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The Price of Truth

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1. Introduction

William James once said that truth is “the good in the way of belief”.¹ For James, this not only signaled that truth was a value, it told us what truth was. Truth’s being a value, in his view, was a fact about the nature of truth itself.

Now days, those of us working on truth for a living mostly ignore James’ insight. The currently dominant philosophical view among the specialists holds that the concept of truth is nothing but an expressive device, one that allows us to overcome our merely medical limitations and generalize over infinitely large chains of propositions. On this view, truth may be a value, but that fact is superfluous to our understanding of what truth is.

I aim to make three points. First, I will argue that talk of the value of truth often slides back and forth between talk of two very different values. Second, I’ll urge that reflection on those values helps us to understand what truth is. In this respect, I agree not only with James, but with the more recent work of Huw Price, who has argued that a “norm of truth plays an essential and little-recognized role in our assertoric dialogue”.² For both Price and myself, to understand truth one must understand what it does, its role in our cognitive economy, and truth’s normative dimension is an integral part of that role. But Price also thinks that we should regard truth—conceived of as property of our beliefs—as something like a metaphysical myth. Here I disagree. My third

¹ James, *Pragmatism and The Meaning of Truth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942) p. 42.

² Price, *Naturalism without Mirrors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) p. 165. The quote is originally from “Truth as Convenient Friction” *Journal of Philosophy* 100 (2003): 167-190. All citations from Price in this paper will refer to the aforementioned book.

point is that reflection on truth's values pushes us in a slightly different direction, one that opens the door to certain metaphysical possibilities that even a Pricean pragmatist can love.

2. *Two Values*

To say that truth is a value can mean at least two things. First, it can mean that truth is the answer to this question: in virtue of what are beliefs in good standing, or correct? Thus, we might say for example: that a belief *qua* belief is correct just when its content is true.

To endorse this thought is to endorse that, in one sense of the word "norm", that truth is the basic norm of belief. It needn't be the only norm, of course, or the only way in which a state of belief can be correct. Beliefs can also be correct when they are justified, for example, and because of that we presumably sometimes correctly believe what is false. Thus the correctness of believing what is true must be *pro tanto*: it is always correct but not always correct all things considered. In this way, cognitive norms like justification and truth are no different than most norms or values. Keeping one's promises is always *pro tanto* right, but it is not always right all things considered, as everyone knows. Sometimes a *pro tanto* value is outweighed by other values, and so it is with truth.

The analogy with promising illustrates a further point. When we talk about truth being the norm of belief, what we are saying is something more like: truth—that is, the truth of the content—is the *right*, not the good, of belief. The proposition's being true makes it correct to have the attitude of belief toward that proposition; it provides, as it were, a definitive reason to believe it. As Shah has argued, this is because the belief that *p* is indirectly *responsive* to *<p>*'s truth. In the typical conscious, deliberative case, it is so by via being directly responsive to evidence for *<p>* (Shah, 2003). And this suggests, in turn, that truth is not just a norm of belief, it is a more basic norm than justification or warrant. For we take it to be correct to believe what is based on evidence *because* beliefs based on evidence are likely to be *true*, and thus the value of truth in this sense is more basic than the value of believing what is based on evidence.

The idea that truth is the norm of belief is one thing that is sometimes meant when we say that truth is a value. But there is another thing we might have in mind as well. To see what it is, consider this: you might think that being a

winning move is what makes a particular move in a game correct, but wonder why we should care about winning. In the same way, you might think that being true is what makes a belief correct but wonder why we should care about having correct beliefs. You might wonder why having true beliefs is valuable.

The fact that we can even raise this question points at the second thing we typically mean when we say that truth is a value. The state of affairs of having true beliefs is a good. If so, then we should strive to reach it while engaging in any practice aimed at producing beliefs. Inquiry is one such practice. So having true beliefs is, as it were, a worthy goal of inquiry, the practice of figuring out what to believe. This is a thought that again is often identified with the pragmatists, who in some moods go so far as to identify truth with that towards which we strive during inquiry.

So here are two different thoughts that folks have in mind when they talk about the value of truth:

NORM: Beliefs are (pro tanto) correct just when their contents are true.

GOAL: Having true beliefs is of value, and therefore should be the goal of inquiry.

There is of course, much debate – and there should be – about how to exactly characterize either of these values. One might wonder, for example, whether NORM underwrites an equivalence, like:

NORM* The belief that p is correct if and only if the proposition that p is true.³

The idea here would be to see NORM as expressing the *Socratic* reading of NORM*: as telling us that the right hand side has explanatory priority over the left. On the other hand, you might think – notwithstanding my remarks about pro tanto correctness above—that NORM* is too strong. If so, then you might say that NORM only implies that truth is a sufficient condition for correctness of belief. Moreover, there is the question of how NORM or

³ See, e.g. P. Horwich “The Value of Truth” *Nous*, 40: 347-40; N. Shah, “How Truth Governs Belief” *Philosophical Review* 112 (4): 447-82.

