Three Questions for Truth Pluralism

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1. Three questions

Truth pluralism, as I understand it, is a metaphysical theory about the nature of truth. It is therefore concerned with that in virtue of which propositions are true, when they are lucky enough to be true. In contrast to monists, who hold that there is only one property of propositions in virtue of which they are true, and deflationists, who can be understood, crudely, to deny that there is any such property (or any interesting property), the pluralist seeks to widen the playing field.¹ She endorses

**PLURALISM:** there is more than one property of propositions in virtue of which propositions are true.

While there are, as we’ll see, a range of pluralist positions on truth, the basic idea behind most versions is that while some propositions are true in virtue of say, corresponding to reality, others may be true by virtue of possessing some epistemic property, such as:

**SUPERWARRANT:** P is superwarranted just when believing P is warranted at some stage of inquiry and would remain warranted without defeat at every successive stage of inquiry.²

One basic motivation for pluralism—not the only motivation, but an important one – is that it has certain theoretical benefits that its rivals lack. Monist theories have

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¹ Crispin Wright is the most important advocate of pluralism; his original statement is Wright, 1992; some important revisions to his view were made in his 2001: there, as here, the position is presented in terms of properties.

² This notion is obviously derivative of Crispin Wright’s notion of superassertbility. For a related epistemic notion of truth, see Putnam, 1982.
always seen truth as an explanatorily rich notion: understanding the nature of truth helps us understand the nature knowledge, content and the norms of thought. But traditional theories face counterexamples, and counterexamples of a particular form. Such theories work well-enough as accounts of how some propositions are true, but fail when with regard to others. The most plausible correspondence theories, for example, are plausible when applied to propositions about the color of snow, but generate problems when applied to normative and mathematical propositions.\(^3\) Epistemic theories – whether they are unpacked in terms of superwarrant or coherence—seem on firmer ground when applied to normative propositions, but less plausible when applied to propositions about middle-sized dry goods.

These patterns of failure have motivated many philosophers who think about truth for a living to pursue deflationism. The basic deflationary insight is that we can know all we need to know about truth by looking at its function. And that function, says the deflationist, is really very simple: our concept of truth doesn’t work to pick out an interesting property of propositions, it simply serves as an expressive device: it allows us to overcome our biological limitations and generalize over infinite strings of propositions. But as most deflationists will acknowledge, they pay a price for this simple account of truth: they remove truth from our explanatory resources. We can no longer use it to help explain content, or meaning, or the norms of thought.\(^4\)

Prima facie, the pluralist seems poised to take advantage of the other approaches’ shortcomings. She claims that different propositions can be true by virtue of distinct properties. So, like the traditionalist, the pluralist can seemingly allow, if she wishes, that truth can have explanatory value. We might even be able to appeal to the different kinds of truth to explain the different kinds of content our propositional attitudes enjoy.\(^5\) And as I’ll argue below, pluralism – seen in its

\[^{3}\text{By a plausible correspondence theory of truth that goes beyond simply affirming the correspondence or Objectivity platitude about truth, but explains such platitudes by appeal to a theory of correspondence, or what in contemporary terms is called representation. See Wittgenstein (1922); Russell see Lynch 2009.}\]

\[^{4}\text{For explicit acknowledgements of this sort, see for example, Horwich, 1998 and Michael Williams, 2001.}\]

\[^{5}\text{See Lynch 2009 for just such an attempt.}\]
best light—also shares a key commitment with deflationism: the idea that the key to truth’s nature is through its function.

Naturally, pluralism’s theoretical advantages (and its costs) are best appreciated after we get a clear sense of the view itself. Indeed, as with any new view, making sense of it is half the battle. So in this essay, I aim to clarify pluralism by concentrating on three questions any pluralist theory of truth must answer:

- How do we identify the properties in virtue of which propositions are true?
- How are those properties related to truth?
- What determines whether a given proposition has one of those properties rather than another?

Clearly, these aren’t just questions for pluralists. Any substantive view of truth must face them. Nor are they the only questions facing pluralists. Yet they are certainly among the most basic. Consequently, it pays for anyone sympathetic to the view to give these questions serious attention. But my aim will not be solely clarificatory. I will make a case for a specific answer to each, building on some of the views I defended in *Truth as One and Many* (hereafter TOM).

2. What makes a theory a theory of truth?

Alethic pluralism is a metaphysical view of truth. Like any other metaphysics of truth, it is distinct from views about the concept of truth, or the meaning of the truth predicate, and again from an account of how we fix that predicate’s reference. Nonetheless, it is clear that something needs to be said about an issue that, at the very least, is in the neighborhood of these other questions. Any non-deflationary view of truth takes it that there is some property \( F \) of true propositions in virtue of which they are true. Some of those views will take it that \( F \) is truth. Others may hold that truth supervenes on \( F \). But whichever way one ends up going on that question, we will need to be given some reason for thinking that \( F \) has – to put it bluntly—anything to do with truth. And that means we need some way of narrowing down the candidates for \( F \) – one that rules out obvious non-starters.

