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A dilemma for determination pluralism (or dualism)

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Abstract

Douglas Edwards is arguably the most prominent contemporary advocate of *moderate alethic pluralism*. Significantly influenced by Crispin Wright and Michael Lynch, his work on the nature of truth has become widely discussed in the topical literature. Edwards labels his version of moderate alethic pluralism *determination pluralism*. At first blush, determination pluralism appears philosophically promising. The position deserves thoughtful consideration, particularly because of its capacity to accommodate the scope problem. I argue, however, that upon analysis the view is better understood as a form of metaphysical dualism or what I will call *meta-dualism*. Furthermore, determination pluralists face a dilemma; there appears to be an instability at the core of their dualistic model. On the one horn of the dilemma, they need a clear metaphysical demarcation at the interface of their two necessary domains. On the other horn, they seem to need to a metaphysically vague boundary at the interface of their two necessary domains. Determination pluralism needs substantial revision.

Key words

truth, dualism, pluralism, alethic pluralism, ontological pluralism, determination pluralism

Introduction

Truth pluralism or *alethic pluralism* is the view “that different properties play important roles in the analysis of truth in different domains of discourse” (Edwards 2012, p. 200).¹

¹ Edwards (2008) points out that the alethic pluralist does not take ‘true’ to be ambiguous:

although the word ‘true’ is picking out different properties, the alethic pluralist is not charged with equivocating on the word ‘true’, as he holds that the meaning of ‘true’, and the concept of truth, are held fixed across domains of discourse (p. 148, fn.10).

These domains involve language about some subject matter; examples of domains are physical, biological, social, institutional, moral and mathematical domains. By way of the scope problem,² alethic pluralists argue that there are more than one way domain-relative truth bearers can be true. A truth bearer – say a sentence³ – in the *physical* domain may be made true by having the property of *correspondence*. In *non-physical* domains a truth bearer may be made true by having the property of coherence or *superassertibility*.⁴

Developed by Crispin Wright,⁵ Michael Lynch and now a new generation including Douglas Edwards,⁶ alethic pluralism is increasingly prominent in the literature. Contemporary alethic pluralists are grouped into two camps: *strong alethic pluralists* and *moderate alethic pluralists*. Strong alethic pluralists hold that truth varies according to domains of discourse; there is no unitary meta-truth realized across domains. Moderate alethic pluralists, on the

“‘True’ is not ambiguous as are ‘stage’, ‘tear’, and ‘still’” notes Wright (2003, p. 78); we can talk of truth *simpliciter*. We do not have to talk of physical truth, moral truth and mathematical truth etc. See also Wright (1996) and Lynch (2001).

² Russell (2001) puts the problem this way: “if truth consists in a correspondence of thought with something outside thought, thought can never know when truth has been attained” (p. 70). If truth consists in coherence, “there is no reason to suppose that only *one* coherent body of beliefs is possible” (p. 71 original emphasis). Intuitively speaking, either option is philosophically undesirable. Accordingly, alethic pluralists hold “that different theories of truth should be limited in scope, as they each perform well in some domains, but not others” (Edwards 2018a, p. 83). See Sher (1998) and Lynch (2009, pp. 32–36) for further detail on what the scope problem entails.

³ For various reasons Edwards prefers to speak of sentences, rather than beliefs or propositions as the truth-apt bearers of descriptive content. I adopt his convention here.

⁴ Wright explains superassertibility as durable warrant:

A statement is superassertible. . . if and only if it is, or can be, warranted and some warrant for it would survive arbitrarily close scrutiny of its pedigree and arbitrarily extensive increments to or other forms of improvement of our information. (1992, p. 48)

Alternatively, “‘ $\langle p \rangle$ ’ is superassertible if and only if ‘ $\langle p \rangle$ ’ is warranted without defeat at some stage of enquiry, and would remain so at every successive stage of enquiry” (Dodd 2013, p. 29 fn.4).

⁵ Putnam (1994) also entertained a version of truth pluralism at around the same time as Wright.

⁶ Other ‘new generation’ truth pluralists include notably Pedersen (2010; 2014) and Ferrari (Ferrari, Lynch and Edwards 2015; Ferrari 2018). Horgan and Potrč (2008) and Sher (1998; 2005) develop note-worthy versions of *correspondence pluralism*: truth always consists in correspondence, but there are different ways of corresponding.

other hand, generally argue that micro-truths spread across domains realize or manifest a ‘higher’ meta-truth (see Pedersen and Wright 2013; Pedersen and C. D. Wright 2018 for detail).

Moderate alethic pluralists assume that, if there are two ways sentences can be true, it follows there may be three, four or more ways sentences can be true. Alethic dualism is, therefore, usually subsumed under the umbrella of alethic pluralism.⁷ This seems fair enough. However, I will argue that Edwards’ recently developed version of moderate alethic pluralism – *determination pluralism* – is committed to dualism in a further broader way. Determination pluralists consider *language* to be either *representational* (correspondence truth) or *constructionist* (superassertible truth); and they consider *being* to be either *physical* or *non-physical*. This implies global dualism: in one domain language *represents* the physical, in the other language *constructs* the non-physical. This broad dualism cannot be incorporated into a *meta-pluralist* framework I argue. Determination pluralists are, in fact, incorporating their pluralistic alethic framework into a *meta-dualistic* metaphysical framework.