NORM* are connected to the idea – explored by Price and others—that truth is also a norm of *assertion*.⁴

Parallel questions of detail arise with GOAL. For example, you might wonder whether the value of having true beliefs entails that we should strive to have all and only true beliefs (be like God in effect) or whether a more humdrum end—like having true beliefs about matters we care about—would do.⁵ And again, you might wonder how GOAL is connected to other values in the vicinity: most notably the value of knowledge. (Some believe that knowledge is more valuable than mere true belief, for example, although I am not among them).

In any event, in these remarks, I won't be fussing too much over those particular details. I want to turn instead to the question of whether GOAL and NORM tell us anything about truth.

3. *But what does this tell us about the nature of truth?*

It seems to me that NORM and GOAL do tell us *something* about truth. In the first instance, they tell us about true beliefs, or, to speak more precisely, about beliefs in true propositions. If having true beliefs is valuable, then GOAL tells us that true propositions are those we should aim at believing during inquiry. NORM tells us that true propositions are those that are correct to believe. Now while these truisms are explicitly about true propositions, they implicitly describe the property in virtue of which propositions are true. That is, we can take them to describe the property that plays the *truth-role*. That is:

N1: If a property plays the truth-role, then it is had by propositions that are correctly believed.

⁴ One thought is that they are connected because one ought to assert what one believes and one should believe what is true.

⁵ For discussion of this sort see Kvanvig, J. *The Value of Knowledge and the Pursuit of Understanding*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)l M. P. Lynch, *True to Life* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), "Replies to Critics" in *Philosophical Books* 46: 331-42. M. David. "Truth as an Epistemic Goal" in M. Steup (ed). *Knowledge, Truth and Duty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

G1: If a property plays the truth-role, then it is had by propositions we aim, during inquiry, to believe.

To the extent to which N1 and G1 tell us about the property that plays the truth-role, they also tell us about that role itself: its shape and structure, as it were. Of course, it is an open question how “deep” the information they give us about the truth-role really is. I’ll have more to say about that in a moment. Right now, I am content point out that however you conceive of the information GOAL and NORM give us about truth, that information has a normative character. And this normative character is what suggests that the information contained in NORM and GOAL is distinct from the information contained in purely “descriptive” platitudes, such as

ES: The proposition that p is true iff p .

Arguably, we can’t derive GOAL or NORM from the purely descriptive ES. And if this is right, then at least one version of deflationism—minimalism—is mistaken.

The label “deflationism”, much like the word “realism” or “naturalism” has come to describe a family, or at best, a spectrum of views. There are at least three dimensions along which a theory can be labeled deflationary.⁶

EQUIVALENCE: Ascribing the truth concept or predicate to a contentful item is equivalent to just expressing that content.

CONCEPTUAL: Appealing to ES is sufficient to account for the concept of truth.

EXHAUSTION: An account of the concept of truth is sufficient to account for its nature, or the property of truth: all the essential facts about the property are exhausted by (an account of) the concept and/or meaning of the truth predicate.

Not all views that might be called deflationary will endorse all of these views. And specific deflationary views will differ in how they explain each of them. Views may differ, for example, over how to understand the equivalence relationship between a truth ascription and a contentful item given in

⁶ For a similar account of deflationism, see Burgess and Burgess, *Truth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

EQUIVALENCE; or they may differ on what it is to give an account of a concept. But what we might call fully deflationary views endorse all three. The combination of CONCEPTUAL and EQUIVALENCE tell us that, for the full deflationist, the truth-role is very simple. Truth functions as an expressive device and only as such a device. EXHAUSTION tells us that there is nothing more to say metaphysically about truth.

Perhaps the most prominent example of a fully deflationary view, and the one I'll take as my stalking horse here, is Paul Horwich's minimalism. According to Horwich, the concept of truth is a logical device for generalization: it allows us to overcome our merely medical limitations and make generalizations (such as "every proposition is either true or false"). We grasp this concept by grasping instances of the equivalence schema. And when we do so we know all the essential facts about truth – any other fact about the truth-role can be deduced from ES together with some non-truth-theoretic fact. Consequently, even if we grant that truth is a property – if a metaphysically transparent one, like the concept of being a logical conjunction—it is a property that does no significant explanatory work.⁷

If NORM tells us something distinctive about truth, then a fully deflationary view like minimalism is in trouble for two reasons. First, it won't be the case that we can know all the facts about the truth-role just by grasping the instances of ES. Hence what we labeled CONCEPTUAL above will be mistaken. And second, truth will apparently do some explanatory work. In particular, it explains when tokens of a certain kind of mental state are in good standing.

