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ON THE FUNCTIONALIZATION OF PLURALIST APPROACHES TO TRUTH

ABSTRACT. Traditional inflationary approaches that specify the nature of truth are attractive in certain ways; yet, while many of these theories successfully explain why propositions in certain domains of discourse are true, they fail to adequately specify the nature of truth because they run up against counterexamples when attempting to generalize across all domains. One popular consequence is skepticism about the efficaciousness of inflationary approaches altogether. Yet, by recognizing that the failure to explain the truth of disparate propositions often stems from inflationary approaches' allegiance to alethic monism, pluralist approaches are able to avoid this explanatory inadequacy and the resulting skepticism, though at the cost of inviting other conceptual difficulties. A novel approach, alethic functionalism, attempts to circumvent the problems faced by pluralist approaches while preserving their main insights. Unfortunately, it too generates additional problems – namely, with its suspect appropriation of the multiple realizability paradigm and its platitude-based strategy – that need to be dissolved before it can constitute an adequate inflationary approach to the nature of truth.

1. THE INADEQUACY OF TRADITIONAL INFLATIONARY APPROACHES

1.1. *The Problem of the Common Denominator*[1]

Despite radical differences in content – ranging from mathematics to Greek mythology, neuropsychopharmacology to applied ethics, etc. – we are prone to think that propositions about the way the world is are correct in virtue of being true, in virtue of having some property picked out by our ordinary concept of truth.[2,3] Consider a collection of truth-apt propositions expressing a broad range of thoughts:

(1) $7 + 5 = 12$,

(2)   the number of Tutsis slaughtered in the Rwandan genocide of 1994 is roughly 250 times greater than the number of Americans killed in the September 11th attacks on the World Trade Center, which is still only half as many as the 1.5 million massacred in either the Armenian genocide of 1915–1923 or the Cambodian genocide of 1975–1979,

(3)   decreased activity of D_2 receptors in the nucleus accumbens is correlated with anhedonia as measured by brain reward thresholds,

(4)   Higgs–Boson particles probably constitute the dark matter located in black holes and brown dwarfs,

(5)   if bachelors are unmarried adult males, then the Pope is a bachelor and the Vatican is a bachelor pad,

(6)   Bellerophon was the rider of the winged Pegasus,

(7)   Johannes Climacus is Søren Aabye Kierkegaard,

(8)   water is either H_2O, H_3O, or XYZ,

(9)   murder is wrong, and

(10)   perhaps Jesus is Lord only because God is dead.

Though the domains of discourse are wildly different – with their varied ontological posits, inferential commitments, methods of verification, etc. – such differences do not seem to frustrate our ability to use these propositions to make correct pronouncements.[4] Yet, such a collection presents a problem for virtually all traditional inflationary approaches (e.g., coherence, existentialist, identity, correspondence) that purport to specify the nature of truth: because of the mottled manner in which each proposition relates to the conditions under which it is true, it appears that there is no common denominator such that our ordinary concept of truth picks out any uniform property. To be sure, some regularities occur in this collection, but it is not immediately clear that any one regularity extends throughout; different characterizations are more appropriate in some domains than in others. Further, this problem becomes increasingly salient as we shift from 'snow is white' and 'cat on the mat' talk to discourse that is more representative of our *actual* communicative practices, not to mention shifts to veridical discourse that is non-standard (e.g., schizophrenic).

For instance, while (2) or (7) might be true in virtue of some sort of observed causal or correspondence relationship between the elements of the proposition and the way the world is, or (3), (4), or (8) in virtue of some sort of theoretically-postulated causal or correspondence relationship, it is unclear how such relationships might hold for the propositions in (1), (9),

or (10). Alternatively, the truth of (3) might just as plausibly be a matter of concordance with other propositions *within* a given model of anhedonia – and (4) true in virtue of its consistency with other mathematical evidence and evidential claims in physics and astronomy – rather than any causal or correspondence relations with mind-independent objects. Nor would it be unreasonable to think that (9) might just as well be true in virtue of its practical utility or good consequences; or, insofar as it is a fact, perhaps (9) might be true in virtue of its being identical with the fact that murder is wrong. The truth of humorous, mythological, or literary propositions like those in (2), (5), (6), (7), and (10) might be "hermeneutically colored", where the facts in those cases are considered "soft"; in such a case, truth-apt propositions might seem less amenable to an objectivist, realist, or identity theory of truth.[5] In particular, the difficulty in separating the per-spectival content of the estimations in (2) from their "comportment" with the facts about the world affords the impetus for an alternative treatment. Just the same, there might plausibly be nothing outside of the mechanisms of grammar in virtue of which (5), (6), and (7) are true. Without belaboring the point, suffice it to say that each and every one of the propositions in the above collection seems to be truth-apt. The problem is that it is far from obvious that they are all true in the same way, or that any one particular inflationary theory can handle all of them equally well.

1.2. *The Skeptical Response*

The problem of specifying a common denominator forces a shift in focus, from specifying the nature of truth to the prior question of whether it would even be possible for an alethic theory to identify a single axiomatic princi-ple, or unified family of principles, that specifies its nature. Because truth does not seem to retain the same features, or operate uniformly, across all domains of discourse, traditional inflationary approaches have been unable to identify the sort of axiomatic principles that capture, without remainder, everything there is to capture about truth. This situation has motivated many philosophers to respond with skepticism about the efficaciousness of such approaches in providing a substantial and illuminating specification of what the truth of all true propositions consists in.[6]

What binds many of these skeptical responses together is that, by exploiting the problem of the common denominator to advance their skep-ticism, they subsequently expose a fundamental assumption common to most traditional inflationary approaches. The vast majority of these ap-proaches are *monistic* – maintaining that truth does indeed have a single unified nature, that the truth of true propositions consists in the same sort of thing – and underlying each skeptical response is the idea that this

allegiance to alethic monism is what generates explanatory inadequacy. So, while traditional inflationary approaches successfully explain how individual propositions in certain domains of discourse can be true, those approaches fail to specify *the* nature of truth because they run up against counterexamples when attempting to generalize across all domains.

In the remarks to follow, I investigate a pair of recent inflationary approaches attempting to resolve eristic debates about truth, and the cluster of problems they face. In Section 2, I spell out the motivation for finding an adequate inflationary solution that can dissolve the skepticism resulting from the problem of the common denominator, and discuss one promising solution – alethic pluralism. After noting some conceptual problems which this approach generates, I focus on a novel solution in Section 3 – Lynch's functionalized version of weak alethic pluralism – which is allegedly exempt from these problems. Section 4 mounts a few criticisms that this functionalized version must countenance in order to be successful. I conclude by suggesting that this novel solution provides insight into what a good inflationary theory of truth ought to look like, but that it does so (i) at the cost of its allegiance to alethic pluralism, (ii) based on a perfunctory disregard for standard functionalist taxonomies of the realizability relation, and (iii) despite generating additional problems due to its use of a platitude-based strategy.

