



Truth is One (No Need for Pluralism)

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Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the currently most popular argument for alethic pluralism, maintaining that the so-called scope problem provides no compelling reason for abandoning the traditional view that truth is one and the same (substantive) property across the various regions of thought or discourse in which it is ascribed or denied to the things we think or say. I disarm the argument by showing that the scope problem does not arise for a number of non-deflationary, monistic views of truth that meet certain semantic and metaphysical constraints, for one can accept any of these views and provide a plausible account of the fact that mental and linguistic tokenings belonging to different regions of discourse involve radically different ways of engaging with reality – from detecting pre-existing facts to constituting them.

Keywords Truth · Alethic pluralism · Scope problem · Uniformity assumption

1 Introduction

In the wake of Crispin Wright's (1992) pioneering work, in the last three decades an increasing number of philosophers have come to endorse a pluralist conception of truth (for a representative sample of their views, see the papers collected in Pedersen & Wright, 2013a; Wyatt, Pedersen & Kellen, 2018). In this paper, I discuss the currently most popular, and perhaps most powerful, argument for alethic pluralism, maintaining that it provides no compelling reason for giving up the traditional view that truth is one and the same property across the various regions of thought or discourse in which it is ascribed (or denied) to the things that we think or say. What I offer is in fact a non-deflationary defence of the *Uniformity Assumption*:

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(UA) If truth has a nature, then it has a uniform nature that is invariant across discipline or region of discourse

(Wright, 2012, p. 89) against the objection that turns on the so-called *scope problem*.

The claim that differences between the *truths* – i.e., the true propositions – of different regions of discourse¹ need not be conceived as differences between the ways in which those propositions can be *true* has been defended by a number of philosophers. Adapting a suggestion that Quine originally made with regard to existence, Mark Sainsbury (1996, p. 900), Simon Blackburn (2013, p. 265), and Julian Dodd (2013, pp. 304–305) have argued that the differences that alethic pluralists typically point to can be naturally construed as differences in the *subject matters* of the relevant propositions rather than as differences in the *kinds of truth* those propositions are respectively apt for. Claiming that the true propositions of different regions of discourse are true in different ways involves, they suggest, a kind of *double counting*: “why add to a distinction of content, another, mirroring, distinction, one only applying to kinds of truth or conceptions of truth?” (Blackburn, 2013, p. 265). I share the feeling expressed by this question. But Sainsbury, Blackburn and Dodd go on to argue, each in slightly different ways, that the reason why the truths of different regions of discourse do not differ in their respective ways of being true is just that *they are all true in a merely deflationary way*. Thus, they are all committed to the view that (UA) is merely vacuously true. On the other hand, I want to defend the view that (UA) holds good not because truth has no nature, but because its nature is invariant across region of discourse.

In what follows I will try to show that the argument that is usually produced in support of alethic pluralism loses much of its appeal when issues concerning the nature of the facts and contents associated with different regions of discourse are prevented from affecting theorising about truth. I will argue that acknowledging that different regions of discourse involve different ways of engaging with reality is in fact perfectly compatible with maintaining that there is just one way for the associated beliefs and statements to be true – and not necessarily a deflationary one.²

¹ Henceforth I will use ‘region of discourse’ as shorthand for ‘region of thought or discourse’.

² The argument offered in this paper is similar in spirit to a set of arguments that Will Gamester (2021) has recently produced in support of the view that alethic pluralism is just a ‘theoretical spinning wheel’ in a plausible account of the ontological variety that is typically adduced to motivate its adoption. However, my strategy differs from Gamester’s in two key respects (as well as in some matters of detail). First, I focus on just one argument for alethic pluralism, the core metaphysical argument that seems to motivate most adherents to the view, abstracting away from the details that differentiate the various versions discussed by Gamester: my hope is that keeping a consistent focus on the core metaphysical argument for alethic pluralism will enable readers to get a sharper picture of what is at stake in the debate. Second, I do not share Gamester’s assumption that the claim that truth is grounded in being entails that truth is in any interesting sense *representational*. So, the single most important difference between my view and Gamester’s is that I argue that the nature on truth is invariant across region of discourse because it is neither representational nor non-representational, while he argues that it is invariant across region of discourse because it is uniformly representational. The general thrust of my argument is also similar to that of an argument offered to the same effect by Bar-On & Simmons (2018). However, I do not share their idea that the kind of variety the recognition of which typically leads alethic pluralists to countenance a plurality of truth properties cannot involve a variety at the level of content (propositions) along with a variety at the level of worldly conditions (facts).

The plan of the paper is as follows. In Sect. 2 I introduce the *scope problem* – the difficulty that, supposedly being fatal to monistic views of truth, occupies centre stage in the arguments commonly offered in support of alethic pluralism. I lay bare a crucial assumption of those arguments and consider a very straightforward Dummett-inspired rationale for accepting it. That rationale presupposes a currently unpopular conception of the debates about realism, so in Sect. 3 I go on to consider a more attractive way in which the assumption can be substantiated, focussing on Crispin Wright’s use of the so-called *Euthyphro debate* to capture what is at stake in those disputes. In Sect. 4 I present my defence of the uniformity assumption, arguing that accepting a realist, inflationary conception of truth is no obstacle to doing justice to the variety of ways in which different kinds of discourse engage with reality. And in Sect. 5 I offer a more precise characterisation of the range of (realist) views of truth whose acceptance is consistent with the development of a non-deflationary defence of alethic monism.