Here we face an obvious objection from the minimalist. For ease of exposition, I'll put these objections in terms of NORM, but I think a similar debate can occur over GOAL. The objection is that we can derive NORM*, for example, from ES, as long as we add a further non truth-theoretic fact. What we can do is to endorse instances of

(B): It is correct to believe <p> iff p.

And then if we add instances of

ES: <p> is true iff p.

⁷ The *locus classicus* of minimalism is Paul Horwich's *Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

Presto, we derive:

NORM*: It is correct to believe $\langle p \rangle$ iff $\langle p \rangle$ is true.

In short, the thought goes, NORM doesn't tell us anything new about truth. It merely demonstrates the expressive use of the truth predicate.

Let's look, however, at this supposed derivation. I don't find it persuasive, because it is difficult to see why we would accept instances of (B) in the absence of already being committed to the implicit generalization NORM*.⁸ For the list of (B)'s instances is an infinite list of normative prescriptions: a list of little belief norms as it were: it is correct to believe snow is white iff snow is white, correct to believe roses are red iff roses are red and so on. But now we are faced with an obvious question: Why should we accept each of these individual norms? Individual normative prescriptions are justified by general normative principles. Consider promising: it is correct to keep your promise to Tom for the same reason that it is correct to keep your promise to Bridget: because it is correct, other things being equal, to keep your promises. So too with truth: it is *prima facie* correct to believe that grass is green for the same reason it is correct to believe that snow is white: because it is correct to believe what is true. The *general normative principle*—NORM* in this case—is in the epistemic driver's seat. Consequently we are justified in accepting instances of (B) only in virtue of accepting instances of NORM*.

An aspect of my point here was made familiar by Gupta: namely, you can't get generalizations from schemas.⁹ We might put it this way: the generalization problem, *even if it could be overcome elsewhere*, is damning when it comes to generalizations over norms.

Why? The reason concerns the *epistemology* of norms. In ethics, there is a position known as particularism according to which there are no true general moral principles, or if there are, no such principle does any epistemic work in our moral reasoning. Perhaps particularism about morality is true –although I doubt it. (It has always been hard for me to take seriously the idea that

⁸ The following argument originally appeared in "Minimalism and the Value of Truth" *Philosophical Quarterly* 54 (2004): 497-517.

⁹ See Anil Gupta, "A Critique of Deflationism." *Philosophical Topics* 21 (1993) 2: 57-81.

there are no true generalizations about some matter). My present point is that even if it is true for morality, it seems very implausible when applied to cognitive norms like truth. It seems, rather, very plausible that the reason it is correct to believe that snow is white when snow is white is the very SAME reason it is correct to believe that oysters are tasty when they are tasty. Namely: it is correct to believe what is true. You ought to endorse the individual prescriptions because of a general normative truth.

One way to avoid the argument would be to go find yourself a logical apparatus that allows you to generalize over (B). Something like substitutional quantification might come to mind, for example.¹⁰ But one might wonder how much ground one would gain from such a maneuver. First, note that by appealing to a device like substitutional quantification, we deprive the minimalist of one of their key points: that the reason we have a truth concept at all is for generalizing—that is truth’s job as it were. Appealing to substitutional quantification effectively outsources that job. More importantly, appealing to substitutional quantification in particular leaves the problem that caused Horwich—rightly in my view—to appeal to schemas in the first place: namely, that it is hard to see how to define substitutional quantifiers without appealing to truth. Indeed, if we appeal to substitutional quantification to generalize over (B) then we would be, in effect, trying to explain away one putative fact about truth by appeal to a device that is *itself* explained in terms of truth, thereby demonstrating that truth has more than an expressive role to play after all.

But even if some such maneuver were to work, it doesn’t settle the issue. That issue is whether CONCEPTUAL is true: whether or not, in coming to grasp NORM or NORM*, we learn a new fact about truth, or, as I’ve put it, the truth-role. The argument we’ve been considering is that CONCEPTUAL is true because we can deduce NORM* from ES and some non-truth theoretic fact. And there’s the rub. Whether this strategy works will depend on whether (B) (in either the generalized or schema form) really is “non-truth-theoretic”. That is, it will depend on what (B) is “about”—or what *explains why (B) is true*.

¹⁰ See Chris Hill’s *Thought and World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) for one strategy for example. And of course one might pursue completely different versions of deflationism, such as a prosentential theory like Brandom’s or the “pure disquotational” theory of Field.