2. A PROMISING NON-SKEPTICAL SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF THE COMMON DENOMINATOR

2.1. *Skepticism About Skepticism*

Several philosophers sympathetic to inflationary approaches have expressed the desire for a better response to the problem of the common denominator than skepticism. One central motivation for formulating an adequate, non-skeptical solution stems from the recognition that one of the charges of truth is to be a normative source of rational connectivity among domains of discourse – true propositions *ought* to be believed. As McDowell remarks,

> A belief or judgment that things are thus and so must be a posture or stance that is correctly or incorrectly adopted to whether or not things are indeed thus and so. . . . This relation between mind and world is normative, then, in this sense: thinking that aims at judgment, or at the fixation of belief, is answerable to the world – to how things are – for whether or not it is correctly executed. (1996, xi–xii)

This sort of explanation suggests that one requirement on alethic theories is to account for how the world can be a "source of friction" on information

and propositional content, and satisfying this requirement in turn prompts an investigation into the norms registered by truth predicates. As complex cognitive beings, we care about truth and the regulative grip it has on us; if we did not so care, we would not have the belief-forming practices we do in fact have, and discovering and characterizing reality would simply become a prosaic, inconsequential pastime.

Skeptical responses, however, often either ignore or fail to fully explain this normative dimension. For instance, it is often unclear how deflationary approaches satisfy this requirement using only the resources of the disquotation or equivalence schemas.[7] As Wright (2001, 757) notes, "All that can be elicited from the equivalence and disquotation schemas is the problem . . . these principles keep silent when the question is raised, what does the satisfaction or non-satisfaction of this norm consist in, and how can it fail to be a substantive property". Similarly, quietism about truth can come across as dissatisfying, insofar as it prematurely abandons the attempt to formulate an adequate inflationary theory. Ideally, inflationists desire a theory of truth that is maximally informative, unites other disciplines or research programs, explains the inferential commitments of our epistemic endeavors, helps solve an array of philosophical problems, and so on. But if no such ideal can be reached, neither do they want to slip into some sort of alethic quietism where virtually *nothing* illuminating can be said.

2.2. *The Purchase of Alethic Pluralism*

For philosophers sympathetic to inflationary approaches, skeptical responses have been a serendipitous source of insight, giving them justification for looking askance at alethic monism, and goading them into seeking an alternative inflationary solution to the problem of the common denominator (e.g., Anderson 1998; Beall 2000; Lynch 2000; Wright 2001). Pettit (1996, 886), for instance, writes, "It is just that what truth involves in one area – what realizes the appropriate role – may be different from what it involves in another. The difference between what truth involves in different areas will be explained by reference to different subject matters: the different truth-conditions, and the different truth-makers, in each discourse". Similarly, Wright (1992, 38) remarks that, ". . . any predicate that exhibits 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". Horgan (2001, 73) holds that, while indexing discourse according to context does not render truth ineffectual, the truth of any given proposition is nevertheless dependent on the domains that situate it: "Although contextual semantics asserts that the operative semantic

standard governing truth (semantic correctness) can vary from one context to another, it also asserts that contextually operative metalinguistic semantic standards normally require truth ascriptions to obey Tarski's schema T". And finally, Putnam (1994, 515) contends that the nature of truth is indexed according to domains of discourse, writing that, "On the one hand, to regard an assertion or a belief or a thought as true or false is to regard it as being right or wrong; on the other hand, just what sort of rightness or wrongness is in question varies enormously with the sort of discourse". These and other philosophers (e.g., Alston 2002; Moser 1993) have given prominence to the belief that truth is not homogenous across all domains – that it changes in subtle ways depending on the nature of the propositions to which the truth predicate is appended. Accordingly, the context and nature of the discourse significantly determine the alethic properties predicated of a given proposition and the normative relations between them; or, conversely, without contextual and dialogical clues among patterns of thought, predication of these alethic properties would be cognitively abstruse.

This alternative point of departure has occasioned the formulation of alethic pluralism – the view that the nature of truth (and possibly falsehood?) is pluralistic, that there are different ways for propositions to be true. So, rather than asking whether or not a proposition is truth-apt, alethic pluralists typically focus on what *kind* of truth that proposition has. This alternative solution thereby evades the problem of having to explain what the common denominator would be for a collection of statements like (1)–(10), and thus provides a rationale for defending the potential legitimacy of each distinct alethic theory. As Moser (1993, 163; see also Rorty 1998, 40) remarks, "The ends embodied in inquiry, for one, can offer a rationale for adopting one specific notion of truth rather than another. Those ends can thereby play a key role in one's reasoned defense of a certain specific notion of truth". In emphasizing the contributions made by the axiomatic principles of dissimilar theories, pluralism about truth maintains that they *synergistically* account for the different ways of being true, and consequently amounts to a sort of theoretical miscegenation which implies that the nature of truth cannot be comprehensively canvassed by any one single schema, model, or theory.[8]

This initial characterization of the view admits of different senses of 'pluralism'. Once disambiguated, there seem to be at least two distinct varieties of alethic pluralism – weak and strong.[9] Weak alethic pluralism holds that our ordinary concept of truth picks out a single alethic property – the property of being true – and that different propositions can have this property in virtue of having other properties (e.g., being rationally

acceptable under ideal epistemic conditions, corresponding with reality, being stipulated by the hegemonic power structures of a given society, being identical to a fact). So, this variety suggests that the alethic property predicated of true propositions is contextually determined by the domains of discourse within which those propositions are situated. The variable ways that any given proposition can be true, as contextually determined by its respective domain, are indexed according to (among other things) the epistemic standards, inferential concerns, and methodological commitments of the cognizers working in those domains. For instance, weak alethic pluralists like Pettit (1996) and Wright (1992; 1996) might deem propositions like (1), (2), and (3) above as belonging to different domains of discourse, and all equally true – but nevertheless, all equally true in different ways. Truth is different from domain to domain – one thing in mathematics and another in the political history of mass murder, both of which may be different than truth in neuropsychopharmacology. Hence, the nature of truth is 'pluralistic'. Of course, it does not follow from the fact that one holds weak alethic pluralism that one is pluralist with regard to *all* domains of discourse, for nothing here prevents one from selecting those domains that one is pluralist about. Subsequently, weak alethic pluralism can be thought of as a continuum of varying degrees of weakness, where different views line up according to how significantly contextual and dialogical factors are permitted to determine the alethic property predicated of propositions.[10]

Weak alethic pluralism is weak because it maintains an insular, conservative view of the alethic property denoted by the truth predicate. While the truth of true propositions is variable, in the sense of being contextually determined by different domains of discourse, any given proposition is still only true *in one particular way*. That is, true propositions are true simply because they possess a certain property – the property of being true. Strong alethic pluralism, however, rejects this assumption, and is therefore 'pluralistic' in a different, more radical sense. On this latter view, propositions can be true in different ways, insofar as there is not just one single property picked out by our ordinary concept of truth – the property of being true; rather, there are multiple alethic properties that a proposition can possess. That is, strong alethic pluralism holds that there are different truth predicates that can be appended to one and the same proposition, each one denoting a different alethic property. Accordingly, there is no one single way of being true. A proposition like (9) would, verily, be true in different ways; advancing good consequences, cohering with a significant portion of ethical theory or jurisprudence, *and* being identical with some fact about a body of legislation are all ways that 'murder is wrong' might be true.[11]

2.3. *The Plight of Alethic Pluralism*

Focusing on what kind of truth a given proposition has gives alethic pluralism theoretical "elasticity", making it a promising non-trivial solution to the problem of the common denominator. At first blush, such an approach has the resources to formulate the sort of substantive inflationary explanation inaccessible to traditional monistic theories, while avoiding skepticism. Unfortunately, there is an extremely serious cluster of objections facing strong alethic pluralism (Lynch 2001; Pettit 1996; Sainsbury 1996; Swoyer 1982; Tappolet 1997). I will briefly mention three. Further, weak alethic pluralism generates additional worries of its own.

