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## ***ReWrighting Pluralism***

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It is a commonplace to think that some things – like beauty or love – can manifest themselves in more than one way. Alethic pluralism applies this thought to truth: it is the idea that propositions, sentences, beliefs and the like can be true in more than one way. Moral propositions, for example, might be true by being part of a coherent moral theory, while propositions about physical objects might be true by corresponding to the facts about those objects.

I have two aims. The first is to chart some recent changes in the work of alethic pluralism's most distinguished advocate, Crispin Wright.<sup>1</sup> I'll argue that, surprisingly, his current position ends up unstably sharing a central tenet of more deflationary views. For those of use tempted by pluralism but lacking the deflationist's taste for barren landscapes, this is not good news. Thus my second aim: to suggest a way we can capture the spirit of Wright's pluralism without incurring its problems.

### **1 Wright on Pluralism**

Pluralism about truth is motivated, in part, by the failure of traditional theories of truth to address *the scope problem*.<sup>2</sup> This is the challenge of saying what is in common between all truths, no matter what their subject. Theories that seem plausible when applied to propositions about the physical world around us (such as the causal/referential theory) are less plausible when applied to propositions about numbers, or norms.<sup>3</sup> Yet theories that seem plausible when applied to the propositions of pure mathematics and normative propositions (such as the coherence theory) seem much less convincing when applied to propositions about the physical world.<sup>4</sup> In response to such difficulties, philosophers typically adopt one of two strategies. Those adopting the first strategy hold fast to their favored theory of truth and deny that various troublesome propositions are true, or even capable of being true. This is the strategy favored by expressivists, error-theorists, fictionalists and the like. The second strategy dismisses the whole project of giving a metaphysical theory of truth, and declares that all propositions are

equally apt for truth in a uniform but entirely thin sense. This is the deflationary strategy.

Against these two options, the pluralist provides a third: that propositions can be true in different ways. This allows for the possibility that there is more to say about truth than the deflationist believes, but the more there is to say depends on the type of proposition in question.<sup>5</sup>

As recent work (Sher, 2004; Lynch, 2004a; C.W. Wright, 2005) has shown, however, alethic pluralism is itself plural: it comes in different forms. So-called *strong alethic pluralism* (SAP) is the view that there is more than one robust and philosophically complex *concept* of truth. According to such a view, “true” is ambiguous: in the moral domain it expresses one robust concept, in the mathematical domain, a different concept. As a number of commentators have remarked (Tappolet, 1997; Williamson 1994), this is a bad idea. For one thing, it would make the validity of mixed inferences mysterious. Take an inference like

Two and two are five or murder is wrong  
Two and two are not five  
Therefore, murder is wrong.

On the standard account, an inference is valid when it preserves a single property – truth – from premises to conclusion. But the propositions forming this particular argument are from different domains – the conclusion is normative while one of the premises is not. Naturally then, one would expect the advocate of SAP to hold that the premises and the conclusion are true in literally different senses. If so, then contra the standard account of validity, there is no single property being preserved from premises to conclusion.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, SAP makes nonsense of blind generalizations involving truth (Lynch, 2004a). Suppose a devout believer says that “everything God believes is true”. She is not intending to say that “everything that God believes is true in one sense or another”. Her claim about God is not like my claim that “Everything Bush says is funny”—where I intentionally trade on the fact that “funny” is ambiguous between “comedic” and “suspicious”. She means that everything God believes is true *period*.

These and other problems should encourage us to avoid SAP.<sup>7</sup> Yet in his early presentations of pluralism, Wright often appeared to be endorsing it. Wright’s basic position, which he calls “minimalism”, is the view that an analysis of the concept of truth proceeds with reference to a set of principles (or “platitudes”). These principles include, among others:

The proposition that p is true iff p

To assert is to present as true  
 A proposition can be true but unjustified and justified but untrue  
 Truth is absolute and does not admit of degrees  
 Truth-apt contents have truth-apt negations and can be  
 embedded within conditionals, conjunctions etc.<sup>8</sup>

Together, these and similar principles provide “a body of conceptual truths that, without providing any reductive account, nevertheless collectively constrain and locate the target concept and sufficiently characterize some of its relations with other concepts and its role and purposes” (2001, 759). Accordingly, as Wright earlier put it,

The proposal is simply that any predicate that exhibits certain very general features qualifies, just on that account, as a truth predicate. That is quite consistent...with acknowledging that there is a prospect of pluralism—that the more there is to say may well vary from discourse to discourse (1992: 38).

