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Reclaiming Pluralism from the Truth Pluralist

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This paper argues against alethic pluralism about truth: it argues against the idea that there are different concepts of truth for different kinds of beliefs and argues for a unified pragmatist account of truth. This unified account of truth captures a sensible pluralism about the kinds of beliefs that are truth-apt and suggests that we try to wrest the label *pluralism* from the alethic truth pluralist. The roots of this unified account of truth are pragmatist: they are traceable to the work of C. S. Peirce and F. P. Ramsey.

Introduction

Bjørn Ramberg has been concerned with truth and pragmatism for most of his career. He once earned a rare and major concession from Richard Rorty:

> [i]t was a mistake on my part to go from criticism of attempts to define truth as accurate representation of the intrinsic nature of reality to a denial that true statements get things right, [and granting Davidson's point that] most of our beliefs about anything [...] must be true of that thing—[we] must get that thing right. Rorty (2000, 374; cf. Ramberg, 2000)

One has beliefs about many things—for instance, I believe there is a desk in front of me here and now; that all humans are mortal; that consuming arsenic will make you ill; and that women ought to be able to choose to abort an early and unwanted pregnancy. What it is to get those things (singular empirical things; unrestricted general facts; causes; oughts) right looks different in each case. It has seemed to some that we need distinct concepts of truth to deal with these various kinds of things. In this paper, I will argue that we need only one concept of truth: the pragmatist concept.

Bjørn and I have been talking about truth since the late 1980s, when we were both young faculty members at Queen's University in Kingston, Canada. It was lovely to find another pragmatist in my first job, even if we did not agree on precisely what kind of pragmatism was best. I offer this paper as a continuation of our conversation.

Three Ways of Being a Pluralist about Truth

There are (at least) three ways contemporary philosophers think about truth's being plural. The first is to adopt a bare deflationism, on which a plurality of sentences (any well-formed sentence) can be slotted into the truth schema: *'p' is true iff p*.[1] The second is alethic pluralism, which asserts that there are different kinds of truths, which get right different kinds of properties. Cory Pederson and Crispin Wright adopt this second kind of pluralism:

> what property makes propositions true may vary across domains, or from subject matter to subject matter. Corresponding with reality might be the alethically potent property—the property that can make propositions true—when it comes to discourse about ordinary, concrete objects. On the other hand, cohering with the axioms of Peano arithmetic and being endorsed most widely might be the relevant properties for discourse about respectively arithmetic and the goodness of consumer goods.   Pederson and Wright, 2013, 2

This kind of alethic pluralist thinks that in science, truth is correspondence, in logic or mathematics it is coherence with axioms, and in ethics

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[1] See Misak (2015) for the argument that it does not do justice to the functions of our concept of truth.

and comedy it is superassertibility (the belief is justified by our own standards and its justification would survive any scrutiny of its descent and any additions and improvements to the information).[2] There are different concepts of truth, each holding for a different domain of discourse: "truth may consist in different things in different [...] areas: in the instantiation of one concept in one area, and in that of a different concept in another" (Wright, 1999, 228).

The third route, which I shall propose, is to offer a substantial, pragmatist conception of truth on which there are many different kinds of candidates for truth. There is just one answer to the question *What is meant by the truth?*, while there is a range of different ways of assessing what is true or methods for inquiring into what is true in particular discourses. This is a unified conception of truth that nonetheless captures the insight of pluralism about truth, the insight that different kinds of true belief are true for different kinds of reasons.

In calling the pragmatist account of truth a kind of pluralism, I am pulling against the framing of the debate as one which asks

> whether truth is one or many [...] is there only one property in virtue of which propositions can be true, or are there several? The truth monist holds the former view, while the truth pluralist adheres to the latter   Pederson and Wright ,2013, 2

I want to reclaim the label pluralism and have it apply to a theory of truth that says there is one property of truth, in virtue of which many kinds of propositions can be true. Some might argue that what I offer is not truth pluralism proper. They might argue that only alethic pluralism is genuine pluralism about truth. But this would be a kind of linguistic imperialism or an assertion of a trademark on the term 'pluralism'. The kind of position I put forward in this paper is best characterized as a kind of pluralism, for it shows us how we can aim at truth in a plurality of contexts.