Some might think that just because (B) doesn't use the word "true", it is obvious (B) isn't about truth or the truth-role. But words—or the lack of them—are cheap. If a generalized (B) were said to be a good paraphrase of NORM*, then we would have just as much reason to think generalized (B) conveys information about the truth-role as we do for thinking NORM* does. Good paraphrases carry their ontological commitments with them. (Otherwise they wouldn't be good paraphrases). And it seems that the advocate of generalized (B) would have to say that *is* such a paraphrase, precisely because *it is part of the standard deflationary position* that the right hand sides of (B) and NORM* are—by dint of (ES)—intersubstitutable (ignoring as always opaque and pathological contexts).¹¹

So again: what makes (B) true? One thought is that it is true by virtue of the concept of belief. It is a conceptual truth about belief, that tells us something about what beliefs are. This seems very plausible. Indeed, it seems plausible that *both* (B) and NORM are tell us something about belief. We might even go so far to say that the fact that beliefs are correct in virtue of their contents being true is partly constitutive of what is to be a belief.¹² Believing, unlike hoping desiring or assuming, is a propositional attitude that can go right or wrong by way of the proposition believed being true or false.¹³

¹¹ Indeed, this fact is what the appeal to (B) trades on: the idea is that we can paraphrase away the seeming commitment to the "truth-property" by showing that we can express whatever is said by NORM* with a generalized version of (B), which lacks even the appearance of referring to the alleged property. And there is the fact that "the average family has 1.5 children" is semantically equivalent to "the number of children divided by the number of families is 1.5" doesn't all by itself tell you which is the more perspicuous statement. One must supply some additional theory—such as reasons to think that the material world contains no such things as "average families"—in order to make that call. Likewise with truth: mere paraphrase *alone* shows nothing about what exists. It only shows that we can talk either way.

¹² For similar pronouncements see: D. Velleman, *The Possibility of Practical Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16. P. Boghossian, "The Normativity of Content", *Philosophical Issues*, 13 (2003), 31–45; M. P. Lynch, "The Values of Truth and the Truth of Values", in D. Pritchard (ed.), *Epistemic Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); N. Shah, "How Truth Governs Belief" *Philosophical Review*, 112 (2003), 447–83; R. Wedgwood, "The Aim of Belief" *Philosophical Perspectives*, 36 (2002), 267–297.

¹³ Of course, to say this much isn't to say very much about belief. One would like an explanation. But it is worth pointing out that philosophers of mind have tried to give such explanations: one explanation, for example, is that beliefs have a distinctive direction of fit – beliefs try to fit how things are. Another explanation is that having a true content is a belief-state's proper function, what it was designed to do. Whatever the explanation, the point is

But acknowledging this fact leaves open the obvious possibility that what explains why NORM, NORM* and (B) are true are conceptual facts about belief *and* truth. That is, it leaves open the possibility that in the relevant sense of “about” NORM and (B) are about the concepts of belief *and* truth. Given the connection between belief and truth noted above, this seems very plausible – even unavoidable. And it is hardly surprising given the standard functionalist analysis of belief. Consider, for example, the thought that

If one believes that X'ing will get you Y, and one desires Y, then one is likely to X.

Is this a truth about belief or desire? The standard answer is: both. It is a truism that shows the connection between these two concepts and is true in virtue of them. I take NORM* and (B) to be similar: they tell us something about truth and belief. This was something Dummett pointed out a long time ago by way of a famous analogy with winning and truth. One doesn't understand what a competitive game is if one doesn't understand that the point of the game is to win. And one wouldn't understand winning if one didn't understand that it was the point of a competitive game.

Nonetheless, if ALL that NORM or NORM* were to tell us about truth is that it is what makes beliefs correct, one might feel rightly cheated. That, one might think, is hardly substantive information about truth's nature or essence. But in fact, NORM and NORM* tell us more than that, as I'll now go on to argue. What NORM tells us is that (a) truth, and therefore any property that plays that role, is a *fundamental norm*; (b); that said property is *regulative* of any practice aimed at producing beliefs; and (c) that it is an *unabstractable* norm.

4. *Truth as a fundamental and regulative norm of belief.*

To appreciate the specific information NORM tells us about the truth-role, let's turn to a thought experiment of Huw Price's—who, along with Crispin Wright, has repeatedly and influentially stressed the importance of understanding the value of truth.

not epistemological. It is not about how we tell whether a propositional attitude is a belief. We do that, presumably, by looking at the person's behavior. The idea, rather, is that part of what it is to be a belief is that a belief is correct just when true.

