

## ALETHIC FUNCTIONALISM AND THE NORM OF BELIEF

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### ***Summary :***

*A common objection to deflationism is that it is unable to account for the normative import of truth as a norm for assertion and belief. Most of the versions of truth pluralism agree, against deflationism that the normativity of truth is a substantive feature of it. Alethic functionalism, as defended by Lynch (2009) includes it among the platitudes characteristic of the role of truth which are manifested differently in various domains. But I argue that this multiple manifestation is incompatible both with the uniformity and the substantiveness of the norm of truth for belief. Either alethic functionalism has to reject the first, but then it cannot maintain the view that the same norm of truth applies across domains, or it gives up the second, and comes dangerously close to deflationism.*

- 1. Introduction alethic functionalism***
- 2. Minimalism and the the norm of truth***
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### ***1. Alethic functionalism and the norm of truth***

Deflationists take truth to have no essence and to be nothing more than an expressive device encapsulated in the disquotation schema

(DS)  $\langle p \rangle$  is true if and only if  $p$ .

A familiar objection to deflationism is that truth contains more than this platitude. The extra element that it contains is that truth is the norm of assertion, what our assertions aim at, and in this sense it involves a substantive property (Dummett 1959, Wright 1992). To that objection, deflationists have answered either by denying that truth involves any normative dimension or by agreeing that truth is a norm of assertion, while denying that this can be a substantive property. Truth, the deflationist argues, is indeed desirable and valuable, but this evaluative dimension is not part of the concept of truth itself (Horwich 1999, 2003). But is it clear that all there is to say about the normativity of truth can be drawn from the deflationist platitudes? And are we forced to choose between a “lightweight” and a “heavyweight” conception of the normativity of truth? Perhaps there is some middle ground between these extremes, which would both allow us both to grant that the normative dimension of truth is a substantive property – *contra* deflationism – and which nevertheless would not entail that truth has an essence – *contra* nature traditional theories (correspondence, coherence and the like). Functionalism about truth seems to suit that purpose. According to alethic functionalism truth is a complex functional property identified by various properties playing jointly a certain role. These properties are the platitudes or truisms which we commonly associate to truth: the disquotation principle, that to be true is to correspond to the facts, that truth is distinct from justification, that truth is objective, that truth is the correctness condition of belief, that truth is the end of inquiry. Together these truisms compose the functional role of truth, just as, for analytic functionalism in the philosophy of mind, the various properties associated to being in pain compose the functional role of pain. To be true for a proposition is to have a property that plays the truth- role. Just as the functional property of pain is

realised differently in various organisms, the functional role of truth is realised differently in different domains and discourses where truth applies. Although there is a common role which all truths play, all truths are not of the same sort: moral truths, mathematical truths, truth about ordinary physical medium size objects, or truths about aesthetic matters, if such there be, are each of a distinctive kind. This view has been suggested by Crispin Wright (1996, 2001) and further elaborated by Michael Lynch (2009). My objective, in this article, is not to discuss the ontological and logical difficulties which alethic functionalism encounters (C.D.Wright 2010, Pedersen 2010), but to concentrate on the specific issue from which much of this discussion started, that of the normative role of truth. In particular I want to concentrate on the two following so-called “truisms”:

( NT) *Norm of belief*: it is *prima facie* correct to believe that  $p$  if and only if the proposition that  $p$  is true

( EI) *End of inquiry* : other things being equal, true beliefs are a worthy goal of inquiry

The question which I want to raise is the one which Lynch asks directly in his essay: how does alethic functionalism account for the normativity of truth (Lynch 2009: 153-155)? According to Lynch, his form of pluralism accounts for both truisms, and makes them part of what plays the truth role. One of the tenets of functionalism about truth, thus understood, is that specification of the truth-role is just a “job description”, and that the normative truism is “part of the core folk theory that individuates the truth role” The functionalist needs not, according to Lynch, be more specific than that. In particular it needs not explain *why* truth is a worthy goal of inquiry and why it is a norm of belief. Can alethic functionalism account for this part of the truth-role, and

can it incorporate it among the truisms about truth? I would like to argue that it does so at the price of misunderstanding the substantive nature of the norm of truth.

I shall first rehearse the reasons that we have for claiming, against deflationism, that the truism that truth is the correctness condition for belief has to be understood in the objective sense. The norm of truth for belief is actually a norm of knowledge. I shall then argue that this puts a strong constraint upon alethic functionalism, which threatens the claim that the truism can be realised in different domains. A consequence of alethic functionalism, which it shares with alethic pluralism in general, is that there should be different norms of truth for belief in different domains. But there are, I shall try to argue, good reasons to think that the norm of truth has to be interpreted uniformly across domains. The functionalist picture is thus threatened.