According to Wright, the specifics about truth in a particular domain hang on the a priori facts about that domain. Thus in some domains, the concepts we employ therein impose what Wright calls an *evidential constraint*: that is, that it is impossible for truth in that domain to outrun all evidence available in principle. In such domains, he suggests, a proposition might be true just when it is *superassertible*, or “justified by some (in principle accessible) state of information and then remaining justified no matter how that state of information might be enlarged upon or improved” (2001,771).<sup>9</sup> In other, more unrestrained domains, “the structure of truth is best conceived as by correspondence” (1999, 225).

But right here the problem arises. For a natural way of reading the above passage takes it to imply that there can be more than one “truth predicate”. Early commentators took this to commit Wright to more than one concept of truth, and so to SAP (Sainsbury 1996; Pettit 1996; Tappolet 1997; Blackburn 1998). In reply, Wright vigorously protested that

The contention of *Truth and Objectivity* is not that ‘true’ is ambiguous, that it means different things as applied within different regions of discourse. On the contrary, the concept admits of a uniform characterization wherever it is applied – the characterization given by the minimal platitudes... (1996, 101).

The form of pluralism relevant to his position, Wright contended, was therefore not SAP, but one that allowed truth to admit of “variable realization” (Ibid).

Nonetheless, subsequent presentations of his view continued to encourage the charge that Wright’s minimalism involved a version of SAP:

...we should not scruple to say that truth may consist in different things in different...areas: in the instantiation of one concept in one area, and in that of a different concept in another (1999: 228).

Indeed, this passage, far from discouraging the SAP interpretation, seems a clear and direct statement of it.

In a more recent discussion, however, Wright has made an important alteration to his view. As he now says,

Even if the *concept* [of truth] may be fully characterized by reference to certain basic a priori principles concerning it, the question of which *property* or *properties* of propositions, or sentences, realize the concept can be still be sensibly raised for every discourse in which truth has application...Minimalism only requires that each discourse that deals in truth-apt claims is associated with such a property whose character need not be fully determinable just from the list of basic principles serving to characterize the concept, but which, relative to the discourse in question, serves as truth by dint of satisfying those principles (2001, 752).

Here, Wright is invoking the familiar distinction between the property and concept of truth. As Alston has put the same point, “a property might have various features not reflected in our concept of that property” (2002, 11). Therefore, just as our account of the property of being water (as being H<sub>2</sub>O) goes beyond our ordinary concept of water, so our account of truth in some domain may go beyond our account of the concept. In sum, Wright now explicitly endorses a single concept of truth, but allows that this single concept may denote more than one property.<sup>10</sup> As such, he avoids any implication that “true” is ambiguous or equivocal, but still allows a metaphysical pluralism about truth.

## 2 Truth as descriptive

While the general shape of Wright's position is emerging, we need to get clearer on the details. An analogy with definite descriptions and contexts of utterance is helpful in this regard. Take a definite description like "the brightest object in the sky". Depending on the context – time of day, the location and so on, the brightest object in the sky could be the sun, or the moon, or a satellite. Nonetheless, the phrase has the same meaning on any particular occasion as it does on any other; it isn't ambiguous in the way "step" or "bank" are. Definite descriptions like "the brightest object in the sky" are univocal, but non-rigid; they pick out different objects in different contexts. Similarly, the description "the color of the sky at noon" univocally picks out different *properties* in different contexts. Intuitively, it differs from a term like "magnetism" which presumably names the same property in every context and, indeed, in every world.<sup>11</sup>

A natural interpretation of Wright's view is that it takes "truth" as more like "the color of the sky at noon" than "magnetism". It is a disguised definite description, not of an object, but of a property. But unlike "the color of the sky at noon", which picks out different properties in different environmental contexts, as it were, "truth", on Wright's view, refers to different properties in different *propositional domains*. That is, what determines which property "truth" refers to, and "is true" ascribes, is the domain the relevant sentence/belief/proposition is a member of. Thus when saying it is true that acts of cruelty are wrong we ascribe one property; when saying that it is true that there is a book on the table, we ascribe another. Nonetheless, in both cases –as with "the color of the sky at noon"—we employ a single concept, even though what property we pick out with that concept differs.

