholder for a kind of normative constraint that contrasts with warranted assertibility, but it does not actually flesh out what the constraint is. All the Inflationary Argument is meant to establish is simply that there clearly is some kind of norm distinct from warranted assertibility operating in truth-apt discourses, and that deflationists should recognize it. Thus, the main point is that once we have truth, alongside warranted

²⁷² See Price, H. (1998):250-253.

²⁷³ I should thank Michael Lynch for a useful conversation on this point.

assertibility, as a device of endorsement within the assertoric practice, then because of the point about extensional divergence, we are committed to recognize that truth marks a *sui generis* criterion of correctness that contrasts with warranted assertibility in the way the Inflationary Argument shows. However, it is crucial to notice that it is not the mere fact that truth behaves disquotationally that forces the inflationary conclusion. It is that fact together with the fact that we use the truth predicate, alongside warranted assertibility, as a device of endorsement within our assertoric practice. If a community of speakers, like the one envisaged by Price,²⁷⁴ properly masters the notion of *epistemic* incorrectness (i.e., that it is incorrect to assert that *p* if one has no warrant for *p*), then they must recognize the possibility of neutral states of information (i.e., states in which she has no warrant for *p* and no warrant for *not-p*). Consequently, they must recognize that they would not be licensed to assert that *not-p* on the basis of her lack of warrant for *p*. This fact, together with the fact that this community properly masters the disquotational truth predicate, would be enough for the members of the community to realize that the lack of truth by a proposition marks a kind of bad standing which is distinct from the bad standing indicated by a lack of warrant. Thus, they would recognize that truth is a *sui generis* norm of correctness.

Moreover, if a community of speakers were to use ‘Twice’ as a device of endorsement in the same way in which we use ‘true’, the point established by the Inflationary Argument would apply to ‘Twice’ as used within that community, precisely in virtue of its disquotational character. A proposition’s being *Twice* would indicate a kind of good standing distinct from warrant. However, this leaves intact the point that the Inflationary Argument establishes with respect to the truth predicate. Of course, there is much more to say about the aetiology and functioning of this distinctive norm within the assertoric practice. This is indeed the main topic of the present thesis. The important point

²⁷⁴ See Price, H. (1998):247. Price asks us to think of a community of speakers who criticize assertions for being insincere and unwarranted but not for being untrue. These speakers, according to Price, “express their beliefs – i.e., the kind of behavioral dispositions which we would characterize as beliefs – by means of a speech act we might call *merely opinionated assertion*” (Price, H. (1998):247). Moreover, according to Price’s story these speakers are fully competent in using a disquotational truth predicate, and so in applying the deflationist truth concept (see p.248).

is that Wright could certainly endorse the kind of genealogical story Price is providing us, and that would complement Wright's argument against deflationism, rather than showing that it is invalid.²⁷⁵

§4.5.2.3 *Third Attempt – Paul Horwich*

The last attempt I will discuss is that suggested by Paul Horwich in some of his more recent works on the topic.²⁷⁶ The general shape of the strategy can be seen as an attempt to reduce the evaluative aspect of the normativity of truth to aspects concerning beliefs and the assertoric practice which are, in turn, accounted for in purely naturalistic terms.

According to Horwich, the evaluative aspect of the normativity of truth can be derived from the Equivalence Schema together with instances of the premise that:

(CB) It is correct to believe *that p* if, and only if, *p*.

The derivation goes as follows. We begin with a (potentially infinite) list of particular principles concerning the correctness of beliefs:

(B1) It is correct to believe that snow is white if, and only if, snow is white.

(B2) It is correct to believe that torturing people is wrong if, and only if, torturing people is wrong.

[...]

Then by exploiting the Equivalence Schema, we can carry out the following substitutions:

²⁷⁵ I should thank Crispin Wright for this point. See McGrath, M. (2003) for a different line of reply to Price's argument on behalf of deflationists. I agree with McGrath's conclusion that deflationists have some strategies available to account for the normative feature of truth even though I think that, because of the Inflationary Argument, deflationists have to relax the insubstantiality thesis about the truth property. See also, Lynch, M. (forthcoming) for a discussion of Price's argument with an anti-deflationist upshot.

²⁷⁶ See in particular Horwich (2000) and (2006).

(B1*) It is correct to believe that snow is white if, and only if, that snow is white is true.

(B2*) It is correct to believe that torturing people is wrong if, and only if, that torturing people is wrong is true.

[...]

What this step shows is that the Equivalence Schema enables us to recast each component of the list (B1)-(B n) into a form susceptible to generalization in the normal (i.e., objectual) way. In fact, by exploiting the generalization function of truth, via the Equivalence Schema, we obtain:

(EN) It is correct to believe that p if, and only if, *that* p is true.

This can be translated into the more mundane thought that it is correct to believe what is true and only what is true.

In this respect, the evaluative norm does not exhibit any deep fact about the nature of truth. Rather, it simply shows how the concept of truth can be used in its generalizing function to get the evaluative norm from particular norms like (B1)-(B n) which are cashed out in purely non truth-theoretic terms. This conclusion should not be taken as a proof that deflationists are committed to deny that truth has any normative import. Rather, it should be taken as a proof that an explanation of the fact that truth is an evaluative norm of assertion and belief does not require anything more than an endorsement of the Equivalence Schema.

There are two main reasons of discomfort about this strategy. The first one concerns the direction of explanation involved in Horwich's reduction. It seems very hard to deny that what explains the correctness of our particular beliefs is the fact that they are true.²⁷⁷ In other words, what explains why

²⁷⁷ See Lynch, M. (2004), (2009).

It is correct to believe that snow is white if, and only if, snow is white.

It is correct to believe that $2+2=4$ if, and only if, $2+2=4$.

It is correct to believe that murdering is wrong if, and only if, murdering is wrong.

[...]

are facts about truth. Simply put, it is because a belief is true that it is a correct one to have. This means that the role of truth *vis-à-vis* the issue of evaluative normativity is more substantive than its mere generalization function. It is, at least partially, a fact about truth that explains the correctness of true beliefs and not a fact about beliefs alone which is explanatorily independent of facts about truth. What else would explain why it is correct to believe a particular proposition p whenever p is in fact the case, if not facts about truth (together with facts about beliefs)? Once deflationists characterize their view by accepting all the basic principles discussed above, it is hard to see how they could avoid appealing to characteristics of the property of truth in an explanation of facts concerning the correctness of beliefs.

Moreover, and this leads us to our second concern, the point about extensional divergence between truth and warrant remains unanswered by Horwich's attempted reduction. We still have to explain what makes the kind of correctness in play in the various biconditionals in the list above a distinctively *alethic* one – rather than, e.g., an epistemic one. In connection to this point, we need to explain why a justified belief in a true proposition is in a better shape than a justified belief in a false proposition. In other words, we still have to explain how it comes that truth and warrant register two different norms concerning the evaluative good standing of a belief. In all probability, Horwich is more than happy to concede that truth and warrant diverge in extension and thus that they pose different normative constraints to enquiry. In addition, he sees no reason for thinking that this truism about truth and warrant presents any significant threat to the deflationary conception of truth he is defending. However, it is not clear whether Horwich has the right to this claim. Once we admit that truth is a genuine property of propositions and that the possession (or lack) of such property marks a kind of success (or failure) distinct from that

exhibited by warrant it is hard to maintain that truth is an insubstantial property with no underlying nature. The fact that all (and only) those propositions that are true are those that are correct to believe (in this distinctively *alethic* sense) is an important fact about truth that is not reducible either to normative facts concerning other notions (e.g., warrant) or to any other non-normative fact.²⁷⁸

§4.5.3 Concluding Remarks – Is the Inflationary Argument really Inflationary?

In this section, I discussed some of the main replies to Wright's Inflationary Argument. In the light of this discussion, it appears that no fully satisfactory response to the argument has been given so far.

However, although the argument points to some tension between some fundamental theses adopted by deflationists, the result might not be that catastrophic for deflationism. What the argument ultimately requires is that we relax INSUBSTANTIALITY in order to make space for the normative character of truth. The lesson is that from a commitment to the Equivalence Schema together with a commitment to the thesis that truth functions as a device of endorsement of beliefs, it follows that truth exerts a normative control in enquiry that cannot be reduced to that exerted by warranted assertibility (and in this sense we can say that truth exerts a *sui generis* normative control on enquiry). Moreover, once we admit that 'true' refers to a genuine property, we cannot deny that truth constitutes a characteristic of propositions the possession of which indicates

²⁷⁸ See §4.7.2 for a more detailed discussion, in connection with the axiological challenge, of why Horwich's strategy is not satisfactory. In his most recent work on the issue of the normativity of truth, which, unfortunately, appeared in print when most of this thesis was already in its final stage, Horwich takes the deontic dimension as basic and he attempts to explain the evaluative norm in terms of the deontic one. I cannot go into the detail of his proposal, which strikes me as very interesting, but only make two brief remarks: for reasons that will become clear in subsequent sections, I think Horwich's minimalism has problems with explaining the deontic and the axiological norms without presupposing the evaluative norm. Secondly, taking deontic as basic seems to preclude the kind of normative variability I have discussed in my Chapter 2. If I am right in claiming that the main difference in disagreement as it occurs in the taste domain and in the moral domain is the fact that truth exerts deontic force in the first domain but not in the second, then he needs to explain why it is so. Taking deontic as normatively basic seems, at least *prima facie*, in tension with that phenomenon. See Horwich, P. (2013).

the compliance with a norm (a kind of *good standing*) which is distinct from that exerted by warranted assertibility. In particular, and in connection with disagreement, a proposition being untrue (i.e., the failure of possessing the truth property by a proposition) elicits a kind of reproach to anyone endorsing such a proposition which is importantly distinct from the kind of reproach elicited by lack of warrant. This is certainly a significant feature of the truth property, and one that makes its nature more interesting than INSUBSTANTIALITY seems to allow.