## *2 Can the norm of truth be deflated?*

The origins of the present discussion about the normativity of truth are probably in Dummett's classical article "Truth" (1959) where the role of truth is compared to the role of winning in a game and argues against the then called "redundantist" conception of truth that it cannot account for the "point" of the concept of truth. But the more proximate origins are in Crispin Wright's (1992) discussion of deflationism. Deflationism, the view that truth is not a genuine property and that all there to truth is the disquotational schema (DS) is wrong, according to Wright, because it is not able to account for the difference between truth and assertibility and for the normative character of truth. Truth registers a different norm than warranted assertibility. In essentials, the argument is the following. Warrant and truth are intimately related in our assertoric practice : whenever I believe I am warranted in asserting some proposition, I also believe that it is true, and whenever I believe some proposition is true, I also believe that I have warrant for it. So truth and warrant coincide in positive

normative force. Now according to deflationism, the disquotatation schema (DS) is has an equivalent for negation

(NE) It is true that *not p* iff it is not true that *p*

But the corresponding instance of (NE) is wrong is if we substitute in it “warranted” in for “true”. For any proposition which is for us neither warranted nor unwarranted (such as, say, *that the Loch Ness monster does not exist*) the conditional

It is warrantably assertible that *not p* if it is not warrantably assertible that *p*

So truth is a norm of correctness *distinct* from warranted assertibility : they diverge in extension (Wright 1992: 18, 2005 : 756).

Truth is normative, in the sense that it is “a property the possession or lack of which determines which assertions are acceptable and which are not” (Wright 2001, 775). Truth is a species of correctness, the correctness condition for assertions, and, more fundamentally, for beliefs. In other words, if one were to describe the assertoric practices of a population without mentioning that truth is what these assertoric practices are *for*, and that it is what makes them *correct*, one would have failed to describe these practices. We could not *explain* these practices if we took truth and warranted assertibility to coincide in extension.

Wright’s discussion of the normative import of truth is led in terms of the norm governing assertion. But, although assertion and belief are distinct, the correctness condition for assertion can easily be transposed to belief: truth is what it is correct to believe.

Deflationists can deny that truth has any normative load in relation to assertion or to belief. They can argue that the so-called normativity which attaches to belief does

not amount to more than the fact that beliefs have a mind to world direction of fit such that they are either true or false<sup>1</sup>. But most deflationists about truth accept the idea that there is a normative dimension in belief and in assertion, and that in so far as belief and assertion have correctness conditions, this dimension belongs to our concept of truth as well. But they deny that this normativity is an *essential* feature of truth. So the deflationist (Horwich 1998, 2001, Dodd 1999) can perfectly accept the idea that truth carries with it a normative load and he can say that his account does take care of the norms

(i) One should assert (believe) only what is true

or

(ii) Truth is what it is (good) valuable to assert (believe)

He denies, however, that this comes down to more than

(iii) One should (it good to) believe that  $p$  iff  $p$

from which in turn one can derive a (potentially infinite) disjunction of sentences of the form

(iv) One should assert that snow is white only if snow is white; one should assert that grass is green only if grass is green, etc.

or

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<sup>1</sup> See for instance Dretske: «I agree that beliefs are necessarily true or false. If I didn't understand what it was to *be* true or false, I could hardly understand what it was to be a belief. But I do not see that I need go further than this. This seems like enough to distinguish beliefs from other mental states like wishes, desires, hopes, doubts, and pains [...] Why, in order to understand what a belief is, do I also have to think of a belief as something that is *supposed to be* true? If I deliberately deceive you, is the resulting belief supposed to be true?» (Dretske 2001: 248)

- (v) It is good valuable to assert that snow is white only if snow is white; one should assert that grass is green only if grass is green, etc

Indeed (i) or (ii) allow us to generalise over the conjunctions of claims (iv) and (v), but that does not mean that there is a general norm of truth for assertion independently of subject matter and of the particular assertions listed, and truth is neither mentioned in (iii) nor (iii) conjunctions like (iii) and (iv) (Horwich 1998, Dodd 1999: 297). So the deflationist can claim that Wright's argument does not show that truth is normative in any robust sense.