The upshot of Wright's position appears to be that truth is what we might call a descriptive concept. So unveiled, the view is at once more innocuous and more radical than it first appears. It is more innocuous because concepts that function as definite descriptions are a dime a dozen. But it is more radical in that it seems *prima facie* implausible that "truth" functions in this way – that it does not rigidly pick out the same property in every possible domain. Admittedly using my own intuitions as a guide, it certainly *feels* like I'm talking about the same property when I talk about the truth of moral propositions and the truth of mathematical propositions. My semantic intuitions, in other words, don't lead me to think that "truth" is like "the color of the sky at noon". Further, and more importantly for pluralists hoping to make their view distinct from others already on the scene, the idea that truth is a descriptive concept brings Wright much closer to deflationism.

### 3 Truth as an Objective Kind

Traditional, robust theorists of truth take “truth” to name a metaphysically heavyweight property that all and only true propositions have in common. Deflationists deny this. We can put this by saying that for the robust theorist, but not for the deflationist, true propositions form at least a *minimally objective kind*. A kind is minimally objective when, (1) the members of the kind all share a property in virtue of which they are members of that kind. And (2), their having that property is not merely a projection of our concept of the kind. For example, “what is hip” plausibly doesn’t name an objective kind. As those experts in hipness *Tower of Power* once put it, “Hipness is what it is, except when it is what it ain’t”. Some things are hip and some not, but those which are share nothing more in common than the fact that we call them so. In contrast, a paradigmatically natural kind like *gold* is minimally objective because there is an explanation in terms of atomic structure for why the members of that kind are members of the kind which goes beyond the fact that they fall under the ordinary concept. Likewise for a functional kind like *heart*, since here too it is an objective matter, independent of our use of the concept, whether something has properties that allow it to fulfill the function of pumping blood.

Deflationists believe that truths form a kind, but not a minimally objective kind. This is because they will allow that truth is a property only in the honorific sense of “property” (e.g. Horwich, 1998, 2001). That is, they can say, as anyone could, that all and only the truths have the property of falling under the concept of truth. And this honorific property can of course be used to show that true propositions form a kind—true propositions just are the propositions that all share the honorific property of truth. Crucially, however, the deflationist will not hold that propositions have the honorific property in virtue of some other property they share in common. For that would be to hold that there is something objective that *makes* true propositions the kind of propositions they are – and this is precisely what the deflationist must deny. Thus for the deflationist, whether a proposition has the property of falling under the concept of truth is entirely an artifact of that concept, or how we use the word “true”. Accordingly, for the deflationist, “the truths” no more names a minimally objective kind of proposition than “hip music” names an objective kind of music. We have such concepts certainly; and we may even find them useful or even indispensable in

certain respects, but neither names a category worthy of deep metaphysical investigation.

With these points in hand, we can ask whether Wright's view can allow that truth is a minimally objective kind. The answer appears to be no. For while there may be something in common between all true moral propositions and all true propositions about middle-sized dry goods on his view, there is no property in common between all true propositions period.

It may be replied that all truths do share a property on Wright's view: the *disjunctive* property,

D: corresponding to the facts or being superassertible or being coherent or...etc.

This however, is not helpful. First, it assumes that there *are* truly disjunctive *properties*, over and above mere disjunctive *predicates*. Moreover, even if genuinely disjunctive properties exist, according to Wright's view, "true" does not ascribe the same property in all domains. Hence, "true" does not describe a single disjunctive property either. Therefore, having the disjunctive property D, which "truth" on the account *does not refer to*, can no more serve to make a given true proposition the member of the minimally objective kind *truth* than its having any other disjunctive property.

So on Wright's view, as on the deflationist's, there is no property common between all true propositions. At best, all true propositions share the property of falling under the concept truth. Consequently, truths, on Wright's view, can't form a minimally objective kind, and his view is closer to deflationism than it first appears.<sup>12</sup>

But in granting this, one might still wonder how serious a charge this actually is. Perhaps the Wrightian pluralist can simply acknowledge that the deflationists are just right on this score. After all, Wright can point out that there remain at least two senses in which his view is *not* deflationary. First, even if truth simpliciter isn't an objective kind, mathematical truth, moral truth, physical truth and so on are. Second, Wright's view of the concept is also more robust than the deflationists'. For the average run of the mill deflationist, *all* we have to say about the concept of truth is captured by one principle: the T-schema (or its instances). In contrast, Wright, as we noted above, thinks that the concept is fixed by a number of principles. The concept is thicker, as we might say, on Wright's account. So perhaps we can be still have a pretty robust account even if we deny that truths form a minimally objective kind.