Now, the important question to ask is: how inflationary is the Inflationary Argument? The answer, I believe, is: not that much. Conceding the point of the argument comes with no significant metaphysical costs. Given that we are considering the *explanatory role* mark of sparseness, admitting that truth is a norm, *per se* does not make truth a significantly sparse property. Surely, truth, *qua* normative property, plays a role in explaining why it is correct to believe that grass is green, that snow is white, etc. – i.e., it explains all facts about (alethic) correctness. It is because true propositions are true that it is correct to believe them, where the kind of correctness in question here is distinctively alethic. However, this explanatory function is rather narrow in scope and *per se* does not make truth a significantly sparse property.²⁷⁹

As I have already mentioned, the minimally inflated version of deflationism I am

²⁷⁹ It is extremely important to be clear about the scope of the claim I am making here. I am focusing on the issue whether the Inflationary Argument requires a substantial inflation of truth in connection with the normative role that truth plays in enquiry. I maintain that with respect to issues concerning the normativity of truth, the conclusion established by the Inflationary Argument is *per se* not sufficient for attributing to truth an explanatory role wider than that admissible by MID. Thus, I am not claiming that, *all things* considered, the truth property qualifies as insubstantive. That would certainly be an overreaching conclusion. In fact, there are other important issues, not directly related to the normativity of truth, that are relevant to the question of the ‘metaphysical weight’ of truth and that might require some widening in truth’s cosmological role and thus some inflation of the truth property. In particular, two issues are worth mentioning. On the one hand, whether adopting a truth-conditional account of meaning might put some pressure on MID in connection with the insubstantiality claim, and, if so, whether it is open to MID to adopt a use-theoretic account of meaning. On the other hand, there is the issue of whether truth has some causal efficacy in determining the success of our actions on the basis of our beliefs and desires. This is a question that concerns not only deflationary theories of truth, but other theories as well (e.g., epistemic theories of truth). And it is specifically an issue concerning the *causal power* that the truth property might have in determining the success of our actions. Thus I take it to be a significantly different issue to that that I am trying to address in this thesis. Paul Horwich has dealt with this issue in various places and, in principle, I take that advocates of MID can take a similar line of reply to the challenge: see especially his (1998), pp.43-51; see also Damnjanovic, N. (2005) and Devitt, M. (1996). These are, certainly important questions that I cannot satisfactorily deal with in the space of this thesis, and given its specific focus on issues concerning the normativity of truth in enquiry. However, I would like to investigate how MID can deal with both issues in future research.

defending in this Chapter takes the conclusion of Wright's argument at face value and thus concedes that truth has a normative nature. However, if I am right in maintaining that the inflation required by Wright's argument is minimal, we can see how MID fully qualifies as a deflationary account of truth despite its acceptance of truth having a normative nature. In this respect, it might be useful to understand how MID relates to Horwich-style deflationism. The first thing to notice is that MID rejects the austere form of metaphysical deflation required by the insubstantiality thesis that Horwich endorses. This is because it denies that truth has no underlying nature. Thus, instead of INSUBSTANTIALITY, MID endorses a mitigated form of metaphysical deflation that can be expressed by the following principle:

INSUBSTANTIALITY* Although the property denoted by 'is true' has an underlying nature, possessing such a nature does not make truth a sparse property. Given its very narrow explanatory role, truth qualifies as a reasonably abundant property.

In other words, even admitting that truth has a normative nature, we can still claim that it is an abundant property. However, MID can agree with Horwich-style deflationism that having an account of truth in terms of the Equivalence Schema provides a complete account of the nature of the truth property. Thus, it can agree with Horwich that EXHAUSTION is true. This is because what is required for establishing the conclusion of the Inflationary Argument is nothing more than an appeal to the Equivalence Schema (together with other facts concerning negation and warrant that do not necessarily involve truth). Moreover, a commitment to EQUIVALENCE follows directly from a commitment to the Equivalence Schema, thus MID can accept it.

Lastly, concerning the SUFFICIENT feature, things are not so easy for MID. Although I am focusing only on questions concerning *metaphysical* inflation, in the narrow way in which I understand this notion, there are important questions at the level of the concept that I have not considered so far. Without going into complicated details, I think that an advocate of MID is committed to reject SUFFICIENT as it stands. It seems that

MID is committed to say that there is more to the concept of truth than the mere fact that the Equivalence Schema governs the logico-semantic behaviour of the truth predicate. The concept of truth is the concept of a normative notion and, more to the point, is the concept of a notion whose normative profile is open to multiple realizations. This second specification does not follow, of course, from Wright's argument alone. We want it as a feature of our concept of truth because we want MID to be able to account for both *normative lightness* and *normative variability*. Thus, an advocate of MID would certainly list, among the basic principles characterizing the concept of truth, more than simply the fact that 'true' is essentially governed by the Equivalence Schema. Whether this is a radical departure from a deflationary conception of truth, is a question I will not fully address in this work. If our primary worry has to do with issues concerning metaphysical inflation/deflation then we can set this important issue aside for present purposes.

An important corollary of the Inflationary Argument is that, because truth represents a *sui generis* norm of enquiry, questions concerning the various normative dimensions discussed in the previous Chapter apply distinctively to the case of truth. This means that whenever we pursue enquiry within domains of discourse dealing with truth-apt contents, we might ask, e.g., whether truth has a *sui generis* value or whether truth is what we ought to believe. In other words, since truth is a *sui generis* evaluative norm of enquiry, the following principles tell us something distinctive about truth:

- (i) That truth is the aim of enquiry;
- (ii) That truth is valuable
- (iii) That truth is what enquirers ought to believe.

All these principles express facts about truth. They attribute to the property of truth certain features and they are true if, and only if, truth possesses those features. In this respect, how much inflation to truth is required is going to depend on what it takes, from a deflationary perspective, to account for the full range of normative aspects that truth might exert in enquiry. If it turns out that truth possessing such features (or at least some of them) has an

indispensable and direct role in explanations of a relatively wide range of phenomena then, as a consequence, we would have that the thesis that truth is INSUBSTANTIAL* – a reasonably abundant property – is under considerable pressure. The deflationist project would be in serious jeopardy.

In what follows I will discuss whether accounting for the full range of the normativity of truth represents an insurmountable challenge to the minimally inflated version of deflationism I have sketched. I will consider each aspect of the normativity of truth, investigating whether truth's possessing that specific normative feature represents a challenge to MID.

§ 4.6 The Teleological Challenge

A second line of criticism to the deflationary conception comes from Dummett's 1959 influential paper "Truth". Although the specific targets of the paper are redundancy theories of truth, championed by Ramsey, among others,²⁸⁰ Dummett's point applies with equal force to Horwich's version of deflationism and, potentially, also to MID. My goal in this section is to show that MID can accommodate Dummett's point without taking on the burdens of inflationism.

Dummett's criticism²⁸¹ is that deflationists are unable to account for one particular aspect of the normativity of truth – namely, what I have called the teleological aspect. Let us recall our preferred formulation of the teleological principle:

AIM In judging about a subject matter S, a subject aims at having true and only true beliefs about S.

²⁸⁰ See Ramsey, P.F. (1927). For a more recent development of the redundantist idea – that goes under the name of *prosententialism* – see Grover, D., Kamp, J., and Belnap, N. (1975).

²⁸¹ Besides the teleological challenge, the main criticism that Dummett advances against deflationists *à la* Horwich is that according to such deflationists the concept of truth does not play any role in the theory of meaning and that they consider the notion of proposition as primitive and unanalyzable.

According to Dummett, it is part of the concept of truth that in pursuing enquiry we aim at believing what is true and given that deflationism is unable to account for this aspect of truth, it must be rejected.

As we have seen, what deflationism gives us are essentially two things. On the one hand an infinite list of biconditionals of the form <the proposition that snow is white is true if and only if snow is white>; <the proposition that sushi is delicious is true if and only if sushi is delicious>, etc. Such a list shows the material adequacy of our truth predicate. On the other hand, it explains the concept of truth purely in terms of the Equivalence Schema, which provides us with a simple criterion for the application of 'true'. According to deflationists, these two things together give us an adequate account of the usage of the truth predicate. To this bare-bones deflationism, we can add, as Horwich does, that 'true' denotes a genuine property.

Dummett's concern directly challenges the claim that this version of deflationism provides an adequate account of truth. In fact, there is a crucial aspect of the concept of truth that deflationism cannot explain, namely that truth is what we aim at in enquiry. This is not something that an account of truth purely in terms of the Equivalence Schema can give us. In general, as Dummett expresses the point,

We cannot [...] suppose that we give a proper account of a concept by describing those circumstances in which we do, and those in which we do not, make use of the relevant word, by describing the usage of that word; we must also give an account of the point of the concept.²⁸²

I take it that what Dummett means with the expression "proper account" is synonymous with "an explanatorily adequate account". In order to make this point more vivid, Dummett draws an analogy with winning a board game. A deflationary conception of *winning* would, for each particular game, provide us with a comprehensive list of all the

²⁸² Dummett, M. (1959):143.

possible winning positions in that game, and a schematic characterization of what counts as winning in that game. However, according to Dummett, it is clear that this is not enough, for an explanatorily adequate account of winning. We still have to know that winning is the aim of any competitive game. In general, to have a proper account of winning we need to know that, for each specific game, the aim of that game is to achieve what for that game counts as the winning position. Analogous considerations apply to the case of truth. An explanatorily adequate account of truth must explain that truth teleologically constrains enquiry in a way analogous to that in which winning-at-X teleologically constrains our playing X. Since this fact about truth cannot be directly derived from the core commitments characterizing deflationism, some revision of the theory is needed.

The first thing to observe is that the upshot of Dummett's criticism to deflationism is importantly different from that of Wright's argument. While Wright's argument shows the incompatibility between some core commitments of deflationism – incompatibility that can be solved by relaxing the austere metaphysical deflation required by INSUBSTANTIALITY – Dummett's criticism points to a structural deficiency of the deflationary account of truth that cannot be fixed by relaxing or tweaking some of the austere commitments of the view. It is meant to show the inadequacy of deflationism to account for AIM. If it turns out that this teleological fact is a fundamental fact about truth that any theory of truth should be able to account for, then showing that deflationism does not have sufficient resources for explaining it would pose a serious threat to the view.

I take it that a deflationist would concede that Dummett is certainly right in observing that whenever we are dealing with judgments that are truth-apt, truth teleologically constrains enquiry as AIM alleges. It is indeed a crucial aspect of the way we pursue enquiry that we aim at having true beliefs and avoiding false ones. However, the pivotal question is whether this is essentially and uniquely a fact *about* truth, and thus something that has to be explained entirely by our theory of truth by invoking extra principles beyond those available in the deflationists' toolkit.

A deflationist like Horwich could in fact resist Dummett's point by denying that

AIM has to be entirely explained by means of substantive facts about truth. He might insist that AIM is surely a fact involving truth but essentially a fact about enquiry. In this respect, that we aim at having true (and only true) beliefs would be fully explainable in terms of our best theory of truth together with our best theories of enquiry. Unless mention of facts about truth other than those accepted by deflationists essentially occurs in the best explanation of enquiry, deflationists may be in a position to account for AIM in a way that does not require any substantive inflation of their view.