First, strong alethic pluralism seems to be *too* strong as a view about the nature of truth. From the premise that there is no one single way of being true, it follows that there are many different alethic predicates, each one denoting a different property. The existence of different kinds of alethic properties promote different ways of conceiving of the nature of truth. Strong alethic pluralism therefore makes an additional suggestion: predicating a plurality of alethic properties entails that we operate with a plurality of alethic concepts, not just a single ordinary one. Hence, Wright – one of the arch alethic pluralists – observes,

> . . . that in different regions of thought and discourse the theory may hold good, a priori, of – may be satisfied by – different concepts. If this is so . . . we should not scruple to say that truth may consist in different things in different such areas: in the instantiation of one concept in one area, and in that of a different concept in another.[12] (1999, 228)

Where the predication of distinct kinds of truth entails variability in our use of the term 'true', strong alethic pluralism amounts to the promotion of a *polysemic* account of truth. The upshot, however, is calamitous: the word 'true' would be ambiguous or equivocal, and the strong alethic pluralist would lack the explanatory resources to say why some propositions are true in some domains and sub-domains while false in others. This particular objection attacks the very coherence of strong alethic pluralism, for if the view that there are different kinds of truth implies a multiplicity of equivocal concepts of truth, then its semantic value will be about as capriciously variable as the truth-conditions of the propositions of which it is predicated.

Another oft-noted problem with strong alethic pluralism that is connected to a polysemic view of truth concerns the inability to generalize across certain propositions. For if the predicate appended to propositions is ambiguous or equivocal in virtue of expressing different alethic concepts, then universal quantification, without some added mechanism, would fail

to distinguish which properties a collection of propositions had. Rather than saying,

(11) $(\exists x)(\forall y)[((x = \text{the collection of propositions (1)–(10)}) \,\&\, (y \in x)) \rightarrow (y \text{ is true})]$,

we would only be justified in saying that those propositions are $true_1$, $true_2$, $\ldots true_{10}$. If this is correct, then far from avoiding the problem of the common denominator, alethic pluralism magnifies it combinatorially. While qualifying true claims in this way may add granularity to interpretations of content, it seems to dissolve the expressive power of the truth predicate.

A third problem concerns the incapacitation of logical validity. Sound arguments with propositions situated in different domains of discourse – that is, "mixed" arguments whose premises are not true in the same way – would not necessarily preserve truth in any valid inference. Consider this basic instance of modus ponens:

(12) If murder is wrong, then most laborers refuse to work in meat-processing plants.

(9) Murder is wrong.

(13) ∴Most laborers refuse to work in meat-processing plants.

The argument form clearly seems to be valid according to our ordinary concept of consequence; yet, for the strong alethic pluralist, no single property of truth would be preserved from premises to conclusion. In particular, since the conditional in (12) combines an emotive or normative antecedent with a descriptive-causal consequent, the conclusion in (13) would be *literally* true in a different sense than in (12) or (9).[13]

Nor is weak alethic pluralism entirely innocent. As I will discuss later, one worry is that it does not seem to be pluralistic in any significant sense, advancing the same sort of theory as the traditional inflationary approaches that it sought to reject at the outset. A worry generated from a competing intuition, however, suggests that weak alethic pluralism is indeed pluralistic, but only because the view that the context-sensitive property of being true is picked out by our ordinary concept of truth turns out to be untenable. That is, further analysis leads to the suspicion that weak alethic pluralism consistently allows for multiple alethic concepts after all, insofar as the property of being true in virtue of possessing the property of corresponding to reality is somehow a different property than the property of being true in virtue of possessing the property of cohering with other assertions – both of

which are different than the property of being true in virtue of possessing the property of being expedient to believe. As such, if toggling between different alethic properties results in a corresponding shift in our alethic concepts, the central claim of weak alethic pluralism – that the property of being true falls under the extension of a single, univocal concept of truth – is annulled. So, strong alethic pluralism threatens to collapse the distinction from which it arises, and any such collapse would indicate that alethic pluralism *just* is strong alethic pluralism.

So, positing a plurality of truth predicates or concepts that are individuated by the different alethic properties falling within their extensions can lead to some quite unsettling consequences. Without a homogenous, general, and unequivocal concept of truth, our ability to talk about the veridicality of assertoric or doxastic discourse is jeopardized. Strong alethic pluralists who do so must have a rough and ready reply as to how there can be multiple ways of being true, or, if there is a plurality of ways of being true, then why a more general truth predicate – the one that does the inferential operations – does not subsume all the other fine-grained, contextualized truth predicates (Tappolet 2000). And weak alethic pluralists must not only have a principled way of maintaining the weak/strong distinction, but one that also allows their view to remain pluralistic. Consequently, the motivation to formulate an impervious alethic theory about the nature of truth – one that is 'pluralistic' in whatever sense needed to solve the problem of the common denominator, but one which does not invite other conceptual difficulties – is firmly in place. Were an alethic pluralist able to dispense with the plight, she would be left with all the purchase.

3. ON THE FUNCTIONALIZATION OF PLURALIST APPROACHES TO THE NATURE OF TRUTH

Because of these and other objections, inflationary approaches based on alethic pluralism have, allegedly, not proven to be entirely adequate. Weak alethic pluralism may end up over-inflating upon examination, and strong alethic pluralism seems to be too strong given that it invites a potentially incoherent, polysemic account of truth. Lynch (2001; see also Pettit 1996, 883–890), however, has proposed a propitious version of alethic pluralism that seems to save the pluralist's insight about solving the problem of the common denominator while staving off the above cluster of objections. This novel version exploits the multiple realizability paradigm and a platitude-based strategy to yield a functional specification of the nature of truth.

Alethic functionalism asserts that there is a single, general, and unified concept of truth – a concept which names a functional role; what varies from discourse to discourse is how that role is satisfied, what kinds of particular properties of propositions realize that role. In the philosophy of mind, stock examples of functionally-specified concepts abound. For instance, mental states like pain or anhedonia are often understood as higher-order functional roles which can be multiply realized by different lower-order physical systems, substrates, states, properties, and so on; rather than its being an intrinsic property, what makes anhedonia the mental state that it is are the relations to somatosensory input, to other mental states, and to behavioral output. A functional specification of the concept of anhedonia, then, would be a relationally-defined concept of a functional role which is able to be realized by different individual properties of organisms. Consider Lynch's principal analogy, intended as an intuitive foray into a specification of the nature of truth qua functional role:

The position of head of state is found in almost every constituted government. It is held by presidents, prime ministers, kings, queens, and even religious figures, all of whom are head of state in virtue of performing a certain job, namely, by being the chief executive officer for the government ... And yet when we say that both Fidel Castro and Bill Clinton are heads of state we are not equivocating. They simply perform, or realize the functional role of being a head of state differently. (2001, 728)

Functional roles are here construed as a type of job, and thus to realize a given functional role is to satisfy a certain "job description". For truth, a functional specification will be one that defines the concept in terms of its relation to other concepts – facts, endorsement, negation, belief, etc. The familiar point, then, is that the functional role of 'head of state' can be occupied – the 'job description' satisfied – by any number of individuals who posses the relevant properties, such that multiple realizability obtains; and so too with truth.

