

# FUNCTIONAL PLURALISM

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Michael Lynch's *True to Life: Why Truth Matters* is a wide-ranging, intellectually stimulating essay on truth, encompassing many of its aspects: metaphysical, epistemological, political, and others. Lynch advocates a robust notion of truth, captured by the following positive theses:

- (A) Truth is objective.
- (B) Truth is normative.
- (C) Truth is a worthy goal of inquiry.
- (D) Truth has an intrinsic value (i.e., is an end in itself).

His criticisms are directed at:

- (A) Relativism and nihilism about truth.
- (B) Deflationist theories of truth.
- (C) Existent 'substantive' theories of truth (causal correspondence, coherence, ideal justification, etc.).

The book is divided into three parts: I. 'Cynical Myths', II. 'False Theories' and III. 'Why Truth matters'. Part I offers a diagnosis and criticism of views that naturally lead to cynicism with respect to truth: (a) the view that truth is unattainable, (b) the view that truth is relative, and (c) the view that falsehood is often more useful than truth. Part II offers a critique of prominent theories of truth. These are divided into three groups: (i) pragmatism and coherentism, (ii) reductive naturalism and causal correspondence, and (iii) fictionalism, minimalism, and deflationism. Part III argues for the normativity and intrinsic value of truth based on personal as well as political considerations.

Since I agree with most of what Lynch says in this book (including his four positive claims and his criticisms of current attitudes and theories), I will best be able to contribute to the debate by concentrating on those parts of the book which are exploratory in nature and where the question of how to go on from here is largely open. In particular, I will critically (if sympathetically) examine Lynch's specific proposal of a *functional-pluralist* theory of truth. In addition to *True to Life*, my discussion will be informed by his papers 'A Functionalist Theory of Truth'<sup>1</sup> and 'Truth and Multiple Realizability'.<sup>2</sup>

1. In Lynch (ed.), *The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives*, (MIT, 2001), pp. 723–49.  
2. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 82 (2004), pp. 384–408.

## 1. Functional Pluralism

Lynch convincingly argues that deflationists are misled by the shortcomings of existing theories of truth into concluding that substantive theorising about truth is not possible. But this conclusion is blind to the possibility of new ways of thinking about truth, one of which is exemplified by Lynch's own positive proposal: *functional pluralism*.

Functional pluralism is an alternative to familiar conceptions of truth: both to substantive, positive conceptions, exemplified by traditional correspondence, coherence, and ideal justification, and to sceptical, anti-substantive conceptions, exemplified by deflationism, relativism, and nihilism. Lynch agrees with the sceptics' criticism of the traditional theories, but holds that a substantive, robust, and explanatory theory of truth is feasible as well as philosophically important. Unlike deflationists he argues that truth "needs to be substantively explained, not explained away";<sup>3</sup> and while their lesson from the failure of traditional theories is that truth is lacking a substantive nature, he concludes that truth has a complex and multi-faceted nature, amenable to substantive theorising. A similar conclusion was reached by Crispin Wright who, indeed, was a pioneer in this area.<sup>4</sup> I, too, have recently arrived at the same conclusion.<sup>5</sup> Various aspects of this approach have their roots in the American Pragmatists and the later Wittgenstein, as well as in Dummett,<sup>6</sup> Resnik,<sup>7</sup> Putnam,<sup>8</sup> Lynch,<sup>9</sup> and others.

In *True to Life* (and the two articles mentioned above) Lynch develops a special version of the 'substantivist' approach to truth that takes into account, and offers an explanation of, both the unity and the diversity of truth. All too briefly, his proposal can be summed up by the following points:

### *Functional Pluralism*

1. Truth is a substantive concept/property,<sup>10</sup> has a substantive nature, and requires a substantive explanation.
2. Truth is context- or domain-sensitive.
3. Basic intuition: truth is both unified and diversified—both the same in all domains and different in different domains.
4. The conflict apparent in (3) may be resolved by distinguishing between (i) the concept/property of truth, and (ii) the nature of truth.

3. Michael Lynch, 'Truth and Multiple Realizability', p. 384.
4. Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, (Harvard, 1992); 'Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed' in Simon Blackburn and Keith Simmons (eds.), *Truth*, (Oxford University Press, 1999) pp. 203–38; and 'Minimalism, Deflationism, Pragmatism, Pluralism', in *The Nature of Truth*, pp. 751–87.
5. Gila Sher, 'On the Possibility of a Substantive Theory of Truth' *Synthese*, 117 (1999), pp. 133–72; and 'In Search of a Substantive Theory of Truth', *Journal of Philosophy*, 101 (2004), pp. 5–36.
6. Michael Dummett, 'Realism', In *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Harvard, 1978), pp. 145–65 (originally published 1963).
7. M.D. Resnik, 'Immanent Truth', *Mind*, 99 (1990), pp. 405–24.
8. Hilary Putnam, 'Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind'. *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994), pp. 445–517.
9. Michael Lynch, *Truth in Context: An Essay on Pluralism and Objectivity* (MIT, 1998).
10. When I speak of truth as a 'concept/property' I mean that truth is on one level a concept, on another a property, and what I say applies to it on both levels.