Moreover, the deflationist claims that one can explain the value which it is attached to truth in instrumentalist terms, on the basis of the familiar idea that true beliefs conjoined with desires lead to actions: for any action A resulting in reaching a goal G, there are beliefs of the form "If I do A I shall get G", which are true. Hence the truth of these beliefs is explained in instrumentalist terms. If one objects that truth is not simply instrumentally valuable but that it is also intrinsically valuable, the deflationist can also grant this and claim that the intrinsic value of truth does not amount to more than an infinite list of the form (iv) or (v) (Horwich 1999: 256-258, 2006)

But this reply is certainly unsatisfactory. First, because, as Wright points out, one cannot accept that what it is to satisfy the norm of truth for belief or assertion amounts to nothing than knowing that series of conjunctions like (iv) and (v) unless one *already* understands the difference between the proposition that snow is white or that grass is green and the proposition that those propositions are warranted ((2001: 757). In other words the normative character of assertion or belief expressed by conjunctions like (iv) and (v) does not capture the generality of the norm or value of truth<sup>2</sup>. Moreover it seems to lead us to a form of particularism about norms or values according to which there as many cognitive norms as there are particular true

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<sup>2</sup> See also Engel 2008 for a similar criticism

sentences that we could assert or beliefs that we could entertain about particular subject matters. On the deflationist reading of the norms of truth for assertion and belief, we can only acknowledge the existence of particular norms or values attached to each sentence or belief, not the existence of a general norm such as (NT) (Lynch 2004: 512-513, see also Lynch 2008). In the second place, the deflationist dissolution of the normative character truth does not capture the distinction between a *subjective* or *prima facie* reason to assert or to believe something

(a) Believing that  $p$  is true is a *prima facie* reason for asserting that  $p$

and an *objective* reason

(b) The fact that  $p$  is truth provides a good reason to assert it

Wright's inflationary argument involves this distinction between merely have *prima facie* reason to assert (believe) that  $p$  and having a *warranted reason* to assert (believe that  $p$ ). The difference is clearly brought out by Huw Price's (1998) distinction between three norms of assertibility :

(i) *Subjective* : it is *prima facie* correct to assert that  $p$  if one believes that  $p$

or : one is incorrect to assert that  $p$  if one does not believe that  $p$

(ii) *Objective* :  $p$  is objectively assertible if S's belief that  $p$  is justified

or: one is incorrect to assert that  $p$  if though one believes that  $p$  one does not have adequate grounds for believing that  $p$

(iii) *Hyper-objective*: if  $p$  is true one should assert that  $p$

or: one is incorrect to assert that  $p$  if, in fact it is not the case that

In order to sort out these, Price invites us to imagine a tribe, the MOA (Merely Opinionated Asserters), who criticize assertions for flouting the principles of subjective assertibility and objective assertibility but not for flouting that of hyper-objective assertibility. These speakers “express their beliefs – i.e., the kind of behavioral dispositions which we would characterize as beliefs – by means of a speech act we might call *merely opinionated assertion*” They criticize one another for making insincere or inadequately justified assertions, but not for asserting what’s false. We can also imagine these speakers being fully competent in using a disquotational truth predicate, and so in applying the deflationist truth concept. They fully understand the deflationist truth concept, but not the concept of truth. Thus, the former can’t be the same as the latter.

The MOA’s concept of truth is limited to the deflationist one and to the warranted assertibility one. But they become extinct because they lack the capacity to express genuine disagreements. They can only express faultless disagreements. They would be relativists of sorts<sup>3</sup>.

Price’s distinction between the three norms of assertibility is a useful one. But it does not settle the debate unless one answers the question: which of the three norms the one which corresponds to our actual conception of truth? The deflationist will deny that we have any reason to think that (iii), the Hyperobjective norm, expresses the notion of truth, and he will argue that it expresses a stronger concept, which it not truth. Price himself claims that a community which, like the MOAs, would not have the resources to express objective disagreements in the sense of the Hyperobjective norm would lack the resources to improve their assertions and their beliefs, but he denies that one needs to interpret the Hyperobjective norm as expressing a substantive concept of truth: he agrees with the deflationist that truth has no hidden essence, but that the MOA behave *as if* they had the substantial concept:

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<sup>3</sup> In a sense not far from the one which is advocated by Kölbel 2008 and other contemporary versions of relativism about truth (Mc Farlane 2005)

“ Suppose there is no substantial, objective, property of this kind, which the Mo’ans’ belief-like behavioural dispositions either have or lack. Nevertheless, it might turn out to be very much to the Mo’ans’ advantage to behave as if there were such a property. As it turns out, it isn’t difficult to adopt this pretence. The practice Mo’ans need to adopt is exactly the same as that required by the previous alternative. They simply need to ensure that when they believe that *p*, they be prepared not only to assert (in the old MOA sense) that *p*, but also to ascribe fault to anyone who asserts not-*p*, independently of any grounds for thinking that that person fails one of the first two norms of assertibility (Price 1998:251).

According to Price it is not unconceivable that the MOA, had they mimicked the hyperobjective norm instead of actually accepted it, would have successfully survived. So it need not be associated with a realist conception of truth, and is compatible with an ideal notion of warranted assertibility, such as the one which Wright calls superassertibility, in the sense of what is warranted to assert or to believe in the ordinary sense and remains warranted no matter how our information is expanded or improved<sup>4</sup>.