To spell out the details of this view, alethic functionalists typically help themselves to the Ramsey/Lewis method of characterizing theoretical terms in order to give just such a functional specification (Lynch 2001). In general, the basic strategy is to amass axiomatic principles and platitudes (e.g., 'if something is α, then it has F', 'if something has G, then it is β', 'if something has δ, then it is H-related to other things that have δ') such that a conjunction R is formed which relates the target concept to other concepts. For anhedonia, the conjuncts of R might include platitudes like 'anhedonia does not feel good', 'diminished reward or pleasure is different than pain', 'people who are anhedonic are not motivated', etc. Typically, R will contain both nascent or theoretical terms in need of characterization,

and old terms which are already and unproblematically characterized; let R be,

(14) $R(T_1, \ldots, T_n, O_1, \ldots, O_n)$.

The uncharacterized nascent or theoretical terms, $T_1, \ldots, T_n$, can then be replaced with a variable – say, x – which is itself a higher-order property, a functional role ranging over properties. This higher-order property specifies a condition C, in the form of an open sentence 'x is C'. The result is a modified Ramsey sentence of R, a biconditional specification such as,

(15) $\langle \sigma \rangle$ is true $\leftrightarrow \exists x_l, \ldots, \exists x_n$ $[R(T_1, \ldots, T_n, O_1, \ldots, O_n)$ & $\langle \sigma \rangle$ has $x_l, \ldots, x_n]$.

The modified Ramsey sentence of R suggests that $\langle \sigma \rangle$ is true if, and only if, it has some property x such that x is C. Thus, for the alethic functionalist, propositions are true insofar as they have the higher-order functional role property of being true. Such a property is, though, context-sensitive and indexed to domains of discourse, since propositions have that property *in virtue* of having some lower-order alethic property that realizes it.

This functional specification identifies the functional role or 'job description' of truth with the commonsense platitudes designated by R (e.g., 'a conjunction of statements is true just in case each of its conjuncts is true', 'true propositions are not always justified', 'justified propositions are not always true'). The functionalist's insight in exploiting a platitude-based strategy is that specifying the nature of truth need not take the form of an analysis of its necessary and sufficient conditions. As Wright (2001, 759) puts it, "… illumination can be equally well, if less directly provided by the assembly of a body of conceptual truths that … collectively constrain and locate the target concept and sufficiently characterize some of its relations with other concepts and its role and purposes". The idea is that informal platitudes are no less illuminating than formal platitudes and schemas, and the fact that platitudes need not take the form of a biconditional or an identity claim does not prevent them from being informative. Further, the informality of platitudes increases the base of admissible information – information that connects the target concept to other relevant concepts, and which would otherwise be omitted in a more stringent analysis of only necessary and sufficient conditions. Using a platitude-based strategy also allows the functionalist to explain why traditional alethic approaches give different specifications of the nature of truth: the alethic properties predicated of propositions satisfy different conjunctions of platitudes depending, in part, on the domain that contextualizes them, suggesting that

traditional alethic approaches are merely "grabbing ahold" of different groupings of platitudes – correspondence with some weighted subset Γ_1, coherence with Γ_2, prosentential with Γ_3, and so forth. Alethic properties of propositions realize this higher-order role property – they instantiate the functional role of truth – by satisfying platitudes for domains of discourse.

As such, the functionalization of alethic pluralism emphasizes a crucial distinction between our ordinary concept of truth and the alethic properties that it picks out, and maps this onto a distinction between higher-order roles and lower-order realizers.[14] In offering a strategy for showing how strong alethic pluralism does not necessarily collapse the distinction from which it arises, and how our ordinary concept of truth need not be fragmented in order to pick out different properties, alethic functionalism thereby emerges as an enhanced, galvanized version of weak alethic pluralism. This functionalised version maintains the central motivation and insight of alethic pluralism; it solves the problem of the common denominator by suggesting that an adequate inflationary theory need not identify a single axiomatic principle or common denominator, precisely because the nature of truth may be different from domain to domain. But unlike strong alethic pluralism, this functionalist solution also has the resources to explain why 'true' is not a polysemic predicate, and why universal generalization and logical validity do not pose problems; variance only occurs at the level of properties, not concepts and roles. So, while the truth of individual propositions might be contextual or domain-relative, truth simpliciter need not be.

4. WHY ALETHIC FUNCTIONALISM IS SLIGHTLY DYSFUNCTIONAL

Alethic functionalism is an interesting and important view that provides insight into what a good inflationary theory of truth – one that solves the problem of the common denominator – might look like; nevertheless, this approach faces some problems that, at present, prevent it from being a thoroughly adequate solution.

4.1. *Alethic Functionalism Turns Out Not To Be a Form of Pluralism About Truth*

The first problem in the alethic functionalist's account concerns whether it can simultaneously prevent strong alethic pluralism from collapsing the weak/strong distinction, *and* retain its commitment to pluralism about truth. At the end of the day, the view is unable to salvage the distinction, and reveals a thorough-going allegiance to alethic monism in the process.

Suppose one is worried about a potential ambiguity or backslide lurking in the functionalist's account, for even with the commitment to our ordinary concept of truth being single, general, and univocal, it may still seem unclear what that concept is a concept of. Alethic functionalists can either construe that concept as the concept of lower-order realizing properties or of the higher-order role property. If construed as the former, then it becomes unclear as to how our ordinary concept of truth could actually be a single, general, and unified concept; rather, the multiplicity of properties denoted would require distinct alethic predicates to differentially denote them, and the use of distinct alethic predicates would effect changes in the concepts that they express. So, were the alethic functionalist to construe our ordinary concept of truth as the concept of a plurality of properties that realize the higher-order functional role, then her view would actually turn out to be an enhanced version of strong alethic pluralism. Now, this would certainly sustain the richness and multiplicity of properties heralded by the strong alethic pluralist, but would also implicate the objections mentioned in Section 2.3 – polysemic predication, universal quantification, the incapacitation of logical validity, etc. This quandary leads Lynch (2001, 734–735) to suggest that alethic functionalists should construe our ordinary concept of truth as the concept of the higher-order functional role property; truth is not about what performs the various normative operations in our epistemic endeavors, but rather the performance itself. He gives two reasons for why this construal is preferable.[15] First, the former construal raises the problems faced by strong alethic pluralism, but this is a consequence to be avoided. This reason is circular and unhelpful. The second reason, however, is that truth is the goal of inquiry, as it is often said, and therefore "we want our beliefs to be coherent, or to correspond to fact, because we want them to be true, not the other way around" (Lynch 2001, 734). This is, I believe, the appropriate move for any weak alethic pluralist who wishes to sustain a single, univocal concept; however, it comes at the cost of treading on the allegiance to a pluralistic approach, making it difficult to see how the functionalist about truth can, at the end of the day, vindicate her pluralist convictions in any meaningful way.

Once alethic functionalists offer a principled clarification of what, on their view, our ordinary alethic concepts are the concept of, it becomes clear that the view is indeed a version of weak alethic pluralism. The problem, however, is that weak alethic pluralism – and alethic functionalism a fortiori – is *not at all* pluralistic. On such an account there is only one way for any given proposition to be true, i.e., it must possess *the* property of being true. Alethic functionalism maintains that truth has a single nature – namely, functional – which remains homogenous, such that truth

is always and everywhere the property of being true, the property of being a higher-order functional role. To wit, this does provide functionalists with an explanation of how wildly different propositions ranging over multifarious domains of discourse can all be truth-apt, but it does so only in a tenuous and misleading sense of 'pluralism'. As such, the appearance of functionalists to be inherently antagonistic toward traditional alethic monisms is merely that – appearance; rather, it proves to be a surreptitious espousal of a rather traditional monistic approach, albeit one that solves the problem of the common denominator, on a par with, say, a correspondence theory that allows for the possibility of different types of correspondence relations. Consequently, the weak/strong distinction does collapse; alethic pluralism actually *just* is strong alethic pluralism (subsequently, this leaves it as an open question as to whether strong alethic pluralism is a plausible view about the nature of truth). Perhaps this problem will not worry the functionalist much, since it is less concerned with its efficaciousness as a non-skeptical alternative solution to the problem of the common denominator than with mere nomenclature. However, *it should.* Any adequate form of alethic pluralism stands a good chance of being the only game in town, for well-formulated pluralistic theories are few and far between; as a form of alethic monism, though, the view faces both strong competition from other plausible monistic approaches, and additional problems that prevent it from being the most compelling approach among these competitors.