5. Truth is a single, high-order concept/property.
6. The concept/property of truth is identified with the functional role of truth.
7. The functional role of truth is determined by a series of platitudes.
8. This role may be fulfilled by different properties in different domains.
9. These properties constitute<sup>11</sup> the nature of truth in those domains.
10. Truth supervenes on these properties but is not reducible to them.
11. As a result, truth is *one* concept/property with *many* natures.
12. We may say that truth is multiply-realised in different domains.
13. How truth is realised in different domains, it is the job of the theory of truth to tell us.
14. While truth is a high-order concept/property, the properties that realise it are of low-order.
15. The low-order realisers of truth are the kind of properties that traditional philosophers identify with truth: causal correspondence, coherence, ideal justification, etc.

Thus, in the domain of everyday physical discourse the role of truth might be realised by causal correspondence, while in the domain of moral or legal discourse it might be realised by coherence. That is, assuming the job of truth is to give a correct account of the facts, it may be the case that a physical utterance gives a correct account of the facts by standing in an appropriate causal connection to its referents, while a moral utterance gives a correct account of the facts by cohering with a certain body of beliefs.<sup>12</sup>

As I have mentioned above, I am very sympathetic to Lynch's overall approach to truth and to his general conception of a theory of truth. But I have several criticisms of the way he works out this conception as well as a few suggestions for revision and future development. My criticisms concern:

- Lynch's platitudinous characterisation of the concept/property of truth.
- His construal of the realisers of truth.
- His treatment of logical complexity and logical inference.

I will conclude with a proposal for overcoming these difficulties:

- A functional-pluralist *correspondence* theory of truth.

## 2. Platitudes

Functional pluralism divides the theory of truth into two parts:

1. A general account of truth regardless of field of discourse: an account of the concept/property of truth.

11. 'Constitute' is a philosophically loaded notion, but here I use it in its everyday sense.

12. (i) As in the case of concepts and properties, I treat truth as applying on one level to propositions and on other levels to utterances, statements, assertions, sentences, beliefs, etc. (ii) My use of 'fact' here is colloquial, i.e., it involves no ontological commitment to facts as objects.

2. Particular accounts of the workings of truth in different areas of discourse: accounts of the multiple realisers or natures of truth.

The present criticism concerns (1).

According to functional pluralism:

- (a) The concept or property of truth—that is, what is common to truth in all its fields of application, its universal characteristic—is its *role* or *function*.
- (b) The function or role of truth is determined and described by a set of *platitudes* about truth.

The platitudes of truth include, but are not exhausted by:

- The proposition that p is true if and only if p.
- The proposition that p is false if and only if it is not the case that p.
- Propositions are what is true and false.
- Every proposition has a negation.
- A proposition can be justified but not true, and true but not justified.
- True propositions represent, or correspond to, the facts, and false ones do not.
- Facts are what make propositions true.
- . . .
- To claim that p is true implies that one believes that p.
- One knows that p only if it is true that p.
- Honest people typically speak the truth.
- Deliberately asserting what you know to be false is a lie. (Lynch, 'A Functionalist Theory of Truth', In *The Nature of Truth*, pp. 730–1)

What does Lynch mean by 'platitude'? Lynch seems to have in mind the following characterisation of platitude:

*Platitude—a pretheoretical, commonsensical, 'folk' principle; a principle belonging to 'the folk theory of truth'.<sup>13</sup>*

What principles belong to 'the folk theory of truth'?

The principles we employ in our folk theory are those the folk tacitly believe, or are rationally committed to. They aren't those principles that result from technical philosophical argument: thus principles that concern the nature of correspondence, reference, coherence, superassertibility, and the like are not part of our folk theory. ('Truth and Multiple Realizability', p. 393, fn.)

13. See 'A Functionalist Theory of Truth', p. 732, and 'Truth and Multiple Realizability', p. 393.

An earlier advocate of the platitude approach is Crispin Wright. Wright understands ‘platitudinous’ as ‘non-theoretical’, ‘ordinary’, ‘intuitive’, contrasting it with ‘fine grained’ and ‘substantive’. More generally, he distinguishes between platitude as the “phrase” by which a given intuition is “characteristically expressed” and the “further substantive content” of this intuition.<sup>14</sup> “The root idea,” he suggests, “is that we should not look for more of a truth predicate than its compliance with a certain set of very general, very intuitive principles—indeed, a set of *platitudes*.”<sup>15</sup> And it is this minimalistic requirement on the truth predicate that stands behind his characterisation of his theory of truth as “minimalist”.<sup>16</sup>

*Worry: A theory based on platitudes is uncritical and unsubstantive.* An obvious worry about the appeal to platitudes in philosophical theorising is their uncritical nature and the unsubstantive nature of theories based on them. By a *substantive theory* I mean a theory that is:

- *Theoretical;*
- *Systematic;*
- *Explanatory;*
- *Rich in consequences and applications;*
- *Based on a thorough and critical investigation;*
- *Aims at a deep understanding;*
- *Provides rigorous and precise formulations.*

...

A substantive theory of truth is concerned with the substantive rather than the platitudinous features of truth, and is committed to providing a substantive rather than a platitudinous account of these features. That is, a substantive theory of truth is interested in just what the platitudes leave out: the ‘theoretical’ treatment, the ‘fine-grained interpretation’, and the ‘substantive content’ of its subject matter. A substantive theory of truth may turn to platitudes as an unavoidable starting point, but it strives to replace them with substantive, theoretical and fine-grained principles.

While neither Wright nor Lynch explicitly addresses this worry, they do seem to be aware of it. Wright, in his later writings, describes the platitudes as “a priori” and “analytic” rather than as non-theoretical, coarsely-grained, and unsubstantive; and he acknowledges their controversial nature.<sup>17</sup> Lynch, on his part, emphasises the platitudes’ defeasibility and revisability, saying they need to be sorted out and be either admitted or rejected by the theory of truth itself.