Indeed, my kind of pragmatist should not need to wrestle the term 'pluralism' from the truth pluralist since I argue that the truth pluralist is wrong about truth, wrong about its very nature. They have mistakenly seen truth as plural, when they should have recognized that it is our practices of securing truth that are many. I show this by locating the centrality of the concept of truth within the interconnected nexus of belief and

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[2] See Wright (1992) for the superassertibility argument.

action. There is one concept of (objective) truth and it is worked out in various ways across practices and subject-matters.[3]

The Problems with Alethic Pluralism

There are three significant problems with alethic pluralism, which make it untenable. The first, which I shall set out bluntly, is that it is method-ologically cumbersome at best, spurious at worst, to multiply kinds of concepts (kinds of concepts of truth) to deal with problems on the ground (problems about how we aim at truth in various domains of inquiry).

The second is that the alethic pluralist has to give an account of the properties in virtue of which propositions can be true. An elaborate metaphysics is required—a world consisting of concrete, abstract, gen-eral, causal, mathematical, ethical, and conditional properties.[4] One chal-lenge here is that some of these properties, such as the ethical, causal, and mathematical, are odd or 'queer' to use John Mackie's word.[5] Another is that, again, the pluralist is multiplying properties (not concepts this time), when, as I shall argue below, there is no need to do that.

The third problem with alethic pluralism is that it is open to the chal-lenge that only one kind of truth is real truth and the other supposed kinds of truth are something else. Lynch (2013), for instance (along with Wright), takes truth to be, in one domain, correspondence, in another superwarrantability, and in another coherence. Correspondence to ob-jects is truth only in discourse about concrete objects and parts of science, whereas a different kind of truth is required for mathematics, ethics, and so on. This position will always be open to the challenge that correspon-dence truth is real truth and some other predicate (warrant, acceptability, rationality, superwarrantability) is not truth and this lesser thing is what is appropriate for other domains. That is, once we drop the conception of truth *per se* in favour of truth in this or that domain of discourse, the challenge is that so-called truth in some discourses looks less robust than truth in other discourses. Once we have correspondence in the mix, super-warrantability and coherence simply look like the best we can do (short of truth). While Wright and Lynch's idea is that there is more than one way for a proposition to be true, their challenger will say that there is more

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[3] I thank Rob Sinclair for this way of framing my position.

[4] See Edwards (2018) for a pluralist account of truth with this kind of complex meta-physics.

[5] See Mackie (1977).

than one way for a proposition to be *warranted*, and only one way for a proposition to be *true*.

If we adopt pragmatism about truth, we can get what the alethic pluralist wants (beliefs about mathematics, ethics, and so on can be true), without the baggage of alethic pluralism.

Unified Pluralism vs. Monism: The Case of Wittgenstein and Ramsey

My approach will be to examine the reasoning, pro and con, of one instance of the debate in the history of analytic philosophy—that between Wittgenstein and Ramsey in the 1920s—and to argue that Ramsey's unified pragmatist pluralist conception of truth is much better than Wittgenstein's monist theory. Not only will this give us an understanding of part of the history of the quest for pluralism about truth (always a good thing for the philosopher to have), but it will deliver a unified conception of truth which is expansive enough so as to not to preclude, from the outset at least, beliefs about ethics, causes, numbers, and so on. The most promising unified approach, I suggest, is that taken by a certain kind of pragmatist, a lineage I identify as arising from C. S. Peirce, continuing with Frank Ramsey, and manifested today in my own work and that of David Wiggins. On this approach, we do not say there are different concepts of truth (and try, impossibly, to work out a metaphysics for them). Rather, we focus on what it is for a belief to be as good as it could be.

In the 1922 *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein set out a metaphysics on which truth is that which corresponds to the facts. Language, like a picture, represents that objects are a certain way. All meaningful propositions can be reduced to elementary propositions which assert the existence of particular states of affairs, and these propositions are true if the world is as they say it is. If a proposition is to assert a fact, there must be something identical or shared in the picture and the depicted, and what is shared is a logical form. A picture is "an image of reality" or "a model of reality"; it agrees with reality or not. (Wittgenstein, 1922, 4.01, 2.12). And that reality is constituted by mind-independent objects and relations between them.