2 The Scope Problem

The key argument for alethic pluralism rehearses an old issue that was occasionally raised in discussions of truth long before the inception and increasing fortune of that view (e.g., Acton, 1935). Here is a recent formulation of what is now commonly referred to as the ‘scope problem’ from a leading alethic pluralist, Michael Lynch:

The most plausible correspondence theories [...] are plausible when applied to propositions about the color of snow, but generate problems when applied to normative and mathematical propositions. Epistemic theories – whether they are unpacked in terms of superwarrant or coherence – seem on firmer ground when applied to normative propositions, but less plausible when applied to propositions about middle-sized dry goods. (Lynch, 2013, p. 22)

One might of course consider further alternatives, but the conclusion would still be that none of the traditional theories of truth applies across the board: “Such theories work well enough as accounts of how some propositions are true, but fail with regards to others” (2013, p. 22).

Sometimes alethic pluralists just leave the argument at that,³ but when they go on to offer a diagnosis of the situation they describe, they typically characterize the diversity in discourse that supposedly generates the scope problem by invoking such contrasts as *realism vs. anti-realism* and *representationalism vs. non-representationalism*. Crispin Wright, for instance, explains that what initially prompted him to consider the viability of alethic pluralism was mainly his “long-standing interest in the debates about realism and objectivity” and the related concern with the different ways

³ This is perhaps why Asay (2018, pp. 176 f.) sees two arguments where I see only one. He also mentions a third argument for alethic pluralism, one moved by the desire to avoid “the perils of deflationism”. However, this third argument does not licence, in itself, a preference for (substantive) alethic pluralism over (substantive) alethic monism.

“in which the various discourses engage with reality” (Wright, 2013, pp. 124, 125). Lynch, in turn, argues that “representationalist” theories of truth are plausible for those regions of discourse in which it is reasonable to regard our beliefs as responsive to mind-independent objects and properties, while “non-representationalist” ones are plausible for those regions of discourse in which our beliefs, though apt for rational assessment, cannot be naturally described as responding to mind-independent objects and properties (Lynch, 2009, pp. 51–53).⁴

The key motivation for subscribing to alethic pluralism is thus claimed to be the recognition that our beliefs and statements engage with the world in different ways in different regions of discourse: while some of them may be plausibly regarded as purporting to describe the world’s mind-independent features, others resist such a realist treatment (unless, that is, one is prepared to incur the cumbersome ontological and epistemological commitments that come with such views as moral intuitionism and mathematical Platonism, an option which I am not going to discuss in this paper). But how exactly is the acknowledgment of this variety of ways of engaging with the world supposed to lead to alethic pluralism? The crucial step is underwritten by the assumption that there is a very tight connection between the way in which a certain kind of discourse ‘engages with reality’ and the way in which the corresponding beliefs and statements may be true (or false). The assumption is, in brief, that the beliefs and statements that belong to those regions of discourse that are amenable to a realist treatment are properly regarded as successful – that is to say, true – when their content corresponds to the features of the mind-independent objects and properties they are about, while the beliefs and statements that belong to those regions of discourse that resist a realist treatment are properly regarded as successful – that is to say, true – when they meet some suitably idealised epistemic constraints. It is in virtue of this assumption that the recognition that different kinds of discourse engage with reality in deeply different ways naturally leads to the pluralist claim that being true consists in different things in different regions of discourse – that there are different properties possession of which enables the propositions of different regions of discourse to instantiate the concept of truth (Wright, 2013, pp. 128–129). Nikolaj Pedersen and Cory D. Wright (2013b, p. 2) describe such properties as the properties that are *alethically potent* in the respective regions of discourse; alethic pluralism can then be characterised as the view that there is a plurality of alethically potent properties the possession of which is responsible for the instantiation of the concept of truth in different regions of discourse.⁵

The idea that the way in which a certain kind of discourse ‘engages with reality’ is tightly connected to the way in which the corresponding beliefs and statements may be true (or false) entered the philosophical debate with Michael Dummett’s sug-

⁴ Pedersen (2014, Sect. 7) elaborates on essentially the same point, while Edwards (2018) offers a “strong argument” for alethic pluralism that turns on the different nature of objective and projected properties.

⁵ Asay (2018) takes issue with pluralist talk of ‘alethically potent’ properties and the associated assumption that it is the possession of one such property that makes some propositions (or other truth-bearers) true. His objection to alethic pluralism is in fact that “[w]hat accounts for why truth-bearers are true is the world’s stock of truthmakers [...], not some set of potent alethic properties” (p. 179). My argument, by contrast, does not depend on denying that it is in virtue of possessing an alethically potent property that some propositions are true.

gestion that, in the end, the dividing issue between realists and anti-realists on such diverse matters as physical objects, mental states, universals, numbers, and so on, is whether the statements of the relevant regions of discourse possess potentially recognition-transcendent truth conditions (1982, p. 55). On his view, what is at stake in the debates between realists and anti-realists is at bottom a semantic issue concerning “the notion of truth appropriate for statements of the disputed class; and this means that it is a dispute concerning the kind of *meaning* which these statements have” (Dummett, 1978, p. 146).