4.2. *The Appropriation of Functionalist Realization Taxonomy is Deviant*

The second problem concerns alethic functionalism's appropriation of the realizability paradigm. Endorsing this paradigm requires the commitment to "levelhood" and a layered picture of metaphysics, and furthermore, to the existence of nomic connections between higher-order functional roles vis-à-vis their lower-order realizers. As noted, alethic functionalism maps the realizability paradigm onto a theory of the nature of truth by situating the architecture of concepts and properties within a "one-many" taxonomy – there is one concept of truth which picks out a single functional role, which can be instantiated by many different properties. Yet, an accurate, comprehensive understanding about realizability relations and the architecture of levelhood entails realizing that the 'one-many' taxonomy is only but a small portion of the functionalist story. In general, functionalism also calls for a single one-to-one realizability relation between a higher-order functional role and lower-order property, as well as a single lower-order property realizing different higher-order roles. The latter is an inversion of the multiple realizability paradigm – a "many-one" situation. For example,

if being wrong is analogously taken to be a higher-order functional role property, then it, alongside being repugnant, being blameworthy, etc., might be realized by an act having the property of being murderous. With regard to truth, Alston articulates precisely this 'many-one' taxonomy:

> When concepts with different extensions, as in the above case, are said to be concepts of the "same thing", we are obviously cutting corners a bit …To apply this all to truth, there could be different concepts of truth that pick out the same property. Here I am not speaking of the obvious point that 'true' is used with quite different meanings in, e.g., 'true friend', 'true likeness', 'true bill', and 'true proposition'. No, the point is that propositional truth itself may be conceptualized differently. We may contrast a "minimal" concept that is conveyed by the T-schema with a more developed correspondence concept employed by, e.g., Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*. (2001, 14)

And given that 'one-one', 'one-many', and 'many-one' taxonomies obtain, the "many-many" taxonomy comes along for free – a multiplicity of higher-order roles are realized a multiplicity of lower-order realizers. The architecture of these four taxonomies of realization suggest a lattice-like structure where a property, or set of properties, can realize a higher-order functional role, but can also realize a different role given some contextual change, just as a higher-order functional role can be realized by differing sets of properties given some other contextual change.

Alethic functionalists are forced to dismiss these three other taxonomies, and thus the Functionalist's general story about realizability, in order to maintain their view. The 'many-one' and 'many-many' taxonomies are dismissed because the postulation of additional functional roles would entail the proliferation of discrete concepts of truth, and thereby reinstate the ambages that accompany conceptual variance vis-à-vis strong alethic pluralism – that our ordinary concept of truth names a *single* functional role is what staves off the problem with polysemic predication, for one. The 'one-one' taxonomy is dismissed because it would not allow for the context-sensitivity to different domains of discourse, which the alethic functionalism requires in order to solve the problem of the common denominator. Yet, these dismissals make for a deviant, ad hoc appropriation of the functionalist's general realizability paradigm.

In order to better frame this problem, reconsider the principal analogy, 'head of state', used to both usher in their theory of truth, and to show that 'true' is not a polysemic predicate. The claim was that the role of head of state can be satisfied by Chief Seattle, Pope John Paul II, Pol Pot, Marcus Aurelius, Margaret Thatcher, or anyone else suitably able to be an executive officer of a government given its background conditions. Against the background of the general functionalist's realizability paradigm, though, any one of those individuals can realize many other roles. In addition to playing the role of head of state, for instance, Marcus Aurelius realized the

roles of Roman patrician, government official, author of the *Meditations*, stoic philosopher, husband to Faustina, and so on. Each individual operates in a wide array of capacities thus realizing a multiplicity of higher-order functional roles, and each role is realized by different individuals relative to background conditions. Now, functionalists about truth can, and should, immediately counter this objection by noting that they *can* consistently accept a multiplicity of higher-order roles as entailed by the taxonomies of realization relations. What they must deny, however, is that, of all possible higher-order functional roles, only one is identifiable as the role of 'head of state' – otherwise, the analogy with truth would be undermined. So, unless the functional roles postulated exhibit some sort of isomorphism, the objection that the appropriation of a functionalist taxonomy of realization relations entails the commitment to a multiplicity of higher-order functional roles, and a fortiori, a multiplicity of concepts for each one, would simply be a non sequitur. It would not matter that Marcus Aurelius performed different jobs and realized numerous roles; what matters is whether we understand different things by the selfsame higher-order 'head of state' role. Despite this counter-objection, the alethic functionalist's analogy *is* somewhat perfidious, since it begs the question against the claim that there are not, or cannot be, multiple concepts of 'head of state' – that we always signify the same thing by such a role. The idea is that anyone suitably able to be the chief executive officer for their government counts as the head of state; but to say that the operations and performances of Chief Seattle, Pope John Paul II, Pol Pot, Marcus Aurelius, and Margaret Thatcher always and everywhere constitute the same *role* is incredible, and all the more when considering that the meanings of 'head', 'state', and 'government' are themselves imprecise. Are both Margaret Thatcher, in virtue of being prime minister, and the leaders of Spanish anarchism in the 1930's, in virtue of being directorial pundits, both 'heads of state'? Yes, in some sense, but the *roles* they performed were quite different; and as additional examples are added to this modicum, our intuitions – and with them the alethic functionalist's analogy – become stretched thin. This is, perhaps, because of the difficulty in trying to account for the particular differences between individuals satisfying the job description of 'head of state' while simultaneously trying to identify a single, general role by abstracting away from those differences. For, if realizing the 'head of state' or truth role requires satisfying a maximally *general* set of platitudes, that set will neither comprise an interesting or distinctive specification of the role. The only job description common to all heads of state are global but uninformative maxims like 'lead followers', 'rule effectively', 'maintain power and authority', 'make decisions about public affairs', etc. Yet, if this

pitfall is avoided, there will then be the danger of specifying a conceptual grammar too constrictive to fit our ordinary judgments as to what counts as the operations of a 'head of state'.

In considering the analogy between the functional roles of truth and head of state, none of my remarks have suggested that we *actually* equivocate when predicating alethic properties of propositions, and whatever weaknesses there are with the analogy does not, by itself, undermine the success of the view. What they *do* suggest is that, since the mapping of the nature of realizability and stratification onto the nature of truth entails other taxonomies that posit a multiplicity of higher-order roles, then unless the alethic functionalist can somehow commit to both the general functionalist story about realization *and* that a single, general, univocal truth role, she must dismiss these other realization taxonomies implied by functionalist metaphysics. That is, proponents of the view need to offer a principled reason as to why the perfunctory disregard for the functionalist's other taxonomies of realization relations is legitimate. Without having done so, the alethic functionalist is faced with a dilemma: either (i) give an *accurate* functionalist portrayal about the nature of truth – that is, a *real* alethic pluralism which includes a multiplicity of higher-order truth roles in addition to a multiplicity of realizers, but one which, again, reinstates the problems mentioned at the end of Section 2.3 – or, (ii) be left with a devious mapping from functionalist metaphysics – one that cannot identify the concept of truth with either the plurality of higher-order roles or with the plurality of lower-order properties which realize those roles for any given domain of discourse. This dilemma aims to show that, in its present form, only a narrow and inhibited conception of alethic functionalism can make use of the resources and explanatory merit of the functionalist metaphysics from which it is fashioned.