These points are certainly correct. Wright's position, as I've here described it, is more deflationary than some; less deflationary than

others. Nonetheless, it is hard to see the denial of “truth” naming a minimally objective kind, and the corresponding claim that the truths only share an honorific as anything less than a significant deflationary commitment. It is significant because it is a metaphysical claim. As Alston (1996) and others have argued, minimalism about the *concept* is completely compatible with a robust metaphysical theory of truth. Likewise, a thick theory of the concept is compatible with the denial that the concept picks out any property – let alone a substantive one. In matters deflationary, as elsewhere, metaphysics is in the driver’s seat. The denial that there is a single substantive property of truth is arguably the most fundamental deflationary talking point. By sharing it, Wright’s view is therefore deflationary in a significant, non-trivial sense.

But let us put such issues aside. For the fact is that someone with Wright’s basic philosophical commitments should not deny that truths form an objective kind in any case. As Wright is well known for emphasizing, truth is a general and distinct normative property of assertion – “a property the possession or lack of which determines which assertions are acceptable and which are not” (2001, 775). Truth, like rightness, is a species of correctness: where being right or wrong is what makes actions morally correct or incorrect, truth is what makes assertions (and more fundamentally, beliefs) correct or incorrect.

This fact – what we might call the normative generality of truth – is an old idea in philosophy: as James noted, truth is the good in the way of belief; it is the end or aim of belief and assertion (James 1975: 42). The same idea is illustrated by Dummett’s well-known analogy between the concept of truth and the concept of winning a game (2001: 237). You wouldn’t understand a notion of a competitive game if you were not aware that the point of the game is to win. As such, winning is a univocal, single norm of any competitive game. Analogously, that assertions and beliefs aim to be true is part of what makes assertion and belief what they are; truth is a constitutive norm of *any* assertoric or doxastic practice. That is, we take it that, other things being equal, it is good to assert or believe a proposition only if it is true. And it is hard to see how this could *not* be a substantive, more than honorific fact about truth *in general*. If we were to insist instead that each domain came with its own little norm, then the best we could say is that there is only a list of particular norms, e.g. in the moral domain, that it is good to believe what is T; in the mathematical domain that it is good to believe what is T1. But to say as much overlooks Dummett’s point that it is part of the point of the truth norm that it applies to all forms of belief and assertion because it is part of what makes belief or assertion what they are.

Although I won't argue for it here, I believe the normative generality of truth causes big trouble for *any* view that denies that truth is substantive property.<sup>13</sup> But whether or not I am right about this, Wright himself is clearly committed to truth's normative generality by his own well-known "inflationary argument". That argument alleges to prove deflationism unstable precisely because of truth's normative nature.

Here is an extremely abbreviated form of the argument. Ordinary practice distinguishes between assertions that are warranted and those that are not. And naturally I should be warranted in making the assertions I do make: warrant is a normative property of my assertions. But warrant and truth are intimately related. Whenever I believe I am warranted in asserting some proposition, I also believe that it is true, and whenever I believe some proposition is true, I also believe that I have warrant for it. This means that as Wright says, truth and warrant coincide in positive normative force. Now the central tenet of deflationism is the T-schema, or the idea that it is true that p if and only if, p. Wright notes that the T-schema is provably equivalent to

(NE): It is true that [not p] iff it is not true that [p]<sup>14</sup>

Now take a proposition like, *it rained here 15,000 years ago today*. We are neither warranted in believing this proposition nor warranted in believing its negation. In such cases, the relevant instance of (NE) would be invalid were we to substitute "warranted" in for "true" That is,

It is warranted that it did not rain here 15,000 years ago today iff  
it is not warranted that it rained here 15,000 years ago today,

is false because we may lack justification for its having rained on that date without thereby having justification that it didn't. Consequently, in endorsing the T-schema we commit ourselves to the idea that truth is a "norm of correctness" *distinct* from warrant. As Wright says:

The point of the inflationary argument is precisely that the basic principles on which deflationism builds its account spawn the concept of a norm—a way a proposition can be in good or bad standing...that contrasts with its current evidential status. But these principles keep silence when the question is raised, What does the satisfaction or nonsatisfaction of this new norm consist in, and how can it fail to be substantive property? (2001, 757).