In relation to this point, it is instructive to look at the way in which Horwich sees explanation of facts involving truth:

[R]emember that most of the interesting facts to be explained concern relations between truth and certain other matters; and in such cases it is perfectly proper to make use of theories about these other matters, and not to expect all the explanatory work to be done by the theory of truth in isolation. When this methodological point is borne in mind it becomes more plausible to suppose that the explanatory duties of a theory of truth can be carried out by the minimal theory.²⁸³

Later on in the book, he provides an example of this general principle:

Of course we do not expect our theory of X to do the explanatory work all by itself. It does not follow solely from the theory of electrons that electrons are smaller than elephants; we need a theory of elephants too. Our goal, then, is to find a simple theory of X, which, together with our theories of other matters, will engender all the facts.²⁸⁴

Horwich takes his deflationism to be exactly such a theory. Following the methodological point expressed in the first quote, a deflationist can say that his theory of truth is fully

²⁸³ Horwich, P. (1998):7.

²⁸⁴ Horwich, P. (1998):24.

adequate to explain all the (non-relational) facts about truth, and also that such theory, together with theories of other related phenomena, can explain all facts involving truth. In this way, a deflationist can explain AIM by appealing to his theory of truth plus his theory of assertion (or his theory of enquiry).

As I briefly mentioned above, an important caveat is that truth does not indispensably occur in our best account of enquiry and assertoric practice in such a way as to require more in terms of explanatory potential than that granted by the deflationists' basic toolkit. In fact, one could reply to the deflationist by saying that insofar as truth plays a fundamental role in our explanation of assertoric content (*via* an explanation of meaning in truth-conditional terms) it is surely an indispensable and substantive ingredient in the explanation of such practices. If this is the case, the strategy just suggested on behalf of deflationists looks defective.

Two brief comments on this point. The first is that, even granting that truth occurs indispensably in our best account of assertion and enquiry, we have not yet shown that what is primarily responsible for AIM are substantive features of truth. What we have so far is only that our theory of truth is among the various elements that, taken together, explain the fact that enquirers generally aim at having true and only true beliefs. However, although truth is indeed an indispensable component of the explanatory brew in virtue of its connection with assertion and enquiry, this does not mean that truth's explanatory role *vis-à-vis* AIM has to be rather substantive and thus incompatible with a deflationary account of truth. It might well be that the explanatory contribution that truth makes is a very minimal one – requiring of truth nothing more than those features allowed by the deflationary conception. In brief, the point is that it might well be that truth plays an indispensable contributory role in the explanation of why enquirers aim at having true beliefs. However, such contribution might still be a minimal one and, together with the other elements of the explanatory brew (e.g., in particular psychological facts about enquirers) they make for an adequate explanation. I will return to this point in a moment.

The second comment is that it is not clear that a deflationist should concede that assertoric content has to be characterized in truth-conditional terms. Horwich, for instance,

rejects the idea that what determines the content of a given assertoric expression will be identified with a truth-theoretic fact of some kind. He thinks that there is no reason to suppose that the derivations of truth-theoretic semantics contribute to explanations of enquiry and linguistic activity. What we should do is to adopt a radically different approach to assertoric content in terms of its *use*-conditions rather than *truth*-conditions. As Horwich expresses the point:

[A] natural approach to pursue derives from the plausibility of supposing—given that what are to be explained are phenomena of sentence-acceptance—that the primary explaining facts (namely, the meanings of words) should also be facts of acceptance. [...] [W]e might conjecture that the meaning of a word is a law-like regularity governing its use—a law dictating the acceptance of certain sentences containing it in certain circumstances.²⁸⁵

In this passage, Horwich is talking in terms of acceptance, but I take that notion to also include facts of assertion (bracketing some important pragmatic issues attached to the notion of assertion). The upshot of this strategy is to show that everything we do with the truth-predicate can be explained by that core acceptance-regularity. We do not need to appeal to some deep truth-theoretic facts in order to account for assertoric content. This does not mean that a deflationist is not allowed to talk in terms of truth-conditions. According to Horwich talk of truth-conditions is quite cheap once we integrate a use-theoretical account of meaning with a deflationary account of truth.²⁸⁶ Rather the point is that talking in terms of truth-conditions does not carry any substantive explanatory weight. Thus, truth does not occur essentially in our account of facts about assertoric practice, and the possibility of explaining the teleological aspect without appealing to substantive facts about the nature of truth seems entirely open to a deflationist who endorses a use-theoretic account of meaning.

²⁸⁵ Horwich, P. (2008):318.

²⁸⁶ See Horwich, P. (2008):321.

It is certainly not my aim here to evaluate Horwich's approach to meaning,²⁸⁷ or whether such an account faces significant difficulties in accounting for the normative aspects of meaning.²⁸⁸ The point of this brief discussion is just that it is not obvious that a deflationist like Horwich has no arrows in his quiver to address Dummett's concern about the explanatory adequacy of the deflationary conception of truth.

Note, however, that if we have some qualms with respect to a use-theoretic account of meaning, the kind of minimally inflated deflationism I am advocating in this Chapter might offer an alternative explanation of AIM that is compatible with a truth-theoretic account of meaning. In this respect, the methodological point expressed by the first of Horwich's quotes above is worth taking seriously and it might turn out to be very helpful. As I have already mentioned, even granting that truth is an important and indispensable factor in the explanation of AIM, this does not mean that it has to do all the explanatory work by itself. One way of mitigating the consequences of Dummett's point is to argue that AIM is explained by facts about truth together with some other truth-independent facts about the assertoric practice.

Let me say a bit more about the proposal and why it might be reconciled with MID. From Wright's argument we have that truth is a *sui generis* normative notion. In addition, we have seen that this is essentially a fact about truth but one that can be integrated within a deflationary conception by simply relaxing the austere anti-metaphysical commitment of insubstantiality. Now, what I want to argue for is that truth's being normative in the way Wright's argument shows is all that is required by truth in the explanation of AIM. In other words, truth's being a *sui generis* norm of correctness of beliefs is the only additional feature of truth, besides those typically accepted by deflationists, that is required of truth's explanatory contribution to the teleological issue. If this is right, then it shows that MID has the resource to account for this aspect of the normativity of truth without taking on the

²⁸⁷ See Gupta, A. (2003) for a criticism of Horwich's use-theoretic account of meaning based in the problem of how to account for the fact that the use of an expression engenders the particular representational properties of the expression. Horwich replies to this criticism in his (2005):41-43. See also Bar-On, D. ; Horisk, C. & Lycan, W.G. (2000), "Deflationism, meaning and truth-conditions" *Philosophical Studies* 101 (1):1-28.

²⁸⁸ See, for instance, Boghossian, P. (2003).

burdens of inflationism.

Let me anticipate an important element of the strategy I will adopt in order to get clear about the dialectic. The route for proving the point that nothing more than that established by Wright's argument is required will be a long and complex one and it will involve, among other things, a proof of the fact that truth's being valuable in the way it is can be accounted for by MID without any substantive inflation. This task will be carried out in the next section.

With this in mind, we should note that the mere fact that truth constitutes a *sui generis* norm of correctness of assertions and beliefs is not sufficient to explain AIM. Analogously, the mere fact that a certain move in chess made by White is the one that has the highest objective chance of leading to checkmate – and thus it is a correct move – does tell us nothing about what is the point of making such a move (or what is the point of playing chess). What we need in addition are facts connected to our disposition to engage in the practice in such a way as to tend to select only those moves that have a certain characteristic – i.e., those that counts as the correct ones. The important point for the kind of proposal I am suggesting here is that these facts, whatever they turn out to be exactly, are not facts ultimately accountable in terms of substantive features of truth. So, what are these facts? My conjecture is that they are facts concerning what enquirers happen to care about in pursuing enquiry. These facts involve truth. What explains why we typically engage in enquiry in the way we do is that we pursue the truth (as well as other kinds of intellectual values such as understanding and knowledge). And we pursue the truth because it is valuable. If this is right, there is an important explanatory connection between what I am calling the teleological and the axiological aspects of the normativity of truth. And the connection is, schematically, the following: what explains, at least in part, why we aim at truth is that we aim at having beliefs that qualify as correct; and we aim at having correct beliefs because we care about getting things right (alethically speaking). In short, we aim at truth partly because we value having true beliefs. At this point, the pivotal question in order to understand whether MID can fully account for AIM is to investigate what it is required in order to account for the kind of axiological fact involving truth that

figures in the explanation of AIM. My strategy will be to show that nothing over and above what is granted by Wright's argument is required in order to account for the axiological aspect of the normativity of truth. This will be the topic of the next section.

§4.7 The Axiological and Deontic Challenges

In this section, I will discuss the axiological and deontic challenges. Since the structure of the two challenges and the strategy a deflationist might adopt in addressing them is exactly parallel in the two cases, I will focus primarily on the axiological concern. In the last part of the section I will discuss what MID can say about the deontic aspect of the normativity of truth and how it can account for the kind of variability in the deontic constraint that we discussed in Chapter 2.²⁸⁹

§4.7.1 The Axiological Question

Many deflationists enthusiastically subscribe to the thesis that having true beliefs is of value, and for this reason a desirable thing, whereas having false beliefs is of disvalue and for this reason undesirable. In fact, they think they can easily account for this aspect of truth. For instance, Horwich writes:

To value truth is, very roughly speaking, to wish for satisfaction of the schema ' p iff I believe p ', and therefore to be committed to the techniques of investigation that will apparently achieve this result.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁹ See Chapter 2, §2.5.

²⁹⁰ Horwich, P. (1998):62.

Besides the, perhaps negligible, fact that it sounds a bit unnatural to say that valuing truth consists in wishing for the satisfaction of a schema, matters might not be that simple for deflationists. Some philosophers, especially Bernard Williams and Michael Lynch, have argued that a deflationary conception leaves this axiological fact about truth unexplained. If truth is so little a thing for deflationists, indeed nothing more than a device of endorsement and generalization, then the question is: How can deflationary truth be something valuable? What, in the deflationary conception, is responsible for explaining the role that truth plays in our intellectual lives? These are important questions that deflationists need to address.

In what follows, I will first discuss Horwich's attempt to explain the value of truth. I will then consider an objection to Horwich's account recently made by Michael Lynch. In the last part of this section I will discuss how MID could respond to Lynch's challenge.