As it turns out, this is not a question that only the pluralist must answer. Any view of truth must say something about what would qualify as a property in virtue of which propositions are true. This is because our first question is
really just an instance of a more general issue. What makes a given metaphysical theory of truth a theory of truth, rather than a theory of some other thing?

In doing metaphysics, we are look for real essences—we seek to understand the nature of causation, identity, mind. Yet in order to search for something, you must already know something about it, otherwise you won’t know if you have found it. So in searching for the real essence of something, we must already have some beliefs about it. Call these beliefs its nominal essence. The nominal essence of something, in the sense I intend here, is the set of largely tacit beliefs we folk have about it. By appealing to those folk beliefs, or truisms, we won’t learn everything about the object or property we are interested in. And our later discoveries may force us to revise our preconceptions of it. But however these questions play out, keeping one eye on our folk beliefs about the thing about which we are curious will hopefully tell us whether our subsequent theories of its nature address the topic we were concerned with when our theorizing began.6

What applies in metaphysics generally applies to the metaphysics of truth. This suggests a simple answer to our question. A theory is about truth as opposed to something else if it incorporates most of what I’ll call the core truisms about truth—the nominal essence of truth. So what are these? Well one obvious contender is the truism celebrated by correspondence theories of truth: the idea that truth is objective. To speak truly is to “say of what is, that it is”, as Aristotle said.7 And since what we say, at least when we are sincere, is an expression of what we believe or judge, a parallel truism holds about true propositions we believe. That is,

Objectivity: True propositions are those that when we believe them, things are as we believe them to be.8

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6 The strategy is of course familiar. See Jackson (1998) and Crispin Wright (1992).


8 Together with some further and reasonably obvious assumptions, Objectivity underwrites further derivative principles which are typically highlighted by philosophers. One related principle is that when, for example, I believe that roses are red, things are as I believe them to be just when roses are red. That is,

With respect to the belief P, things are as they are believed to be if, and only if, P.
Two more obvious contenders are platitudes celebrated by epistemic theories of truth such as classical pragmatist theories:

- **End of Inquiry:** True propositions are those we should aim to believe when engaging in inquiry.
- **Norm of Belief:** True propositions are those that are correct to believe.

There are doubtless many other obvious and fundamental platitudes about truth, but the historical importance of these three suggest they are among the most central. They connect truth to inquiry, belief, and objective being—how things are. It is difficult to deny that truth has these relations in the platitudeous sense identified by the truisms. We would find it puzzling, to say the least, if someone claimed to believe truly that roses are red but denied that this is how things are. We would ask for an explanation, and if none was forthcoming, we’d suspect that that they mean something different by “believing truly” than what we mean. Likewise, with End of Inquiry: if you don’t think that truth is, other things being equal, what we are trying to get at when asking questions, then you are probably using “truth” to talk about something other than what the rest of us use those words to talk about.

Call such truisms *core truisms*. Core truisms about truth cannot be denied without significant theoretical consequence and loss of plausibility. If you do deny any one of them, you must be prepared to explain how this can be so in the face of intuitive opposition. And denying *many or all* would mean that, at the very least, other users of the concept would be justified as taking you to be changing the subject.9

Two points to allay misunderstanding. First, in saying that these principles are truisms, I don’t mean that they are consciously endorsed by all the folk. They are the sorts of principles we believe tacitly. And what someone tacitly

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9 For an earlier, and somewhat different discussion of truisms, see the exchange between myself and Cory Wright (Lynch, 2005, C.D. Wright, 2005).
believes is more often revealed in action than in verbal reports. So the fact that, e.g. many college freshman would appear to deny Objectivity by saying that “what is true for me might not be true for you” doesn’t mean that they think that believing makes it so. Most freshmen, I think, aren’t going to act consistently with the idea that belief is sufficient for truth. Second, the fact that there is disagreement amongst experts about which are the core truisms doesn’t imply that there are no such truisms, or that we don’t tacitly believe some rather than others. Nobody ever said it would be easy to specify the content of our tacit beliefs about matters as complicated as truth.

On the view I’m suggesting, then, what makes a theory about truth rather than something else is that it incorporates the core truisms, in the sense of either including them among the principles of the theory or including principles that directly entail them. And we’ll count it as a THEORY of truth (as opposed to just a chat about it say) just when it explains those truisms. And an obvious way to do that is to show why they are true by pointing to some property or properties that all true propositions have that results in those propositions satisfying the truisms. Such a property will have the features described by the core truisms. Features of this sort could obviously be called core features. But in the present case what we might as well call them the truish features.