Quite so; and we might add, these questions are perfectly general, as is Wright's inflationary argument. If it shows anything (and here I put aside the question of whether it is in fact successful) it shows that there is a substantive normative property that all true propositions share. And that means that one cannot stably endorse the normative generality of truth and deny that truth is an objective kind.<sup>15</sup>

#### 4 Supervenient truth and alethic functionalism

We've seen that Wrightian pluralism is committed to both denying and affirming that truth is an objective kind. How exactly did the Wrightian pluralist get to this position, and how might it be avoided? The key is a metaphysical assumption underlying Wright's minimalism. It is this assumption that pluralists should reject.

We can isolate this assumption by contrasting Wrightian minimalism with another view which, like Wright's, makes room for a type of alethic pluralism. According to Wright's view, there are various substantive properties that "truth" denotes, but there is no single, non-honorific property of truth. Rather, in the sense described in the last section, truth reduces to different domain-relative properties. *But if this sort of view is coherent, then surely so is a non-reductive version of it.* That is:

**ST:** For any proposition, if it is true, then it has some property F such that, necessarily, if a proposition has F, then it has the property of truth.

What ST proposes is that truth is a *supervenient* property. And ST is compatible, clearly, with the possibility that truth has more than one subvening base. It is compatible with truth being multiply realizable.<sup>16</sup>

Any position which takes a given property as supervenient upon one or more lower-level properties must have a way of identifying the supervening property in question. A natural way to do so conjoins ST with what I've elsewhere called *alethic functionalism*.<sup>17</sup> An alethic functionalist sees truth as a functional property, or as a property that can be implicitly defined by its place within a network of folk beliefs or platitudes. This makes the view similar to analytic functionalism in the philosophy of mind. Such functionalists might hold that our property of pain is implicitly defined by the sum of tacitly but widely held beliefs about pain. These will include "the threat of pain causes fear" and "if you are in pain, you may say 'ouch'" and "if you are hit in the head, you will probably be in pain" and the like. Similarly, the alethic functionalist takes it that our property of truth is defined by the set of mostly tacit but widely held folk beliefs about truth. Together these beliefs form what we might call our folk theory of truth. Prominent among them are the platitudes that Wright employs in his minimal theory: the T-schema, the idea that truth is distinct from justification, the absoluteness of truth, and so on. Like Wright, the functionalist takes the property of truth to be implicitly marked out by our folk principles about that property.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the functionalist account also goes beyond Wrightian minimalism in at least two key respects. First, the functionalist's net will be wider. The platitudes that help to holistically define truth will include

not only those that connect truth to other semantic properties (reference, denotation and the like) but to non-semantic properties and states that are nonetheless intimately related to truth (such as belief). Second, the functionalist sees these platitudes as admitting of a *particular type of systematization* – one peculiar to functionalist concepts.

The systematization in question is straightforward. According to functionalists, the various folk-platitudes about a functional property *F* jointly define the *F*-role. The role can then be filled by different properties. A distinct advantage of this approach is that by employing typical functional machinery – the Ramsey-Lewis method for defining theoretical terms – we can say precisely what it is for a property to realize this role. In the present case, this amounts to taking the conjunction **A** of folk-theoretic platitudes, replacing occurrences of “true” with a variable and existentially quantifying in the usual way. As a result, we can say that

x has a property that realizes that plays the truth-role if and only if  $\exists t_1 [ \mathbf{A}(t_1 \dots O_1 \dots O_n) \ \& \ x \text{ has } t_1 ]$ .

This in turn can be used to state the conditions under which a proposition is true:

**FT:** The proposition that *p* is true if and only if it has a property that plays the truth role.

Propositions are true when they have a property that plays the truth-role and false otherwise. Such a definition tells us when propositions are true but – as the pluralist demands – leaves it open whether the same property realizes the truth-role in every context.

There is, of course, much more to say about the details of any such functionalist theory – such as the scope of the theory and the nature of the platitudes, among other issues.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, it may well face certain objections analogous to those leveled against functionalist theories in the philosophy of mind.<sup>20</sup> For present purposes, let us put these issues, pressing as they may be, aside and focus on the question of whether the functionalist is better off than the Wrightian pluralist with the regard to the question of whether truth is objective kind.

The first thing to notice is that FT only tells us the truth conditions for truth. We haven’t said anything about what truth is. That calls for a decision, and it is right here that the underlying metaphysical assumption behind Wright’s account emerges. The decision in question, familiar in the philosophy of mind, is between taking truth to be identical to the first-order properties that realize the truth-role (whatever they may be) and whether we take it as identical to what is often called the role property.