Assigning pride of place to semantics makes it almost inevitable to derive a pluralist conclusion about the nature of truth from the acknowledgment of the divide that separates those regions of discourse that are amenable to a realist treatment from those that resist it. But Dummett’s proposal was not widely accepted (Devitt, 1984, pp. 261–267, is representative of a widespread line of criticism), and it is now commonly acknowledged that “the realist/anti-realist debate is not a semantic debate in the end” (Wright, 2013, p. 125). Yet, the spirit of Dummett’s view has survived in a widespread feeling that the propositions of those regions of discourse that lend themselves to a realist construal and the propositions of those regions of discourse that resist such a construal must be apt for different kinds of truth. It is this sort of feeling that prompted Crispin Wright to declare in a single breath that “[w]hat’s really varying is the way in which the various discourses engage with reality, the kind of truth that applies” (2013, p. 125). And it is this sort of feeling that lies behind most endorsements of alethic pluralism in the recent debate on truth, underwriting as it does the step from the recognition of the deep differences that separate the regions of discourse that are amenable to a realist construal from those that resist it to the view that there is more than one way for propositions to be true. But if Dummett’s semantic reconceptualization of the traditional metaphysical debates between realists and anti-realists is abandoned, what rationale is left for postulating such a tight connection between the way in which any given kind of discourse engages with reality and the kind of truth that the corresponding beliefs and statements are apt for? It is again to Crispin Wright (1992, pp. 79–82; 108–139) that we must turn to for answering this question.

3 The Euthyphro Debate

Having alerted his readers to the limits of Dummett’s semantic approach, Crispin Wright (1992, p. 81) introduces the *Euthyphro debate* as a more effective way of attacking the crucial question concerning the relationship between truth and *superassertibility*, i.e., between truth and the epistemically constrained property that is possessed by a proposition just in case “someone investigating it [the proposition] could, in the world as it actually is, arrive at a state of information on which its acceptance was justified, which justification would then persist no matter how much more relevant information was acquired” (Wright, 1999, p. 228). The debate described in Plato’s dialogue ostensibly concerns the qualities of being loved by the gods and of being pious, but the contrast it depicts is in fact the sort of contrast that would now be phrased by using such terms as ‘realism’ and ‘anti-realism’. So Crispin Wright man-

ages to give a novel twist to the debates between realists and anti-realists by reframing them on Plato's model as debates concerning the relationship between truth and superassertibility, and he does so in a way that does not depend on the Dummettian assumption that these notions diverge in extension. He notes that in the debates in question the realist side will typically contend that

(*TexpSA*) It is because certain propositions (in the region of discourse in question) are true that they are superassertible,

while the anti-realist side will typically contend that

(*SAexpT*) It is because certain propositions (in the region of discourse in question) are superassertible that they are true.

(Wright, 1992, p. 80. '*TexpSA*' stands for 'Truth explains Superassertibility', '*SAexpT*' for 'Superassertibility explains Truth'). This is because, in his view, the debate between realists and anti-realists about any given region of discourse ultimately concerns whether truth and assertibility originate in different ways, which is the realist claim, or derive from one and the same source, which is the anti-realist one. Superassertibility can then be regarded as a candidate for alethic potency in, and only in, those regions of discourse in which it is a priori that all truths are in principle recognizable as such – in which it is a priori that any true proposition could become the content of an agent's permanently justified belief (1992, pp. 57–61; 2001, pp. 778–781). For it is only for those regions of discourse in which truth does not outrun superassertibility that it makes sense to consider an anti-realist (*SAexpT*) rather than a realist (*TexpSA*) explanation of the relationship between such properties. On the other hand, in those regions of discourse in which it is *not* a priori that all truths are in principle recognizable as such, (*SAexpT*) could never be a serious alternative to (*TexpSA*).⁶

These considerations help to bring out the fact that the word 'because' plays subtly different roles in these formulations. The occurrence of 'because' in (*TexpSA*) serves to articulate the idea that agents investigating the propositions of the relevant region of discourse possess the ability to detect, at least in favourable cases, a constitutively independent property – truth – whose possession may properly be cited in an *explanation* of their epistemic commerce with those propositions. On the other hand, the occurrence of 'because' in (*SAexpT*) serves to reject the idea that, in the relevant regions of discourse, truth is such a constitutively independent property: the claim is that, in such regions of discourse, superassertibility and truth originate from the same source, the former being the *conceptual ground* of the latter (Wright, 1992, pp. 79 f.).

⁶ It is worth noting that, although the regions of discourse in which it is not a priori that all truths are in principle recognizable need not necessarily contain any true propositions that are not superassertible, they may well do so – indeed, they will typically do so. However, (*TexpSA*) need not be construed as involving the presupposition that truth and superassertibility coincide in extension: what it will be appropriate to say about those regions of discourse in which truth outruns superassertibility is that the propositions of those regions *that are superassertible* are superassertible because they are true.

The contrast between (*TexpSA*) and (*SAexpT*) appears to articulate fairly well the crux of the debate between realists and anti-realists concerning those regions of discourse for which it can be assumed a priori that all truths are in principle recognizable as such. However, it is not clear that the property of being superassertible is stable enough to qualify as a candidate for alethic potency with respect to the propositions of whatever region of discourse (Skorupski, 1988, p. 522; Künne, 2003, pp. 418 f.), so one may wish to look for alternatives. Another way of spelling out the contrast is in terms of *best opinions*, but the usual subjunctive accounts that equate best opinions with the propositions that practitioners of the relevant kind of discourse *would accept under the conditions which are cognitively ideal for that discourse* are themselves beset by well-known difficulties (Shope, 1978; cf. Wright, 1992, pp. 117–120). Thus, in what follows I will dodge the difficult task of providing a satisfactory characterisation of the relevant property by helping myself to ‘best opinions’ talk in a very generic way, with the only purpose of abstracting away from the most specific and potentially problematic features of superassertibility and other epistemically constrained candidates to alethic potency. What I will be using is just the working notion of an epistemically (uniquely) valuable property that can plausibly be regarded as the conceptual ground of truth in those regions of discourse in which it is a priori that all truths are in principle recognizable as such. If Crispin Wright is right that superassertibility can fill this role, the best opinion on any given issue belonging to such regions of discourse will be the proposition that is superassertible on that issue. If he is not, it will be the proposition that instantiates the property that is alethically potent on that issue.