Price’s diagnosis concurs in part with Wright’s “minimalism”. For Wright we have to distinguish two levels: on the one hand our *concept* of truth, which is identifiable through the set of platitudes which are *a priori* associated to it (syntactic discipline, correspondence, objectivity, etc.), on the other hand, the *property* of truth, which realises the concept (Wright 2001: 752). The former is stable and invariant over all discourses which are truth-apt, whereas the second can vary from discourse to discourse. Minimalism in Wright’s sense resembles deflationism in that it admits that there is a unique concept of truth, which is characterised by a set of *relatively* “lightweight” features (this qualification will be explained below). But minimalism diverges from deflationism in that the later denies that truth corresponds to any property, whereas the former is compatible with truth being “realised” or

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<sup>4</sup> Superassertibility is named by Lynch 2009 “superwarrant”

“constituted”<sup>5</sup> differently from domain to domain. So it “incorporates a potential *pluralism*” (*ibid.*) about truth, which allows that the metaphysical commitments that one can undertake about the property of truth may vary depending upon whether one deals with mathematics, ethics, physical objects or other domains. Thus for physical objects, the truth property can be correspondence, for ethics it can be coherence, for mathematics superassertibility, etc. The pluralism in question is “potential” because it does not entail that there is no truth property shared by all true propositions. A view according to which the truth property would have to be distinctive in each domain would be a form of strong pluralism, which is not Wright’s view<sup>6</sup>. Neither is Wright’s minimalism a form of *conceptual* pluralism about truth. It is not the view that there are several concepts of truth or that the concept of truth is ambiguous<sup>7</sup>. On the contrary it claims that there is a common core of the concept of truth which is uniform across various domains of discourse. This core is constituted by the platitudes which Wright (2001: 760) lists thus:

- *transparency*: to assert (believe) that *p* is to present *p* as true
- *epistemic opacity*: some truths may not be known or be unknowable
- *embedding*: truth aptness is preserved under various syntactic operations
- *correspondence*: for a proposition to be true is to correspond to reality
- *contrast*: a proposition may be true without being justified and vice versa
- *stability*: if a proposition is ever true, then it is always true
- *absoluteness*: truth is absolute, there are no degrees of truth

What is striking here is that the normativity of truth – truth is the correctness condition of belief – does not figure in this list of platitudes, whereas other pluralist

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<sup>5</sup> Wright uses the first vocabulary in Wright 2001 and the second vocabulary in Wright 1996 (926)

<sup>6</sup> I agree here with Pedersen ( this volume, Ms note 9 )

<sup>7</sup> Although Wright 1992 is sometimes unclear on this, Wright 1996 (p. 924) is not. The idea that there might be a plurality of concepts of truth is what Lynch calls “simple alethic pluralism” ( 2009: 54-59 )

views, in particular Lynch's, include it in the list. There are two possible answers. One is that the normativity of truth – that truth is a norm of assertion – is implicit in the other platitudes. In particular if one agrees that assertion is regulated by the norm of truth, this is implicit in the *transparency* feature. And if we agree that the norm is stronger than warranted assertibility, one could consider that this is implicit in the *contrast* feature. But given that the normativity of truth is taken to indicate a *substantive* feature, this means that the platitudes which are *a priori* associated with our concept of truth are not – at least for this one – “lightweight”. This is in tension with the idea that our concept of truth involves non substantive features which are uniform across truth-apt discourses. The other answer is that for Wright the normativity of truth is not simply a truism among the others. It is the sign of the divergence of extension between the *property* of truth and the *property* of warranted assertibility<sup>8</sup>. The difference does not lie at the concept level but at the realiser or property level. This means that *whatever* property realises the concept of truth in a particular domain has to register the normativity of truth as a substantive feature. This seems plausible for the domains where truth seems to consist in some objective notion of correspondence or for which superassertibility is the appropriate model – such as discourse about physical objects or about numbers – but this is much less plausible for domains where the objectivity of truth is in question – such as ethics, law or discourse about the comic. But for the latter discourse at least it is unlikely that truth can outstrip warranted assertibility ( it would correspond at most to the subjective norm in Price's sense).

So pluralism about truth *à la* Wright seems unstable: either the normativity of truth is a mere platitude associated to its *concept*, which means it cannot be said to be a substantive feature (and thus we come close to the deflationist view according to which normativity is trivial), or it is a substantive feature of the *property* of truth, but

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<sup>8</sup> This answer seems to be the one that Wright himself adopts, since he explicitly formulates his inflationary argument in terms of the difference between the *property* of truth as warranted assertibility and the *property* of being normative (2001: 754-755)

then this means that the scope of pluralism becomes limited, and we come closer to monism. This instability, which is proper to the normative feature of truth, is related to the one which has been said to threaten alethic pluralism in general (Pedersen 2010). The second disjunct will be examined in § 4 below. The first disjunct—incorporating the truth norm among the truisms about truth is the one taken by Lynch’s version of pluralism – alethic functionalism. But can it account for the force of the norm of truth?