The former route, in the analogous debate in the philosophy of mind, has been championed by David Lewis (1988) and more recently, by Jaegwon Kim (1998). Translating this view into the present dispute, we arrive at a position that looks much like Wright's. Kim, for example, holds that "pain" is a non-rigid definite description –or what he calls a second-order designator or concept – that denotes different properties in organisms. As Kim puts it, "When I say, x has property M, where 'M' is a second-order designator...the 'truth-maker' of this statement is the fact, or state of affairs, that x has P1 or P2 or P3, where the Ps are the realizers of M" (1998, 105). Consequently, there is no fact about whether x is M over and above whether x has some P, and so "there is no need to think of M itself as a property in its own right" (104). Nonetheless, Kim says, M-terms are perfectly legitimate: "we should recognize that these designators introduce a set of useful and practically indispensable concepts that group first-order properties in ways that are essential for descriptive and communicative purposes." (105). The point here is that there is no one property that all the *m*'s share in common; thus *m*'s don't form any sort of objective kind. Of course, as Kim makes clear, with a suitably "liberal" conception of properties, one can insist that there is such a property – the property of falling under the concept M. But as Kim notes, this doesn't make the *m*'s form an *objective* kind (Ibid.).

Our earlier question was how Wright's form of pluralism – which was meant to be distinct from deflationism – could end up agreeing with one of its central tenets: that truth is not an objective kind. The above reflections reveal an answer. Wright takes a position analogous to Kim's in the philosophy of mind: there is a single concept of truth, but that single concept doesn't rigidly denote the same property in every domain. Rather, it denotes distinct "first-order" properties: correspondence in some domains, superassertibility in others, and there is no fact about whether a proposition is true over and above whether it has one of those first-order properties. Truth, is therefore not a distinct supervenient property.

Kim takes his analogous position to be a form of reductionism. To be in mental state M, on his view, just reduces to being in physical state P of a species (1998, 110). M is identical to its realizer P. Again, Wright's view is parallel: truth is identical to superassertibility in some domains, correspondence in others. Truth just reduces to the property that realizes the truth-role in a given domain. Consequently, there is no objective property shared by all truths, and the truths don't form an objective kind. This is an interesting result: a position that began as being anti-reductionist and anti-deflationist emerges, on inspection, to be both more deflationary and reductionist than it first appeared.

The pluralist can and should avoid these consequences. As suggested at the beginning of this section, the solution is to characterize truth functionally, yet hold that “truth” rigidly denotes a distinctively supervenient role property. On such a view, truth is a second-order property. That is:

**FTP:** The property of being true = the property of having a property that realizes the truth-role.

Propositions are true when they have a property that realizes that role, but being true doesn’t consist in realizing that role. Being true consists in *being such as to have a property that plays the truth-role*. If we take this route, we capture the pluralist intuition that truth can be realized in different domains in fundamentally different ways while retaining a robust anti-deflationism.

If truth is the role property, then there is a single property that all true propositions share, and “truth” rigidly designates that property in every domain. The truths, as we might put it, form a functional kind. But do they also form a minimally objective kind? Recall that a kind is minimally objective when (a) the members of the kind share a property in virtue of which they are member of that kind; and (b), their having that property is not a mere projection of, or construction out of, our concept of that kind. If truth is understood as a supervenient role property, then the first condition is obviously met, and so, I’ll argue, is the second.

In general, a real distinction between a property and concept is merited whenever there are features relevant to something’s being F which go beyond what can be known just by reflecting on our concept of F’s. Whenever that is the case, something’s having the property *being F* cannot be a mere construction out of the concept. Three reasons suggest that this is how matters stand for whether propositions have the functional role property of truth. Consequently, the role property is not a conceptual projection, and truths, on the functional account, form a minimally objective kind.

First, according to alethic functionalism, a proposition is a member of the truth kind in virtue of its having the supervenient role property of truth. But *whether it has that property depends on whether it has a property that realizes the truth-role*. Should truth be multiply realizable, the nature and character of the relevant realizing property, and whether a given proposition has or lacks it, depends on further facts about the propositional domain in question. These facts will therefore help to determine whether something has the role property of truth. But they go beyond the ordinary concept; mere reflection on the concept of truth does not reveal them.