Assuming again that it is a priori that all truths in the region of discourse in question are in principle recognizable as such, the realist side will typically contend that

(*TexpBO*) In region of thought or discourse R , if the best opinion on the issue is that p , it is because it is true that p that the best opinion on the issue is that p ,

while the anti-realist side will typically contend that

(*BOexpT*) In region of discourse R , if it is true that p , it is because the best opinion on the issue is that p that it is true that p .

(‘*TexpBO*’ stands for ‘Truth explains Best Opinion’, and ‘*BOexpT*’ for ‘Best Opinion explains Truth’).

Again, formulations like (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) seem to capture fairly well what is at stake in the debates that oppose realists and anti-realists concerning those regions of discourse for which anti-realism is not clearly a non-starter. Indeed, the alternatives captured by these formulations appear to concern the very *kind of truth* that the propositions of that region may be apt for. So it is tempting to say that (*TexpBO*) gives the correct account of the relation between best opinion and truth as it obtains in those regions of discourse that naturally lend themselves to a realist treatment (think of propositions about the physical properties of middle-sized dry goods), while (*BOexpT*) gives the correct account of that relation as it obtains in those regions of discourse that resist such a realist treatment (think of propositions about the moral

properties of agents, actions, and institutions). In the (*TexpBO*) cases, best opinions can be described as playing a *detecting* role – they detect *pre-existing* true propositions. On the other hand, in the (*BOexpT*) cases best opinions can be described as playing a *constitutive* role – they *make it the case* that certain propositions are true. But then, it seems almost inevitable to conclude that the propositions whose truth does not constitutively depend on the best opinion on the issue and those whose truth exhibits such a constitutive dependence *cannot be true in the same way* – that the alethically potent property must be some form of correspondence to the facts or reality in the (*TexpBO*) cases and some epistemically constrained property in the (*BOexpT*) ones.

So at last we have an apparently compelling line of argument that can be used to bridge the gap that separates the acknowledgment that different kinds of discourse engage differently with reality from the endorsement of alethic pluralism. In the next section I will argue that this line of argument is much less compelling than it first appears.

4 Reconciling Alethic Monism with Linguistic and Metaphysical Variety

Let me clarify from the start that my reaction to the *Euthyphro* dilemma does not turn on denying that the contrast evoked by formulations like (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) points to a genuine difference between the ways in which various kinds of discourse engage with reality. In other words, I do not mean to deny that the nature of the types of discourse that alethic pluralists typically associate with epistemically constrained truth is in an important sense, unlike that of other types of discourse, *non-representational*. As a consequence, I do not mean to deny that different types of discourse involve different types of content. What I want to question is, rather, the idea that formulations like (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) offer the most accurate and fundamental account of the relevant difference – that the most accurate and fundamental account of the difference essentially involves the notion of truth. I propose to question this idea without invoking the deflationary thought that the truth predicate appears in such formulations merely as an expressive device for attaining generality; but unlike Gamester (2021), I am not going to suggest that the nature of truth is invariantly representational across all regions of discourse – indeed, I believe that no clear sense can be given to the claim that *truth*, as opposed to certain kinds of *discourse*, is representational rather than non-representational. What I propose to show is that it is possible to do full justice to the genuine difference that the contrast articulated by formulations like (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) points to without giving up a deeply entrenched intuition about truth, one that opens up the conceptual space for developing a number of non-deflationary accounts of truth that do not themselves encapsulate any (substantive) form of representationalism.

The intuition in question was first articulated by Aristotle, and although it is fair to say that it has prompted many philosophers to regard the correspondence theory as the most natural candidate for a plausible account of truth, it would be a mistake to construe it as necessarily involving commitment to such a theory. Its thrust is just

that if it is true that things are a certain way, it is true *because thing are that way*, and not vice versa. In Aristotle's words:

You are not white because we truly think you are, but it is because you are white that we speak the truth when we say you are. (*Met.* Θ, 10, 1051^b6-9)

[T]he true sentence is in no way the cause of the object's being so; instead it is the object in question that appears in some way to be the cause of the sentence's being true, for it is because the object in question is so or not so that the sentence is said true or false. (*Cat.* 12, 14^b18-22)

The intuition voiced in these passages is a *realist* intuition in that it involves an order of explanation that goes from facts to truths rather than from truths to facts: it might be expressed by saying that *truths are grounded in facts*, and not vice versa. I offer this as a conceptual claim: it is analytic of the concept of truth that truths are grounded in facts, and not vice versa. Please note that I help myself to the non-Aristotelian term 'fact' in a metaphysically deflationary spirit, just for ease of exposition. When I epitomise the intuition by saying that truths are grounded in facts, and not vice versa, I in no way mean to suggest that it involves commitment to an ontology of facts, let alone to fact-based correspondence or truth-making theory. (This, of course, does not entail that it is *incompatible* with more robust views of facts and truth: more on this in Sect. 5.)

It is crucial to notice that the realism suggested by Aristotle's passages is merely *alethic*, in the sense that it does not involve any metaphysical claim about the mind-independence of facts (deflationarily conceived), or their independence from the best opinions on the issue. So the thought that I propose to distil from the passages above is actually that

(AR) If it is true that *p*, it is true that *p* because *p*, and not vice versa, *whatever it takes for it to be the case that p*.