Price asks us to imagine a community of speakers who don't recognize a truth norm of assertion, one that is parallel to the truth norm of belief we've been considering. The imagined community—he calls them the “Mo'ans” -- instead takes itself to operate by two weaker norms. The first is a norm of sincerity: one ought to assert what one believes. The second is a norm of warranted assertibility, according to which what makes an assertion correct or incorrect is whether it is warranted.¹⁴ Presumably, this norm itself is not understood by the members of the community as being defined in terms of truth. For them, “being based on adequate grounds” is just, say, “being coherent with one's previous assertions”. So for the Mo'ans, when one person asserts that, e.g. “Sarah Palin is a genius” what they are asserting is correct (according to the norms of the community) just when they believe it, and it is coherent with their previous assertions. And someone who asserts the negation of the above is likewise correct just when *her* assertion is sincere and coherent with *her* past assertions.

As Price has noted, the Mo'ans needn't lack a disquotational truth predicate or the minimalist concept of truth. We can still imagine them using the concept of truth to generalize over their “assertions”. Someone who asserts “Everything Sarah Palin says is true” (shudder) can be thought to be asserting something like “if SP says that x, then x, and if SP says that y, then y...” and so on. Of course, the conjuncts here, if asserted, are correct, according the community, only in virtue of whether they are warranted in the sense in which they understand that term. But that doesn't mean they can't use a disquotational truth predicate or a minimalist concept of truth.

So what *is* lacking in this society? Well one thing that seems to be lacking, Price notes, is conversational engagement in fundamental disagreement or criticism. The Mo'ans seems to be blind to the fact, so obvious to us, that assertions can be criticized as being right or wrong independently of whether those assertions are warranted by the community's standards.

And surely this is right: there is no disagreement in *assertion* amongst the Mo'ans. But that doesn't mean there is no disagreement. It just means that they are like a bunch of freshman who say “whatever, dude” when confronted with anyone else's claims. They can't be bothered to really dig in, to confront one another just so long as consistency is gained. But they still might believe each other to be mistaken even if they tolerate one another's

¹⁴ See Price, 2011, chapter 8. See also “Three Norms of Assertibility” in J. Tomberlin (ed). *Philosophical Perspectives*. Vol. XII, *Language, Mind and Ontology*, Blackwell, 241-54.

assertions.

So let's modify Price's thought experiment. Let's imagine that in addition to lacking a truth norm for assertion, our imaginary community—call them the Ultra-Mo'ans—also lacks one for belief. Let's imagine, in short, that they are not governed by NORM (whether or not they recognize this fact).¹⁵ We can imagine that the members of our community still “accept” certain propositions and “reject” others. These mental acceptances, are correct, let's say, just when they are coherent with what they've accepted in the past. So they have mental states. They have norms operating on those mental states. And again, it seems possible that they have a truth predicate allows them to generalize over infinite strings of the contents of such states.

Price's community lacked the ability to disagree in assertion. But it seems clear our new community lacks quite a bit more. The Ultra-Mo'ans lack the ability to disagree in belief. And there is an obvious reason why: *they don't have beliefs*. In accepting what they accept and rejecting what they reject, the Ultra-Mo'ans are governed only by whether or not those acceptances are coherent or incoherent with what a given member has accepted in the past. If so, and if NORM is constitutive of belief, then they lack beliefs.

Where beliefs vanish, so does inquiry. Inquiry is just the practice of trying to figure out what to believe. Sure, they may LOOK like they inquire. They'll ask questions, and give answers. They might go through the motions of what looks like belief-formation—at least sometimes. But they wouldn't be trying to answer the questions correctly. They'd just be looking to accept answers that are consistent with their previous acceptances. This is hard to imagine. It is hard to imagine because it sounds to us like such people would really only be engaged in an elaborate game of wishful thinking.

What the case of the Ultra-Mo'ans tells us is that if we disagree, and are believers, we must be governed by NORM. But as Price himself notes (2011, 180) the thought experiments also tell us something else: namely, that the values in question can't be reduced to “purely” epistemic, non-truth conducive values. For the members of our second community have norms that express such values, but they lack the goal or norm of truth. Consequently, the truth norm is more basic than a warrant norm. Note that this is even more obvious when—unlike our modified Mo'ans—we take

¹⁵ Here I draw on a previous paper of mine, “Truth, Value and Epistemic Expressivism” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2006.

warrant to be defined as that which makes our beliefs likely to be true. Here we take warrant to be subservient to truth by definition: it is correct to believe what is warranted *because* doing so is likely to result in having true beliefs.