I will then argue that this dualism appears unstable due to a dilemma at the heart of Edwards’ model. The dilemma arises from the fact that determination pluralism only offers two ways for language to relate to the world; as dualists, they only offer two domains of discourse about some subject matter. On the one horn of the dilemma, determination pluralists must clearly demarcate their two domains. However, if they do, it is difficult to explain why some vague cases at the boundary between the two domains appear to contain features from both domains. I use the example of the predicate ‘is gay’ that picks out the property of being gay; gayness appears to contain both physical and non-physical features. On the other horn of the dilemma, determination pluralists cannot accommodate this vague boundary between their two domains. I will argue that this is because determination pluralism is foundational on having a clear distinction at its core. Determination pluralism (or dualism) collapses if unsupported by a clear demarcation between its two global domains. Edwards must choose whether gayness is purely physical (i.e. biological) or purely non-physical (i.e. socially

⁷C. D. Wright notes the various dualisms in alethic pluralism. Alethic pluralists include “‘thin/thick’ or ‘lightweight/heavyweight’ distinctions among truth properties that have thus far been their hallmark way of navigating realist/anti-realist controversies” (Wright, C.D. 2012, p. 98). Pedersen (2014), likewise, recognizes dualism to be foundational to alethic pluralism; “the distinction between mind-dependent and mind-independent existence is crucial” in supporting alethic pluralism (p. 275).

constructed). Therefore, there is an awkward instability at the centre of the Edwards's universal metaphysical model.

In part 1 of this paper I introduce Edwards' determination pluralism as influenced by Wright and Lynch. I then explicate the global dualism that overshadows Edwards' position. In part 2, I argue that this meta-dualism threatens to destabilise determination pluralism. In part 3, I present determination pluralists with a dilemma. Regardless of whether their meta-dualism is sharply or vaguely demarcated, they cannot account for tricky boundary cases such as gayness. Determination pluralism as currently formulated requires revision.

(1.) Determination pluralism (or dualism)

(1.1.) Introducing Edwards' view

For Edwards substantive or inflationary truth is at heart significantly different from insubstantial or deflated truth. This is, firstly, due to its robust *explanatory power* and, secondly, due to its *normative* force (Wright 1992, ch.1; Edwards 2018a, pp. 28–29). Truth *qua* property has “metaphysical weight. . . truths form a genuine kind” (Edwards 2018a, p. 36). Our investigation of the truth-property is mediated by investigation of the concept of truth (see Edwards 2016 for detail). The content of this truth-concept – truth's features – is defined by a list of *a priori* platitudes instead of necessary and sufficient conditions (Wright 2003, pp. 271–72; Lynch 2009, pp. 8–12; Edwards 2018a, p. 125).⁸ In other words, a list of pre-theoretic conceptual platitudes exhaustively describes the truth-concept. More than one kind of predicate may minimally satisfy the platitudes.

Edwards' truth property cannot be reduced to some other property. A sentence possesses the truth-property by possessing some other property. Truth is a universal, domain-independent property *determined* by functional, domain-relative properties possessed by all true sentences. Roughly, one may think of many domain specific small t truths determining a

⁸ For Wright – and for alethic pluralists generally – the platitudes are the starting point for a theory of the nature of truth. They are the minimal requirements any metaphysically robust account of truth must meet. The platitudes are intuitive though revisable claims constituting the truth concept. Alethic pluralists draw up the list in slightly different ways. However, it generally contains platitudes such as (1) to assert a statement is to present it as true; (2) ‘*p*’ is true if and only if *p*; (3) a sentence is true when the world is as the sentence says it is; (4) a true sentence should be assertible at any time; (5) true sentences are completely true, not true by degrees; (6) truth-apt sentences have truth-apt negations, conjunctions, disjunctions, etc. and (7) truth is a worthy goal of inquiry.

general capital T truth. For Edwards truth is a special – shall we say *transcendent* – kind of property “that has claims to both unity and plurality” (2018a, p. 124). True sentences determine the universal truth property if they have the functional domain-relative properties of either correspondence or superassertibility.

Citing Lewis (1983), Edwards distinguishes between *sparse* versus *abundant* properties in the world (Edwards 2014, ch. 7; 2018a, ch. 4). Sparse properties are universals instantiated by two or more objects sharing that property; they form a distinct ontological kind. Sparse properties contrast with abundant properties. Abundant properties are any extension of a *predicate*; a predicate that picks out a class of objects that satisfy it. Edwards further claims that this sparse/abundant distinction applies to *objects* as well as to properties. A *singular term* forming an atomic sentence with some predicate refers to either a sparse or an abundant object. Universal truth, however, transcends both domain individuation and the sparse/abundant dichotomy because truth is itself “a key instrument used to make the distinction between sparseness and abundance” (Edwards 2018a, p. 140). Like the traditional functionalist notion of *multiply-realized*, for Edwards truth is *multiply-determined*.⁹