Before proceeding, it might be useful to remind the reader of our discussion in Chapter 3 about what is the best formulation of the axiological principle. As a result of that discussion, I have opted for the following formulation:

VALUE For any proposition p and for any subject S , it is valuable that: [S judges p if and only if p is true].

According to this formulation, what is valuable is that the judging subject is in a cognitive state in which s/he believes what is true and only what is true. The value at issue here is of a *sui generis* intellectual kind. For the reasons given in Chapter 3,²⁹¹ we should read 'valuable' as *prima facie*, rather than all things considered, value.

With this in mind, we can ask: What can deflationists say in order to account for VALUE? Note that the question is primarily a question concerning the property of truth rather than the concept of truth. The thought is that in explaining why and how truth is valuable, something has to be said about the property of truth – whether truth *qua* property has value, and whether this fact is directly responsible for the explanation of a wide range

²⁹¹ See Chapter 3, §3.5.3.

of phenomena associated with enquiry and the assertoric practice. Accordingly, I will take the core of the axiological challenge to be primarily an issue in the metaphysics of truth.

§4.7.2 Horwich's Account of the Value of Truth

In his 2006 paper "The Value of Truth", Horwich defends the claim that his minimalism has no special problem in accounting for truth having value. He argues that VALUE can be obtained quite straightforwardly from the Equivalence Schema, plus some non truth-theoretic facts like the following:

(D) It is valuable that: one believes the proposition *that the Earth revolves around the Sun* just in case the Earth revolves around the Sun.

Now (D) can be seen as an instance of the more general schema of the form:

(B) It is valuable that: one believes <p> if and only if *p*.

Where <p> is a placeholder for particular propositions and *p* is a placeholder for what that proposition is about. Since this principle cannot be immediately generalized in the standard way by replacing a singular term with a variable for universal quantification, we can use the corresponding instance of the Equivalence Schema [The proposition <the Earth revolves around the Sun> is true if and only if the Earth revolves around the Sun] for recasting our original statement as follows:

(D*) It is valuable that: one believes the proposition <the Earth revolves around the Sun> if and only if the proposition <the Earth revolves around the Sun> is true.

Now, since (D*) can be generalized in the usual way, we can immediately recover the

general principle VALUE using only resources compatible with deflationism. VALUE does not tell us anything new about truth; it only illustrates the expressive use of the truth predicate.²⁹²

§4.7.3 *Truth, Explanation and Metaphysical Inflation – Lynch's Criticism to Horwich's Account*

Is Horwich's account of the value of truth in good standing? As Lynch points out, one important reason for dissatisfaction with this argument is that it is not clear at all whether principles like (D) or (B) are in fact non truth-theoretic. In particular, it seems that we need an antecedent endorsement of VALUE in order to take on board the various local principles like (D) and (B). This is an important worry, which, on reflection, generates two distinct concerns.²⁹³

On the one hand, we might ask an epistemic question – which of (D), (B) or VALUE is epistemically prior? On the other hand, we might ask a metaphysical question – which of (D), (B) or VALUE is explanatorily prior?²⁹⁴ Although both questions have to do with the issue of whether it is the general principle that has priority over the various local principles (or vice versa), they are about two different aspects of that issue. One aspect concerns the direction of the justificatory support: is it an endorsement of VALUE that justifies our acceptance of the various local principles, or vice versa? The other aspect has to do with the metaphysical question of the direction of explanation: is it VALUE that explains the various local principles, or vice versa, are the various local principles that explain VALUE? These are two importantly distinct issues. An answer to the epistemic question does not guarantee that the corresponding answer has to be given to the metaphysical one (and vice

²⁹² Horwich, P. (2006):356, and (1998):44-46 and 139-141.

²⁹³ See also McGrath, M. (2005):309.

²⁹⁴ McGrath, M. (2005):309. I understand here questions concerning what (metaphysically) explains what in terms of what grounds what. See below.

versa). Lynch sometimes writes as if he had the epistemic issue in mind,²⁹⁵ even though I believe that the core of his criticism is about the metaphysical issue. Be that as it may, in what follows, I will focus on the metaphysical question and set the epistemic one aside.

The explanatory challenge to deflationism goes as follows. What explains why it is of value to believe that the Earth revolves around the Sun when the Earth revolves around the Sun, are facts about truth that are not explicable using only resources available to deflationists. What we value is having beliefs that track the truth in general. Thus, the direction of explanation must go from VALUE to the various local principles. It is because believing truly is valuable in general that it is valuable to believe that the Earth revolves around the Sun just in case the Earth revolves around the Sun, that grass is green just in case grass is green, etc., and not the other way round. However, if we accept that the general principle is explanatorily prior in the metaphysical sense, we are using the notion of truth in an explanation that we have not yet accounted for. Consequently, the challenge claims, to explain the value of truth in enquiry we need to inflate the truth property in a way incompatible with (both versions of) the insubstantiality thesis.²⁹⁶

Talking of explanation and explanatory priority is often quite elusive, especially when dealing with truth. First, it is important to get clear that the project here is not one about deducibility (or entailment). Lynch is right, I think, in claiming that if we take the project to be that of showing how to derive VALUE from the various local principles, this might look hopeless, and for precisely the reasons Anil Gupta gave.²⁹⁷ However, as Matthew McGrath has suggested, deflationists need not endorse this project.²⁹⁸

That said, I believe that the best way to understand the explanatory concern in its metaphysical sense is to take it to be about the order of grounding between the various principles above. As Kit Fine puts it, the notion of grounding provides a "distinctive kind

²⁹⁵ In his 2004 Lynch sometimes puts the question in epistemic terms: "What is the reason why one might think that it is good to believe that Socrates was a philosopher if and only if he was, and so on? What, in other words, *justifies* or *rationaly explains* acceptance of all instances of (B)?" (2004:507).

²⁹⁶ In Lynch's words: "It is something about the property of truth that makes it good to believe that which has the property", (2004):517.

²⁹⁷ See Anil Gupta (1993), "A Critique of Deflationism", *Philosophical Topics*, (21):57-81.

²⁹⁸ McGrath, M. (2005):310.

of metaphysical explanation, in which *explanans* and *explanandum* are connected, not through some sort of causal mechanism, but through some constitutive form of determination.”²⁹⁹ In other words, the specific question we are considering here is whether the direction of determination goes from the general truth-theoretic principle to the various specific non-truth-theoretic facts or from the various specific non-truth-theoretic facts to the general axiological principle.

As we have seen, Horwich takes it that the *explanantia* are the various local non-truth-theoretic facts and the *explanandum* is the general axiological principle. Lynch, on the contrary, urges that the *explanans* is the general principle and the *explananda* are the various non-truth-theoretic facts. I believe Lynch is right in arguing that the direction of determination has to go from the general principle to the various local axiological facts such as that it is valuable to believe that grass is green just in case grass is green, etc. What confers value on these various facts is that it is valuable to have true and only true beliefs.

There are two main reasons for why this is the case. The first is that, as Lynch himself points out, endorsing the other direction of explanation would commit us to a hardly defensible axiological particularism. It would be a rather mysterious and inexplicable phenomenon that we have an infinite list of structurally similar axiological facts without a common source.³⁰⁰ What truth is doing here seems more substantive than merely allowing us to derive the general principle from particular ones. It seems to provide a common explanation of an otherwise heterogeneous array of phenomena. The thought is simply that, since we believe all kinds of different propositions about a wide variety of subject matters, and we value believing the truth with respect to all these different subject matters, in denying that VALUE provides the common *source* of all these particular axiological facts we would have to tell a different genetic story for each of them. However, this seems hardly a sustainable project, and surely an uneconomical one.

The second worry is that it does not seem right to claim that all these various

²⁹⁹ Fine, K. (2012):37.

³⁰⁰ See Lynch, M. (2004):510-12 for a discussion of this point. See also Hooker, B. & Little, M. (eds), *Moral Particularism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000, for a detailed discussion of particularism in moral philosophy.

specific axiological facts are, *au fond*, non-truth-theoretic. Part of what makes it the case that it is valuable to believe that the Earth revolves around the Sun just in case the Earth revolves around the Sun is precisely the fact that such a belief *gets things right* with respect to the Earth revolving around the Sun, i.e., that there is a sort of agreement – not necessarily a form of correspondence – between our believing that proposition and how things are with respect to that proposition. That sort of agreement, however we want to characterize it, seems, no surprise, exactly the sort of thing that we would call *truth*. What confers value on our believing that the Earth revolves around the Sun just in case the Earth revolves around the Sun, is our believing what is true about the Earth, which is, in turn, an instance of the general principle that it is valuable to have true and only true beliefs. Therefore, contrary to what Horwich claims, what determines the value of the various local axiological facts is the general fact that it is valuable to have true and only true beliefs. In other words, VALUE is explanatorily prior to the local axiological facts. For these reasons, I believe that Lynch wins this battle.

That said, I do not think that winning this particular battle is sufficient to win the war. In fact I believe that the objection is too quick to conclude that the point just illustrated shows that deflationism is irremediably flawed because it is unable to account for the value of truth. It has still to be shown that the kind of explanatory role that truth plays with respect to the axiological question makes truth a rather sparse property. Clearly, the mere fact that truth's being valuable is what explains why it is valuable that we believe that the Earth revolves around the Sun, that grass is green, etc., is not sufficient for concluding that truth is a significantly sparse property. Sure, truth's being valuable has *some* explanatory role, but this might be perfectly compatible with truth being a rather abundant property. Two sets of issues are relevant at this stage.

The first one is to understand what range of phenomena truth's being valuable in the way it is might help to explain, and whether truth is in fact directly and indispensably responsible for such an explanation. The second issue, to use the Korsgaard's terminology

introduced in Chapter 3,³⁰¹ is whether the source of the value of truth is located in the nature of the truth property itself, or in some facts external to it.

§4.7.4 *A Deflationary Account of the Value of Truth*

In what follows, I will discuss what I take to be the best strategy available to MID to account for the value of truth. The main question I will focus on is whether MID should conceive of the value of truth as entirely grounded in intrinsic features of the truth property or whether the source of the value is located in some relational features that are, at least partially, extrinsic to the nature of truth. I shall argue that MID is committed to maintaining that the value of truth is extrinsic and I will offer what I take to be the best account of the source of truth's value.