Let's bring this back around to the point. Above, we imagined that someone could respond to our earlier arguments by claiming that, while NORM is true, and distinct from ES, it really tells us nothing about the truth-role. It only tells us about belief. But we now have a reason to doubt this. The reason is that, in grasping NORM, *we already* grasp something about the truth-role: namely that the property in virtue of which it is correct to believe a proposition is a more basic norm than justification or warrant. Consequently, NORM, or even a generalized version of NORM*, isn't *just* about belief. To grasp such facts is to grasp something more specific about *truth*. It is to learn not only that truth is a norm of belief, but *that truth is the most fundamental norm of belief*.

A consequence of truth being the fundamental normative standard of belief is that the having of that property plays a regulative role for any practice that aims at producing belief. A property P plays a regulative role in a practice when, just by virtue of participating in that practice, one is normatively committed to regulating one's moves in the practice by one's judgments about what has or lacks that property (Wedgewood, 2002, 268). Thus the property of being a winning chess move is regulative of chess: in playing chess I am committed to regulating my moves by my judgments of what is or isn't a winning move. Likewise, in figuring out what to believe – that is, when engaging in inquiry – I am committed to regulating my doxastic practices by my judgments about what is or isn't true. Indeed, I am regulated by the truth in inquiry in the most direct possible way: the recognition that p is true is a decisive reason to believe it (Shah, 2003). In sum, a further fact about the truth-role that we learn from NORM is that truth is a regulative property of inquiry.

In sum, I think we should acknowledge that the normative truisms NORM and GOAL tell us something important about the truth-role, something distinct from what we learn about truth from platitudes like ES. CONCEPTUAL therefore is unwarranted, and so is any fully deflationary view like minimalism that is committed to it.

5. *Truth as Unabstractable*

So if our Pricean reflections are right, a fully deflationary view is implausible. But as Price himself would no doubt point out, that still leaves a more moderate deflationary position on the table.

Earlier I noted three respects in which a view can be assessed as deflationary: EQUIVALENCE; CONCEPTUAL and EXHAUSTION. To embrace EXHAUSTION is to embrace the idea that we can know all the facts about truth just by virtue of grasping the ordinary concept of truth. *Being true*, on such an account, is a lot like *being a conjunction*. You understand everything about being a conjunction just by grasping the truth-tables. Nothing is left out.

Price can say his view is still deflationary in *this* respect. We might put it like this. To understand what truth is to understand that it is a property that plays a particular functional role in our cognitive life. But that role is exhausted by some simple truisms. One sort of deflationist—the full deflationist—thinks it is exhausted by ES. Another sort—Price’s sort—thinks we need to add more, NORM and GOAL, for example. But both think there is nothing else to say about truth once we’ve grasped these truisms. As Price provocatively puts it, his thought is that we can acknowledge that truth is a norm but still regard talk of a “property” of truth as something akin to a metaphysical fiction. By this, he doesn’t mean that it is true that there is not truth or some such. Rather, he says he is like the person who, rather than saying there is no God, rejects the theological language-game entirely (2011, 181). In short, his thought is that we can acknowledge that truth is a norm without having to say anything “metaphysical” about what that norm consists in.

This is, on the face of it, a curious position. If I tell you that x is correct/right/of value just when it is y , then it is surely reasonable to ask about what y IS, or failing that, about the conditions under which things are or are not y . And if no answer is forthcoming, one might well suspect one’s right to make the normative claim. Indeed, one might think that this sort of reasoning is part of what has led deflationists like Horwich to resist the thought that truth is a norm in the first place—they take it that once you let that camel’s nose under the tent, it will walk away with the whole thing.

So why does Price think that he can acknowledge that truth is a norm without saying anything more about what it consists in? He sees the conclusion as dropping out of the Mo'ans thought experiment. That's because, in his view, what that experiment shows is that "what matters is that speakers *take there* to be a norm of truth, not that there actually be such a norm, in some speaker-independent sense (2011, 180; emphasis added). Yet whether this is convincing hinges on what is meant by "taking there to be a norm". Price suggests this is a practical or pragmatic matter: "I think in practice we find it impossible to stop caring about truth" (Ibid.). This makes it sound as if the modality here is very weak: what matters is for us to act as if we are governed by NORM, not that we are so governed. But the case of the Ultra-Mo'ans suggests that the modality is *conceptual*, not practical. Indeed, this falls out of the very set-up of the ultra-Mo'ans thought experiment. By stipulation, they aren't governed by NORM – whether or *not they recognize that fact*. And in not being governed by NORM, they lack *beliefs*. Hence, it seems deeply plausible that, in order for the ultra-Mo'ans to start to have beliefs, it will not be sufficient for them to just start acting as if they are governed by NORM. To see this, imagine a variant: a group of ultra-Mo'ans that are not governed by NORM but act as if they do. Perhaps they even have convinced themselves they do take beliefs to be correct when true – even when, really, all they do is take beliefs to be correct when they are consistent with their past assertions or flatter their "side" of a "debate. In effect, they still pay lip service to the idea that it is correct to believe when true. But that won't make them have beliefs, any more than saying your are honest means that you are honest.