### ***3. Alethic functionalism and the Norm of Truth***

Lynch’s alethic functionalism does not identify truth with the properties which, in their respective domains, satisfy the truth platitudes. On the first version of his view (Lynch 2001), truth is the second-order functional property of having a property which plays the truth role, according to the analogy with functional properties in the philosophy of mind (thus pain is the second order property of having the properties which characterise the role of pain, and it is realised differently in various organisms). The truth-role is specified by a list of truisms which differs from Wright’s list mainly in that it includes the norm of belief (NT) and the end of inquiry (EI). The property of being true is the property which plays the truth role, relative to a given domain. These properties are thus the realiser properties. But we cannot identify truth with the realiser properties, because, given that these are by definition distinct, what is common to them would be lost, just as the common explanatory power of truth would itself be lost. Indeed if truth is in one domain correspondence, in another superassertibility, yet in another one coherence, it become unclear what common property these realise (Lynch 2009:66). This is why Lynch prefers to say that truth is the property which has the truish features essentially or which plays the truth role *as such* (ibid. 74) and that

truth is not realised but *manifested* in the various properties (correspondence, superassertibility, etc.):

“Truth is, as it were, *immanent* in ontologically distinct properties. Let us say that where property F is immanent in or *manifested by* property M, it is *a priori* that F’s essential features are a subset of M’s features ... Propositions about different subjects can be made true by distinct properties each of which plays the truth-role. Thus (atomic) propositions about the antics of the ordinary objects and properties of our daily life may be true because they represent those objects and properties. For propositions of that kind, correct representation plays the truth-role and it is a priori that if a proposition correctly represents it will be true. For propositions of another sort, perhaps moral propositions, superwarrant may be what plays the truth-role, or manifests truth.” (2009: 74, 77)

This, Lynch tells us allows us to see how truth can be both many and one: many because different properties may manifest truth in distinct domains of Inquiry, one because there is a single property so manifested: “It is the unique property that is, necessarily, objective, had by beliefs at the end of inquiry and which makes a proposition correct to believe” (*ibid.* 74 )

But if one pauses for a moment about what alethic functionalism implies, the question arises: will the truth features which are essential to the property of truth be the same in all domains? In other words, and to limit ourselves to the norm of truth, will it be the *same* norm of truth which is manifested in, say, the domain of the ordinary antics of the objects of our daily life and the moral domain? Suppose that correspondence manifests truth in the first domain and superassertibility in the second. If so the norm of truth will be a distinct norm in each domain. In some domains, for instance for aesthetic or comic truths, it might be manifested differently, since the correctness norm in these latter domains may – if one grants that the aesthetic domain is truth-apt – be presumably attached to a weaker notion of truth than that we holds for, say, mathematics or physics:

“According to our definition of manifestation, a property manifests truth only if it has the “truish” features in some particular way. Consequently, depending on what property manifests truth for a particular proposition, we can say that what makes it correct to believe *that* proposition is that it has the property of superwarrant, or correspondence.” (Lynch 2009: 153-154)

But this is counterintuitive, for, as we saw, a large part of the argument which motivates alethic pluralism *à la* Wright and alethic functionalism *à la* Lynch is precisely that the norm of truth is a stronger norm than warranted assertibility, or, to use Price’s classification it is either objective or hyper-objective. The alternative consists in agreeing with the deflationist that the norm of truth for belief is but a shallow feature which carries no particular weight<sup>9</sup>. So it seems that on Lynch’s functionalist picture, if truth is a normative feature which is part of truth role, it cannot be a substantive property:

“According to functionalism, both normative truisms about truth are integral to what truth is. They are part of the core folk theory of truth that individuates the truth-role. Consequently, any property that manifests truth must satisfy these normative platitudes. So for example, any property that plays the truth-role for propositions of a particular domain must be such that it is correct to believe propositions that have that property. Crucially, however, *this needn’t be because of any intrinsic normative facts about the manifesting property itself*. Such properties considered independently of their role in manifesting truth, may be fully “descriptive”. That is, correspondence *qua* correspondence may have no normative features. It may only be that correspondence *qua* manifestation of truth has such features.” (Lynch 2009: 154-155)

This is odd, because the alethic functionalist intends, like the alethic pluralist *à la* Wright, to differentiate his view from deflationism. If the normativity of truth and the