3. A functional analysis

Our first question for a pluralist theory of truth was: how do we identify the properties in virtue of which propositions are true? We now have an answer. A property determines that a proposition is true just when it has the truish features. That is:

**TRUISH:** A property determines that propositions are true just when it is such that propositions which have it are objective, correct to believe, and those we should aim to believe in inquiry.

The truish features are relational; they specify that truth has a role in a structure of interrelated properties, revealed by the folk truisms—what we called its nominal essence. There may be other features that are part of truth’s nominal essence of course, features that—while possibly going beyond the core—also help to demarcate truth in a structure of relations. These include relations to assertion, negation, and logical
consequence. But at its heart, that structure connects truth with belief, inquiry and objective being.

This, in effect, is the basic insight and starting point of what I’ve elsewhere called the functionalist theory of truth. The guiding idea of that view is that we think of the core truisms as revealing what truth does – its functional role. That is,

\[(F) (\forall x) x \text{ is true if, and only if, } x \text{ has a property that plays the truth-role.}\]

In effect, our discussion above tells us what constitutes playing the truth-role. A property plays the truth role when it has the truish features. Moreover, this idea—the idea that true propositions have a property that has the truish features (or we can now say: “plays the truth-role”)—is a consequence of what it takes for a theory to even count as a theory of truth. These features tell us what a property must be like to play the truth-role.\(^\text{10}\) Thus while we initially appealed to the truish features only to help identify that property or properties that plays the truth-role, it seems warranted to go further and take those truish features as defining that role. This means treating the truish features as features of truth’s nominal essence that are conceptually essential—essential by way of the very concept of truth.\(^\text{11}\)

Understood in this way, our functional understanding of truth is presupposed in our grasp of the concept.\(^\text{12}\) Not

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\(^\text{10}\) As just noted, there will be other features, and possibly other core features, that will help us demarcate the truth-role. Specifying the extent and limits of these features of truth, and determining which are more centrally weighted than others, is an important further project for the alethic functionalist, just as it is for functionalists in the philosophy of mind. But however those questions are decided, the basic functionalist idea truth’s conceptually essential features jointly define the truth-role. See Lynch, 2009, chapter 1 for more discussion.

\(^\text{11}\) Obviously, not every essential feature of a property is conceptually essential. Being identical to itself or being distinct from the number 1 are both features of truth, for example. But neither serves to identify truth (they don’t distinguish truth from other properties) and certainly neither is a conceptual truth about truth. Compare David’s remarks, this volume.

\(^\text{12}\) In a recent article, Cory Wright argues that functionalist views face a problem of epistemic circularity. Wright has in mind versions of the view that explicitly employ ramsification techniques for making an implicit definition of truth (see Lynch 2001, 2004). Such techniques are useful, but as our discussion illustrates, they are not necessary to make the functionalist’s basic point. Nonetheless, Wright may suspect his worry is
surprisingly, then, the major metaphysical theories of truth’s nature are perfectly consistent with it. Take a standard monist theory such as the correspondence theory of truth. Understood from a functional perspective, this is the view that there is only one property that has the truish features, and which therefore plays the truth-role: the correspondence property. Even deflationist theories can be understood in this way. Indeed, deflationists are obviously functionalists: they tell us that truth’s nature is exhausted by its function, which by their account is quite thin: truth functions as an expressive device, and that is all. Consequently, on their view, truth does have a functional role, and that role, insofar as it is played by any property at all, is played by the property of being an expressive device.

So the functionalist theory itself is not a metaphysical theory of the nature of truth. It doesn’t tell us what truth is. But it does give us a way of answering a question that any metaphysic of truth must answer, and a question that is particularly important for pluralism. It tells us how to identify the properties that make judgments true. They are the properties the play the truth-role or have the truish features.

Indeed, it is difficult to see what other sort of answer a pluralist can give to our question. Pluralism is the view that there is more than one property, F1...Fn in virtue of which propositions are true. Either F1,...Fn posses the truish features or they do not. If they do, then they all have something in common: they all satisfy the truisms – which is to say that they all fall under the same (functional) description. If they do not, then, then for reasons adduced above, we should not regard the position as a theory of truth at all. It is the view, instead, that the word “true” picks out various properties, none of which have anything truish in common. This would, in effect, be a form of eliminativism about truth, not pluralism.