(1.2.) Edwards’ meta-dualism

In this paper, I am concerned with Edwards’ metaphysics of the relationship between language and the world rather than the details truth determination. He draws from Wright and Lynch to present a universal metaphysical account of both sentences and facts that I will argue is fundamentally *meta-dualistic*. Determination pluralism is, therefore, probably better construed as *determination dualism*. To build his global metaphysics, Edwards inspects the relationship between properties and predicates via Wright’s notion of *width of cosmological role*. A detailed analysis of this intricate notion is beyond the scope of this paper (see Wright 1992, pp. 196–99 and Edwards 2018a, pp. 69–76). Briefly, however, Wright (1992) explains as follows:

Let the *width of cosmological role* of a subject-matter of a discourse be measured to 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

⁹ By analogy, one can think of truth as winning, and what it takes to win varies depending on what game one is playing (Dummett 1978). Like domain-independent truth, winning “transcend[s] any particular features regarding what it takes to win any particular game” (Edwards 2018a, p. 123).

being in attitudinal states which take such states of affairs as object (p. 196 original emphasis).

A subject matter has a *broad* cosmological role if the states of affairs (objects and properties) it is concerned with cannot be explained merely in terms of our attitudes (beliefs or values) towards those states of affairs. A subject matter has a *narrow* cosmological role if the states of affairs it is concerned with can be explained solely in terms of our attitudes towards them. Domains dealing with physical facts are an example of the former; domains dealing with moral facts are an example of the latter. Domains of discourse exhibiting a broad cosmological role are associated with realism, externalism, representationalism and correspondence truth. Domains of discourse exhibiting a narrow cosmological role are associated with anti-realism, internalism, non-representationalism and coherence or superassertible truth. Edwards (2018a) also notes that “the distinction between narrow and broad cosmological role is not a matter of degree” (p. 70, fn. 15). A sentence about some fact is either a product of our attitudes or it is not.

(1.2.1.) Language dualism

The first component of Edwards’ meta-dualism is language dualism. He divides predicates into *responsive* versus *generative* kinds. By, in part, exhibiting a broad cosmological role, responsive predicates *correspond* to sparse properties. By exhibiting a narrow cosmological role, generative predicates *project* abundant properties. We have responsive predicates because sometimes our language *reacts* to objective properties “out there”. For example, it is because a rod “has the property of being metallic that [the] rod falls under the predicate ‘is metallic’” (Edwards 2018a, p. 68). The explanatory work done by reference to an object’s being metallic involves reference to the *objective* fact that being metallic subsists in (broad cosmological role). This entails a “property-to-predicate direction of explanation. . . it is *because* A has the property of being F that A falls under the predicate ‘is F’” (Edwards 2018a, p. 68 original emphasis).¹⁰

We have generative predicates because sometimes our language *creates* or *constructs* properties. These abundant properties exist because they are projections of predicates. For

¹⁰ Classification of *singular terms* in relation to *objects* mirrors Edwards’ classification of predicates in relation to properties. I focus here on predicates and properties however because the predicate in a sentence, rather than the singular term determines the domain membership of a sentence (Edwards 2018a, p. 78; 2018b, p. 97).

example, “motorbikes have the property of being cool because motorbikes fall under the predicate of ‘is cool’, rather than vice versa” (Edwards 2018a, p. 68). The explanatory work done by reference to an object’s coolness involves only the fact that the object is *believed* to be cool (narrow cosmological role). This entails a “predicate-to-property direction of explanation. . . it is *because* A falls under the predicate ‘is F’ that A is F” (Edwards 2018a, p. 68 original emphasis). It follows that the responsive and the generative models each come with their own account of truth.

Concurrently, Edwards utilizes a representational versus non-representational domain distinction (introduced by Lynch 2009, pp. 52–53). Realist domains of discourse have a representational truth-predicate such as correspondence. Anti-realist domains of discourse have a non-representational truth-predicate such as superassertibility. In representational domains, if two individuals make conflicting truth-claims, then at least one of them has erred. In non-representational domains, there may be faultless disagreement about truth-claims. An example of the former is truth by correspondence in the domain of physical subject matter; an example of the latter is truth by superassertibility in the domain of moral subject matter.

Representational truth is *dependent* on *prior* states of affairs existent in the world. The reference relationship between a sentence and the world exists prior to truth. The physical world is as it is regardless of our alethic constructions. Non-representational truth is *contextual*; it *creates* states of affairs. Truth is inherently dependent on us: dependent on the structure of our linguistic system and what we value. These distinctions entail metaphysical dualism, and the only way “to preserve the availability of both the sparse and abundant models in different domains is to hold that truth comes in at least two general forms” (Edwards 2018a, p. 88).

In representational domains, true sentences correspond to *mind-independent* sparse properties. In non-representational domains, true sentences by being superassertible project *mind-dependent* abundant properties. Examples of responsive predicates – exhibiting a broad cosmological role – are physical predicates (‘is wet’), chemical predicates (‘is acidic’) and biological predicates (‘is an enzyme’). Examples of generative predicates – exhibiting a narrow cosmological role – are institutional predicates (‘is the governor of New York’), social predicates (‘is black’ or ‘is a woman’) and moral predicates (‘is right’ or ‘is wrong’). Each predicate should be examined on a case-by-case basis to establish whether it is responsive or generative (Edwards 2018a, ch. 4). Edwards concludes that

truth *has* to be understood differently in different domains, for we cannot get the general distinctions we made between different domains in terms of sparseness and abundance up and running without a pluralist approach to truth (2018a, p. 83 original emphasis).