§4.7.4.1 *Is the Value of Truth Intrinsic?*

At first glance, maintaining that the value of truth is an intrinsic feature of the truth property seems hardly an option for a deflationary conception of truth. It might be thought that if truth is intrinsically valuable then deflationism is in serious difficulties because it clearly lacks the resources to accommodate that fact. In his paper "Truth in Ethics", Bernard Williams expresses something like this concern in discussing Horwich's minimalism. He thinks that the value of truth "is a good focus for inquiry into how much further we should go beyond the surface facts which are the support of minimalism."³⁰² As it is implicit from this quote, Williams assumes that we need to go beyond deflationism to

³⁰¹ See Chapter 3, §3.5.5.

³⁰² Williams, B. (1996):232.

account for VALUE. I think Williams is right in pointing out that reflecting on the axiological dimension of the normativity of truth, as well as on the other aforementioned dimensions, is a good strategy for understanding what further commitments beyond the core ones a minimalist is forced to accept. Nevertheless, the conclusion that deflationism is incompatible with truth having intrinsic value requires some discussion.

Horwich dismisses Williams' worry and claims that the alleged problem "stems from our failure to understand the concept of intrinsic goodness [and value], rather than from our adoption of the minimalist conception of truth."³⁰³ We might certainly agree with Horwich that the concept of intrinsic value is open to different interpretations. However, we might also think that his reply to Williams is too quick and, as it stands, dialectically ineffective. Many other concepts (perhaps the vast majority) in philosophy are subject to the same lack of clarity. We surely do not want to conclude that (almost) no objection is any good because it employs some philosophical concepts whose interpretation is (to a certain extent) a matter of dispute. As soon as we can accept a minimal characterization of the concept of *intrinsic value* and we can show that, even under that minimal characterization, the fact that truth is intrinsically valuable may represent a serious problem for deflationists, the objection has some force and needs to be addressed.

I will thus outline a characterization of *intrinsic* and *extrinsic value* that is fairly minimal but substantive enough to engender the potential of a worry to deflationists who take truth to have intrinsic value. A thing possesses intrinsic value if and only if it is valuable in virtue of³⁰⁴ its intrinsic properties.³⁰⁵ That is, a thing O is intrinsically valuable if- and only if- there are some properties P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n such that: O has P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n ; P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n are intrinsic, and O has its value only in virtue of P_1, P_2, \dots, P_n . A property P is an

³⁰³ Horwich, P. (1998):63.

³⁰⁴ "In virtue of" can be understood here in terms of Kit Fine's notion of grounding as metaphysical determination. For an account of intrinsic stated explicitly in terms of grounding see Rosen, Gideon (2010), "Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction", in Bob Hale and Aviv Hoffmann (eds.), *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press; pp.109-36.

³⁰⁵ Moore claims: "[t]o say that a kind of value is intrinsic means merely that the question of whether a thing possesses it, and the degree to which it possesses it, depends solely on the intrinsic nature of the thing in question." See Moore, G.E. (1922):260.

intrinsic property of a thing O if and only if no O-duplicate is such that it lacks P.³⁰⁶

Alternatively, if we have some quibbles about the notion of a duplicate, we might appeal to a non-modal analysis of intrinsicity according to which intrinsic properties are those properties such that it is no part of what it is to instantiate them that the bearer stands in some relation with some external object or to its surroundings.³⁰⁷

Paradigmatic examples of intrinsic properties are *having a certain (rest) mass*, or *having a certain shape*.³⁰⁸ As Ross Cameron observes:

There seems to be an interesting distinction between the reasons for my having these two properties [my mass and my weight]. I have my mass solely in virtue of how I am, whereas I have my weight in virtue of both how I am and how my surroundings are. I have my weight as a result of the gravitational pull exerted by the Earth on a thing having my mass, whereas I have my mass independently of other things around me. If you change my surroundings, if you put me on the moon say, my weight will change, but my mass will stay the same.³⁰⁹

Let us put aside all the various concerns we might have with respect to these definitions of an intrinsic property.³¹⁰ I take it that the rough characterization of *intrinsic value* offered here is sufficiently clear for our purposes.³¹¹

Extrinsic value is value that is not intrinsic. However, as with the concept of intrinsic, the concept of extrinsic might be open to several interpretations. On an intuitive level, the contrast between extrinsic and intrinsic is explained in terms of the contrast

³⁰⁶ This (simplified) characterization of intrinsic property is due to Lewis: see Lewis, D.K. (1986):61-62. See also Jackson, F. (1998): Chapter 1.

³⁰⁷ See, for instance, Francescotti, R. (1999), 'How to Define Intrinsic Properties', *Noûs* 33, p590-609.

³⁰⁸ One might think that the property of *having a certain shape* depends, in part, on the curvature of the space and the kind of gravitational force the surrounding space exerts on that object, and in this respect, it might not be considered as intrinsic. See, for instance, Brian Ellis (2001), *Scientific Essentialism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. To keep things simple, I will abstract from this problem here.

³⁰⁹ Cameron, R. (2008):265.

³¹⁰ For an overview of the various definitions of and criticism to the notion of intrinsic, see Weatherson, B., and Marshall, D. (2013).

³¹¹ Of course, one might be skeptical whether the notion of intrinsic value is a useful one. But I will not discuss this issue here since it is not directly relevant to our discussion. See, for instance, Kagan S. (1998) for an argument against the utility of the notion of intrinsic value for moral philosophy.

between relational (extrinsic) and non-relational (intrinsic). However, in this unrefined form the claim is certainly inaccurate. There might be relational properties that are internal to an object (like the relation that an object has with some of its parts, or the internal relations that some parts of an object have with some other parts of it) and whose *relata* are intrinsic features of the object. This means that we might have relational features of an object that count as intrinsic property of that object.

We can make the intuitive characterization more accurate by restricting the category of relational property in this context to *externally* relational properties – i.e., properties that relates a thing to some other, external, thing. Thus, O possesses P extrinsically just in case what determines that O has P are external relations that O has with some distinct thing Q. This means that a duplicate O' of O may differ from O with respect to P, if P is extrinsic. In non-modal terms, a property is extrinsic just in case it is part of what it is to instantiate it that the bearer stands in some external relation to some distinct thing or to its surroundings. Accordingly, the value of a thing is extrinsic just in case what determines or confers the value that the thing possesses are some of the external relations that the thing has with some other, distinct, things.

With these characterizations of intrinsic and extrinsic value in hand, we should ask: why should we think that if the value of truth is intrinsic, deflationism lacks the resources to account for it? The main concern is taken to be about INSUBSTANTIALITY. If being valuable is an intrinsic property of truth, then we need to explain how this is compatible with the thought that truth is a significantly abundant property.

However, unless we have an argument to the contrary, it is safe to assume that not every feature of a property that is possessed intrinsically makes that property sparse. Intrinsicity *per se* does not entail sparseness. Thus, the issue depends on what explanatory potential truth's being valuable possesses. More precisely, the question is: what kind of things might the citation of truth's being valuable help in explaining?

Unquestionably, citing the value of truth does play a part in a variety of explanatory contexts associated with enquiry and assertoric practice. For one thing, as we have seen in the previous section, truth's being valuable contributes to explaining why

enquirers typically aim at having true (and only true) beliefs. Moreover, in connection with this fact, being valuable in the way truth is exerts a significant motivational pull. It explains our *pro tanto* dispositions to make considerable efforts in our enquiries for seeking the truth and avoiding falsehood; to continue to look for the truth despite the numerous failed attempts; to make any effort to avoid deceiving ourselves into believing that *p* is false when in fact *p* is true (and vice versa); to identify who are the experts with respect to a given subject matter and to rely on their testimony. Further, truth's being valuable in the way it is might be cited in the explanation of some substantial similarities concerning patterns of cognitive and assertoric behaviour within different domains of enquiry – for instance, in an explanation of why we tend to justify our claims, or our taking a certain direction, rather than others, in pursuing our enquiry. It might also figure in explaining behaviour like changing our mind when the degree of confidence for a certain proposition goes below the threshold we, as a community of rational thinkers, consider sufficient for belief.

All these are aspects of enquiry that we generally explain by mentioning the fact that truth is valuable. If truth, by possessing the value it has *intrinsically* were directly responsible for accounting for all these phenomena, then this fact would make truth a property belonging more to the sparse side of the spectrum than to the abundant side, and this would be so in virtue of its wide explanatory role. I conclude that deflationism is in tension with the thesis that the value of truth is intrinsic.

§4.7.4.2 *The Value of Truth as Extrinsic*

Accordingly, the strategy that I want to outline on behalf of deflationism maintains that the value of truth is grounded in features that are (at least partly) external to the property of truth. The claim is that the value of truth is extrinsic value. Why would this strategy be compatible with MID? The intuitive thought is quite simple. If we can show that truth *in itself* is, as it were, axiologically inert and that all the explanatory work we typically

attribute to truth's being valuable is grounded in features that are extrinsic to the nature of truth, then truth may remain a reasonably abundant property, in exactly the way MID predicts. Truth in itself would play no interesting explanatory role with respect to the axiological question.

In taking the value of truth to be extrinsic, the main task is to get clear about what extrinsic features are responsible for truth's being valuable in the way it is. If we are not satisfied with Horwich's strategy discussed above, we need to tell an alternative story about what grounds the value of truth that does not depend solely on features intrinsic to the property of truth. Presumably, various proposals can be elaborated to address this concern consistently with the core commitments of MID. For the purposes of this Chapter, I will be content to outline one way in which this can be done.

The most promising strategy for MID is, I think, to connect the source of the value of truth with the concerns and desires that we happen to have in pursuing enquiry. More precisely, advocates of MID could maintain that what confers value to the state of having true and only true beliefs is, at least in part, our valuing being in such a state on the basis of our concerns and desires. It seems compatible with a deflationary conception of truth to maintain that the value that truth possesses is, at least in part, the result of a projection of the concerns and desires we have in pursuing enquiry onto being in a cognitive state with true and only true beliefs.

Accordingly, the shape of the proposal is to take our valuing truth in the way we do as the fundamental metaphysical fact that confers value to truth. It is, at least partly, because we attribute value to having true and only true beliefs that being in such a state is valuable, and not the other way round. This does not mean, however, that the value that truth possesses is merely a fictitious feature of truth. On the contrary, although it is our valuing truth that confers value to truth, such value is nevertheless a real feature that truth has extrinsically. It is just that such a feature does not make truth more substantive than what MID allows. According to this proposal, what is doing the explanatory work *vis-à-vis* the various features of enquiry and assertoric practice that I have discussed above is our valuing truth the way we do, and not truth having value *per se*.

If this proposal can be defended then advocates of MID can concede that truth having value does seem to play a non-trivial explanatory role in relation to a wide range of phenomena, but they will insist that this explanatory work is never direct but always channelled, as it were, through our valuing truth for its own sake.