A similar dilemma confronts anyone who takes “true” to be straightforwardly ambiguous like the word “bank” – that is, as a word with more than one meaning and referent. Either the properties referred to by the predicate bear the nominal

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more general; he says: “But any implicit definition proceeds on the basis of explicit decisions that the principles constitutive of [the relevant ramsey sentence] are themselves true. Hence the circularity. In turn, making any explicit decisions that they are true requires already knowing in advance what truth is. Hence the epistemic circularity.” (Wright, 2010). This is a general problem – but it is, I would suggest, too general to be just a problem for the pluralist. Any attempt to define –or even fix the reference of – “true” –by appeal to what I’ve called truisms will face such a problem. But then the problem is one for any view.
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essence of truth in common, or they don’t. If they do, then why not take that shared nominal essence as the common meaning of “true”? If they don’t, then it is misleading to say that, “there is more than one way to be true”. There is not more than one way to be a bank. Riverbanks and the Bank of America are not two ways to be the same thing. There are simply different meanings to the word. Analogously with an ambiguity view about “true”. What we believed was in common between the different uses, has, on this view, been eliminated.¹³

So we now have a way for the pluralist to identify those properties in virtue of which propositions are true. But we still need address our second question: to say what truth is – and how it is related to those properties that determine it. Here the functionalist faces some options.

4. The Nature of Truth: Four initial options

If the above remarks are right, pluralists must be functionalists about the concept of truth, or at least about how we identify the referent(s) of that concept. But that still leaves open our second question, which is how to relate the various properties pluralists are pluralists about to the property of truth itself. Here are four options for the pluralist cum functionalist:

*Truth is the realizer property.* On this view, there is a single functional concept of truth, but it picks out different properties when ascribed to different kinds of propositions.¹⁴ This is the version of pluralism defended by Crispin Wright (2001). The concept acts as a non-rigid definite description. In this way, “true” is like “the color of the sky at noon”. The latter phrase expresses a single uniform concept, but it denotes different properties in different environmental contexts. Analogously, “true” expresses a single description (as given by Truish above) but that description applies (or can apply) to distinct properties. Hence on this view, we might say that truth *just is* whatever property plays the truth-role for a given kind of proposition.

Realizer functionalism is reductive in nature, and thus akin to other reductive functionalisms, such as those

¹³ For further problems with such a view, see Lynch, 2009, Pedersen 2006, Tappolet 1997.

¹⁴ A lengthier discussion of Crispin Wright’s position can be found in Lynch 2006.
championed by Lewis (1980) and Kim (1998) with regard to psychological properties. On this sort of view, there is no fact about whether, e.g., x is in pain over and above whether x has some physical property P, and so “there is no need to think of [pain] itself as a property in its own right” (Kim 1998, 104).

Realizer pluralism is parallel: there is no fact of the matter whether a proposition is true over and above whether it has some lower-level property like superwarrant or correspondence. Consequently, “truth” does not name a property shared by all truths.

Realizer functionalism has its attractions, but it faces some by-now familiar problems. One of the most discussed concerns the truth of “mixed” compound propositions. Consider the proposition

(W) Waterboarding is painful and waterboarding is wrong.

Intuitively, the conjuncts of this proposition are of distinct kinds. One is normative, the other not. So according to realizer pluralism, the truth concept expresses distinct properties when ascribed to one conjunct (some correspondence property say) and another property (superwarrant say) when ascribed to the other. But if so, what property does it pick out when ascribed to (W) as a whole?

This is a significant problem, and not just for realizer functionalism, as we’ll see below. But it is particularly damning for any view, like realizer functionalism, which denies that there is a “global” truth property – a property expressed by the truth concept that applies across the board to propositions of every type. Indeed, as a number of authors have argued, it seems that any satisfactory resolution of the problem will require just such a property (Tappolet, 1997, Lynch, 2006, Pedersen 2010, Cotnoir 2009).

A second problem for realizer functionalism is that undermines one of the motivations for adopting pluralism in the first place. As we just noted, the analogous position in the philosophy of mind implies that pain is not a real psychological kind. There is nothing in common, in other words, between the states we describe as pain-states in dogs and the states we describe as pain-states in humans. Consequently the view gives up the ability to appeal to pain as such in general psychological

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explanation. And this is a loss. For we do find it useful and informative to talk about pain as such in order to explain other things of psychological interest, such as fear, or anger. A similar loss occurs with realizer functionalism about truth. It implies that true propositions do not form a real kind. The only property shared by all and only true propositions is one that is not, by the lights of the theory itself, ascribed by our use of “true” or denoted by “truth”. Consequently, there is no property we ascribe by “true” that can be appealed to in order to explain certain general facts. One such general fact, for example, we might wish to explain is

Unity: beliefs with radically distinct kinds of content are equally apt for one kind of normative assessment.

We might put this by saying that they are open to being assessed as correct in the same sort of way. What explains this? The simple explanation is that beliefs are correct when they have the property *truth*. Of course, to those who already believe that truth as such has no general explanatory role to play—who believe that it does not figure in explaining anything else of interest such as belief, or content or meaning—this will not be troubling. But then they will not have needed realizer functionalism to reach that conclusion. But to those who see truth as at least a potentially valuable explanatory resource, realizer pluralism remains dissatisfying.