For obvious reasons, I am not claiming that Aristotle endorsed *alethic realism* in exactly these terms. For one thing, I have taken the liberty of giving a propositionalist version of his thought (this will prove useful in due course); more importantly, the issues addressed by the *whatever*-clause at the end of (AR) were certainly not salient to Aristotle. However, commitment to alethic realism *thus conceived* is consistent with endorsement of a non-representational account of any given kind of discourse, as well as with acceptance of an anti-realist view of the associated facts. This means that alethic realism is conceptually independent from the claim that truth is, in any interesting sense, 'inherently representational', for it seems clear that any interesting claim to this effect could hardly be squared with a non-representational account of one or more kinds of discourse. Indeed, it is plausible to think that producing a convincing argument for the claim that truth is 'inherently representational' would involve showing that all the discourses that can be plausibly taken to be truth-apt are representational (and possibly even more than that: for it is far from clear that, if one could show that, the claim that *truth* is inherently representational would then add

anything significant to the claim that the relevant kinds of *discourse* are inherently representational).

The thought that alethic realism is conceptually independent from the claim that truth is, in any interesting sense, ‘inherently representational’ will be a key ingredient in my non-deflationary defence of (UA).⁷ However, alethic realism should not be confused with the thesis articulated by the Equivalence principle

(E) It is true that p if and only if p .⁸

This thesis (which can also be traced back to Aristotle)⁹ is commonly regarded as expressing a key feature of our ordinary concept of truth: few philosophers would accept an analysis of (our ordinary concept of) truth that were radically in conflict with, or departed too far from, it.¹⁰ On the other hand, alethic deflationists usually maintain that the equivalence principle, or a suitably qualified version of it, exhausts more or less everything there is to say both about the concept of truth and the associated property (sometimes described as a merely ‘logical’ one). This commits them to explain away the realist intuition articulated by (AR) or, alternatively, to embark on the difficult task of doing justice to it on deflationary grounds. Neither option strikes me as particularly attractive – the realist intuition articulated by (AR) is well-entrenched, and the prospects of doing justice to an explanatory claim with the aid of a biconditional like (E) are dim (Vision, 2010; cf. Caputo, 2013, p. 299). Admittedly, I have no knock-down objection to either strategy: discussing deflationary attempts to come to terms with (AR) is beyond the scope of this paper, the aim of which is merely to present a viable alternative to deflationary alethic monism, not to refute it. Yet, it is fair to acknowledge that, as long as the possibility of explaining the intuition articulated by (AR) on purely deflationary grounds is left open, it is not clear in what sense a defence of (UA) turning on alethic realism can qualify as non-deflationary. Some disambiguation is in order here. The worry would be justified if providing a non-deflationary defence of (UA) necessarily involved mounting an argument to the effect that both (UA) *and its antecedent* are true. However, I suggest that providing

⁷ Although I am attracted to the view that all propositions, and not just those of some regions of discourse, lack genuinely representational properties, embracing this view is not essential to my defence of (UA): the claim that no clear sense can be given to the idea that truth is representational rather than non-representational is consistent with the view that the propositions of ‘realist’ regions of discourse are derivatively, or perhaps even intrinsically, representational, as long as this is not cashed out in terms of their having (realistically construed) truth values. This said, I do have some sympathy for the views of Speaks (2014) and Brown (2021), although I do not share the latter’s idea that the claim that propositions have no genuinely representational properties can be reconciled with the view that they are the primary bearers of truth values only by accepting an identity or primitivist account of propositional truth.

⁸ The view that I refer to as ‘alethic realism’ thus differs from that expressed by the official formulations of Alston’s (1996) ‘realist conception of truth’.

⁹ Aristotle accepted it in the restricted form suggested by the assumption that all sentences share the subject-predicate form. See, e.g., *Met.* Γ, 7, 1011b26-27; *De Int.* 9, 18a39-b3; *Cat.* 12, 14b14-17.

¹⁰ I use this cautious turn of phrase to acknowledge that the equivalence principle may need qualification in view of the problems raised by the semantic antinomies (perhaps not all instances of the equivalence schema are perfectly in order) and by the possibility of truth-value gaps (perhaps a three-valued logic is indicated).

a non-deflationary defence of (UA) can simply consist in mounting an argument for (UA) *that does not turn on denying that truth has a nature*: such a defence will be non-deflationary in the sense that advocates of a number of inflationary accounts of truth, including versions of the correspondence theory committed to non-deflationary views of facts, will be entitled to employ it to maintain that the nature of truth is invariant across region of discourse.

Let me get back to (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*). I have said that the contrast they evoke points to a genuine difference between the ways in which various kinds of discourse engage with reality. However, we are now in a position to see that the fact that (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) can be used to point to the difference in question need not mean that there are different ways for the propositions of those regions of discourse to be true: the appearance that that there are is just an illusion produced by a conflation that those formulations naturally tend to foster – the conflation of metaphysical issues concerning the nature of the relevant facts with explanatory issues concerning the different ways in which true propositions are related to the associated best opinions. The illusion is dispelled, as I shall presently explain, as soon as it is recognised that (*TexpBO*) is actually parasitic on

(*FexpBO*) In region of discourse *R*, if the best opinion on the issue is that *p*, it is because *p* that the best opinion on the issue is that *p*,

while (*BOexpT*) is actually parasitic on

(*BOexpF*) In region of discourse *R*, if *p*, it is because the best opinion on the issue is that *p* that *p*.