But why did Wright and Lynch appeal to platitudes to begin with? It seems to me that the reasoning underlying their (and other philosophers’) attraction

14. Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity*, p. 27.

15. *Truth and Objectivity*, p. 34.

16. See *Truth and Objectivity*, pp. 24–5, 33–5, 37–8 and 72.

17. See ‘Truth: A Traditional Debate Reviewed’, and ‘Minimalism, Deflationism, Pragmatism, Pluralism’.

to platitudes is something along these lines: one way to reject the deflationist claim that all principles of truth are platitudinous without fully contesting it is to say that the *global* principles of truth are indeed platitudinous but its *local* principles are substantive. The deflationist identifies the principles of truth with its universal principles. But truth is a complex and multi-faceted notion, with local as well as global principles, and if we take the former into account we can accommodate the intuition that truth is a substantive notion with the intuition that it is a platitudinous notion. The 'trick' is to introduce a 'division of labour': truth is locally substantive, globally platitudinous. This is what anti-deflationist minimalism seems to be saying: the deflationist errs in pronouncing truth unsubstantive, but his intuitions about the platitudinous character of truth are right.

I find this reasoning unconvincing. Nothing about truth rules out the possibility of substantive global principles, and no minimalist argument to the contrary exists. Indeed, none of the minimalists known to me have recognised the need to argue for the claim that the global principles of truth are not substantive.

Could one object on the grounds that the existence of substantive global principles of truth would conflict with pluralism about truth? I think not. So long as the global principles are partial—that is, the set of global principles does not provide a complete explanation of truth—there is need for local principles as well, hence, for plurality. In other words: plurality is a matter of partiality, not platitudinousness; and substantiveness is not opposed to partiality. Pluralism about truth does not rule out the existence of global principles of truth, substantive or otherwise; what it rules out is the exhaustiveness of the global principles. Pluralism about truth is perfectly compatible with the existence of global substantive principles of truth provided these principles do not exhaust the topic of truth.

Given the goal of a substantive theory of truth, therefore, a better working hypothesis is:

*WORKING HYPOTHESIS:*

*All principles of truth (of interest to the philosopher) are substantive, but substantive principles are not necessarily universal (global). It is possible that some substantive principles of truth are universal (i.e., apply to truth in all areas of discourse); others partial (that is, apply to truth in some, but not all, areas of discourse).*

Now, although in recent years, as I have indicated above, both Wright and Lynch have de-emphasised the trivial nature of the platitudes, my worries are not fully assuaged. It is one thing to acknowledge the platitudes' revisability and be non-committal with respect to their substantiveness, and another to demand, as I believe we should, that trivial principles be eventually replaced by, or developed into, substantive principles.

(Of course, it could turn out that the universal principles of truth are in fact platitudinous. But to claim that this is the case requires real demonstration—something that no minimalist up to now has provided or even attempted to provide.)

The reader would probably like to see examples of potentially substantive global principles of truth. In 'In Search of a Substantive Theory of Truth' I drew an outline of two such principles:

1. *Immanence*: a 'core' principle that tells us how certain basic features of human thought—immanence (with small 'i'), transcendence, and normativity—are responsible for the emergence of a standard of truth.
2. *Logicity*: a 'specialised' principle that tells us how one factor of truth, logical structure, that due to its special features operates in all areas of discourse, affects the truth value of sentences.

Logicity is an especially interesting example of a universal, yet partial, principle of truth: although logical structure is just one factor in the truth of sentences, it has certain traits—in particular, a very strong invariance property—that make it blind to differences between domains of discourse, hence universal.

### 3. Realisers of Truth

Truth, according to Lynch, is a high-order functional property, realised in different domains by various lower-order properties. Lynch borrows his functionalist framework from the philosophy of mind and ethics. Following Putnam,<sup>18</sup> it is common to view mental properties—pain, desire, belief—as higher-order, functional properties, realised by (or supervening upon) neuro-physiological properties. And following G.E. Moore,<sup>19</sup> we may think of moral properties—such as goodness—as higher-order value properties, realised by (or supervening upon) lower-level natural properties, such as pleasure. Lynch applies the same duality to truth: the higher-order normative property 'true' is realised by different lower-level properties in different domains:

In every discourse, the concept of truth is the concept of a particular higher-order property—the property of having the property that plays the truth role for that discourse. But at the level of deep metaphysics, alethic functionalism allows that this role may be realised by distinct properties that depend on the discourse in question. (Lynch, 'A Functionalist Theory of Truth', p. 745)

What are the lower-level properties that realise truth? According to Lynch they are such properties as those identified with truth by traditional theorists. For example:

18. Hilary Putnam, 'The Nature of Mental States', in *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical Papers*, vol. 2. (Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 429–41 (originally 'Psychological Predicates', in W.H. Capitan and D.D. Merrill (eds.), *Art, Mind, and Religion* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1967), pp. 37–48).
19. *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge University Press, 1903).

*Realisers of Truth:*

- *Causal correspondence:* (Possibly) realises truth in the domain of ‘middle-sized dry goods’;<sup>20</sup>
- *Coherence:* (Possibly) realises truth in the moral and juridical domains;
- *Ideal justification:* (Possibly) realises truth in the domain of theoretical science.