Let us have a look at the proposal in some detail. There are two main ingredients that taken together provide us with a story of why we attribute value to having true and only true beliefs. The first is that truth has a *sui generis* normative nature in the way the Inflationary Argument has shown. This fact about truth, which I take to be an intrinsic aspect of the nature of truth, is part of the reasons why we deeply care about truth in enquiry. More precisely, the fact that enquirers *acknowledge* that truth is a *sui generis* norm of enquiry provides them with some *prima facie* reason to care about having true and only true beliefs. This is because what we care about in pursuing enquiry is primarily to get things right, in this *sui generis* alethic sense. In all probability, if truth were only an honorific property possessed by some propositions in virtue of the fact that, let us say, they were believed by Alexander the Great, we would not care about having true and only true beliefs. As it should be clear by now, this narrow explanatory fact about truth should not worry an advocate of MID since it is something that can be fully accounted for by using only resources available to her. In fact, the thought is not that truth being an evaluative norm is what directly explains our concerns and desires in pursuing enquiry, and thus our valuing truth in the way we do. Rather, the thought is simply that our *acknowledging* that truth has this normative nature provides us with *prima facie* reasons for caring about having true beliefs while avoiding false ones.

The second ingredient which is responsible for our valuing truth in the way we do is related to the various concerns and desires that we typically have in pursuing enquiry about different subject matters. The thought is, to a first approximation, that our innate curiosity about many things together with our concern of getting things right with respect to the subject matter of our enquiry, provides us with sufficient motivations and reasons to care about truth and to pursue enquiry in such a way as to form true and only true beliefs. This is part of what makes us value truth in the way we do.

In order to spell this thought out in more detail, I will adopt some of the ideas Lynch uses in his 2005 book *True to Life*, but without necessarily endorsing Lynch's own view on the matter. Caring about truth is associated with an important intellectual virtue – perhaps the chief intellectual virtue – that of intellectual integrity. Part of what it is to live a virtuous life, in this intellectual sense, is to be disposed to pursue the truth in such a way as to maximize true beliefs and minimize false ones; to be willing to stand for what we have reasons to believe is true; and also to be willing to act, *other things being equal*, in accordance with what we have reasons to believe is true – e.g., to promote the truth whenever we are in a position to do so. All these truth-related concerns contribute to the character of our valuing truth the way we do. In this respect, living a virtuous life is among the factors that lead to the flourishing of culture, education, and understanding – in a word, to *human flourishing*. We all know that in order to live such a life, we have to do, among other things, everything that is within our power to pursue and promote the truth and to avoid believing what is false. What makes a life conducted in the light of truth a virtuous one is the fact that it contributes to the achievement of human flourishing. This, of course, should not be understood as an exclusive claim, meaning that being intellectually virtuous is the only relevant factor that contributes to human flourishing. The claim is rather that living an intellectually virtuous life is only one factor, although an important one, among the various factors that contribute to human flourishing.

Thus, to sum up what has been proposed so far: there are two main elements that, taken together, contribute to an explanation of the fact that we value truth in the way we do. On the one hand, our acknowledging that truth is a *sui generis* norm of enquiry and, as such, a distinctive mark of the good standing of our beliefs that contrasts with justification in the way the Inflationary Argument shows. On the other hand, our innate sense of curiosity, our general concern about living a virtuous life and our desires of getting things right with respect to the subject matter of enquiry. Moreover, it has been suggested that it is our valuing truth in the way we do that contributes to conferring value on truth – more precisely, to the cognitive state of having (mostly) true beliefs. If this is on the right track, then the source of the value of truth is partly located in some intrinsic facts about truth –

truth being a *sui generis* norm of enquiry – and partly in relational features that connect truth with our desires and concerns. Truth's being valuable in the way it is, is partly the result of our projecting onto truth the various desires and concerns we have in pursuing enquiry. As a result, the value that truth possesses is extrinsic value.

Concerning the explanatory question, an advocate of MID can maintain that it is our valuing truth in the characteristic way we do that is responsible for explaining the wide range of phenomena associated with enquiry and the assertoric practice, such as, for instance, our motivation to search for and defend the truth despite the great intellectual effort it requires; or our praising the efforts of those that through a long, and sometimes difficult, period of research made important discoveries. MID can therefore explain all these phenomena while still maintaining that truth *in itself* is a reasonably abundant property with a *sui generis* normative nature whose explanatory role *vis-à-vis* the axiological question is rather narrow.

This is, in outline, my suggestion of how MID can deal with the axiological question. Undoubtedly, many more details are needed in order to have a fully satisfactory story. Nevertheless, I hope that the sketch offered in this section is sufficiently clear as to indicate the direction in which such a story has to be developed.

§ 4.7.5 *The Value of Truth & the Deontic Constraint*

Where does all this leave us with respect to the deontological question? As I have already mentioned at the beginning of this section, the concern one might have with respect to the explanatory adequacy of deflationism *vis-à-vis* the deontic dimension of the normativity of truth is analogous to the axiological challenge discussed above. So I will not going into detail here. The core of the criticism is that a deflationary conception of truth is unable to explain the fact that, at least with respect to some domains of discourse, truth exerts a *sui generis* deontic constraint. However, how can a deflationist account for the fact that a subject in enquiry ought to believe, among the various propositions she considers for

enquiry, those and only those that are true? Given that deflationists *à la* Horwich want to deny that truth has a *sui generis* normative nature, it is unclear what they can offer as an explanation of this deontic aspect of the normativity of truth. The worry is that if truth has no normative core, it seems hard to understand how to explain our obligation to endorse true and only true beliefs. Quite predictably, a deflationist would say that we are looking in the wrong place. We should not be investigating the nature of truth in order to have an explanation of the deontic norm. In support of this claim, she could provide a story exactly analogous to the one Horwich gave with respect to the axiological question. However, there are reasons to be dissatisfied with that strategy, which run parallel to those I provided in reply to Horwich's explanation of the axiological question.

By contrast, it should be clear by now how MID might offer significant improvements on a Horwich-style deflationism. Because it grants that truth has a normative nature it can appeal to this fact as a relevant factor for explaining the deontic control that truth exerts in some domains of discourse. However, this factor alone is not sufficient for an explanation of the deontic feature of truth. The mere fact that a certain belief would be the correct one (alethically speaking) to endorse does not by itself put any obligation on us to endorse it. What else is needed? My suggestion is to take the axiological aspect of truth – more specifically, our valuing having true beliefs in the way we do – as providing the missing ingredient in the explanation of the deontic feature. The thought is that, in order to account for the fact that truth exhibits a deontic constraint in enquiry, a deflationist can appeal to facts concerning our valuing truth in the way we do.

That said, there is still an important issue that needs to be discussed. It concerns the adequacy of MID to account for the *normative variability* desideratum mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter. In particular, in relation to the diagnosis I offered in Chapter 2³¹² of the asymmetry between moral and taste disagreement, we need an explanation of why truth in the moral domain exerts a *sui generis* deontic constraint which is silent in the taste domain. How can MID account for this difference? On this question it is clear that a deflationist cannot endorse the strategy that is available to a pluralist, namely that of

³¹² See Chapter 2, §2.5.

appealing to a difference in the normative nature of the various domain-specific truth properties. In fact, a pluralistic conception of truth has a very simple strategy to deal with the *normative variability* requirement. Since it admits a variety of different truth properties with different natures, they can account for the difference in the normative profile of truth directly in terms of a difference in the nature of the various truth-properties. Things are certainly less straightforward for a deflationist under this respect. However, I believe that something can be said on behalf of MID to account for this fact. I do not have a full story to offer here. However, I can indicate the shape of a successful strategy. The thought is that MID can appeal to an interesting kind of variability in the character of our valuing true beliefs in order to account for the fact that in certain domains of discourse – paradigmatically the moral domain – truth exerts a *sui generis* deontic control, while in other domains – paradigmatically the domain of taste – it does not.

§4.7.5.1 *The Variable Character of Our Valuing Truth*

As I have already mentioned, we have a general desire for intellectual integrity *qua* constitutive part of living a virtuous life. This is a general concern that we typically have with respect to all those areas of enquiry that deal with truth-apt contents. Intellectual integrity is not, of course, the only concern that we have in pursuing enquiry. There are other important concerns associated with our desire of getting things right (in the alethic sense) and which might vary from domain to domain and from subject matter to subject matter. Which specific set of concerns we have in pursuing enquiry will depend on the subject matter at issue – whether we are pursuing enquiry into moral matters, matters of taste, comic matters, or matters concerning the fundamental structure of the physical worlds. This, in turn, is what shapes the character of our valuing truth in different domains. To put it simply, the thought I am exploring here is that the particular way in which we attribute value to true beliefs varies from one domain to another, as a function of the subject matter of our enquiry.

Compare, for instance, our valuing true beliefs in the moral and in the taste domain. In both domains, we are somehow concerned with truth and with getting things right (in the alethic sense). However, it is clear that our concerns with getting things right in the two domains are significantly different. It is undeniable that we generally care about moral issues much more than about matters of taste. We are concerned with living a morally good life, and with being morally good persons much more than we are concerned with having a good dinner (or with having a good laugh). Part of the reason why our concerns differ in the two cases is that the cost of error – i.e., the cost of getting things wrong – in the taste domain is much less extreme than the cost of error in the moral domain. If I believe that your judgments about the taste of a wide variety of things are mostly incorrect, the worst thing that might happen is that I will refrain from inviting you out for dinner and I will try to avoid having conversations about matters of taste with you. I could certainly live with the presence of such a disagreement about matters of taste, and still enjoy my time with you. This, of course, does not mean that we do not care about taste at all, or that we do not care about getting things right concerning matters of taste. Ideally, we would like to see more people sharing our judgments concerning matters of wine, sushi, etc. However, we can certainly live with the presence of widespread divergence in judgments of taste. By contrast, if I believe that your moral judgments are mostly incorrect I would take that fact quite seriously and I would consider our relationship, whatever that might be, to be under serious threat. As I have argued in Chapter 2, I would take our disagreement to involve some kind of significant shortcoming (both moral and alethic) on your side and, for that reason, I would be motivated to try to persuade you to change your mind about most of your moral beliefs.

I take it that this difference in the kind of concerns that we have with respect to different subject matters marks a variation in the character of our valuing truth in different domains (which, remember, might be merely implicit in our practice). The way we value having true moral beliefs is significantly different from the way we value having true beliefs about the gastronomic value of various things, and also different from the way in which we value having true beliefs about the fundamental structure of physical reality.