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<sup>9</sup> The same remark is made by Douglas Edwards : « At most, the property of superassertibility can manifest a restricted truth property (perhaps moral truth, in this case). But this is not the result Lynch needs; he needs superassertibility—and all the domain-specific properties—to manifest the *generic* truth property. That is, he needs them to contain the features of the *domain-free* truth property as a proper part. The generic truth property, however, is composed of the *unrestricted* readings of the truth platitudes; thus, to manifest truth, a property must contain *these* features as a proper part. But, it seems, this cannot be done: at most, they can manifest a property composed of *restricted* readings of these platitudes, which, as we saw above, may constitute a notion *closely related* to truth but, unfortunately, not truth itself.<sup>26</sup> The problem for Lynch’s view, then, is that the claim that truth is *manifested* in the domain-specific properties ends up in tension with the claim that truth is a property independent of any domain-specific annexing (Edwards 2011 : 38-39)

end of inquiry are but platitudes, how can they register a robust property of truth? Indeed Lynch argues that they do not belong to the essence or the nature of truth, but only to its nominal essence, or to its concept. As Lynch notes, that they are truisms does not imply that there is no more to be said about these, and that there is no theory to be given of these. They are implicit in our understanding of the concept of truth, but they can be explained further. It is consistent with alethic functionalism that these are not recognised as such as truisms. They may be recognised only tacit (Lynch 2009: 16-17). This is in line with the commitment of alethic functionalism to be able to explain the concept of truth, and in this sense to consider it has being, at least potentially, substantial. But for the view to be both pluralistic and coherent, the norm of truth must exhibit different degrees of substantiality depending on the domains. Hence there must be distinct norms of truth, and not one only.

One solution to this problems might be to abandon the assumption of uniformity of the property of truth which goes with the functionalist version of truth pluralism, and to come back to a version of what has been called alethic disjunctivism”, the view that the generic property of truth is a disjunctive one, in the sense that a proposition is generically true just in case it possesses the truth property relative to a domain *or* relative to another, and try to explain in what sense the properties of truth within a domain is more basic.<sup>10</sup> Alternatively one might abandon the characterisation of truth through its constitutive platitudes altogether<sup>11</sup>. I shall not here explore these options, and shall argue that we must not give up the uniformity of the concept of truth, because one must not give up the uniformity of the norm of truth for belief, which is, in my view stronger and more substantial than alethic functionalism allows.

#### ***4. The Norm of truth is substantive***

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<sup>10</sup> Pedersen 2010 proposes an adaptation of this view in terms of a distinction between pluralism about predicates and pluralism about properties.

<sup>11</sup> See Cory Wright 2010.

Is the norm of truth for belief a mere “truism”? According to Lynch, that a belief is correct if and only if it is true and that truth is a worthy goal of inquiry are truisms. This why Lynch uses formulations (NT) and (EI) and which are meant to be neutral with respect to various interpretations. Let us for the moment restrict ourselves to (NT). A formulation of (NT) which is indeed neutral and truistic is for instance Gibbard’s :

« For belief, correctness is truth. Correct belief is true belief. My belief that snow is white is correct just in case the belief is true, just in cases snow is white. Correctness, now, seems normative ... The correct belief, if all this is right, seems to be the one [a subject] ought, in this sense, to have » (Gibbard 2005: 338–39)

But as soon as we try to cash out the notion of correctness, we encounter various formulations of the general norm of truth:

(CT) For any P, a belief that P is correct iff P is true

There at least two main interpretations of (CT). One uses explicitly deontic notions such as *ought*, *must* or *should*:

(OT) One ought to believe that P if and only if P is true

Another one reads correctness along with such value or axiological notions as *good*, *bad*, *valuable*, or *disvaluable*. On the latter view the correctness condition for belief expresses literally the fact that belief is an aim or goal which is *prima facie* - and perhaps *ultima facie* – good, and the correctness condition (CT) has to be interpreted in a teleological way:

(T\*) A belief that p is correct if and only if p

*because*

only true beliefs achieve the aim involved in believing

(OT) and (T\*) are clearly different in several respects. First, although they can both be understood as ways of cashing out the notion of reason for belief, they refer to two interpretations of the notion of reason for believing: on the one hand the normative version says there is a norm for belief, which grounds our reasons for believing, and such that the reasons always derive from this norm, and on the other hand the teleological version says there is a value (intrinsic or instrumental) which grounds our reasons for believing, which derive from this value.

In the second place, they presuppose different ontologies: on the one hand the normative account rests upon an ontology of norms, whether or not one conceives these norms as based on facts (along cognitivist lines) or not (along expressivist lines), on the other hand the teleological account presupposes an ontology of values (good, evaluations), which can here too be understood cognitively or expressively.

In the third place, the two views rest upon two kinds of conceptions of epistemic norms. Consider what is often considered as the evidential norm for belief: one ought to believe that P only on the basis of sufficient evidence. On the normative formulation (OT), the epistemic norms are categorically related to the norm (they flow from it) deriving their normative status from the basic norm of truth. On the value formulation they are instrumental, getting their normative status from their ability to guide us to achieve our aims. This difference has an important consequence: if our reasons for beliefs and our adhesion to epistemic norms are explained through an aim-truth - we should be able to weight this aim against other aims or values. But we typically do not balance the aim of truth against other aims. The teleological account,

on the contrary, seems to allow the possibility, at least in principle, of comparing the aim of having true beliefs with other aims (for instance practical ones).