I think Lynch’s conception of the realisers of truth is somewhat problematic, and I will point to four problems:

*Problems*

- A. Most of Lynch’s prospective realisers of truth are of the same type as truth itself.
- B. Lynch’s criticism of the view that truth *is* coherence/ideal justification applies to the view that truth *is realised by* coherence/ideal justification as well.
- C. Lynch’s approach fails to explain plurality on the atomic level.
- D. Lynch’s strongest case for coherence as a realiser of truth—the juridical case—is weak.

*A. Most Realisers of Truth are of the Same Type as Truth Itself.*

A central, philosophically pertinent category under which truth falls is the following:

*Category:*

- Property of propositions (beliefs, sentences, etc.);
- Normative property;
- Property having to do with correctness of propositions;
- Property applicable in a wide range of discourse.

But the same category is just as central and just as philosophically pertinent to two of Lynch’s purported realisers of truth, namely, coherence and ideal justification. These, like truth, are properties of propositions (beliefs, sentences, etc.); they are normative properties; they have to do with the correctness of propositions; and they apply (in principle) to multiple domains of discourse. Yet Lynch places truth on one side of the functional divide, coherence and justification on the other. In contrast, all mental concepts are placed on the same side of the functional divide, and so do all moral-and-normative concepts. Thus, in the philosophy of mind, the functional concepts are mental (‘pain’, for instance) while the realiser concepts are physical (such as ‘brain states’); and in ethics the functional concepts are moral and normative (‘good’, for instance), while the realiser concepts are psychological and non-normative (such as ‘pleasure’). This gives the functional theories of mind and morals a considerable explanatory advantage that Lynch’s theory lacks: The functional account of mental and moral concepts provides at least a partial explanation of these concepts and their differences (for example, the differences between different mental concepts) in

20. ‘A Functionalist Theory of Truth’, p. 724.



terms of their realisers. Had Lynch treated both ‘truth’ and ‘coherence’ as functional concepts, he could do the same in the alethic domain. For example, he could explain the difference in complexity between truth and coherence (partly) by saying that coherence is realised in the same way in all domains, while truth is realised in different ways in different domains. But he cannot.

One possible response by Lynch is that there *is* an important difference in type between truth and coherence: truth is a higher-order, functional property, while coherence is a lower order, realiser property. But these differences are internal to Lynch’s theory. There is nothing about truth and coherence (outside Lynch’s theory) that would lead us to think of one as higher in order than the other, or of one as functional and the other as a realiser. What is relevant to understanding the differences between truth, coherence, and ideal justification are such things as:

- The constraints they set upon propositions;
- The domains of discourse they apply to;
- Their constancy or variability across domains;
- Their epistemic significance;

Etc.

But such things are difficult to compare when the properties in question are placed on different levels: one as explanandum, the other as explanans.

*B. Lynch’s Criticisms of Coherence and Ideal Justification as Prototypes of Truth Apply to Them as Realisers of Truth as Well.*

Another difficulty with Lynch’s conception of the realisers of truth is that some of his criticisms of theories that identify coherence or ideal justification with truth apply to theories that regard them as realisers of truth as well. Let us focus on coherence. Lynch describes the coherence theory of truth as follows:

According to the coherence theory of truth, . . . it is coherent believing that makes it so. That is, a proposition is true . . . if and only if a belief in that proposition would be a member of some coherent system of beliefs. A belief system is coherent, roughly, to the degree that its members are (a) consistent with each other, and (b) display mutual relations of support. On this picture, in other words, beliefs don’t fit the facts; they fit with other beliefs. (*True to Life*, p. 69)

One of Lynch’s criticisms of the coherence theory of truth appears in the following example:

Consider the following little belief system

God exists.

God wrote the Bible.

God is never wrong.

The Bible says that God exists and that He is never wrong.

This is a highly coherent little system. . . . It all hangs together. . . . But just because it hangs together doesn't mean it is true. It may be true, but its coherence doesn't make it so. (*True to Life*, pp. 69–70)

The point is that no matter how well a proposition P coheres with a given body of beliefs, the question still arises: 'is P true?'. To say that its coherence makes it true, Lynch says, is to adopt an excessively weak standard of truth: "Coherence theories are too permissive [to capture the idea of truth]."<sup>21</sup>

But the same objection also applies to coherence as a realiser of truth. Yes, proposition P in, say, moral discourse D, may cohere with all our moral (and other relevant) beliefs, but this by itself does not make it true. The excessive permissiveness of coherence makes it an inappropriate screen for truth in any domain, hence an inappropriate realiser of truth. Thus, if Lynch's criticism of the coherence theory of truth is right, then coherence is too weak to serve as a realiser of truth in any domain.

Lynch may reply that coherence satisfies all the platitudes of truth in certain domains. But this strikes me as unreasonable. If the platitudes of truth include what most people (prior to philosophical theorising) believe about truth, then one of the platitudes is: 'Truth is not coherence; coherence is too weak to serve as truth.' And this platitude, being universal, applies to all domains of truth.

*C. Difficulty in Accounting for the Plurality of Truth on the Atomic Level.*

A well-known challenge to pluralism about truth is posed by 'mixed' propositions and inferences. Suppose the physical and aesthetic domains admitted different kinds of truth (neither one included in the other). What kind of truth would a mixed proposition, obtained by conjoining a physical proposition to an aesthetic proposition by, say, a logical operator, have? For example, what kind of truth would

- (1) Snow is white *and* Snow is beautiful

have? Or suppose the physical and comic domains admitted different kinds of truth (neither included in the other). What kind of truth would be transmitted from the premises to the conclusion of a valid and (presumably) sound inference like

- (2) Wet cats are funny.
- (3) This cat is wet.
- Ergo:*
- (4) This cat is funny?<sup>22</sup>

Lynch resolves this problem by distinguishing (as we have seen) between the property and realisers of truth. Truths in different domains differ in their realisers but have the same functional property; and it is this functional property

21. *True to Life*, p. 69.