(‘*FexpBO*’ stands for ‘Facts explain Best Opinions’, and ‘*BOexpF*’ stands for ‘Best Opinions explain Facts’).¹¹

Here again attention should be paid to the underlying assumption that makes it possible to use these formulations to bring out what is ultimately at stake in the debates between realists and anti-realists. In this case, the assumption does not concern truths, but *facts* (recall that I am using the term ‘fact’ in a metaphysically deflationary spirit): for formulations like (*FexpBO*) and (*BOexpF*) to fulfil their intended purpose, it must be a priori that all facts in the region of discourse in question are in principle recognizable as such. The role of the assumption is to ensure that in the relevant region of discourse the properties of being a fact and of corresponding (again, in a suitably deflationary sense) to the best opinion on the relevant issue coincide in extension: for if this were not the case (if in the relevant region of discourse there were facts devoid of an associated best opinion), (*BOexpF*) could not possibly make for a serious alternative to (*FexpBO*).

¹¹ In construing (*FexpBO*), one should not equate *the best opinion on the issue* with the *true* opinion on that issue, but with the opinion that instantiates the epistemically (uniquely) valuable property that one might be tempted to regard as constituting truth in the relevant region of discourse: (*FexpBO*) does not say that it is because things are a certain way that the *true* opinion on the issue is that they are that way – if it did, the claim would be virtually indistinguishable from that articulated by (AR). For more specific applications of what is essentially the same point, see Gamester (2021, pp. 11,358 f.; 11,365 f.).

Now, alethic deflationists may argue with some plausibility that the reason why (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) point somewhat confusingly to the different ways in which various kinds of discourse engage with reality is that the truth predicate occurs in them merely as a device for attaining generality through the cancellation of semantic ascent (e.g., Dodd, 2013, p. 306). They can focus on (*FexpBO*) and (*BOexpF*) and observe that by replacing the second occurrence of ‘*p*’ in (*FexpBO*) and the first and last occurrences of ‘*p*’ in (*BOexpF*) with as many occurrences of ‘it is true that *p*’ one obtains (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) respectively. So the cases to which (*TexpBO*) applies are actually just cases to which (*FexpBO*) applies, and the cases to which (*BOexpT*) applies are actually just cases to which (*BOexpF*) applies, which goes to show that the difference between the truths covered by (*TexpBO*) and those covered by (*BOexpT*) “is ultimately a difference concerning the things in the world they respectively concern, not in how they are true” (Dodd, 2013, p. 306). This is not, of course, a line of reasoning that I wish to subscribe to. But a related line is available to (inflationary) alethic realists – provided, that is, they do not build too much semantics or metaphysics into their conception of truth (more on this later).

Let us first consider the regions of discourse in which best opinions play a constitutive role. With respect to these regions, it is open to alethic realists to argue that (*BOexpT*) points somewhat confusingly to the feature that is more perspicuously articulated by (*BOexpF*) precisely because whenever it is true that things are a certain way, it is true that they are that way because *they are that way*. Thus, the reason why

(*BOexpT*) In region of discourse *R*, if it is true that *p*, it is because the best opinion on the issue is that *p* that it is true that *p*.

is just that

(*BOexpF*) In region of discourse *R*, if *p*, it is because the best opinion on the issue is that *p* that *p*.

and

(AR) If it is true that *p*, it is true that *p* because *p*, and not vice versa.¹²

– if its being the case that Φ makes it the case that *p*, and its being the case that *p* makes it the case that *it is true that p*, then of course there is a sense in which its being the case that Φ makes it the case that *it is true that p*.

Things get a bit more complicated when it comes to the regions of discourse in which best opinions play a detecting role (i.e., detect pre-existing true propositions). For it would be incorrect to argue from

(*FexpBO*) In region of discourse *R*, if the best opinion on the issue is that *p*, it is because *p* that the best opinion on the issue is that *p*.

¹² For simplicity, here and below I omit the clause ‘whatever it takes for it to be the case that *p*’.

and

(AR) If it is true that p , it is true that p because p , and not vice versa.

to

(*TexpBO*) In region of discourse R , if the best opinion on the issue is that p , it is because it is true that p that the best opinion on the issue is that p .

– its being the case that p can make it the case both that Φ and that *it is true that p* , without *its being true that p* making it the case that Φ .¹³ However, (*FexpBO*) and (AR) may be invoked to explain why (*TexpBO*) may *appear* to be true: for if things are as (*FexpBO*) and (AR) say, then of course for any best opinion in the relevant region of discourse there will be a corresponding true proposition whose truth one may be tempted to invoke in an explanation of its being the best opinion on the issue. But the explanation offered by (*FexpBO*) screens-off that offered by (*TexpBO*).

In the end, then, (*TexpBO*) and (*BOexpT*) need not be taken to provide the most accurate and fundamental account of what tells apart the regions of discourse in which best opinions play a detecting role from those in which they play a constitutive role. If the most accurate and fundamental account of the matter is given by (*FexpBO*) and (*BOexpF*), it seems reasonable to conclude that the difference between the ways in which various kinds of discourse engage with reality has little to do with truth: it is, rather, a *metaphysical* difference that can be spelled out in terms of the different kinds of relation that the facts of various regions of discourse entertain with the associated best opinions. Now, best opinions are *propositions*, so this metaphysical difference will be matched by a corresponding difference between the contents exchanged in different regions of discourse – call it a *semantic* difference if you like, but of course not in the sense that it concerns the way in which those contents may be true (or false). What seems clear is that acknowledging the existence of the metaphysical difference, as well as of the associated difference in content, is perfectly compatible with maintaining that truth is one and the same thing across the board.