(1.2.2.) Ontological dualism

The second component of Edwards' meta-dualism is ontological dualism. He suggests that pluralism offers the

most plausible route for those who both want to investigate the nature of existence and also want to be open to the idea that both abstract and concrete objects exist (Cotnoir and Edwards 2015, pp. 10–11).

Edwards argues that truth pluralism motivates *ontological pluralism*, and, therefore, *global pluralism* about the relationship between language and the world.¹¹ What we can say about the nature of *being* varies from one kind of property (or object) to the next depending, in part, on whether the subject matter is concrete or abstract. As before, this sounds more like dualism than pluralism. In realist representational domains (physical and chemical, for example) the concrete world has *casual powers* to which true sentences respond. In anti-realist non-representational domains (social, institutional, mathematical and moral) true sentences *construct* the abstract world. Moreover, being has the same essential characteristics as truth. It is a universal transcendent multiply-determined property that is neither sparse nor abundant. Therefore, *mutatis mutandis*, global dualism or what I am calling *meta-dualism* follows. This meta-dualism involves two global *meta-domains* incorporating both truth and being. One can illustrate Edwards' global dualism as follows:

Constructionist meta-domain: generative language —→ abundant ontology (non-physical)

Representational meta-domain: responsive language ←— sparse ontology (physical)

Although purportedly inspired by the distinctions in Wright and Lynch's alethic pluralism, Edwards' model involves ontological and then global dualism built on top of a theory of truth dualism. I will suggest in the next section that Edwards therefore carries a special philosophical burden. This is to explain exactly why and how physical, chemical and

¹¹ However, not all forms of ontological pluralism entail alethic pluralism or *vice versa* (Cotnoir and Edwards 2015).

biological domains belong on one side of the meta-domain divide; while moral, mathematical, institutional and social domains belong on the other side. I argue, however, that determination pluralism cannot meet this burden. A vague boundary at the interface of the two domains seems required. This blurring, however, introduces problems of its own. A dilemma then surfaces: the interface between determination pluralism's two meta-domains can be neither sharpened nor blurred.

(2.) An instability in determination pluralism

Having explicated the meta-dualism in determination pluralism, I will now discuss a potentially destabilising problem at the core of the view. Like any dualist Edwards, draws a necessary demarcation between two domains that presents a target of attack for monists. These two domains are his representational and constructionist meta-domains about the relationship between language and the world illustrated above. In what follows I claim that Edwards faces a dilemma; either there must be a sharp boundary at the interface of his two meta-domains or there must be a fuzzy boundary. I argue that either option is untenable given the way he formulates his view. The dilemma threatens the stability of determination pluralism.

I make my case in three steps. Firstly, I suggest that there must be a sharp demarcation between determination pluralism's responsive and generative predicate meta-kinds. Secondly, however, due to tricky cases at the interface of responsive and generative predicate meta-kinds, it seems a vague boundary is needed. The third step follows from the previous two steps; determination pluralists face a dilemma. I conclude that Edwards' meta-dualism appears metaphysically unstable.

(2.1.) A sharp distinction is needed

As stated above, Edwards demarcates sparse from abundant *properties*. For our purposes here, however, my concern is with Edwards' associated *predicate* distinction. When it comes to demarcating responsive from generative predicates (that pick out sparse and abundant properties respectively) he proceeds as follows:

predicates come in different kinds, and. . . predicate kinds are distinguished by the kinds of functional roles that predicates have. . . These are intended to mark fairly intuitive distinctions between kinds of subject-matter (2018a, p. 61, 63).

Edwards discusses how moral and religious predicate kinds, for example, seem to overlap (2018a, p. 63). Nonetheless, he suggests that with some philosophical work, distinctions can

be drawn according to the *functions* these predicates perform (Edwards 2018a, pp. 88–89).¹² Edwards mentions many predicate kinds (physical, chemical, biological, social, institutional, mathematical, moral etc.). Let us call these *micro-kinds*. However, as indicated above, he classifies these micro-kinds into what one may think of as two *meta-kinds*: responsive and generative predicates. According to the criteria already introduced, physical and chemical predicates clearly lie on the responsive side of the demarcation, while mathematical and moral predicates clearly lie on the generative side. As we will see, however, things get somewhat murky at the interface of the biological and social domains.

Edwards allows room for debate about where and how predicate micro-kind distinctions are drawn; “there may be many different reasons why we might want to make these distinctions” (Edwards 2018a, p. 66). This implies that, depending on context, there are different ways to individuate predicate kinds. Edwards, therefore, tolerates a degree of metaphysical vagueness or blurring at the boundaries of the predicate micro-kinds. *Prima facie*, this must be the case. Articulating a sharp demarcation between biological and chemical kinds or between institutional and social kinds, for example, is notoriously problematic (see Eronen 2015 and Potochnick and McGill 2012). A continuum of degrees of ‘kindness’ seems more appropriate than a spectrum of sharply individuated kinds (see Wimsatt 1994). Lynch (2001) agrees:

We should not expect there to be a sharp and clear line between discourses or forms of thought. . . sometimes we may say things that don’t clearly fall into either category. . . It follows that we should expect some vagueness as to what discourse a particular proposition belongs (p. 733).