*Truth is the role property*. This view (Lynch, 2001, 2004, 2006) attempts to avoid the above problems by identifying truth with what is sometimes called the “role” property: or the property of having a property that plays the truth-role. This allows one to say that there is a single property of truth. Hence there is no barrier to Unity: any proposition is correct just when true – that is, just when it has the property of having a property that plays the truth-role.

But this position is ultimately unsatisfying. First, like its cousin ‘realizer truth functionalism’ it says nothing about mixed conjunctions other than they are true when they have the property of having a property that plays the truth-role. But it doesn’t tell us what property a mixed conjunction has that plays the truth-role.

Second, the property of having a property that plays the truth-role doesn’t obviously have the truish features that define truth’s functional role. Is the property of having a property that play the truth-role the property that we aim our beliefs to have in inquiry? It doesn’t look like it.
Truth is a disjunctive property. A third option is to take the functional concept of truth to denote a single disjunctive property.\textsuperscript{16} Suppose, for simplicity’s sake, that some propositions are true when superwarranted and all other propositions are true when they represent things as they are. If so, then we might say that our functional description of truth just picks out a property defined like this:

A proposition is \( \text{true}_D \) just when it is either superwarranted or represents things as they are.

If we can accept that a proposition is correct just when it is \( \text{true}_D \), --- when it is either superwarranted or representing, this view allows us to grant the simple explanation of Unity. But it too seems to founder on mixed conjunctions like (W) above. For again the question is what makes the conjunction itself \textit{true}. And the conjunction itself is surely not true because it has the property of, say, being either superwarranted or representing the facts. For that to be the case (W) must have one of the “disjunct properties”; but it is not clear what property that would be. The proposition that waterboarding is painful might represent some fact (or object/property pair). It is far from clear that the proposition that waterboarding is painful and waterboarding is wrong itself represents any fact.

Truth is a disquotational property. A final possibility is that truth itself is a merely disquotational property: that is, the property of being an expressive device.\textsuperscript{17} This would be the result if we took it that the function of truth was as thin as the deflationists typically take it to be. On this view, the concept of truth would be the concept of the property whose only feature is that it is \textit{a device for generalization via disquotation}. There is nothing else to say about truth itself other than that.

The problem with this view becomes apparent once we remember it is to be combined with the metaphysics of pluralism. The combined view is odd to say the least: truth itself is a disquotational property. If a proposition \( P \) has that property, you can infer \( P \), and if \( P \), you can infer it has that

\textsuperscript{16} See Pedersen 2010 for discussion of versions of this alternative. In a forthcoming paper, he suggests that there are properties specific to the various compounds in virtue of which they can possess the disjunctive property. This leads, as he acknowledges, to a multiplication of truth determining properties.

\textsuperscript{17} A variant is tentatively suggested by Cotnoir (2009).
property. But whether a proposition has that property is determined by whether it has some more substantive property, like correspondence. But why would a proposition’s having the disquotational property depend on its having some other, presumably non-disquotational property? Moreover, the view would rule out appealing to truth itself to explain phenomena like Unity above. So like the realizer view, it is not clear that it would have virtues above those of deflationism simpliciter.

5. Truth as Immanent

Recall where we are: I’ve said that pluralists should be—indeed, have to be—functionalists. The properties in virtue of which propositions are true are those that play the truth-role. What constitutes a property playing that role is it’s having the truish features. But our second question is still outstanding: what do these properties have to do with truth?

In order to answer this question, the pluralist cum functionalist needs two things. She needs an account of what functionalists sometimes call “realization” and she needs an account of the property truth itself.

I think we can meet both demands at once. Start with the thought that properties can have their features essentially or accidentally. A functional property is defined by its functional role, which, I’ve suggested, is best seen as the sum of those relational features implicit in the nominal essence of the property. Those features can therefore be thought to be essential to it. Thus, for the functionalist, the natural suggestion is to *equate* the property of truth with the property *that has the truish features essentially* or which plays the truth-role *as such*. It is the property that is, necessarily, had by believed contents just when things are as they are believed to be; had by propositions believed at the end of inquiry and which makes propositions correct to believe.

This gives us a straightforward account of what truth is. Yet once we understand truth this way, we can go on to say that the property can be *immanent* in other properties.\(^{18}\) An immanent property is a property that can be manifested by other properties. M manifests an immanent property F just when it is a priori that F’s conceptually essential features are a subset of M’s features. Again, a conceptually essential feature

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\(^{18}\) Why talk of manifestation and immanence rather than realization? To avoid confusion; “realization” is generally understood by philosophers of mind to be an a posteriori, non-rational relationship.
of F is an essential feature of F that (a) is part of the nominal essence of F; (b) holds as a matter of conceptual necessity; and so, (c) helps to distinguish F from other properties. Since every property’s conceptually essential features are a subset of its own features, every property manifests itself. So immanence, like identity, is reflexive. But unlike identity, it is non-symmetric. Where M and F are distinct—individuated by non-identical sets of conceptually essential features and relations—and F is immanent in M, M is not immanent in truth. Intuitively put, where F is immanent in M, it will be the case that part of being M is being F.