If what I have been arguing so far is roughly along the right lines, it is then possible to mount a successful defence of the claim that

(UA) If truth has a nature, then it has a uniform nature that is invariant across discipline or region of discourse.

against allegations that alethic monism cannot account for the fact that various kinds of discourse engage with reality in deeply different ways. I describe this defence as *non-deflationary* insofar as it does not hinge on the deflationary claim that truth has no nature, but on the realist claim that truths are grounded in facts across the board (as I said, this is an assumption that alethic deflationists might or might not be able to

¹³ What I am saying here concerning the relation between truth and best opinions in those regions of discourse in which the latter play a detecting role does not entail that truth can never play an explanatory role in those regions: it only entails that it need not play the explanatory role described by (*TexpBO*).

account for). What I have urged is indeed that subscribing to (monistic) alethic realism is perfectly compatible with acknowledging that there are regions of discourse in which the best opinions detect the facts of the matter and regions of discourse in which the best opinions go as far as constituting them. This tends to go unnoticed because the difference between such regions is frequently described with the help of the notion of truth. But what distinguishes the beliefs and statements of profoundly different regions of discourse has to do with metaphysics and content rather than truth, and can be brought out more accurately and perspicuously without mentioning the latter – and indeed without abandoning non-deflationary alethic monism in favour of alethic pluralism.

5 Truth Between Semantics and Metaphysics

What I have been assuming about truth in making my case for (UA) is just that

(E) It is true that p if and only if p ,

which is common ground between alethic deflationists and inflationists, and that

(AR) If it is true that p , it is true that p because p , and not vice versa,

a claim that prompts varied reactions from the deflationist camp.

In the previous section I noted that alethic deflationists will either attempt to explain away Aristotle's realist intuition or, alternatively, try to do justice to it on the slender basis afforded by their view of truth. Most alethic deflationists go for the first option: they typically offer independent derivations of the substitution-instances of (AR) and then argue that the truth predicate occurs within them, as within (AR) itself, merely as a device for attaining generality through the cancellation of semantic ascent. This is, essentially, the strategy followed by Horwich (1998, pp. 104–105; 2010, pp. 43–45), who pays some lip service to alethic realism but ultimately seeks to undermine the claim that it articulates a fundamental intuition about *truth* itself (for a different strategy, cf. Douven & Hindricks, 2005). On the other hand, there is perhaps room for arguing that, although (AR) articulates a genuine insight about truth (one that cannot be explained away as just another generalisation the articulation of which is made possible by the expressive power of the truth predicate), the insight in question concerns *something else besides truth*, and so alethic deflationists can legitimately attempt to do justice to it by employing conceptual resources that go beyond the equivalence principle (Caputo, 2013, pp. 313–315). I am somewhat sceptical about the prospects of this line of reasoning, but it seems clear that deflationists attracted by it might easily embed the defence of (UA) proposed in the last section within their framework. I have no objection to that. The crucial point here is just that that defence is non-deflationary in the sense that it does not depend on rejecting the antecedent of (UA), and as such is available to alethic realists subscribing to a whole range of inflationary views of truth.

A fair question to ask is whether the suggested defence of alethic monism is compatible with *every* inflationary conception of truth involving commitment to the equivalence principle and to alethic realism. Unsurprisingly, the answer is no: the line of argument that I have presented cannot be used to maintain that every realist conception of truth can account for the fact that different kinds of discourse engage with reality in deeply different ways. I suggested before that the argument is available only to those (inflationary) alethic realists who do not build too much semantics or metaphysics into their conception of truth. Let me address both requirements in turn.

What leads me to say that the argument will not go through if too much *semantics* is built into one's conception of truth is the familiar but sometimes forgotten point that providing an analysis of truth and giving a recursive specification of the truth conditions of the sentences of a language or of an agent's beliefs are different projects, which should be pursued with a clear awareness of their distinctive features. 'Theories of truth' that exploit Tarskian techniques to provide a recursive specification of the truth conditions of the sentences of a language or of an agent's beliefs may well provide semantic insight into the way the sentences of a language come to express the propositions they express or the way our beliefs come to have the content they have; but well-known discussions of Davidson's project have made abundantly clear that, in order to do so, they must be understood in a way that prevents them from being used to shed light on the nature of truth or the associated concept (Soames, 1984; Etchemendy, 1988). The point I want to press is indeed that, for a theory of truth to be able to fulfil metaphysical or conceptual purposes, it must not mix up the issue of truth with issues of content or representation – which means that it must be a theory of the truth *of propositions* rather than a specification of the way truth-bearers of a linguistic or mental kind acquire the semantic or representational properties, and hence the truth conditions, they actually have. This claim is of course controversial (Michael Dummett was one of its most prolific and articulate critics), and there is no space here to mount an argument in its defence.¹⁴ However, it is a claim that alethic pluralists typically accept (Ferrari, 2021), which means that my argument is not hostage to an assumption that alethic pluralists are likely to question. That said, it is fair to recognize that the line of argument of the last section can be successful only if it

¹⁴ For arguments in defence of this propositionalist claim, see Mackie (1973, Chap. 2, § 3) and Soames (1999, pp. 102–107; 2014, pp. 35–38). Glanzberg (2021, § 6.2) helpfully distinguishes the *theories of truth* that explain the way the truth values of certain truth-bearers are fixed from the *theories of truth conditions* that are 'as much theories of how truth-bearers are meaningful as of how their truth values are fixed'. It is worth emphasising that, while the acknowledgment that semantic theories of truth conditions exploiting Tarskian techniques cannot shed light on the nature of truth or the associated concept may lead to acceptance of a primitivist view of truth (Davidson, 1990, 1996), the point that metaphysical or conceptual theories of truth should not be saddled with improper semantical tasks is wholly independent of the claim that truth is unanalysable. Mackie and Soames share with Cappelen & Hawthorne (2009) the idea that the notion of truth that must be used to provide information about the meaning of sentences (relative to contexts) is the ordinary notion of monadic, propositional truth. On the other hand, practitioners of truth-conditional semantics in the tradition of Lewis and Kaplan typically relativize truth to worlds, times, locations, and possibly other parameters: the difference in adicity between the truth predicates used in such theories and those used in everyday talk may be taken as evidence that the notions of truth employed in those theories are distinct from the notion that provides the subject matter for metaphysical and conceptual analyses of truth (Kölbel, 2008, pp. 245–248, and MacFarlane, 2014, pp. 93 f., are very explicit on this; I am grateful to an anonymous referee for this journal for drawing my attention to the point).