Moreover, “[i]f what I say, the proposition I express, is not clearly a member of one discourse or another, how its truth is realized will also be unclear” (Lynch 2001, p. 734). As we will see, however, this vagueness or grading between *micro-kinds* is not apt for the delineation of Edward’s two predicate *meta-kinds*. In a similar context, Wright discusses vague, borderline cases on the colour spectrum. For a shade of colour to

¹² It is not clear how this can be done in a non-question begging way. If demarcations between predicate kinds are drawn by *intuition*, then the question becomes ‘whose intuitions?’ Edwards’ uses his own rather than empirical data from the general population. See Ulatowski (2017) for a convincing case that philosophers researching truth should utilize x-phi-style surveys, rather than personal judgements particularly when it comes to establishing conceptual premises *viz.* functional platitudes.

lie on the borderline between red and purple is for it to enjoy a status consistent *both* with its being red *and* with its being purple – not a third kind of status, inconsistent with both (Wright 2003, p. 74 original emphasis).

This tactic cannot work for Edwards' binary meta-kinds however. There is an inherently *qualitative*, rather than a merely *quantitative* difference between his two predicate meta-kinds. This is because they are fundamentally distinct in their core metaphysical composition. As just intimated, one can allow for vagueness between chemical and biological predicate kinds for example; both fall within the responsive predicate meta-kind domain. The same goes for institutional and social predicate kinds; both fall within the generative predicate meta-kind domain. However, it seems one cannot allow any vagueness between the predicate meta-kinds themselves. This is because *responsiveness* and *generativeness* are by Edwards' own criteria metaphysically antithetical. In the former case predicates *react*; they are *passive*. In the latter case predicates *create*; they are *active*. The meta-kinds are functional opposites; they are mutually incompatible. Metaphysically speaking, there is no standardly conceivable way to merge the two by blurring the boundary.¹³ Saying that meta-kind borderline cases can enjoy a status that is *both* responsive and generative is akin to saying that a predicate can contain antithetical metaphysical properties. Holding this kind of contradictory metaphysics is akin to concurrently believing both 'p' and 'not p'.

The predicate meta-kind distinction carries the metaphysical weight of Edwards' global dualism. This is because his predicate meta-kind distinction supports an identical singular term distinction and, therefore, *language dualism*. The predicate distinction also supports property dualism, while the singular term distinction supports object dualism. In other words, language dualism (responsive versus generative language) supports *ontological dualism* (sparse versus abundant being). Language dualism in conjunction with ontological dualism then ultimately supports global dualism or *meta-dualism*. We have a nested metaphysical hierarchy built from a distinction about predicates all the way up to meta-

¹³Edwards' claim that we should draw distinctions on a case-by-case basis is not helpful. This only invokes a further question of what criteria to use when deciding cases. Whatever criteria one stipulates will implicitly draw the necessary distinction. This is a famous problem for epistemic pluralists. They cannot appeal to a 'higher' principle to decide disagreements since this would introduce a forbidden meta-criteria offensive to the diversity intrinsic in their view.

dualism. In other words, if a sharp predicate meta-kind distinction is necessary, a sharp property meta-kind-distinction is necessary and so on all the way up to a sharp global meta-domain distinction. Without clear predicate meta-kind individuation, Edwards' entire metaphysical structure appears unstable.

(2.2.) A vague distinction is needed

I have argued that there cannot be a graded boundary at the interface of determination pluralism's two meta-domains. Recall that one meta-domain – the representational meta-domain – contains responsive language reacting to a sparse ontology; the other meta-domain – the constructionist meta-domain – contains generative language creating an abundant ontology. Although Edwards is not explicit about it, the interface between the two meta-domains surely lies somewhere about where the biological domain interfaces with the social domain. The biological domain contains responsive language representing the physical world; the social domain contains generative language creating a constructed ontology.

In his writings, Edwards is particularly concerned with the metaphysics of race and gender predicates and properties. He asserts the following about biological predicate kinds versus social predicate kinds:

Part of the functional role of biological predicates is to. . . discern different kinds in nature. . . without imposing any sort of privilege or subjugation of different kinds of organisms. Social predicates, on the other hand, are. . . concerned with describing and explaining power relations between different groups of people (Edwards 2018a, p. 64).

It follows that biological predicates – ‘is a catalyst’ and ‘is an enzyme’ – are responsive, while social predicates – ‘is black’ and ‘is a woman’ – are generative (Edwards 2018a, p. 66).¹⁴ The former pick out mind-independent properties without the taint of privilege or subjugation; the latter pick out mind-dependent properties where power relations and the like come to the fore. Unfortunately, however, we are not told where exactly the border lies between responsive predicates reacting to mind-independent properties and generative

¹⁴ Edwards makes a point of citing Haslanger's (2012) suggestion that the notion of sex, as well as gender, may be socially constructed (Edwards 2018a, p. 65 fn. 5), and also Appiah's (1994) suggestion that the notion of morphological geographical human groups, as well as races, are not biological kinds (Edwards 2018a, pp. 73–74).

predicates creating mind-dependent properties. One wonders whether predicates such as ‘is disabled’, ‘is talented’ and ‘is gay’ are responsive (i.e. *represent* biological properties) or generative (i.e. *construct* social properties). Running these borderline cases through Edwards’ model does not produce an obvious outcome. Determination pluralism seems unable to account for these tricky cases at the interface of the two predicate meta-kinds.