22. Christine Tappolet, 'Mixed Inferences: A Problem for Pluralism about Truth Predicates', *Analysis*, 57 (1997), pp. 209–10, at p. 209.

that is possessed by mixed propositions and transmitted by valid inferences, whether uniform or mixed.

But now the same question arises with respect to the realisers of truth. What property realises the truth of (1)? And how can a proposition whose truth is due to, say, physical correspondence transmit its truth to another proposition that can only be true by, say, cohering with a body of comic beliefs? Lynch's answer to this question is:

[T]he functionalist . . . can appeal to a simple, and indeed, a traditional solution: Apply one's theory of truth initially only to atomic propositions. . . . Having done so, it is then open to functionalism, as it is to any theory of truth, to understand the truth of a compound proposition in the standard recursive way, namely as a truth-function of the atomic propositions of which it is composed. ('Truth and Multiple Realizability', p. 396)

And this solution can presumably be adapted to the problem of mixed inferences as well.

I think Lynch's solution to the problem of plurality due to recursive logical operators is too quick, but let us assume it's OK. His solution, however, does not apply to mixed truths and inferences whose plurality is *not* due to such operators, and in particular to plurality in (or involving) atomic propositions. Consider the mixed atomic proposition,

(5) Causing pain is bad.

(If you prefer to parse (5) as non-atomic, take any atomic proposition with 'mixed' concepts, that is concepts from multiple domains, and apply the following line of thought to it.) Assuming (5) is true, what is its realiser—coherence? ideal justification? something else? The answer to this question, according to Lynch, depends on the domain of (5). How are domains determined in Lynch's theory? Here is what he says:

Intuitively, a propositional domain is simply an area of thought. For example, moral propositions form one domain and propositions about mathematics form another. Propositional domains are individuated by the types of propositions of which they are composed. Propositions are in turn individuated by the *concepts* (moral, legal, mathematical) that compose the propositions. This means that ultimately, what makes one domain different from another derives from differences in the concepts we employ in thinking about different subject matters. . . . In so far as it makes sense to distinguish our thought about morality as different from our thought about physics (and surely it does make sense), that distinction must ultimately derive from differences between the *concepts* that are distinctive of each domain. In this way, our reflections, e.g., on the concept of number impact how we understand the difference between mathematical propositions and propositions about the physical world. ('Truth and Multiple Realizability', p. 399, my italics)

That is, the domain of (5) is determined by the concepts appearing in (5). But (5) is constituted by concepts that point to three different domains: the physical domain ('causing'), the mental domain ('pain'), and the moral domain ('bad'). So which of these three domains—the physical, the mental, and the moral—does (5) belong to? What is the realiser of (5)?

Could (5) be realised by coherence or ideal justification? The problem with coherence and ideal justification as realisers of (5) is that they are irreducibly properties of full propositions. As such they cannot account for plurality arising on the sub-propositional level, that is, plurality due to the diversity of concepts appearing in a given proposition (or given propositions). Lynch rules out plurality on the atomic level. Atomic propositions, he says, are always "domain specific"; "[n]o atomic proposition is a member of more than one domain."<sup>23</sup> I believe plurality can occur in atomic propositions, and although I do not wish to rule out in advance the possibility of an adequate account of atomic plurality in accordance with Lynch's conception of the realisers of truth, I think the problem is more difficult to solve if we take irreducibly propositional properties as realisers.

More importantly, the case of mixed atomic propositions suggests a novel approach to the plurality of truth, an approach that neither Lynch nor Wright, as far as I know, has considered. According to this approach, the plurality of truth is rooted not in differences between complete propositions but in differences between sub-propositional units: names, predicates, and functions. As a result, the plurality of truth is reduced to a plurality of reference, satisfaction, and fulfilment. (5) is realised by a combination of three distinct forms of reference/satisfaction/fulfilment: M-reference, P-fulfilment, and R-satisfaction, where M, P, and R are the forms of reference/satisfaction/fulfilment applicable to mental, physical, and moral concepts, respectively.<sup>24</sup> This approach rules out coherence and ideal justification as realisers of truth, and it opens the way to a new conception of the realisers of truth, which I will briefly describe in (E) below.

*D. The Case for Coherence as a Realiser of Truth in the Juridical Domain is Inconclusive.*

Does any domain 'compel' us to view truth as realised by coherence? The juridical domain, the domain of "propositions of law",<sup>25</sup> is Lynch's strongest candidate for such a domain:

[P]ropositions of law, . . . [i.e.] claims made about what the law requires or allows, including both general claims, such as the proposition that segregation is illegal or that the law protects flag burning, and specific propositions, say, that Exxon must compensate Alaska for an oil spill[,] . . . are surely capable of being true. And yet propositions of law . . . don't correspond to something concrete and mind independent called 'The Law'. It seems

23. 'Truth and Multiple Realizability', p. 400.

24. This analysis could be further contextualised so that P-reference in, say, a fictional context would differ (in a systematic way) from P-reference in a 'real-life' context.