Applied to truth, the initial thought is this: for some propositions, truth is manifested by, or immanent in their correspondence to various bits of reality. Part of what is for those propositions to correspond is for them to be true. Just as the psychological functionalist will claim that which physical property realizes pain in a given organism is determined by facts about the organism, the alethic functionalist will claim that which property manifests truth for a particular proposition will depend on facts about that proposition. Two kinds of fact are clearly relevant. The first is what the proposition is about. The second is the proposition’s logical structure.

This second point is not surprising. That a proposition’s logical structure should help to determine how it is true is familiar from traditional correspondence views, according to which the only sort of propositions that correspond to facts are atomic. Similarly, which property manifests truth for a proposition depends on whether it is atomic or not. How we understand this, however, depends on how we understand the first sort of fact.

In TOM, I suggested that pluralists hold that truth for atomics is always manifested relative to what I called a domain of inquiry. As I defined it, a propositional domain is a subject-matter: mathematics and ethics are two examples. How do we know whether a proposition is about one subject rather than another? How else? By looking at the objects and properties the concepts which compose that proposition are about.

I still take this to be fairly straightforward. Almost any philosopher will think that there are different kinds of content, and will take it for granted that we believe all sorts of different kinds of propositions: propositions about ethics, mathematics, about the sundries of everyday life. No one, presumably, will deny that these propositions concern not just different subjects, but fundamentally different subjects. And any philosopher who wishes to claim that we should treat
propositions about these subject matters differently—for example, by saying that they aren’t representational, or are all false—must have a way of distinguishing propositions of different kinds from one another. Nothing about pluralism distinguishes it in this regard.

Nonetheless, talk of “domains”, does suggest, if it does not imply, that subject matters come in natural kinds, and that as a result, we can sort them into these kinds with little difficulty. That is implausible. We can admit, as is obvious, that beliefs have different kinds of content, but we needn’t say that the propositions that are those contents divide into natural or rigid kinds.

So why the use of the term “domain”? One reason was this. There are doubtless propositions that correspond but are not superwarranted. For example, consider

(Star) At this very moment, the number of stars in the universe is odd.

Presumably either this proposition or its negation is true. But neither is superwarranted. No matter how many stages of inquiry we go through, we are never going to possess warrant for or against (Star). Yet presumably there either are or are not an odd number of stars in the universe at this moment.

If both correspondence and superwarrant manifest truth – play the truth-role – for (Star) then we have a problem. Assume that falsity is truth of negation. Assume that (Star) is not superwarranted, but that it does correspond with reality. Conclusion: it is both true and false. In TOM, I solved this by drawing a page from the philosophy of mind. Just as a given neural property only realizes pain relative for a given organism, so a given semantic property like correspondence only realizes truth for a domain. But this was more theory than I needed. All I really needed to say was this: properties like correspondence manifest truth for some propositions and not others, and only one property of a proposition manifests truth for that proposition.19

Let’s unpack this. We can say that where M is a property distinct from truth,

If P is an atomic proposition, then: P is true if and only if it has the property M that manifests truth for P.

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19 A number of commentators have suggested this point to me, including, most recently, Marian David in his contribution to this volume.
And

If $P$ is atomic and $P$ is $M$, then: $M$ manifests truth for $P$, if and only if it is a priori that the truish features are a proper subset of $M$'s features.

So an atomic proposition is true when it has the distinct further property that manifests truth for $M$.20 Not being true consists in lacking that property, either because there is no property that manifests truth, in which case the content in question is neither true nor false, or because there is such a property, but the proposition in question fails to have it, in which case it is false.

But if it is not the facts about the domain to which a proposition belongs which determine which property manifests truth for a proposition, what does? The very same facts as before. Think about it this way. No matter what your theory of truth might be, the question of what makes a particular proposition true (or even truth-apt) will depend on the facts about that proposition. What is it about? What concepts does it employ and so on? These are the questions we will ask when confronting this issue. It would be curious if our answers didn't sort themselves into groups, since, as I've already noted, it is obvious that propositions do come in at least rough kinds –kinds that are individuated by differences in the sorts of properties and objects that the various sorts of propositions are about.