‘Is gay’, for example, cannot be solely responsive by Edwards’ criteria. ‘Is gay’ obviously has associations with subjugation, power and so on. A brief glance at human history or at any newspaper will attest to the underprivileged social role gay persons generally play. Ostensibly, however, ‘is gay’ cannot be solely generative either. There is strong empirical confirmation that ‘is gay’ has biological associations. A large-scale study published recently in *Science* (Ganna et al. 2019) is one of many convincing research projects finding same-sex sexual orientation to have a significant genetic component even if there is no single gay gene (see also Mills 2019 for commentary on the study).¹⁵ The functional role of ‘is gay’ cannot be explained solely in terms of objective biological phenomena (responsive predicates/wide cosmological role) nor solely in terms of our attitudes and beliefs (generative predicates/narrow cosmological role). ‘Is gay’ neither picks out a strictly physical property nor a strictly non-physical property. Gayness, it seems, has elements of both mind-independence and mind-dependence. This option is, however, not available to the meta-kind dualist; there cannot be a little bit of both. As I argued in the previous section, Edwards must specify whether a given predicate is solely responsive versus solely generative.

In his writings, Edwards only mentions easy predicate kind individuation cases. He only discusses cases that uncontroversially lie on one side or the other of the predicate meta-kind demarcation. Nonetheless, predicates like ‘is gay’, ‘is disabled’ and ‘is talented’ appear to contain elements of both.¹⁶ However, admitting that these cases are to some degree both

¹⁵ Gay persons, themselves, also generally testify ‘I was born this way’.

¹⁶ James (1907) uses the examples of health, wealth and strength while making his famous case for a pragmatist conception of truth. He argues that these cases, like truth, are hard to categorize as either strictly realist (*ante rem*) or anti-realist (*post rem*). He concludes that:

just as health, wealth, strength, etc., are names for other processes connected with life, and also pursued because it pays to pursue them. Truth is made, just as health, wealth, and strength are made, in the

responsive and generative is not an option for determination pluralists. Doing so would necessitate blurring over the boundary between their two predicate meta-kinds. This would, in turn, involve abandoning the dualism their global metaphysics of language and the world is predicated upon.

We appear to be on a slippery slope. Perhaps any predicate picking out one of *our* human properties carries *some* biologically represented aspects and *some* socially constructed aspects.¹⁷ Moreover, if there is no clear predicate demarcation here, then plausibly some aspects of both representation and construction may apply to *any* predicate we relate to any property in the world.¹⁸ According to Duhem (1954), our background beliefs always affect the conclusions we draw from observations of nature. Convincing arguments made by Quine (1951) and Davidson (1984) for *semantic holism* also suggest that predicate dualism is untenable. Since any observation sentence is theory-laden, “our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body” (Quine 1951, p. 41). For Kuhn (1996), statements about the world depend, in part, on our prior assumptions for their meaning and conditions of application. These assumptions include

course of experience. . . Truth exists *ante rem* just as much and as little as the other things do (pp. 83–84).

The predicates ‘is healthy’, ‘is wealthy’ and ‘is strong’ – like ‘is disabled’, ‘is talented’ and ‘is gay’ – are not easy to classify as strictly responsive or strictly generative. Edwards does, however, cite Hacking (1999) who categorizes the properties of being fat, being anorexic and being a genius as “looping kinds” (Edwards 2018a, p. 103). As before, however, Edwards does not mention whether he considers ‘is fat’, ‘is anorexic’ and ‘is a genius’ to fall into the responsive or the generative predicate meta-kind domain. Nothing in his work suggests that he holds there to be three predicate kinds: responsive, generative and looping kinds.

¹⁷ See also Hales (2018), who has similar concerns about Edwards’ predicate and property dualism. Hales argues persuasively that defining human *properties* is always contextual and vague. Likewise, human *predicates* – such as ‘is tall’ or ‘is a woman’ – have an underlying physical determinant albeit with socially constructed elements. Both Hales and I are presenting versions of *Sorites paradox* as a challenge to determination pluralism. When is a heap of grain a heap? See Smith (2008) for more detail on Sorites paradox and on vague predicates in general. Soritoricality does not generally present a problem in everyday speech nor for metaphysical monists and global reductionists. However, it does present a problem for someone like Edwards who draws a clear predicate kind distinction, then builds a metaphysical model of universal dualism thereupon.