Second, the alethic functionalist can allow that there are constraints on kind-membership that go beyond what is revealed in the concept of truth. For functional kinds like *heart*, there are broad and structural constraints on membership. The point of these constraints, so to speak, is to ensure that any realizer of the kind has certain properties that allow it to fulfill the function of pumping the blood. Hearts, to cite an obvious example, could not be made out of tissue paper. But not all such constraints will be known prior to investigation. Some may emerge only *after* we've compared some realizers of a supervenient kind with other quite different realizers. Doing so will often give us a better understanding of how they all differently realize the function in question, while at the same time help us to appreciate the constraints under which anything that does realize that function must operate. In such cases, that means there are facts that are relevant to whether something *can* have the relevant functional property that go beyond the features reflected in the concept. In the same way, the functionalist can allow that there are constraints on what can count as a truth-apt claim that go beyond what is revealed in the concept. The facts about such constraints may remain unknown prior to investigation. Since such facts will constrain the sorts of properties that can act as possible realizers for the truth-property, they are germane to whether any particular proposition is true. And since knowledge of such facts may exceed that which can be known about truth via the concept alone, they are not plausibly thought of as mere projections of the concept.

The above two points illustrate how the role property of truth is not a conceptual projection by illustrating how facts about whether something has that property go beyond the facts known by reflecting on the concept alone. A third reason for thinking that the role property is, in the relevant sense, "objective" is that it has distinct explanatory relevance over and above its realizers.<sup>21</sup> Of course, whether truth has any explanatory value – in explaining meaning, content, reasons for belief etc., is a vexed issue. But should truth do *any* explanatory work – which Wright and the functionalist will insist, against the deflationist, that it does – appeals to truth over and above any putative realizer have clear explanatory value.

Here's the point. If there is an explanation of some *particular* fact that refers to truth, there will also be an equally good explanation of that particular fact that refers only to one of truth's realizing properties. If, for example, I appeal to a particular proposition's truth in order to explain why I should believe it, I might also appeal to the property that realizes its truth, e.g. correspondence or perhaps coherence. But this does not entail that if there is an explanation in terms of truth of what *several*

*particular facts have in common*, there must be an equally good explanation of that commonality in terms of truth's realizers.<sup>22</sup> In general, an appeal to supervenient properties is justified whenever they are needed to explain commonalities. And we obviously do employ truth to explain such commonalities. We want to say, for example, that what is in common between all valid inferences is that they preserve truth, or that for any proposition, it is good to believe it only if it is true. But such explanations do not come for free. In order to make them, we must reify over the supervenient property of truth.

Some may think that I can sufficiently explain what is common between, e.g. all valid inferences, or all cognitively good beliefs, by showing that they share the disjunctive property of being either R1 or R2 or R3...Rn. Not so – for the simple reason that I may not, and probably cannot, know all the actual, *let alone all the possible* realizers of the supervening role property. An explanation that appeals to truth allows me to illuminate what is common between all the cases in question without that knowledge. Thus explanation in terms of the supervening property carry more information than any I might be able to make that appeal only to its realizers. That alone indicates they are better explanations.<sup>23</sup> To those who reply that this is a mere epistemic argument, and that God would suffer no such lack of knowledge, I reply: explanation is an epistemic matter and explanations are explanations for us. Of God's knowledge I know nothing. What I do know is that in science and in philosophy, we are justified in supposing a property exists whenever we need that property to be able to explain the facts at hand. And that is the case with the role property of truth.

Doubtless, there is much more that can be said on these matters. Moreover, the above discussion all assumes that truth *can be* realized differently in different domains. But of course, that is part of the point, which has been to argue for the relative merits of functionalism over Wright's more austere minimalism. Right or wrong, alethic functionalism of the kind just sketched is clearly non-deflationary in character; it allows truth to be a minimally objective kind, and it can make sense of the idea that a higher-level property of truth is a real property distinct from its realizers. As such, pluralists are hereby advised to go functionalist – realizer, role and all.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In Wright 1992; see also Wright 1999, 2001, 2003. Other pluralist approaches include Sher (2004); Newman (2002, 44-45); Beall (2000); Horgan (2001) and Lynch (1998, 2001, 2004a; 2005).

<sup>2</sup> See Lynch, 2001, 2004a; Sher (2004) calls it the "disunity challenge" .

<sup>3</sup> The theory in question was first suggested by Field (1972) and developed by Devitt (see, e.g. his 1997).