What is responsible for this variation is, plausibly, the way in which the kind of intellectual value characteristically associated with truth interacts with other kinds of value – such as, e.g., practical value, aesthetic value, moral value, etc. As I have already specified in §2.5.1.1, the relatively strong reaction against divergent moral opinions that enquirers typically have is not merely a moral reaction (grounded in the attribution of some moral shortcoming to their respective opponent), but also an intellectual reaction (grounded in the attribution of a specific kind of alethic shortcoming – lack of truth (as we see it) – to their respective opponent). If this suggestion has some plausibility, then we can see how the value that truth has is not uniform but varies in relation to the subject matter of enquiry.

§4.7.5.2 *The Value of Truth, Deontic Constraint and Normative Variability*

Concerning the deontic aspect of the normativity of truth, the proposal I want to offer on behalf of MID is that an advocate of MID could appeal to the variability in the axiological character of truth in order to explain why in certain domains truth exhibits a deontic constraint while in others it is deontically silent. In order to avoid the accusation of conflating the deontic aspect with the axiological aspect, which I carefully distinguished in the previous Chapter, it is important to appreciate that the claim I am making here is about *normative determination*. The thought is that it is the presence of a certain axiological aspect – namely, the particular way in which enquirers normally value the project of achieving the truth in a certain domain – which brings about the specific deontic constraint that truth exerts in that given domain. Thus the structure of the normativity of enquiry that I am proposing here takes the axiological aspect as fundamental and grounds (in the sense of *normative determination*) the presence of the deontic aspect on the axiological aspect.³¹³

³¹³ One might worry at this point that the strategy suggested here makes the kind of prescription exerted by the deontic aspect of truth hypothetical rather than categorical – which surely seems wrong. However, once my model connecting the axiological with the deontic is understood correctly as a thesis concerning the direction of normative determination, such a worry should lose much of its force. In fact the model does not

With this in hands, an advocate of MID could say that an effective explanation of why truth in the moral domain exerts deontic force has to do with the kind of concerns that we typically have in pursuing moral enquiry. In disputing about morality, we are not only concerned with getting things right, but we also strongly desire others to get things right and, other things being equal, in case of a disagreement about an important moral issue, we are motivated, both morally and intellectually, in trying to change our opponent's mind. A judgment of the incorrectness of a moral statement is, at least in some core cases, typically associated with both a judgment of the *moral disvalue* that acting in accordance with such a statement would bring about and a judgment of the intellectual defectiveness of endorsing a set of moral convictions that engenders a belief in a moral statement we deem untrue. For these reasons, an incorrect moral judgment is one that ought not to be had. In exactly this respect, the *sui generis* deontic constraint that truth exhibits in moral enquiry stems from the specific kind of concerns that agents typically have in pursuing moral enquiry. This, of course, should not be taken as a universal maxim that applies uniformly in all cases of moral disagreement. However, it reflects an important aspect of the kind of concerns that we typically have in pursuing moral enquiry. This sharply contrasts with the taste domain, where our valuing truth has a very different character.

The suggestion, briefly, is that of explaining the presence of the deontic constraint on the basis of a projection of the kind of concerns that we typically have in pursuing enquiry in certain domains of discourse. The specific character of our valuing getting things right is what is ultimately responsible for the *sui generis* obligations that we have with respect to the truth in some domains of discourse. Moreover, I think that with respect

commit us to the claim that the prescriptive force exerted by the deontic constraint is hypothetical – i.e. it is exerted only once a certain condition is met. What the model predicts is only that whether deontic aspect of the normativity of truth is operating in a given domain depends, at least in part, on whether and how we value the project of achieving the truth in that domain. However, in all those domains in which truth exerts a deontic constraint, such a constraint might well express a categorical prescription, and not a merely hypothetical one. In other words, there is a distinction between truth's, in its deontic role, exerting a prescriptive force only conditional on the obtaining of a certain condition and truth's failing to operate as a deontic norm in certain domains of discourse. The former is a thesis concerning the specific guidance that truth gives when operating as a deontic norm, whereas the latter is a thesis about the normative functioning of truth in a given domain of discourse. As far as I can see, there is no straightforward connection between these two theses. In particular, the thesis that truth's exerting a deontic constraint is a function of, at least in part, the way we value truth, does not automatically commit us to the thesis that truth, in its deontic function, is prescriptive only conditional on the obtaining of some factors.

to the deontic aspect of the normativity of truth the most promising strategy for a minimally inflated deflationist is to take a version of this value-first approach (what is called, rather misleadingly, *teleological* approach to value) and maintain that the deontic has to be explained in terms of the axiological. According to this general approach, in order to understand what alethic obligations and, more generally, what deontic constraints agents have in engaging in enquiry and why they have such constraints we need to ask what is valuable and, more generally, what agents engaging in enquiry into a specific subject matter value on the basis of their concerns and desires. Thus, whether in a certain domain of discourse truth exerts a deontic constraint on enquiry will be a contingent fact, ultimately depending on what people engaging in that domain of discourse happen to value. In this respect, the normative nature of truth, as established by the Inflationary Argument, has no direct role to play in the explanation of *normative variability*.

That said, how to exactly conceive of the relation between the axiological and the deontic aspects of the normativity of truth (more generally how to conceive of the connection between the various dimensions of normativity discussed in Chapter 3) is a very hard task about which more needs to be said in order to have a comprehensive theory. I plan to develop my framework further in future research. Nevertheless, if the shape of the strategy I have outlined in this Chapter is on the right track, it provides us with the outline of a concrete proposal of how MID can account for both the axiological and the deontic aspects of the normativity of truth together with an explanation of *normative variability*.

§4.7.5.3 *Normative Variability and the Normative Role of Truth in Mixed Discourses*

Before concluding, let me briefly address an important worry that one might have with respect to my proposal. Assuming that the two principles – *normative variability* and *normative lightness* – are true, there is an important question concerning which norms apply in the case of mixed judgments – i.e. judgments that are the result of a logical

composition of judgments belonging to different areas of discourse, such as, e.g. “sushi is delicious and/or eating fish is morally permissible”. Resuming the discussion made in (§1.2.3), there are some strategies that an advocate of MID can adopt to solve this issue. The most promising one for an advocate of MID is, I think, to maintain that the way in which truth is normative with respect to a mixed judgment depends on which is the main connective governing the judgment in question. If the main connective is a conjunction then the suggestion is that the mixed judgment will be governed by the *stricter* of the truth-norms that govern its constituent judgments. Thus, for instance, if the mixed judgment is a conjunction of an (atomic) moral judgment and an (atomic) taste judgment then it will be governed by the truth-norm that applies to the moral judgment. In this respect any disagreement concerning such a conjunctive judgment will involve some deontic fault. On the other hand, if the main connective of the mixed judgment is a disjunction, the truth-norm governing such a judgment will be the weakest of the truth-norms governing its component judgments (e.g. if a judgment of taste is involved then the truth-norm governing the compound judgment will, absent manifest defeaters, always exert no deontic force). Note moreover that adopting this strategy to account for the normative force exerted by truth on mixed judgments does not give rise to the same problem that affects the analogous solution that might be endorsed by alethic pluralists (see §1.2.3). Because for MID truth is one and because the various features that are responsible for the normative variability of truth are not intrinsic of the truth property, an advocate of MID can maintain that a mixed judgment is true in the same way in which some or all of its constituent judgments are true, and vice versa.

Alternatively, one might pursue Edwards’ strategy (See Edwards (2009)) and maintain that questions concerning the normative function of truth with respect to a compound (mixed) judgment are reducible to questions concerning the specific truth-norms governing its constituent judgments. Thus there need not to be some specific truth-norm governing the compound judgment, but only specific truth-norms governing its (atomic) constituents. In this respect any disagreement we might have with respect to a mixed judgment is reduced to a disagreement concerning some (or all) of its constituent

judgments – and this is, intuitively, as it should be. Either way is fine for my purposes, even though, as I have already remarked, I find the first solution more compelling.

§4.8 Concluding Remarks: Truth, Normativity, and Minimally Inflated Deflationism

In this Chapter, I reviewed some of the main criticisms of deflationism that question the explanatory adequacy of the theory to account for the normative role(s) that truth plays in enquiry. The result of my discussion has been that some versions of deflationism – those that share all the basic commitments of Horwich-style deflationism – lack the resources to account for the normativity of truth. In particular, I have argued that Horwich-style deflationism fails to recognize an important fact about the nature of truth – namely that truth is a *sui generis* norm of correctness, as the Inflationary Argument shows it. According to this argument, the *sui generis* normative nature of truth follows from some of the basic commitments that deflationists endorse, but is in tension with another thesis accepted by Horwich-style deflationists, namely that truth, despite being a genuine property, has no underlying nature.

What I have recommended in order to solve this tension is that deflationists should renounce INSUBSTANTIALITY, at least in the metaphysically austere version which they typically endorse. However, from this fact we should not conclude that the entire deflationist project is wrecked. I have argued that all that the Inflationary Argument requires is to relax INSUBSTANTIALITY, and to acknowledge that truth has an underlying nature with a normative character. Although this requires some inflation of the truth property, the degree of inflation that is needed might still be compatible with truth being an abundant property with a narrow explanatory role and thus with a broadly deflationary conception of truth. This is the thesis that I have defended in this Chapter.

The version of deflationism I have outlined and defended in this Chapter – *minimally inflated deflationism* – represents my best attempt to show how a conception of

truth that acknowledges that truth has a (*thin*) normative nature can still be considered deflationary – under a certain understanding of 'deflation' – and yet adequate in accounting for the full range of normative aspects that truth might play in enquiry. If we understand questions of inflation/deflation as questions concerning the explanatory role, then the strategy is to show that truth *itself*, in virtue of its normative nature, has a rather narrow explanatory function and, most importantly, one that is compatible with truth being a reasonably abundant property.

In order to fully account for the normativity of truth, MID takes two facts as explanatorily (i.e., metaphysically) fundamental. On the one hand, it takes the fact that truth has a normative nature in the way the Inflationary Argument has shown as fundamental. On the other hand, it takes our general disposition of caring about having true and only true beliefs in various areas of enquiry, on the basis of our concerns and desires as fundamental. I have argued that it is the combination of these two facts, together with other (non truth-theoretic) aspects of enquiry and the assertoric practice, that allows MID to account for the various normative dimensions of truth. In this Chapter, I provided my best attempt to illustrate the mechanics of this account even though more needs to be done in order to work all the details out in full. However, what I hope to have accomplished is to have indicated the shape of a promising account of how a deflationary conception of truth can accommodate the various challenges discussed in this Chapter.