¹⁸This is a claim regularly made by anti-realists of various stripes. It is also an often-repeated gripe post-modernist have with the general analytic approach in philosophy (see Rorty 1989, ch.1; Foucault 1994, ch. 9). It is a justified concern that should give analytical dualists – like Wright, Lynch and Edwards – pause for revision.

the sorts of values and biases about race and gender Edwards is concerned with. Putnam (1981), similarly, denies that

it makes sense to ask whether our concepts ‘match’ something totally uncontaminated by conceptualization. . . . The very [empirical] inputs upon which our knowledge is based are conceptually contaminated. . . . Our conceptions. . . are by no means ‘value free’ (p. 54).

As soon as we use language to categorize and label the world, it seems, we introduce “the human stain” (Roth 2000). In other words, anything we say about the world carries some aspects of construction albeit often only to some small degree.¹⁹ Rorty (1995) notices a similar problem. Objecting specifically to Wright, he argues convincingly for a naturalized approach to smoothing over the traditional subject-object demarcation. Rorty criticizes Wright’s distinction “between a cognitive nature or level and a noncognitive nature or level. . . between scheme and content, or between subject and object” (Rorty 1995, p. 285, fn.53). Rorty concludes that

James’s and Dewey’s post-Darwinian attempt to naturalize our self-image by dissolving the traditional oppositions between mind and nature and between subject and object, as well as Davidson’s later assault on the scheme-content distinction, are both nicely epitomized in the claim that our perspective on the truth predicate should not be ‘seriously dyadic’ (1995, pp. 268–69).

A possible solution to the slippery slope would be to stipulate that each predicate resides on a metaphysical continuum of degrees of responsiveness versus generativeness. This continuum could, perhaps, be articulated in terms of Lewis’ notion of property *naturalness* (Lewis 1983).²⁰ If applied to biological and social kinds, one could proceed as follows. At

¹⁹ Anti-realists in the philosophy of science, for example, generally argue that the whole of the unobservable world is socially constructed in some or other way. The unobservable world consists of genes, carbon atoms and electrons for example. Van Fraassen (2008) refers to these as “public hallucinations”.

²⁰ According to Lewis, *naturalness* is a feature of properties; properties can be more or less *natural*. Naturalness comes in degrees approximating to metaphysical fundamentality. Edwards (2013) considers that the truth property itself may have a high degree of naturalness (see also his 2014, pp. 130–35). However, he does not translate Lewis’ *property* notion over to *predicates* in the way I am suggesting. He does cite Smith (2013) who gives an account of the descriptive content of predicates in terms of *degrees* of thickness and thinness. Edwards,

the one end, this predicate continuum could have untainted categorization of natural kinds ('pure' representation); at the other end, could be description of absolute privilege and subjugation ('pure' construction). Perhaps this continuum could then be metaphysically 'tethered' in some way to Lewis' property naturalness continuum. We would then have a magnitudinal continuum of degrees of representational versus constructionist predicate kindness. My intuition, however, is that determination pluralists will not find this alternative appealing. Blurring over their predicate meta-kind distinction would involve abandoning global dualism because of the metaphysical nesting mentioned above. Although apparently needed, a predicate *continuum* would be anathema to determination *dualism*.

(3.) The dilemma

The topic of distinctions versus continuums introduces the next issue I would like to discuss. Premised on the arguments from the previous two sections, a dilemma now threatens determination pluralism's overall metaphysics. We have focused on predicates. As mentioned, however, Edwards extends his predicate dualism to language dualism, then ontological dualism and finally global dualism. I now broaden our focus from predicates to domains to reveal a potentially destabilising dilemma at the heart of determination pluralism's universal metaphysics.

Alethic pluralists, like Wright and Lynch, generally posit a multiplicity of domains of discourse characterized by subject matter (e.g. chemical, biological, social and institutional domains). Let us call these *micro-domains*. Each micro-domain contains singular term and predicate micro-kinds relating respectively to object and property micro-kinds. In the same way that Edwards divides the many micro-kinds into two meta-kinds, he also divides the many micro-domains into two *meta-domains* depending on how truth is determined. These are the representational and the constructionist meta-domains already introduced:

Constructionist meta-domain: generative language \longrightarrow abundant ontology (non-physical)

Representational meta-domain: responsive language \longleftarrow sparse ontology (physical)

As per Lynch, some micro-domains (e.g. chemical and biological) fall into the representational meta-domain; other micro-domains (e.g. social and institutional) fall into

however, rejects this option. He insists that determination pluralism's distinction between responsive and generative predicates is not graded in that way (Edwards 2018b, p. 94).

the constructionist meta-domain. In representational cases the direction of determination is from the world to language (facts make sentences true); in constructionist cases the direction of determination is from language to world (true sentences create facts). There is a metaphysically *reversed* order of determination: object-to-subject in the former case, subject-to-object in the latter case. In other words, there is a *180-degree about-turn* in the way that *sentences* (singular terms and predicates) and *the world* (objects and properties) relate to each another. At various times Edwards calls this direction of dependency between sentences and the world either “the order of determination” (2018a, p. 68), the “direction of explanation” (p. 68) or the “direction of the truth principle” (p. 88). Approximately, domains with so-called concrete subject matter make up the representational meta-domain where facts in the world determine our speech; domains with abstract subject matter make up the non-representational meta-domain where our speech determines facts in the world (Edwards 2018a, pp. 112–14).