4.3. *Specifying Conjunctions of Platitudes*

Perhaps alethic functionalists are poised to deal with this second problem. Any such riposte, of course, must return to the method of delineating truth's functional role, construed as a conjunction of commonsense platitudes. As both alethic functionalists and non-functionalists admit, platitudes are not all of a piece, and different sets of platitudes are appealing in different ways. While some platitudes are claimed to constitute the core exemplars of truth's 'job description', and are weighted more than others in virtue of how frequently they are exploited, others are outliers, inactive for a specific domain or only loosely connected, and still others seem to be expendable (Lynch 2001, 739–740). Some platitudes are a priori (e.g., 'a proposition is true when its negation is false', 'alethic

concepts are concepts about truth'), while others are informed, in part, by a posteriori reasoning (e.g., 'doxastic attitudes formed through unreliable processes are probably not true', 'honest people usually utter true claims').

In addition to their sheer diversity, different platitudes are expressed in the course of thinking about truth – that is, they are not generated in a historical vacuum. This seems to indicate that alethic functionalists should characterize the functional role of truth as dynamic and revisable. Such a role would allow for platitudes to be introduced, reformulated, or eliminated at different times, thereby giving alethic functionalists a way of dealing with and incorporating new insights and applications, philosophical emendations, refutations and paradox discoveries, inconsistent theoretical results, etc. Accordingly, Lynch (1998, 62–66) compares our ordinary concept of truth to other fluid, elastic, and continuous concepts in game-theoretic and family resemblance theories, arguing that such concepts – and the 'job descriptions' associated with them – can be extended or enriched in mutually incompatible directions. A further reason for going this route is that different epistemic communities may accept or reject different platitudes depending on how those platitudes are characterized, given that different epistemic communities abide by different logics, different normative and inferential commitments, speech practices, etc. Which set of statements about the nature of truth turns out to be the set of platitudes Γ is therefore by no means a given, since it is certainly possible – nay, likely – that a particular linguistic, logical, or conversational function of truth is not part of some given folk repertoire, and therefore unassociated with any explicit or implicit platitude. It would seem, then, that proponents of platitude-based strategies should therefore be prepared for a certain amount of fluidity or 'elasticity' in the behavior of the truth predicate, in the sense that the conventions of epistemically- and theoretically-diverse communities occasion different sets of platitudes. An epistemic community whose platitude-based strategy is grounded in classical logic, for instance, may accept a set of platitudes Γ, with structure and identity conditions A, while a community whose strategy is based on a paraconsistent or dialethic logic may reject Γ in favor of a different set of platitudes with structure and identity conditions B – say, Γ^*. On the functionalist approach that embraces fluidity of functional roles, there should be no principled barrier to two or more epistemic communities diachronically developing largely disparate, and potentially incommensurable, conceptions of what counts as a platitudinous conjunction.[16]

Yet, if our ordinary concept of truth is fluid and extendable in this way, subject to change in the "shifting sands of context", then *any* modification to either the conjunction R, or to individual conjuncts of R, would result in

a functional role with a different structure and identity conditions. In other words, changing the set of platitudes Γ to Γ_{+1} by replacing or altering one of its members will result in a corresponding change to the identity conditions of the conjunction R (and a fortiori the higher-order functional role which it specifies) to R^*, Γ_{+2} to R^{**}, and so forth. In order to prevent the proliferation of higher-order truth roles – R, R^*, R^{**}, R^{***} – alethic functionalists *must* maintain that the structure and identity conditions of the set of platitudes Γ remains constant; they must posit a *final*, static, non-fluid functional role – most likely, one that either covers all possible platitudes or one that sloughs off all platitudes save only the most essential. Alethic functionalists who do otherwise can, of course, appropriate other functionalist taxonomies of realization relations in a non-deviant or ad hoc way, and thus solve the dilemma, but thereby slide back into strong alethic pluralism and the full range of problems that come along for the ride. So, this move backfires; a dynamic and revisable functional role engenders polyvocal or polysemic truth.

Alethic functionalists who posit a static and unrevisable functional role, on the other hand, will need to have a definitive, non-arbitrary answer as to (i) what counts as a platitude, or how to systematically and non-enumeratively distinguish platitudes from non-platitudes, and (ii) what the criterion is for specifying the appropriate necessary and sufficient conditions for the platitudinous conjunction R. Platitudes are generally said to be informal and obvious truisms that constitute a shared folk theory and constrain the behavior of the truth predicate, and the appeal to platitudes is what grounds the alethic functionalist's reference to 'our *ordinary* concept of truth'. Given the problems with positing a dynamic and revisable functional role, functionalists would seem to be committed to the claim that we all acquiesce to the *same* ordinary concept, the *same* set of platitudes. But this is hardly the case. As noted, platitudes form a heterogeneous lot; some are less than obvious (e.g., 'truth is not scalar – assertions are completely true if true at all', 'the truth of a proposition consists in its coherence with other true propositions', 'truth is a great bacchanalian revel, with not a soul sober'), while others are contentious (e.g., 'if a proposition is ever true, then it always is', 'to claim that a proposition is true implies that one believes that proposition', 'a statement's being true or not is independent of any particular subject's means of appraising its truth value'). What's more, most of the platitudes typically appealed to are not the sort of things that ordinary folk say about truth anyways; rather, they are the products of lifetimes spent philosophizing. Consequently, alethic functionalists positing a static and unrevisable functional role need to explain why there *really* are no competing alternatives as to the structure and identity conditions of

R, and why, in *actuality*, all admissible platitudes have equal status and are equally plausible to philosophers and ordinary folk alike – all whilst simultaneously spelling out *which* set of platitudes Γ constitutes *the* functional role of truth.

Separating admissible from inadmissible platitudes entails that *R* cannot be the conjunction of all possible platitudes. Hence, in order to save the view, it might be said of those platitudes that are not obvious or contentious that they are not *real* platitudes. This type of response would be to merely push the questions in (i) and (ii) back. Worse, as alethic functionalists begin to whittle away the inadmissible conjuncts of *R*, they tread on the motivation for platitude-based strategies in the first place – *amassing* platitudes to relate the target concept to other concepts. And as the list of obvious and uncontentious platitudes decreases in order to accommodate only our *most basic and essential* thoughts about truth – the ones we all allegedly abide by – functionalists will have increasingly less resources for demarcating the functional role. The upshot is that our concept of truth as the concept of a functional role demarcated by platitudes will be less and less informative, and it will be less clear how to distinguish alethic functionalism from certain varieties of deflationism.