These considerations suggest a further fact about the truth-role that we learn from NORM: namely, that truth is an *unabstractable* norm of belief.¹⁶ Here's what I mean. Skeptical views about value generally presuppose that we can take what Mark Timmons has called a disengaged standpoint towards those values. That is, that we can distinguish the standpoint from which we make our, e.g. moral commitments and the standpoint from which we explain the point, nature and truth of those commitments. In the case of moral values, it is not difficult to take this standpoint. We do so by noticing that human beings can engage in actions but take moral values different from our own to govern those actions. We note that engaging in action doesn't necessitate

¹⁶ The following paragraph summarizes arguments made in much more detail in "Truth Value and Epistemic Expressivism" and "The Values of Truth and the Truth of Values" in *Epistemic Value*. Ed. By a. Haddock, A. Millar, D. Pritchard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

having particular moral values to evaluate those actions.

But note that something very different is going on in the case of the cognitive values picked out by NORM And GOAL. For our Pricean thought experiment suggests that we can't abstract in the requisite way – and this unabstractability is due to the very concepts involved. That's why we can't even imagine a community of *believers and inquirers* not governed by NORM And GOAL. We can imagine people doing things and having mental states that are somewhat *like* believing and inquiring, but that is it. We can't seem to sufficiently disengage from those values to be skeptical about them.

The conceptual unabstractability of the truth norm should make us suspicious of Price's implicit view that we can retain EXHAUSTION whilst still holding to the idea that truth is a norm. If our concept of truth requires us to regard it as a norm of belief (and not just to act as if it is) then our question above remains. In what does this norm consist?

6. *Pragmatism and Pluralism*

Price's over-all picture of truth is, as he says, "hard to find on contemporary maps" because its elements are not normally thought to be compatible:

In one sense it is impeccably pragmatist, for example, for it appeals to nothing more than the role of truth in linguistic practice. Yet it rejects the pragmatist's *ur-urge*, to try to identify truth with justification. Again, it defends a kind of truth commonly seen as realist, but does so from a pragmatist starting point, without the metaphysics that typically accompanies a realist view of truth (2011, 182).

I am sympathetic with this picture. According to Price, if we adopt his view of truth, we can avoid what he calls the placement problem—the problem of placing “various kinds of truth in a natural world” (2011, 6). Price diagnoses this problem as resting on the assumption that truth is always and everywhere a matter of representation. Think that, and you'll find yourself puzzled about how our beliefs about numbers and norms can be true: For what items do they represent? Dealing with this problem is the bread and butter of much modern analytic philosophy.¹⁷ But Price suggests a different solution, or dissolution: give up on the idea that truth always consists in representation. Instead, endorse a form of what he has famously called

¹⁷ See Lynch (2009).

“discourse pluralism” “the view that philosophy should recognize an irreducible plurality of kinds of discourse—the moral as well as the scientific, for example.” (2011, 36). Not all truths need to represent the world.

I’m down with pluralism. But I worry about Price’s way into it. In his view, representationalism is wrong not because truth’s nature is sometimes to be understood in terms other than correspondence, but because truth has no nature at all. That is, Price marries pluralism to a kind of deflationism. But as I’ve argued, his deflationism—his endorsement of EXHAUSTION in particular—is in tension with the view that truth is a norm. The problem, again, is that embracing NORM’s lessons begs the question of what this norm consists in. But accepting EXHAUSTION means embracing a dispirited quietism.

In short, here’s the scoreboard as I see it: Price is right that truth has a normative character. He is right that not all truths represent the world. But he is wrong to think that a deflationary view which accepts EXHAUSTION is the right way to combine the first view with the second.

What we need is a way of securing pluralism while being able to say something explanatory about the nature of the truth norm. The key, as I’ve argued elsewhere, lies in embracing the thought that truth is a functional *property*. Like Price, I think that to understand the concept of truth is to grasp a particular functional role—this indeed, is the lesson I took from his brilliant *Facts and the Function of Truth*. But unlike Price, I think that this tells us something about what truth *is*.

To define truth functionally in the sense I am interested in is to define it by way of its connections to other related concepts. These connections are embodied in certain common truisms that have played a central role in the historical discussions over truth. One of these truisms is NORM; another is GOAL. A third is:

OBJECTIVITY: P is true if and only if were P to be believed, things would be as they are believed to be.