25. *True to Life*, p. 44.

more likely that propositions of law are true because they fit or cohere with a particular *system* of like propositions—the *body of law*—and false when they don't fit with that system. (*True to Life*, p. 44)

I am not convinced that the juridical domain favours coherence over other realisers of truth. Lynch's main reasons for his view are negative: propositions of law are not realised by causal correspondence; therefore, they are realised by coherence. (He does not consider ideal justification as a realiser of truth in this domain.) We can break up Lynch's line of reasoning into four parts:

(i) “[*P*]ropositions of law clearly aren't true in the way that propositions about spruce trees are: they don't correspond to something concrete and mind independent called ‘The Law’.”<sup>26</sup> This reason assumes a very rigid traditional conception of correspondence: Correspondence is limited to truths about concrete, middle-sized, physical objects like spruce trees. In my view this conception is altogether unreasonable. The assumption that correspondence requires “concrete and mind independent” objects is one of the reasons existent correspondence theories, theories of causal correspondence, for example, have failed. These theories cannot account for truths about abstract or mind-dependent objects—numbers, thoughts, fictional characters, social institutions, laws, etc.; but many truths are just about such objects. Once we get rid of this assumption, however, once we allow that correspondence is a complex, multi-dimensional relation, applicable to objects of different kinds, the fact that laws are not concrete, mind-independent objects is not a barrier to a correspondence theory of legal truth.

(ii) “[*L*]aws are social constructs par excellence. We make laws.”<sup>27</sup> We also make tables, yet truths about tables are paradigmatic of correspondence truth. Similarly, many truths about social institutions, say, the US congress, are straightforwardly construed as correspondence truths. (Consider: ‘The US congress is now in session.’)

(iii) “We make laws, and different communities make different laws depending on their citizens’ interests, background, and attitudes.”<sup>28</sup> This kind of plurality can be accounted for by correspondence, simply by introducing an indexing device. Such an indexing is at work in many unproblematic correspondence truths, for instance, ‘Bush is president’ (indexed to the American political system in 2005).

(iv) “[*A*] proposition of law is true when it coheres with its immediate grounds and with the grounds of propositions inferentially connected to it. In short, legal truth consists in coherence with the body of law.”<sup>29</sup> This is Lynch's interpretation of Dworkin's characterisation of legal truth:

Everyone thinks that propositions of Law are true or false (or neither) in virtue of other, more familiar kinds of propositions on which these propositions

26. *True to Life*, p. 44; my italics.

27. *True to Life*, p. 44; my italics.

28. *True to Life*, p. 44; my italics.

29. ‘A Functionalist Theory of Truth’, p. 737; my italics. See also *True to Life*, p. 44.

of law are (as we might put it) parasitic. These more familiar propositions furnish what I shall call the “grounds” of law. (Ronald Dworkin, *Law’s Empire* (Harvard, 1986), p. 4)

Dworkin’s point, according to Lynch, is this:

[L]egal propositions are *naturally* thought of as true because of their relation to other “grounding” propositions, not because they correspond to mind-independent objects called “laws” (or worse, “The Law”). . . . [W]hat is included within the grounds—what types of propositions, in other words, make propositions about the law true—is a matter of serious dispute. But at the very least, they include those propositions expressed in the Constitution, previous statutes, and past judicial decisions. It is these sorts of propositions that we think matter for whether it is true that[, say,] a particular corporation is required to pay compensation. Collectively, we might refer to them as the body of law. (‘A Functionalist Theory of Truth’, p. 736–7)

Dworkin, however, says that the nature of ‘grounds of law’ is far from clear and that different theories of law give entirely different accounts of these grounds. For example, according to the ‘plain fact theory’, law is grounded in concrete statutes and precedents, listed in concrete statute books and court records and enacted (or delivered) by concrete judicial bodies.<sup>30</sup> On this conception, legal truth is factual and empirical; i.e., all truth-apt propositions of law are ultimately of the same kind as ‘Driving 65 miles per hour on California highways is legal (in 2005)’. If this theory is correct, then legal truth may very well be realised by causal correspondence: a proposition of law is true if it stands in an appropriate causal relation to an appropriate statute or historical event.

Other theories offer other conceptions of ‘grounds of law’. The ‘intentional theory’, for example, says that it is legislators’ intentions that ground the law.<sup>31</sup> But what a person’s intentions are is often viewed as a factual, or at least a counterfactual, matter; so this view of the grounds of law is also friendly to a correspondence view of legal truth.<sup>32</sup>

Another theory, the ‘realist theory of law’ (‘legal realism’), says that law is a matter of what law-officials will, or are likely to, do (say, enact, decide, etc.).<sup>33</sup> This theory, too, allows legal truth to be realised by some form of correspondence, namely one suitable for predictive discourse.

Dworkin’s own theory, ‘constructive interpretation’, says that we determine the grounds of law by consulting our “convictions about the ‘point’—the justifying purpose or goal or principle—of legal practice as a whole”.<sup>34</sup> This evidently leads to a nuanced, complex conception of legal truth, but given

30. *Law’s Empire*, pp. 4, 7, 31.

31. *Law’s Empire*, pp. 18–9.

32. One way to apply correspondence to counterfactuals is to construe them as modal propositions and use an appropriate possible-world apparatus in stating their correspondence conditions.

33. *Law’s Empire*, pp. 36, 153.

34. *Law’s Empire*, pp. 87–8; see also pp. vii, 52, 90.