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<sup>4</sup> Wright 1999, 234-236 argues that “pure mathematical truth” is best understood in terms of coherence with the Peano axioms.

<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I will use “proposition” as my favored term for whatever bears the property of truth, but will occasionally speak indifferently of “assertions”, “statements”, “beliefs” and the like.

<sup>6</sup> For further discussion, see Beall (2000); Tappolet (2001) and Lynch (2004a).

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of further problems for SAP, see Lynch 2004a.

<sup>8</sup> For a fuller account of the relevant principles, see Wright 1999, 227; 2001, 759-761.

<sup>9</sup> Wright’s introduction of superassertibility has launched a significant literature. See, for example, Brueckner, (1998); Kvanvig (1999); Szubka (2000).

<sup>10</sup> See also Lynch 1998, 130.

<sup>11</sup> Here I am ignoring certain difficulties about the difference between rigid and non-rigid predicates (or singular terms standing for properties); (see Soames 2001, 250-251). Such difficulties are not a barrier to the contrast drawn in the text, which requires only that there is a distinction between descriptive terms or concepts like “is the color of the sky at night” and non-descriptive ones, like “is magnetic”.

<sup>12</sup> Wright’s view may have to invoke the honorific property of truth in any case, in order to account for the validity of mixed inferences. On the standard account, valid inferences, regardless of the domains of their component propositions, preserve a single property – truth – from premises to conclusion. By implying that “truth” denotes different properties in different domains, Wright’s view implicitly denies this. Presumably then, Wright has two options: explain validity in terms that don’t commit us to property-preservation (which, for reasons I won’t go into here, I think is harder than it sounds), or argue that it is merely the honorific property of truth that is preserved in valid inference.

<sup>13</sup> Arguments for the claim can be found in Lynch (2004a and 2004c). The opposing view can be found in Horwich (2002).

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<sup>14</sup> (NE) is derived from TS as follows: negate both halves of TS and take “not-p” for “p”. Transitivity results in TS. See Wright 2001, 756.

<sup>15</sup> To further drive home the point, consider this remark of Wright’s: “my own view is that the best deflationist response to the inflationary argument is to concede its immediate conclusion but insist that it shows no more than that concept of truth is indeed of a dimension of (substantial) success and failure, distinct from warrant, for *each particular proposition*, but that there still need be no *single* thing in which, for any two propositions, such success or failure consists.” (2001, 784). My point is that Wright himself is in an analogous position: he can’t say that there is a single normative property of truth, but only that, for every domain, there is a normative property that constitutes success or failure for contents in that domain. But this is precisely what the inflationary argument, if successful, makes implausible.

<sup>16</sup> It is sometimes said that truth “supervenes” on being, in that what is determines what is true. (It is worth noting that given the T-schema, the reverse is also true). If so, then ST alleges that truth is doubly or indirectly supervenient on being in that it supervenes on certain properties of propositions which, presumably, in turn supervene on what is.

<sup>17</sup> Lynch 2001, 2004a, 2005. Earlier expressions of the position can be found in Pettit 1996 and Lynch 1998. See also Devlin 2003.

<sup>18</sup> For more on the principles and their nature, see Lynch 2001.

<sup>19</sup> For a development of the view in terms of these details, see Lynch (2001, 2004a).

<sup>20</sup> As C. D. Wright argues in his 2005; for a response see Lynch 2005.

<sup>21</sup> It is worth emphasizing that in contrast to the parallel debate in the philosophy of mind, the issue here is explanatory, not causal relevance; abstract semantic properties don’t have direct causal powers.

<sup>22</sup> My way of putting the point has been influenced by Sober, 1999, 78, who argues that appeals to supervenient properties are justified in biology for precisely this reason.

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<sup>23</sup> Moreover, an explanation in terms of a disjunction of realizers will always be weaker than one in terms of the supervening property of truth unless it includes the further generalization that “and these are all the realizers of truth there can be”. But that fact, of course, already appeals to truth.

<sup>24</sup> I’m grateful to the members of my graduate seminar on truth, whose criticism substantially improved this paper. I’ve also benefited from discussion with J.C. Beall, Paul Bloomfield, Tom Bontly, Patrick Greenough, John McDowell, Sven Rosencrantz, Lionel Shapiro and Crispin Wright. These ideas were originally and fruitfully aired during the Truth and Realism Pre-Conference at the University of St. Andrews.