Even if alethic functionalism could somehow be ameliorated so as to avoid having to postulate a plurality of functional truth roles, it would still be harangued with problems of both vacuity and vagueness. Inflationary alethic theories exploiting a platitude-based strategy are substantive and illuminating only insofar as some, if not all, platitudes are doing some sort of explanatory work. Yet, the nature of platitudes *as* platitudinous seems to obstruct the ability to express something truly illuminating or substantive about the nature of truth. To be sure, alethic functionalism surpasses the theory that holds that a proposition $\langle\sigma\rangle$ is true iff $[(\langle\sigma\rangle =$ 'murder is wrong' & murder is wrong) $\vee (\langle\sigma\rangle =$ 'water is either H_2O, H_3O, or XYZ' & water is either H_2O, H_3O, or XYZ) $\vee (\langle\sigma\rangle =$ 'Climacus is Kierkegaard' & Climacus is Kierkegaard) $\vee \dots]$ (Sher 1999). Yet, the functionalist's strategy of amassing obvious, trivial, or vacuous platitudes invites the charge that, on such a view, the concept of truth itself is obvious, trivial, or vacuous – a consequence that would be anathema to most inflationists. Perhaps it will be objected that this epitomizes a fallacy of division – it might be the case that sets of platitudes can be explanatorily informative where individual platitudes fail to be; a morass of obvious, trivial, and vacuous platitudes does not entail that sets of platitudes are themselves obvious, trivial, and vacuous. Nevertheless, it seems plausible that platitudes are not just obvious, trivial, or vacuous by definition – they are obviously, trivially, or vacuously *true* by definition, in which case using platitudes to specify the

nature of truth requires a precursory grasp of why platitudes are true in the first place. Further, it would still be incumbent on the functionalist to explain which critical mass of trivial and vacuous platitudes is necessary and sufficient to specify the nature of truth. So whatever grip this objection has it has in virtue of pushing the problem back.

Problems with vagueness and ambiguity in linguistic expressions are much aligned, and so it might not be a surprise that problems with one often connect to problems with the other; as Fine (1996, 136) remarks, "vagueness is ambiguity on a grand and systematic scale". In order to deal with the problem of realizers being forced to comprehensively satisfy entire conjunctions, Lynch (2001, 739) notes that the functional theory of truth needs to be amended such that only "partial" or "near-perfect" realizers are necessary for satisfying truth's 'job description'. That is, not every conjunct of R needs to be satisfied in order for a property to count as a realizer of the higher-order role for a domain of discourse – satisfying most of them is good enough. But even if 'partial realizers' were admissible, the impact of vagueness would be tenfold, for it would be then unclear when partial or 'near-perfect' realization could be said to have occurred. The functionalist would need to tell a story about which conjuncts of R are necessary to satisfy and when; yet, such a story would seem to be incompatible with both the claim that all platitudes have equal status, and the commitment to positing a static and unrevisable functional role. So, while the conjunction R that constitutes truth's role apparently gives the meaning of the word 'true' a certain fixedness, that meaning suffers from deficiency. Of course, a functionalized pluralist approach may concede this problem, since the vagueness of 'true' does not entail its ambiguity; but then the further question can be posed about what approximate degree of vagueness there is in the term 'true'. If vagueness is part and parcel of the functional theory of truth, then the alethic functionalist ought to be able to say something informative about it.

All told, there is reason to cast doubt on whether the problems facing alethic functionalism can be comprehensively addressed by a platitude-based strategy. In particular, the identity conditions of alethic concepts need to be spelled out better such that alethic functionalists can show how the ordinary concept of truth is individuated. Revising the theory to meet these and other objections should allow alethic functionalism to provide an adequate, inflationary solution to skepticism about specifying the nature of truth.

NOTES

[1] My use of this phrase is borrowed from Sher (1999).

[2] I aim to remain neutral about what sort of things bearing content are truth-apt. If 'proposition' turns out to be an anguished burden, feel free to substitute the preferred word of choice – statements, sentences or sentence tokens, beliefs, declarative clauses, assertions, etc.

[3] Our ordinary concept of truth, whatever *that* is, involves something like the Aristotelian maxim of "saying of what is that it is". To a first approximation, one might think of it as an abstract mental representation(s) which, among other things, abets the successful categorization and evaluation of information about the world. In saying that our ordinary concept of truth picks out some property, I am suggesting that 'is true' is a legitimate predicate; yet, I intend to here leave it as an open question whether or not the property picked out is the sort of metaphysically robust property required by traditional inflationary approaches (for a view to the contrary, see Brandom 1994, ch. 5).

[4] 'Domains of discourse' – which may hark from Wittgensteinian 'language-games' – here refer to more or less systematized, theoretical structures that are partitioned, in part, by the types of propositions falling within their scope. The boundaries of domains are not static or absolute, or even tightly organized, and there is no hierarchical assumption of priority; as Sellars (1997, 80) remarks, ". . . discourse no longer appears as one plane parallel to another, but as a tangle of intersecting dimensions whose relations with another and with extra-linguistic fact conform to no single or simple pattern". Naturally, it would seem that, as the boundaries of domains shift, so too do the propositions that order them; subsequently, a given sentence $\langle \sigma \rangle$ need not always and everywhere be a member of a single domain – $\langle \sigma \rangle$ may belong to multiple domains, or may be "liminal" or "orphaned" (insofar as its content prevents it from resolutely being a member of one domain or another). This claim is controversial, however, since some alethic functionalists are committed to the view that propositions have their domain-membership essentially, and that no atomic proposition may be true in one domain and false in another, since no atomic proposition is a member of more than one domain (M. P. Lynch, personal communication).

[5] Lynch (1999) advances an interesting and persuasive argument that chimes with this aspect of the problem of the common denominator. He demonstrates that, irrespective of one's alethic theory, endorsing contextualism, perspectivalism, or relativism about content requires one to endorse the same view of facts; if this argument is correct, it is easy to see how propositions can be understood as 'hermeneutically-colored', or facts as 'soft'. One might object that Lynch's argument comes dangerously close to standard relativist problems of self-refutation. If we assume content relativism, as the argument stipulates, then fact relativism – the view that thinkable contents are dependent upon a given conceptual scheme, and therefore that there is no fact of the matter about the semantics of those thinkable contents apart from their conceptual schemes – is true, and so it is a fact that

fact relativism is true; subsequently, all facts are 'soft' facts. The force of the objection is that, because the conclusion – that fact relativism is true, assuming we are relativists about content – is intended to obtain independent of one's perspective on fact relativism or one's alethic theory, not all facts are scheme-relative. In other words, if it is true that content relativism entails fact relativism, and therefore a fact that content relativism entails fact relativism, then, as McDowell (1996, 27–29) says, our warranted appeal to *that* particular thinkable content will be constrained by what is the case, by a factual reality that impresses itself on the conceptual. There will be at least one fact that is not relative, or 'soft'. Perhaps this objection problematically assumes some sort of realism. Yet, even if Lynch's argument does have problems with self-refutation, the spirit of that argument would remain undiminished. Any view of how propositions make correct pronouncements about the world, or whether a proposition is, or corresponds to, a fact, must struggle with the fact that veridicality is based, in part, on the meanings uttered in different usage events occurring in different contexts, and uttered by speakers with unique cognitive architectures, perspectives, embodied experiences, and different (encyclopedic) access to linguistic and epistemic information.