How does MID fare with respect to the two desiderata of *normative lightness* and *normative variability*? I believe that concerning *normative lightness* things are, at least in principle, relatively straightforward for advocates of MID. Given that the only normative feature that truth possesses intrinsically (merely in virtue of the basic theoretical commitments that MID accepts) is the evaluative one – truth as a *sui generis* standard of correctness of beliefs – truth can be as normatively thin as it is required in order to allow for the possibility of parity and deontic faultlessness of disagreements in certain areas of discourse (e.g., taste). However, in practice, things might not be that easy given that how normatively thin truth can be according to MID partly depends on how the account fares with respect to the second desideratum – *normative variability*. The thought is simply that

if MID, because of its monistic nature, is committed to treat the normative profile of truth as uniform and, in particular, as encompassing the deontic constraint, then truth might not be normatively thin in the sense that is required for my project. However, I believe that the account I offered on behalf of MID does a good job of showing how MID can explain the normative variability of truth. Concisely, the suggestion takes the axiological dimension of the normativity of truth as prior and explains the deontic aspect of truth by means of aspects concerning the character of our *valuing* truth in different areas of enquiry. Since the character of our valuing truth ultimately depends on the specific kind of concerns and desires that we have in pursuing enquiry, and since such concerns and desires might vary from one domain to another in relation to the subject matter of our enquiry, this variation in the axiological aspect of truth contributes to explaining why truth exhibits a deontic constraint in some domains but not in others. This is only the shape, but a promising one for a proposal of how MID can account for *normative variability*. I plan to investigate in more detail this aspect of my account in future research.

Let me conclude with a brief consideration concerning the difference between pluralism and MID *vis-à-vis* the issue of *normative variability*. I take it that the main point of divergence at this stage relies in the order of explanation that the two accounts provide. On the one hand, it is open to pluralists to say that the value of truth is uniformly intrinsic and thus that the normative variability feature of truth is explained by a difference in the nature of the various domain-specific alethic properties. Since each of them has different intrinsic value, this fact might explain why in certain domains, but not in others, truth exerts a *sui generis* deontic control. On the other hand, MID does not have this resource. For this reason, I believe, as I have argued, that it is forced to give an account which is broadly in line with the extrinsic account that I have offered in this Chapter.³¹⁴

³¹⁴ I explore the issue of how various model of alethic pluralism can account for *normative variability* in my work-in-progress, “Alethic Pluralism and the Normativity of Truth: A Reply to Engel’s Dilemma”.

Conclusions

The focus of this thesis has been the normativity of truth in connection with disagreement. In this respect my overarching aims have been threefold. Firstly, to provide a comparative analysis of disagreements in three core areas beneath Cognitive Command – taste, moral and comedic – with particular attention to the variable normative function of truth. Secondly, to outline a fairly comprehensive and general framework within which to conduct the investigation of the various normative roles that truth might play in enquiry. Thirdly, to defend an amended version of a deflationary conception of truth – what I have called *minimally inflated deflationism* – from the various challenges concerning the normativity of truth, and to show that such a conception is explanatorily adequate in accounting for to the two main desiderata of my project: what I have called *normative lightness* and *normative variability*.

On a general level, I take it that my thesis offers some original contributions in all these respects. Despite the extensive discussion of disagreement in recent years, no systematic comparison of disagreements in different areas of discourse has been offered so far. This thesis, in proposing a comparative analysis of moral, taste and comedic disagreements, is a first, significant step in that direction.

Analogously, the framework developed in Chapter 3 provides a model for conducting a fruitful investigation of the normative aspects of enquiry, which is original in its generality and systematicity. Although each of the various dimensions discussed in this Chapter are already familiar in the literature, there is still little research that aims at

providing a general and comprehensive account of all these various normative aspects.³¹⁵ Much more needs to be done in order to have a full account. In particular, more work is required in order to understand the connections between the various aspects of normativity I have discussed. I take this to be an important task that I wish to investigate in future research.

Lastly, the deflationary account of truth that I defended in Chapter 4 is interestingly different from other deflationary accounts in that, in accepting the point established by the Inflationary Argument, it admits that truth has a *sui generis* normative nature. It has been argued that, in virtue of accepting the thesis that truth has a normative nature, minimally inflated deflationism is in a position to account for the various aspects of the normativity of truth together with the *normative variability* desideratum. Again, more work is needed in order to crystallize this proposal and to show that it can be properly conceived of as a deflationary conception of truth. In particular, in future research I wish to develop my deflationary account of *normative variability* in more detail.

In Chapter 1, I have outlined the basic features of the framework within which I carried out my discussion of the normativity of truth in connection with disagreement. The framework is a bare-bones version of that pioneered by Crispin Wright in *Truth and Objectivity*. My original contribution in Chapter 1 has been a specific proposal of the functional role of what I have called the *objectified form of judgment* in the various domains beneath cognitive command amounts to. I have argued that the primary function of objectified judgments like “Capital punishment is morally wrong”, “This sushi is delicious”, or “This joke is funny” is not that of merely reporting our emotions or subjective reactions to a given gustatory, moral or comic experience – as when we say, using a more subjective form of judgment, “I am amused by this joke”, or “I am delighted by this sushi”, etc. Rather, objectified judgments purport to say something *about* the

³¹⁵ I came across the recently published volume *The Aim of Belief*, edited by Timothy Chan, only at a very late stage of my dissertation. Several contributors of this volume discuss the issue of how some of the various dimensions of normativity I have outlined here are related. Unfortunately, given the very little time at my disposal, I could not discuss in detail in this thesis the various paper in that volume. However, I have tried to take into account some of the interesting points I have come across in reading the volume.

wrongness of torturing, the deliciousness of sushi and the funniness of the joke. I have shown that these two forms of judgment are amenable to different conditions of defeat. This provides us with a functional story in support of the use of objectified judgments in the moral, taste and comic domains.

In Chapter 2, I have accomplished two things. On the one hand, I have outlined and critically discussed some important features concerning disagreement in various areas of the evaluative discourse. I have also discussed how they are manifested differently in different areas as a function of the subject matter at issue. On the other hand, I have provided what I take to be the best explanation of these differences in terms of the different normative role that truth plays in the various areas of the evaluative domain. I have focused in particular on three categories of evaluative judgment: judgments of taste, moral judgments and comic judgments.

The main contrast I have highlighted is that between moral judgments, on the one hand, and taste and comic judgments on the other. Truth in the moral discourse exerts a *sui generis* deontic constraint: the truth of a moral judgment commits anybody holding that judgment to consider anyone holding a contrary judgment not only as wrong but as judging in a way that she ought not to. There is a *sui generis* kind of deontic fault associated with substantive moral disagreement. This normative feature of truth seems to be lacking both in the domain of taste and humor. Here a disagreement does not necessarily involve any deontic fault on the part of either party. In disagreeing with you about whether sushi is delicious, I am not licensed to think that you are endorsing a judgment that you ought not to. I have proposed to model this variation in deontic constraint by means of the notion of alethic suberogation. Although this thesis offers only a sketch of the proposal, I intend to develop it in detail in future research.

Concerning the contrast between taste and comedic disagreement, I have conjectured that it might be captured by reflecting on the fact that disagreements about whether a certain joke is funny may involve an element of intellectual evaluation that is absent in the taste case. In disagreeing with you about whether a certain joke is funny, I might be licensed in thinking that you did not get the point of the joke (even assuming that

you fully grasped the literal content of it). On the other hand, you might judge me as being silly in being amused by such a childish joke. Thus, there might be an element of intellectual snobbery associated with comic matters which seems absent in the case of judgments of taste where no substantive cognitive or intellectual elements are involved in the making of the judgment. In connection with this, I would like to point out that there is actually very little research on humor and comic matters, in particular on question concerning the role of disagreement in such areas. The comparative analysis that I have offered Chapter 2 might be a promising first step towards a more comprehensive investigation in that direction.

In Chapter 3, I have outlined a framework for understanding the normative function that truth might play in enquiry. Although such a framework does not aim at being exhaustive, I think it provides a valuable model for conducting investigations into questions concerning the normativity of enquiry. The hope is to make the discussion about the normativity of enquiry clearer and more systematic. I have discussed the pros and cons of each of the various aspects of the normativity I have considered (teleological, evaluative, deontic and axiological), and I have defended what I consider the best formulation of each of them. I believe that a systematic investigation of these various aspects of the normativity of truth and of their relations is an extremely valuable project that I would like to pursue in much more detail in future research. Moreover, given the centrality of issues concerning the normativity of enquiry, this project has the potential of making significant contributions in various debates across different areas of philosophy (for instance, it might help in clarifying the connections between justification, truth and knowledge *vis-à-vis* the different normative roles they play in enquiry; it might have an impact on the debate about the normativity of content and how that relates to the normativity of truth; and, more generally, it might provide a useful framework for adjudicating the explanatory adequacy of different theories of truth).

In Chapter 4, I reviewed some of the main criticisms of deflationism that question the explanatory adequacy of the theory to account for the normative role(s) that truth plays in enquiry. The result of my discussion has been that some versions of deflationism – those

that share all the basic commitments of Horwich-style deflationism – lack the resources to account for the normativity of truth. In particular, I have argued that Horwich-style deflationism fails to recognize an important fact about the nature of truth – namely that truth is a *sui generis* norm of correctness, as the Inflationary Argument shows it. According to this argument, the *sui generis* normative nature of truth follows from some of the basic commitments that deflationists endorse, but is in tension with another thesis accepted by Horwich-style deflationists, namely that truth, despite being a genuine property, has no underlying nature.

The version of deflationism I have defended – *minimally inflated deflationism* – represents my best attempt to show how a conception of truth that acknowledges that truth has a (*thin*) normative nature can still be considered deflationary – under a certain understanding of 'deflation' – and yet adequate in accounting for the full range of normative aspects that truth might play in enquiry. If we understand questions of inflation/deflation as questions concerning the explanatory role, then the strategy is to show that truth *itself*, in virtue of its normative nature, has a rather narrow explanatory function and, most importantly, one that is compatible with truth being a reasonably abundant property. Moreover, I have shown how minimally inflated deflationism can account for the *normative variability* desideratum. Many details need to be discussed, and some important objections deserve a full treatment. Again, this is material on which I would like to focus in future research.

For a more detailed discussion of the main results of my research, I invite the reader to look at the concluding remarks of each Chapter.

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