If this is right, there is no need for the pluralist to sort (atomic) propositions into strict domains. She takes each proposition as it comes, finding that, in fact, they come in groups, in bunches, in mobs.21

6. Plain truth

A significant benefit of understanding truth as an immanent

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20 David (this volume) complains that I must relativize playing the truth-role, not manifestation. But playing the truth-role means having the truish features, and properties that have those features manifest truth. It is manifestation that is in the metaphysical driver’s seat.

21 So does must the pluralist believe that we always know what subject we are talking about? No. Are there interesting philosophical problems about when are talking about ethics and when the law, when we are talking about mathematics and when physics? Sure. But they aren't special to pluralists.
property is that a natural way of dealing with the problem of mixed compounds drops out of the position. Whether or not a recursive account of all compound propositions can be given, there is something right about the insight that guides such analyses. What’s right about it could be captured by saying that all truth is grounded in a certain sense. There can be no change in the truth-value of a compound proposition without change in the truth-value of some atomic propositions. The truth-value of compounds supervenes on the truth-value of atomic propositions. Call this the weak grounding principle. According to the theory that truth is an immanent functional property, a property \( M \) manifests truth just when it is a priori that the truish features are a subset of the features and relations of \( M \). Manifestation, so described, is a reflexive relation, since every set is a subset of itself. Thus all properties, including truth, self-manifest. When a proposition is true only by virtue of self-manifesting truth, we can say that the relevant proposition is \textit{plainly true}. What makes a compound proposition plainly true? Given our weak grounding principle, compound propositions are plainly true if their truth-value is weakly grounded. That is, if their truth-value supervenes on the truth-value of propositions which are either compound and grounded or atomic (and hence whose truth-value depends on having a property \textit{other than truth} that manifests truth.) So even if it turns out that a truth-functional recursive analysis does not apply to every compound proposition (like subjunctive conditionals, for example) the immanence pluralist can accept the weak grounding principle. Moreover, she will have independent motivation to do so. For she is already committed to (i) the thought that what’s true depends on what is true in a particular way; and (ii), to the idea that true atomic propositions have further properties like superwarrant that manifest truth. Consequently, it seems reasonable for her to hold that a compound proposition’s truth is ultimately grounded on the truth-values of atomic propositions. Compound propositions, mixed or not, are true because they are plainly true.

As I noted above the picture here is familiar from older correspondence theories of truth: the theory is applied in the first instance to atomics. But does the weak grounding principle hold across the board? Might not there be some plain truths that don’t supervene on countable unplain truths?\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{22} This question was put to me by Stewart Shapiro in his comments on my book at a session at the APA, February 2010.
As I see it, pluralists who embrace an immanence metaphysics can agree that there are without any significant modification to their view. To see why they might wish to, consider a truth attribution such as

(1) The proposition that roses are red is true.

This is an atomic proposition. It ascribes a property—truth—to an object, a proposition. In virtue of what is it true? There are various answers available to the pluralist. They might say, for example, that truth attributions are true in the same way as the proposition to which truth is ascribed. Call this the inheritance view. Thus (1), for example, is true however

(2) Roses are red

is true. So if (2) is true because it corresponds to reality (however that is cashed out) then so is (1). Truth attributions *inherit* the property that manifests their truth from the proposition to which they attribute truth. Thus (1) will be correspondence true, and so will any proposition that attributes truth to *it* and so on up the ladder of semantic ascent.

Given a pluralist metaphysics, the inheritance view implies that truth ascriptions can themselves be true in different ways. And that might seem to be at tension with the idea that which property manifests truth for a proposition depends on the subject matter it is about. There would be no tension if (1) and (2) are the same proposition. But it is not clear that pluralists should, or even can, embrace this deflationary standpoint. If not, then one would need to explain why attributions of truth aren’t all true in the same way.\(^{23}\)

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\(^{23}\) One could also go in the complete other direction and adopt a levels view (see Cotnoir, this volume). Here you hold that every level of truth attribution is made in a different domain, and hence that every truth attribution is true in a different way than the one preceding it on the semantic ladder. (For reasons having to do with the paradoxes, you might add that no domain has the resources to make truth attributions about itself. As Cotnoir notes, a solution to the liar opens up that will be in many ways parallel to Tarski’s). Here are three concerns. First, why think that (1) and an attribution of truth to (1) manifest truth differently? Second, given that we can continue to attribute truth to the truth attribution to (1) and so on, this seems to imply that an indefinite number of different properties that manifest truth. And finally, note that the levels view implies that (1) and an attribution of truth to (1) are not cognitively equivalent. As with an inheritance view, this may or may not be a bad thing, depending on one’s view about how to read the so-called “equivalence schema”.

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In any event, the inheritance view is not, I think, what pluralists should say about truth attributions. For it seems hopeless in the face of the fact that we use truth to generalize over propositions, as when we say:

(3) Everything Stewart says is true.