As before, Edwards cannot claim there is a vague or blurred boundary between the representational versus non-representational meta-domains. Like the two predicate meta-kinds, the two meta-domains must have a sharp demarcation at their interface. Two domains containing juxtaposed metaphysical orders of determination – from sentence to world or *vice versa* – cannot be merged at the interface of the two (not by any conventional metaphysics anyway). The completely reversed order of determination between language and the world in the two meta-domains makes it necessarily the case that they cannot have a vague boundary. The core feature of the responsive model is the *object-to-subject* (world-to-language) order of determination. The core feature of the generative model is the *subject-to-object* (language-to-world) order of determination. The 180-degree about-turn in direction of determination, not only defines, but constitutes the metaphysical essence of the two meta-domains. There cannot be a vague boundary between the two meta-domains when they perform binary primary functions.

As already intimated, Edwards’ nested series of distinctions – from predicate dualism to global dualism – carries the weight of his overall model. It follows that for determination pluralism to be a substantial theory, there must be clear metaphysical meta-domain individuation.²¹ Considering its central role, it is surprising Edwards overlooks detailed

²¹ Edwards (2018b) has endeavoured to give an account of the metaphysics of domains. However, he only discusses how one may, in principle, individuate what I have called micro-domains (physical, biological, moral,

discussion of the meta-domain distinction in his writings. Where exactly does this boundary between a world-to-language domain and a language-to-world domain lie? As far as I can tell, the boundary between the two – if there is one – must lie somewhere about where the traditional concrete/abstract or body/mind demarcation should be: somewhere with(in) *us*. It seems to lie about where Edwards' biological and social micro-domains interface.

Key metaphysical questions about *the will* and *the self* – not to mention belief, knowledge and meaning – are often explored around this crucial intersection of the biological and the social. However, one can only speculate how determination pluralism accounts for these issues since Edwards does not discuss where and how the biological and the social interface. This is, I suppose, the area of alethic discourse we care about most intimately. Edwards is unfortunately silent when it really matters. For determination pluralism to be a robust and convincing account of language and the world, there needs to be precise individuation and articulation of the two meta-domains. Alternatively, Edwards could grade over the distinction between the meta-domains. He would, thereby, abandon meta-dualism for holism and adopt metaphysical continuums *viz.* degrees of physical representation versus social construction.²²

A dilemma, therefore, surfaces. On the one horn, there must be a strict demarcation between the two meta-domains due to their antithetical orders of determination between language and the world. However, if determination pluralists draw a sharp boundary between the representational and the constructionist meta-domains, a seemingly impossible task follows. This would involve clearly stipulating whether tricky cases – like the predicate 'is gay' that picks out the property of being gay – are solely mind-independent or solely mind-dependent. Does gayness belong in the representational or the constructionist meta-domain? Opting for the former requires denying that subjugation, power and the like play a role in what being gay entails. Opting for the latter requires contradicting convincing empirical evidence that genetics plays a role in being gay. Either option appears philosophically untenable.

mathematical etc.). He does not account for individuation of the two meta-domains (representational versus constructionist).

²² These problems with Edwards' dualism should concern other alethic pluralists – like Wright, Lynch, Pedersen and Ferrari – who likewise group predicates into two meta-kinds and also metaphysical domains into two meta-domains.

On the other horn of the dilemma, if determination pluralists blur over their meta-domain distinction – if gayness contains both physical and non-physical features – then they abandon dualism. Giving up dualism, however, would precede giving up determination pluralism. This is because of the nested series of sharp distinctions that support determination pluralism *qua* global metaphysical model. Edwards’ position in its current collapses without metaphysical dualism. Giving up dualism is, therefore, obviously not an appealing option for determination pluralists.

Conclusion

I have summarized Douglas Edwards’ recently developed version of moderate alethic pluralism: determination pluralism. I looked specifically at his universal metaphysical account of the relationship between language and the world. I explained how determination pluralism is innately dualistic. I argued that for this position to hang together, determination pluralists must either clearly articulate the distinction between their two necessary domains or they must allow for a blurring at the boundary. This naturally leads to a dilemma.

Determination pluralism has several strengths. Most salient is its capacity to deal with the scope problem. Intuitively, the same kind of truth does not seem applicable to physical, mathematical and moral discourse. However, the position as currently formulated appears to contain a metaphysical instability.²³ The dualism intrinsic to Edwards’ position needs a clear distinction, yet at the same time needs a vague distinction. The challenge is to somehow develop a version of determination pluralism free from this *distinction instability* at its centre.

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²³Tappolet (1997; 2000) presents what has come to be known as *the instability challenge* to alethic pluralism. This challenge relates to an inconsistency in maintaining that there is a plurality of truth properties $T_1 \dots T_n$. Each of these truth properties will have in common the alethic property T_u : the property of being true in one of the ways $T_1 \dots T_n$. Therefore, alethic pluralism is committed to a universal truth property T_u , and the plurality of truth properties $T_1 \dots T_n$ are superfluous; “the question arises [why the] further way of being true is not the only one we need” (Tappolet 2000, p. 385) (see Pedersen 2010 for one possible solution). Although philosophically relevant, Tappolet’s instability challenge is not directly related to the *distinction instability* I highlighted in this paper.

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