Dworkin's emphasis on the *objective* 'right' and 'wrong' of legal (and moral) propositions, his conception stands in some tension with the 'mere coherence' view of legal truth.<sup>35</sup>

Finally, some theories of the grounds of law relegate the 'burden of truth' to other domains. For instance, the 'natural law theory' says that law is ultimately (or largely, or at least partly) grounded in morality.<sup>36</sup> So prior to determining the nature of moral truth, this theory, too, is open to some version of correspondence.

#### 4. Logical Complexity and Logical Inference

Lynch's solution to the problem of mixed truth and inference on the non-atomic level involves, as we have seen in Section III.C above, an account of the role played by logical structure in determining truth and validity. His account, however, is deflationist in nature. Let us consider, once again, the logically valid inference,

- (2) Wet cats are funny
- (3) This cat is wet
- (4) This cat is funny,

and let us assume that truth in the physical domain is realised by causal correspondence while truth in the comic domain is realised by coherence. Given this assumption, our inference transmits truth from two premises realised by coherence and causal correspondence, respectively, to a conclusion realised (only) by coherence. The question arises how a truth realised by causal correspondence can play a role in ensuring the truth of a sentence realised by coherence. How can the causal correspondence responsible for the truth of (3) give rise (albeit not by itself) to the coherence (with a body of comic beliefs) needed for (4) to be true? Lynch's answer is that the transmission of truth from (2) and (3) to (4) is due to logical structure alone, and the contribution of logical structure to truth can be accounted for in a purely deflationist manner, i.e., without involving the realisers of truth at all. To repeat:

[T]he functionalist . . . can appeal to a simple, and indeed, a traditional solution: Apply one's theory of truth initially only to atomic propositions. . . . Having done so, it is then open to functionalism, as it is to any theory of truth, to understand the truth of a compound proposition in the standard recursive way, namely as a truth-function of the atomic propositions of which it is composed. ('Truth and Multiple Realizability', p. 396; cited in Section III.C above)

35. See *Law's Empire*, pp. 76–86; see also Dworkin, 'Objectivity and Truth: You'd Better Believe It', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 25 (1996), pp. 87–139.

36. *Law's Empire*, pp. 35, 397.

It seems to me that Lynch's deflationist account of logical structure as a constituent of truth (like his deflationist account of the function of truth in terms of platitudes discussed in Section II) is inadequate: to deal with truths involving logical operators, the functional-pluralist has to do more than just account for atomic truth and use the recursive method to extend this account to logically-complex truth. Since some logically-complex truths are not just true but are logically true, i.e. belong to the logical domain, the functional-pluralist has to provide an account of the contribution of logical structure to truth that explains the realisation of truth in the logical domain. So his account of logically-complex truth and, as a result, of logically valid inference, must after all engage the realisers of truth: He has to explain the realisation of truth in logically complex propositions in a way that agrees with, and indeed is informed by, his account of the realisation of truth in the logical domain. Moreover, the functional pluralist is committed to a substantive account of truth, and this rules out a deflationist account of the realisation of truth, including its realisation in the logical domain.

In Section II we have seen how the functional-pluralist's commitment to substantive theorising poses a challenge to his account of the role (or function) of truth. Here we see how this commitment poses a challenge to his treatment of the contribution of logical complexity to truth and inference.

### **5. Solution: A Functional-Pluralist Correspondence Theory of Truth**

One solution to the present criticisms of Lynch's functional-pluralist theory of truth is to adjust its conception of the role and realisers of truth. While Lynch thinks of the role of truth in terms of a variety of platitudes, I propose that we think of it in terms of *correspondence*, and whereas Lynch conceives of the realisers of truth as a mixed lot including causal correspondence, coherence, and ideal justification, I propose that we conceive of them in a more unified manner as *forms of correspondence*. Indeed, informally, Lynch himself tends to explain the role of truth in correspondence terms:

[T]rue propositions can be seen as having a certain job—or function—to perform in our mental life. True propositions are those that . . . *correctly portray the world as it is*. This is truth's job description, as it were. Beliefs or propositions are true when they do that job. . . . Being true is having a particular job, the job of *correctly portraying things as they are*. (*True to Life*, pp. 98–9, my italics)<sup>37</sup>

And one of his paradigms of a realiser of truth, causal correspondence, falls under my notion of 'form of correspondence'. (Another form of correspondence, as we shall see below, is formal or structural correspondence.)

37. See also 'A Functionalist Theory of Truth', p. 728.



A correspondence approach to functional pluralism will enable us to solve all the problems discussed in this paper:

1. We will be able to replace the platitude-based account of the role of truth by a theoretic, systematic, explanatory, critical, and rigorous account of its correspondence role.
2. The realisers of truth will not be properties of the same type as truth itself. Forms of correspondence, unlike truth, coherence and ideal justification, do not fall under the category of “normative property of propositions, having to do with their correctness and applicable in all or most domains of discourse”.
3. Our theory will not be subject to Lynch’s (just) criticisms of traditional theories of truth.
4. We will be able to account for the plurality of truth on the atomic as well as the non-atomic level.
5. We will be able to provide a substantive account of the contribution of logical structure to truth and inference.

I will not be able to pursue all these points here, but I will briefly dwell on the last three.

### *3. Immunity to Lynch’s Criticisms of Traditional Theories of Truth.*

Lynch, as we have seen above, criticises traditional coherentism on the grounds that the coherence standard is too weak to be identified with truth. If a sentence is coherent, we can still ask: ‘But is it true?’ In contrast, the correspondence standard is not weaker than that of truth, and therefore the question ‘But is it also true?’ does not arise for propositions whose correspondence with reality has been established.