In the fourth place, normative requirements upon beliefs are typically categorical, whereas aims are typically hypothetical. This seems to imply two different conceptions of epistemic rationality, a categorical one and an instrumental one (Kelly 2003). They do not involve the same kind of semantics for normative terms, the same kind of ontology, and the same kind of guidance or regulation. In particular the normative regulation which seems to be attached to (OT) seems to involve categorical prescriptions to the effect that a believer ought to have true beliefs and avoid false ones.

Moreover formulations like (OT), however, have led to numerous objections about the feasibility of the normative regulation: does it entail what one ought to believe *any* truth whatsoever, and that it prescribes to believe only truths? Many doubts have been expressed about how prescriptions like (OT) can actually regulate belief formation and thus can be able to have a genuine normative force.<sup>12</sup> A formulation like (IT), which implies that truth is an aim or goal for belief, seems, by contrast to provide us with a clear normative guidance: a goal can be aimed at intentionally, and so the correctness condition can be understood in this sense: « To believe that *p* is to have the aim of regarding that proposition as true only if it in fact *is* true » (Velleman 2000). But this reading too raises a number of problems, which I am not going to detail here<sup>13</sup>.

Lynch himself favours an axiological reading of (NT): it is *prima facie* good, to believe that *p* if and only if *p*. (EI), which saw that truth is a worthy goal of inquiry, is supposed to be a distinct platitude from (NT). But if one interprets the latter in the teleological sense (IT), one comes close to the idea that truth is a goal of inquiry. Lynch, however, distinguishes the two, and talks regularly about (NT) as the norm for

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<sup>12</sup> For doubts of this sort see e.g. A. Hattiangadi and K. Bykvist 2007, K. Glüer and A. Wikforss 2009

<sup>13</sup> See Engel 2005, 2008, Shah 2003

belief<sup>14</sup>. Clearly he intends to formulate it so that it remains neutral over the kinds of interpretations that we have just considered. Alethic functionalism allows, as we saw, that various interpretations of (NT). One way to interpret alethic functionalism and the part of the truth role played by (NT) among the truistic features would be to suggest that in some domains the norm of truth for belief could be interpreted in value terms, in others in deontic terms, and in some domains it could be understood ontologically or at the met-ethical level in expressivist terms, in others in cognitive terms. But this move is hardly coherent, for two reasons. The first is that the norm of truth for belief, on Lynch's own view, *has* to be understood in cognitive or realist terms, for an expressivist reading of it is unstable : it oscillates between an "engaged" ethical standpoint, from which one employs the evaluative language just as the realist does, and a "disengaged" meta-ethical standpoint, from which ascriptions of correctness are neither true nor false (Lynch 2008). The second has already been indicated in the previous paragraph: the norm of truth would lose the uniformity which is needed if functionalism about truth is to work. So, on alethic functionalism's own terms, the norm of truth for belief cannot be a feature which would be manifested in different ways. It has to be univocal, and the same *everywhere*. Lynch cannot renounce this commitment of his view unless running the risk of bringing it dangerously close to deflationism.

There is a further, in my view more important reason to defend the uniformity and the substantive character of the norm of truth. The reason has to do with the plausibility of the view that not only truth, but *knowledge* is the norm of assertion and of belief. I cannot deal here with the reasons for defending the very discussed claim that knowledge is the norm of assertion<sup>15</sup>. Since Lynch actually formulates (NT) in terms of a norm for belief, I shall only limit my suggestion to the latter.

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<sup>14</sup> In particular he distinguishes clearly the two readings in his 2008.

<sup>15</sup> See in particular Williamson 2000 and the vast literature which it has engendered.

The difficulty that many writers have expressed about the standard of correctness (OT) for belief is well expressed in Wedgwood's following remark: "It seems implausible that this fundamental epistemic norm can explain the norms of rational belief, for after all, according to this principle, any belief in a true proposition is correct - even if the belief in question is grossly irrational; so how can this principle explain the norms of rational belief?" (2002: 270). The obvious suggestion here is that our main reasons to believe have to do not with the truth of the beliefs that we consider, but with the *evidence* or *justification* that we have for them. In this sense the norm of *evidence* - that one ought to believe only on the basis of sufficient evidence - seems much more effective than the truth-norm. It seems, in this sense, that evidence has a much more important role in the formation, the maintenance, and the revision or rejection of beliefs than truth itself. We can understand it as the requirement that a belief be *justified*, or based on appropriate *reasons*, and that it be revised or rejected if it not bases on such reasons. And if justified believing is knowledge, why not say that the fundamental epistemic norm is the norm of *knowledge*? (OT), and (NT) as well fail to explain the sense in which it is defective to believe a proposition when one is not in a position to *know* that it is true. So why not simply accept that the constitutive norm for belief is rather:

(NK) It is the *norm* of belief that one ought to believe that P if and only if one knows that P<sup>16</sup> ?