The idea is that these truisms, or ones very much like them, together with certain obvious platitudes connecting truth with validity, knowledge and the like, jointly pick out the truth-role. They do so by describing the conceptually essential features of the truth property. We might put it like this: truth *just is*

the property that has these features essentially. Having that property is what constitutes a proposition's being true. It is in this sense that the functionalist thinks that truth is one, and in it is in this sense that the functionalist view is most akin to Price's. For like Price, the functionalist takes the truth-role to be more complex than the full deflationist (she rejects CONCEPTUAL), and like Price, she takes the truth property itself to be a holistically defined affair.

But unlike Price, my kind of alethic functionalist can allow for pluralism without having to accept EXHAUSTION. For truth's being a functional property is consistent with the idea that there is more than one property *in virtue of which propositions are true*.¹⁸ That is, it is consistent with the idea that whether a given proposition is true is *determined* by its having some other, ontologically distinct property – perhaps a representational property, like correspondence, or perhaps an epistemically constrained property such as Wright's superassertibility.¹⁹ According to the functionalist, we can pick out a property that determines whether a proposition is true by seeing whether it plays the truth-role. Such properties should not be confused with truth itself, but they could be described as properties that, under certain conditions, and for certain kinds of content, realize truth. And of course, the fact that truth is multiply realizable in this way is not something that we can read off from the truth concept. To see whether it is true, we must do some “metaphysical” work.

So it seems to me that this is just the sort of view the Pricean pragmatist needs. It allows us to say, against traditional theorists, that truth as such may be a very thin property. Beliefs are true just when they are correct, when they are the sort of beliefs we aim to have during inquiry, when the world is as they portray it as being, That is the job-description of truth, as it were. But seeing truth as a functional property in this sense is entirely consistent with there being OTHER properties, distinct from truth, which *satisfy this* description and so realize that thin property – which, in short, play the truth-role. And that is a helpful thought, because it opens to door *to appealing to these other properties* to explain what grounds the norm in different domains or discourses. It allows us new tools for addressing what plays the truth-role

¹⁸ This is the view first defended by Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); see also Lynch, *Truth in Context* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) and Lynch, *Truth as One and Many* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹⁹ See Wright, 1992 for discussion.

for different sorts of belief, and therefore, what makes particular beliefs of those kinds correct. It opens new theoretical doors rather than closing them.

Now it might be said that pragmatists aren't supposed to like Metaphysics. But (to modify a famous bit of Rorty's) there is Metaphysics and then there is metaphysics. There is nothing spooky about investigating the properties that play the truth-role. In conjunction with cognitive science, for example, we can ask how some mental states might represent certain objects and properties. That is a perfectly naturalistic enterprise to all save those who think they can build an a priori wall against the onslaught of empirical science that says that such representation is possible (Good luck, I say: a priori walls only look impressive from the inside). Nor is there anything particularly *recherché* in the task of figuring out what it means to say a proposition would be warranted relative to all future stages of information.

My present goal is not to conduct these investigations of course (although I've made some headway elsewhere) but to simply recommend them as reasonable lines of inquiry, and ones that can be approached from a naturalistic, pragmatist perspective.²⁰ Indeed, to pursue such investigations is to follow an important pragmatic maxim, famously invoked by James, who urged us to know the "particular go of it" when it came to truth. It is not enough, James warned, to endorse platitudes and truisms to understand what truth is; not enough to simply say that "true beliefs correspond to reality" or "it is correct to believe what is true". What the pragmatist demands, or should demand, is some understanding of what "correspondence" and "reality" are, what makes for "correctness" and so on. That's what is involved in figuring out what plays the truth-role: understanding the particular go of it.

Another thing I've always thought the pragmatists had right, and which Price in particular has stressed, is that if you want to know what something is then you need to understand what it does, why it matters in our cognitive economy, why we care about it. The pragmatists' big idea was that this held not just for ideas like belief and assertion, but for truth itself. And their idea still seems right, at least in spirit, if not in detail. If you want to understand truth, you must understand truth's values. Yet the cost of doing so is not

²⁰ For discussion of both representation and superwarrant/superassertibility, see Lynch, 2009.

quietism; it is further, metaphysical, work. Happily, this is not too high a price to pay.²¹

²¹ Thanks to audiences at Princeton University, the University of Aberdeen and the conference on Price's Naturalism Without Mirrors at the University of Zurich. I've benefited greatly from discussions and comments from Douglas Edwards, Casey Johnson, Paul Horwich, Huw Price, Steven Gross, Lionel Shapiro and Crispin Wright.