This of course, is not atomic. It is a universal generalization over propositions said, or potentially said, by Stewart, that is:

For every proposition P, if Stewarts says P then P is true.

It is obvious why the inheritance view won't work. It says that a truth attributer inherits the way it is true from the truth attributee. But obviously Stewart may say all sorts of propositions, about all sorts of things. Given pluralism, they might have their truth manifested in distinct ways.

So if the inheritance view won't work, what will? An obvious suggestion is to say that truth attributions are plainly true. That is, they aren't true in any particular way. This seems particularly sensible in the case of a proposition like (1). For it is intuitive that (1) is true because (2) is true. While (1) and (2) are both atomic, (1) is clearly true because of (2), and (2)'s truth will be manifested by correspondence. The plain truth of (1) is founded on the unplain truth of (2).

So far so good. But what about (3)? It is not at all clear that the truth of (3) will depend on any countable number of unplain truths. This may be because of paradox. Suppose I assert (3). One of the things Stewart might say is that what Lynch says is false. Contradiction. But even putting aside the always troublesome paradoxes, imagine that I assert (3) and one of the things Stewart says is that everything Lynch says is true (a much happier example). Which truths, exactly, will the truth of (3) depend on? We seem caught in a loop.

A simple way of unraveling these knots is for the pluralist to grant that there may be propositions that are plainly true but whose truth does not depend on the truth-value of any unplain truth. Indeed, there are a variety of reasons to consider this. Consider, for example, the truths of logic, such as

(4) If P, then P.
This is again not atomic. But its truth-value doesn’t clearly depend on the truth-value of its atomic components; P could have any truth-value and (4) would still be true. Moreover, it seems curious to say that it corresponds to reality either. What reality, exactly? And being a necessary truth, it seems less than plausible to say that its truth is somehow epistemically constrained and hence that its truth is manifested by its being superwarranted. It seems much more plausible to simply say that (4) is plainly true – not because its truth depends on some other truth, but because its truth is somehow basic. It needs no metaphysical explanation.

But then has pluralism/functionalism simply collapsed into deflationism? If ungrounded plain truth is good enough for some propositions, then why not all? Here’s my reply: The possibility of ungrounded plain truths does not mean that deflationism is on its way. To see this, let’s think for a minute about what deflationism involves. It is hard to generalize, but I think deflationary views involve two commitments. First, the concept of truth is an expressive device of generalization. Second, whatever property, if any, that concept denotes is itself metaphysically transparent. A property is metaphysically transparent just when all the essential facts about the property can by known via grasp of the concept alone.

It follows that plain truth is not deflationary truth. The property of being true, I claim, is the property that has the truish features essentially. That is, the property of truth is the property propositions have when they are objective, correct to believe and the sort of propositions we aim at in inquiry. So truth is not just an expressive device on my view. Indeed I’m not sure it is even essentially such a device. Moreover, truth is not metaphysically transparent either. While you can know the truish features of truth just by grasping the concept of truth, you can’t know all the essential features of truth that way. Here’s one essential feature of truth you can’t know that way: that it is open to multiple manifestation.

But still: why not say that all true propositions are plainly true? Why worry about whether some propositions also have to their truth manifested in some other distinct property like correspondence? Well, think of identity. Suppose we think that some things, like necessarily existing objects, are just plainly identical across time. Their identity is not manifested by any other property. That hardly means that some things might not be identical in a particular way. Personal identity across time might well be manifested by psychological continuity. It all depends – not only on what we think we must say in order to account for personal identity, but
more importantly, on what we think we must say about personal identity *in order to explain other phenomena of interest – such as personal responsibility and human rights*. The same holds in the case of truth. The reason I think that there is more to say about truth in some domains is the same reason other substantive theorists of truth think this: I think that we must say more about certain kinds of propositions to explain other phenomena of interest: such as the differences in content between moral, mathematical and physical-object propositions.

In sum, I don’t think the problems raised here are *problems for the pluralist*. After all, everyone has a problem explaining what makes ascriptions of truth true. Indeed, what I these reflections to show is that the form of pluralism I’ve defended here has the resources to offer some new explanations for why certain truths are true.

7. Conclusion

We have put three questions to the pluralist. We now have three answers.

- How do we identify those properties by virtue of which propositions are true? Answer: by seeing which properties play the truth-role, and hence have the truish features.
- How are those properties related to truth? Answer: Truth as such is the property that has the truish features essentially. But truth can be immanent in distinct properties, properties that have the truish features accidentally.
- What determines whether a given proposition has one of those properties rather than another? Answer: two things. First, the logical structure of the proposition and second, the subject matter of the proposition.

These are not the only three questions a pluralist must answer. Nor, perhaps, are these the only answers available. But if the pluralist wishes to make sense of her view, some such answers must be given. Avoiding them is not an option.

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