Lynch’s criticism of the traditional correspondence theory of truth is based on two objections:

- (i) A Moorean objection: you cannot define a normative concept like truth by a purely descriptive concept like correspondence.<sup>38</sup>
- (ii) A scope objection: physical correspondence works well in some domains of truth (the physical domain, for instance) but not in all domains (not in the mathematical domain, for example).<sup>39</sup>

Neither objection applies to the correspondence version of functional pluralism:

- (i) On any functional-pluralist approach, truth is defined in terms of its role, and a role description (whether in terms of correspondence or in other terms) is by its nature normative.

38. See *True to Life*, pp. 88–91.

39. See *True to Life*, 86–8; ‘A Functionalist Theory of Truth’, p. 724; and ‘Truth and Multiple Realizability’, p. 385.

- (ii) The scope problem disappears once we allow multiple forms of correspondence.

4. *Account of Mixed Truth both on the Atomic and on the Non-Atomic Level.* Consider, once again, the mixed atomic truth,

- (5) Causing pain is bad.

On the present conception, three different factors play a role in the truth of this sentence: a physical factor, a mental factor, and a moral factor. As a result, its truth is realised by a complex form of correspondence—a form of correspondence having physical, mental, and moral constituents. To see what this form of correspondence is, we observe, first, that correspondence is reducible to a combination of reference, satisfaction, and fulfilment; and derivatively a form of correspondence is reducible to a combination of forms of reference, satisfaction, and fulfilment. Let the forms of reference/satisfaction/fulfilment applicable to physical, mental, and moral expressions be P-, M-, and R-reference/satisfaction/fulfilment, respectively. Then, the realisation of (5) is reducible to:

- (i) The P-fulfilment of ‘the causing of x’,
- (ii) The M-reference of ‘pain’,
- (iii) The R-satisfaction of ‘x is bad’.

(5) is true because the causing of pain *M-satisfies* ‘x is bad’, i.e., because the object that *P-fulfils* ‘the causing of pain’ *M-satisfies* ‘x is bad’, i.e., because the *P-fulfiller* of ‘the causing of the *M-referent* of “pain” *R-satisfies* ‘x is bad’.

Similarly, the logically complex mixed truth,

- (1) Snow is white *and* Snow is beautiful

is realised by a complex form of correspondence involving physical, aesthetic, and logical constituents. One way to explain the truth of (1) on the present analysis is to say that (1) is true because the P-referent of ‘snow’ L-satisfies the condition of being in the intersection of the set of objects P-satisfying ‘x is white’ and A-satisfying ‘x is beautiful’ (where ‘L’ stands for ‘logically’ and ‘A’ stands for ‘aesthetically’).

5. *A Substantive Account of the Contribution of Logical Structure to Truth and Inference.*

Suppose that on Lynch’s account, physical truth is realised by causal correspondence and comic truth is realised by coherence. Consider the following logically valid inference:

- (6) Only wet cats are funny
- (4) This cat is funny
- (3) This cat is wet.

How can the coherently realised truth of (6) and (4) guarantee the causal-correspondently realised truth of (3)? On the present account we can not only

explain the transmission of truth in this inference, but provide a substantive account of its validity. In a nutshell: the formal/structural ‘skeleton’ of the situations corresponding to (6) and (4) guarantees the existence of a situation corresponding to (and hence responsible for the truth of) (3). Explanation: the formal features of the situations corresponding to (6), (4), and (3), respectively, are, using set-theoretic language:

$$\begin{aligned} F &\subseteq [W \cap C] \\ c &\in [C \cap F] \\ c &\in [C \cap W]. \end{aligned}$$

It is a formal law governing the behaviour of objects and properties that the existence of situations of the first two formal types guarantees the existence of a situation of the last formal type. And this formal law underwrites the validity of the above inference, regardless of what non-logical constituents are involved in (the realisation of) its premises and conclusion. In a similar way we can explain the validity of logical truths, as well as the contribution of logical structure to non-logical truth. We have implicitly provided such an explanation for the truth of (1) above.

So far I have concentrated on specific advantages of the ‘forms of correspondence’ approach. But this approach has general methodological advantages as well:

- (A) It provides greater unity to the functional-pluralist theory of truth than a conglomeration of coherentism, ideal justification, and causal correspondence.
- (B) It creates a new alternative for those looking for greater openness and flexibility in a correspondence theory of truth than are currently available.<sup>40</sup>

## 6. Conclusion

Putting things in perspective, I agree with Lynch on all the large issues concerning truth:

- (a) Truth is objective.
- (b) Truth is a complex and multi-faceted concept/property.
- (c) Truth is a substantive concept/property.
- (e) The role of truth is a central element in the unity of truth.
- (d) We should allow a plurality of realisations of truth.
- (f) Existent theories of truth enunciate an exceedingly narrow conception of truth.
- (g) Deflationism is blind to the possibility of a substantive theory of truth that does not suffer from the shortcomings of existent theories.

40. I also think a correspondence version of the functional-pluralist theory of truth is likely to lead to an overall more substantive theory, but space does not allow me to elaborate this here.

But, unlike Lynch, I prefer a theory of truth that enunciates substantive rather than platitudinal principles of truth, and I think forms of correspondence are better candidates for realisers of truth than the properties traditional theories substitute for truth: coherence, ideal justification, and causal correspondence.<sup>41</sup>

41. I would like to thank Cory Wright for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. Thanks also to Michael Lynch, David Marian, and Matt McGrath.