[6] Three such responses – which exploit different aspects of the problem of the common denominator in order to advance skepticism about the adequacy of traditional inflationary approaches – can be found in Kant, Davidson, and virtually all deflationists. As Sher (1999, 138–145) points out, Kant noticed that the vast range of truths requires a single, general explanans, while the vast diversity of truths requires a multiplicity of particular ones. Kant (A58/B83) argued that no alethic theory could adequately specify the nature of truth, if doing so required providing an axiomatic principle or family of principles that is at once both completely particular and completely general; that is, no such definition specifying the denominator common to all truths can be had. This suggests a methodological tension in accounting for the particular differences between true propositions while *simultaneously* abstracting away from them when generalizing over all propositions, i.e., the axiomatic principles which motivate particularity compromise, and are compromised, by principles which motivate generality. Davidson has likewise remarked that virtually all of these approaches' attempts to specify the nature of truth are unattractive in some light or another; he writes, "...the intuition or hope remains that we can characterize truth using some fairly simple formula ... though there are many such formulas on the market, none of them seems to keep clear of fairly obvious counterexamples" (2001, 625). The skepticism endorsed by Davidson is of a very different sort – a sort of quietism that takes the nature of truth to be simply unspecifiable or explanatorily primitive. Deflationists, in claiming that truth simply has no nature, or that a truth predicate does not express a substantive property, often point to exactly these sorts of explanatory inadequacies. Hence, the reason traditional alethic theories appear unable to account for all members of a collection of propositions like (1)–(10) equally well is that there is little-to-nothing to explain in the first place. Accordingly, deflationary approaches suggest that alethic predicates are merely a way to replace talk about the world with talk about language, and their significance is exhausted by their expressive function. The only axiomatic principles needed to deal with the explanatory burdens of alethic theories are certain exceedingly puritanical schemas (e.g., disquotational, prosentential); as such, truth simply becomes an "empty compliment paid to a proposition".

[7] As Wright (1992) demonstrates, showing that the truth predicate is merely an endorsement device requires more than merely using the disquotation schema to explicate the semantic norms for truth predication. Hence, the deflationist cannot consistently maintain that the predicate 'is true' is nothing over and above the predicate 'is warrantedly assert-

ible', since the predication of truth to a proposition about how the world is coincides with, but is distinct from, being justified in asserting that claim. If Wright's argument here is correct, then countenancing the normative dimension of truth indeed calls for an inflationary theory. There are, of course, standard responses (e.g., Brandom 1994; McGrath 2003; Rorty 1998) to this standard line of criticism; my only concern here, however, is to motivate a reason for being *skeptical* of skepticism.

[8] Pushed to the logical limit, such a pluralism could engender this rather odd consequence: the truth predicate appended to propositions can be informed by both substantive and insubstantive axiomatic principles (depending on the subject matter and the norms of the epistemic communities involved) and can be made to accept that both inflationary and deflationary theories add to our understanding of the nature of truth *without any* inconsistency.

[9] For a contrary conception of truth as relativized to different kinds of cognizers, see Unwin (1987).

[10] Another construal might suggest a further distinction between inter-level and intra-level weak alethic pluralism, where the latter variety merely adds the suggestion that propositions *within* a given domain of discourse can also be true in different ways. This view would be less conservative and permit additional variability, and would be tantamount to a rejection of the assumption that the unit of contextual determination and partitioning is a domain of discourse; analysis at the level of domains is too blunt or monolithic to be useful in revealing the ways in which the property of being true is determined by context or dialogical factors.

[11] This move also affords strong alethic pluralism a segue into non-classical logics by allowing for the predication of truth to inconsistent propositions, insofar as the alethic properties predicated of a proposition are not co-extensive.

[12] Wright has been ambivalent about his stance on strong and weak alethic pluralism, and in particular, about the relationship between alethic concepts and properties. At times, Wright (1995, 215; see also Lynch 2001, fn. 6) has been concerned to express a homogeneous view of alethic concepts, and seems to have recently backed down from strong alethic pluralism (Wright 1996, 924; 2001, 761). At other times, however, he has suggested that the differential characteristics of truth predicates are meted out by different alethic concepts (e.g., Wright 1996, 865; 1999).

[13] Of course, revising the ordinary concept of validity is certainly a possibility. For instance, Beall and Restall advocate a view of logical consequence that is exactly similar to alethic pluralism:

Logic is a matter of truth preservation in all cases. Different *logics* are given by different explications of the cases in question. [Debates] arise from different accounts of the "cases" in which claims are true or not. Once this realization is made, apparent disagreements between some formal logics are shown to be just that: merely *apparent*. A number of different logics each have their place in formalizing and regulating inference. Each is an elucidation of our pretheoretic, intuitive notion of logical consequence. (2000, 493)

As Beall and Restall have it, logical concepts like validity are not amenable to being captured by monistic theories because the nature of logic is fundamentally plural. Any such monistic theory will, at best, give only a partial story of the nature of logical concepts like validity, as there are no regularities that extend throughout the set of valid arguments.

Logical pluralism is interesting here because, when combined with alethic pluralism, the objection that sound arguments containing propositions situated in different domains of discourse are not necessarily truth-preserving in valid inferences becomes exponentially

more important to overcome. If 'mixed' arguments fail to preserve any one particular alethic property in a valid inference, such that the meaning of 'true' is ambiguous or equivocal, then certainly no one particular truth property will be preserved with a multiplicity of concepts of valid logical inference in play. Rather than having, say, valid arguments consisting of true premises, we will have valid$_7$ arguments with true$_2$ premises, valid$_4$ arguments with true$_1$ premises, valid$_3$ arguments with true$_8$ premises, and so on. When the meaning of 'valid' staggers as well, the sense of rational connectivity mentioned earlier is severed from both ends – only a slight intersection will remain, with a combinatorily exploded number of distinct alethic properties being transmitted through a network of different types of valid inferences.

[14] Alethic functionalists may want to contend that their view should not be construed as a version of pluralism about truth, and that any problems with either theory do not necessarily impugn the other. The two theories are indeed distinct. Yet, both pluralism and functionalism have been closely and explicitly associated in the literature, with the latter often construed as an offshoot of the former by its own proponents (Lynch 1998, 2000; Pettit 1996).

[15] It is not always clear which construal Lynch (2001, 727–732), like Wright, intends to make; he writes, "Functional concepts are concepts of properties, states, or objects that occupy or play a functional role". In particular, where the functionally-specified concept of pain is concerned, "the concept of pain will therefore apply to any property or state that fits this job description, that realizes the causal role", and where truth is concerned, "Our concept of truth is the concept of whatever property a proposition has when the world is as that proposition says that it is".

[16] It may seem implausible that two or more epistemic communities could develop such radically different conceptions of what counts as a platitudinous conjunction, or that particular platitudes could be interpreted differently. After all, it will be said, our ordinary concept of truth is a minimal concept – represented by the T-schema – which concerns how things are in the world, and one which everyone operates with regardless of what additional platitudes supplement it. I think this is reasonable response, although, it is not fully supported by anthropological data (Maffie 2002). Even still, notice that it still does not preclude different epistemic communities from appealing to different platitudes representing the T-schema (disquotation schema, equivalence schema, prosentence forming operator, etc.) while rejecting others. That is, while it seems reasonable to assume that one of the conjuncts of R must be the T-schema, there are different platitudes for expressing that T-schema, and there is no real consensus for which has pride of place. Thus, it remains plausible that different epistemic communities can develop different alethic concepts, where such concepts pick out numerically distinct functional role as demarcated by different conjunctions of platitudes. Second, this response assumes that there are at least some platitudes which are indefeasible and unrevisable. Wright (1992, 34; 2001, 760), for instance, proffers two such platitudes: 'to assert is to present as true' and 'any truth-apt content has a significant negation which is also truth-apt'. The first, however, is flatly problematic and susceptible to myriad counterexamples; there are numerous times when declarative clauses are asserted, but are not presented as true: flirting behavior, playing games, most instances of metonymy, playing "devil's advocate", pedagogical techniques, etc. come to mind. The second might also be revisable, at least insofar as there still are interesting logical issues regarding the concept of negation.

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