is possible to draw a clear distinction between the aim and scope of the philosophical analysis of truth and the aim and scope of various semantics projects that use the notion of truth to illuminate the way the sentences we utter or the psychological states we are in come to have the content they have. If no such distinction is drawn, the risk is high that semantic assumptions that look plausible for certain classes of linguistic or mental tokenings – such as, for instance, the assumptions that are typically made by causal and teleological accounts of reference – may end up burdening the resulting ‘theory of truth’ with general claims about the relationship between best opinions and facts that would preclude using the line of argument that I have proposed to do justice to the fact that different kinds of discourse engage with reality in deeply different ways. So my point is in fact that, while a failure to attend to the distinction may help to lend some credibility to the pluralist claim that *utterance* or *belief* truth involves different properties in different regions of discourse, it will do so only by lending some credibility to the *semantic* claim that in different regions of discourse our mental tokenings come to have the content they have and our linguistic tokenings come to express the propositions they express in significantly different ways. But this semantic claim, even if correct, does not licence the conclusion that there are different ways for the relevant *propositions* to be true.¹⁵

As for the *metaphysical* side of the issue, the sense in which the line of argument of the last section is available only to inflationary alethic realists who do not build too much metaphysics into their conception of truth is perhaps more obvious. The point is just that pursuing that line of argument requires viewing facts as the sort of things relative to which best opinions can play not only a detecting, but a constitutive role. This requirement is surely met by the deflationary construal of facts adopted in the informal paraphrases of (AR) given in the last section, but it is met also by metaphysically more substantive conceptions. However, not every conception of facts will do. Thus, for instance, compositional conceptions that view facts as structured entities built up out of mind-independent objects, properties and relations will be incompatible with the claim that, in certain regions of discourse, best opinions play a constitutive role with respect to the relevant facts. On the other hand, compositional conceptions that acknowledge that the building blocks of facts may include response-dependent properties and relations may sit rather comfortably with the view that, in certain domains, best opinions play such a constitutive role. And the same goes for those propositional conceptions that take facts to be the unstructured referents of expressions of the form ‘the fact that *p*’, if the possibility is left open that our best opinions may play a constitutive role with respect to some of those facts. So not any conception of facts is compatible with my non-deflationary defence of (UA), but some indisputably are, which means that the line of argument that I have sketched is available to supporters of some, though not all, versions of the correspondence theory of truth (the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for truth-making theories; but these raise issues that go beyond the scope of this paper).

¹⁵ Unlike most fellow alethic pluralists, Brian Ball (2017) focuses his attention on utterance rather than proposition truth, which is crucial for his case that “truth is differently constituted in different domains” (p. 120). My rejoinder is that, by failing to observe the distinction spelled out in the main text, Ball’s argument establishes, at best, that the nature of *semantic denotation* varies across regions of discourse – which falls short of establishing that the nature of *truth* does. For references to the relevant literature, see fn. 14.

A final remark. It makes sense to assume that the propositions of a given region of discourse are truth-apt only if there is reason to expect that they have truth conditions that are (roughly) governed by the equivalence principle. Thus, my attempt to show that the propositions of those regions of discourse that appear to resist a realist treatment may be true (or false) just in the same way as any other proposition would be doomed if there were no reason to assume that a best opinion on the relevant issues is available to constitute the corresponding facts. Admittedly, I have provided no ground for this assumption. But this does no harm to my argument, because in this respect I do not face any difficulty that alethic pluralists do not themselves face. For their attempt to identify the alethically potent property of certain regions of discourse with superassertibility (or any other epistemic property) would also be doomed if there were no reason to assume that the true propositions of those regions are in principle knowable – that there is a best opinion on the relevant issues despite no corresponding facts being there to be detected. Indeed, this assumption is essential to the motivation of the pluralist project – if it were not in place, there would be no scope problem to begin with. But if it is in place, alethic monists are just as entitled to it as alethic pluralists.

6 Conclusion

In this paper I have offered a defence of alethic monism – the conditional claim that, if truth has a nature, then it has a uniform nature that is invariant across region of discourse – against the objection that it cannot account for the fact that different kinds of discourse engage with reality in deeply different ways. My defence of alethic monism qualifies as non-deflationary in so far as it does not turn on denying the conditional’s antecedent. And although its assumptions are so weak that it might be appropriated by some alethic deflationists, it most naturally recommends itself to upholders of several inflationary views of truth, including versions of the correspondence theory, provided such views meet some reasonable constraints.¹⁶

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¹⁶ The objection to alethic monism addressed in this paper provides the currently most popular and influential motivation for adopting alethic pluralism, but of course other considerations may influence the choice between monism and pluralism about truth. Such considerations I have not discussed here. In particular, I have not addressed a normative variation on the scope problem that has recently been proposed by Filippo Ferrari (2021) as the “axiological scope problem”. Discussion of this variation, as well as of the functional considerations that might be relevant to the debate between alethic monists and pluralists (see, e.g., Gamester 2021, pp. 11,374 f.), will have to await for another occasion.

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