This proposal has the advantage of explaining why we can say that "Belief aims at knowledge" in Williamson's sense:

Knowing sets the standard of appropriateness for belief . . . Knowing is in that sense the best kind of believing. Mere believing is a kind of botched knowing. In short, belief aims at knowledge (not just truth)." (2000: 47)

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<sup>16</sup> This view has been suggested, in various forms, by Peacocke 1999:34, Williamson 2000: 47, Engel 2002, Engel 2005, Smythies 2011 and Mc Hugh (forthcoming)

Given that knowledge is factive and entails truth, it seems easy to derive the norm (NT) from this one. It also can explain why the norm of evidence is in place, for evidence, as much as truth, leads to knowledge<sup>17</sup>.

Much more would be needed here if one were to give an argument to the effect that knowledge, rather than truth is the primary candidate for the truth norm. But given that knowledge involves a stronger commitment than truth, it entails that the norm governing belief is much more substantive than alethic pluralism, and indeed than alethic functionalism allows.

If this is correct, does it really threaten the alethic functionalist picture? Can't there be different norms of knowledge, depending upon whether truth is realised or manifested, in one domain as correspondence, as superassertibility or as coherence, and with varying strengths of knowledge? Contextualists about knowledge ascriptions, after all, accept that knowledge is the norm of assertion, while claiming that the strength of knowledge is a matter of contextual sensitivity?<sup>18</sup> If the concept of knowledge lacks the kind of unity that the norm of belief is supposed to have, the pluralist stance seems to be still available to us. But that wouldn't do. That ascriptions of knowledge are contextual does not mean that the norm of knowledge is manifested differently in different domains. On the contrary, the norm involves a unity which truth does not, *prima facie*, have.

Another direction that alethic functionalism could take would be to reject (NT) and (NI) as truisms characterising our common sense concept of truth. Lynch includes theses, unlike Wright, with the platitudes which constitute the truth role, because he considers that the truisms are as much about truth as they are about belief:

“It seems reasonable to think that if (TN) tells us something about belief, then it also tells us something about truth—namely that truth just is, in part, a basic norm of

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<sup>17</sup> (even more so, when one holds, as Williamson (2000), that evidence *is* knowledge, but one need not defend this strong version in order to accept (NK))

<sup>18</sup> See for instance DeRose 2002

correctness for belief. Truth and belief are clearly interrelated. And so it seems that if (TN) is a constitutive fact about belief, then it is also a constitutive fact about truth. Here Dummett's old analogy of truth and winning is on the mark: the fact that the aim of a game is to win is not just a fact about games; it is also a fact about winning (Dummett 1959). Similarly, the fact that the 'aim' of belief is truth is not just a fact about belief; it is a fact about truth. (Lynch 2008: 236)

But it is not clear that (NT), or other norms of truth “tells something about truth” and are constitutive of *truth*. The fact that truth is the correctness condition of belief is a fact about belief, but not a fact about truth. The normativity which attaches to (NT) is a normativity about belief (or about our concept of belief) as an attitude, not a normativity which attaches to truth itself. In particular (NT) is perfectly compatible with the view that truth itself is not a normative notion. This conclusion will be welcomed by the deflationist, who continuously suspects that in the discussions about the norm of truth one slides too easily from the idea that truth is the norm of belief to the idea that truth is a normative property. But then we would move away as much from the pluralist perspective.

### ***5. Conclusion***

Where does this leave us? The initial motivation of Wright's version of alethic pluralism was the need to inflate the notion of truth which deflationism had reduced to the minimal disquotation schema. The extra element which was to distinguish Wright's view from deflationism was the normative nature of assertion and of belief, conceived as a “robust” and resilient feature of our concept of truth. Alethic functionalism includes this robust feature within the platitudes which make the functional role of truth. But it does so either at the expense of an implausible pluralisation of the norm of truth or at the expense of emptying it of its substance. I have tried to argue that the norm of truth is actually much more substantive than what deflationism and functionalism about truth allow. Does that necessarily lead us to

monism about truth, the view that there is but one truth property which is possessed by all true propositions? Not necessarily, but it leads us to the view that even if truth is not the same in all domains (pluralism), the norm of truth for belief has to be uniform. Hence it leads us to a monism about the norm of truth, whereas the functionalist picture leads us to a pluralism about the norm of truth. So probably truth functionalism has to abandon the latter picture<sup>19</sup>.

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