Not much is meaningful, or a candidate for truth, on this picture. What can be expressed in the primary language are the natural sciences. General statements, such as scientific and causal hypotheses (*All humans are mortal*; *Arsenic is poisonous*) talk about all instances past, present, and

future. They go beyond actual objects in the world, and so cannot be expressed in the elementary or primary language. Wittgenstein tried to treat the general quantifier as depending "*palpably* on that of the elementary propositions", so that a generalization is an infinite conjunction of its instances.[6] To say that All humans are mortal is to say that Bertrand Russell is mortal, and G. E. Moore is mortal, and on and on. To take causes to be anything more would be "superstition" (Wittgenstein, 1922, 5.1361). Ethics and aesthetics most certainly are not expressible in the primary language. Wittgenstein treated them in a special way, asserting that they were somehow higher than what could be said in the primary language. He saw that his own sentences in the *Tractatus* were philosophical—another kind of sentence which cannot mirror the world of objects—and he advised the reader to think of his philosophical sentences as a ladder, to be kicked out from under the readers' feet once they had climbed up it to see that philosophy was meaningless.

Wittgenstein eventually gave up on the metaphysical project of the *Tractatus*, having been battered by the objections of his young translator, Frank Ramsey. One of Ramsey's objections, in quip form, was "What we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either" (Ramsey, 1929a [1991], 146). He put the point more carefully as well. He argued that the fact that unrestricted or open generalizations such as *All humans are mortal* and *Arsenic is poisonous* cannot be captured in Wittgenstein's elementary language is a fatal flaw, as we cannot do without generalizations in science or in the rest of life.

Ramsey also argued that Wittgenstein's moves about ethics, aesthetics, and philosophical propositions were illicit. We cannot say that ethical and aesthetic statements are nonsense, but that they are somehow a higher kind of belief than those of the elementary sort. Wittgenstein cannot treat philosophical statements as nonsense yet employ his own philosophical statements in order to reach that conclusion. Ramsey said, again putting a good argument in a quip: "What we can't do, we can't do, and it's no good trying" (Galavotti, 1991, 51). We must avoid the "absurd position" of the child in the following dialogue:

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[6] Wittgenstein (1922, 4.411). He said some other things as well—that scientific laws are like meshes applied to a surface, giving them form and that signs are rule-governed projections of possible situations (Wittgenstein, 1922, 6.341; 6.35 3.5). But it is unclear how a mesh or rule can be expressed in the primary language of the *Tractatus*—how they might be broken down so as to hook up to simple objects in the world.

—"Say breakfast."

—"Can't."

—"What can't you say?"

—"Can't say breakfast." Ramsey, 1919b [1991], 6

Again, he put his point more carefully: if "the chief proposition of philosophy is that philosophy is nonsense", then "we must then take seriously that it is nonsense, and not pretend, as Wittgenstein does, that it is important nonsense!" (ASP/FPR.1983.01: 006-02-03). His conclusion was that "we cannot be satisfied with a theory that deals only with elementary propositions" (Ramsey, 1923, 469). Ramsey thought that the logical positivism of Schlick and Carnap suffered from the same flaws. In Gilbert Ryle's snappy phrase, the logical positivists' mantra of "either science or nonsense" "had too few 'ors' in it" (Ryle, 1970, 10). We need a conception of meaning and truth that is more pluralist, so that captures, in one way or another, science with its generalizations and causes, philosophy, ethics, and anything else that seems to aspire to truth, and distinguishes them in a principled way from genuine nonsense.

Wittgenstein eventually felt the force of Ramsey's arguments. He admitted that his greatest mistake in the *Tractatus* was to treat open generalizations as infinite conjunctions. He became what we call the later Wittgenstein, capitulating to Ramsey's insistence that philosophy should be focused on meaning as use and the primacy of practice.[7]

Ramsey didn't simply explode Wittgenstein's metaphysics. He offered an account of belief and truth that could take seriously the plurality of kinds of belief. He had noted, straight after reading the manuscript that would become the *Tractatus*, that if we adopt Wittgenstein's picture theory, we "incidentally" solve the problem of truth: "if a thought or proposition token 'p' says p, then it is called true if p, and false if $\neg p$" (Ramsey, 1923, 469). Ramsey is thus often taken to be the founder of the disquotationalist or redundancy theory of truth, on which to assert that ' "p" is true' is simply to assert p itself: " 'It is true that Caesar was murdered' means no more than that Caesar was murdered" (Ramsey, 1927 [1991], 38).

But this was never Ramsey's resting point. One of his signature moves was to set out the deflationary definition of truth so he could go on and make a more important pragmatist point about truth. Every time he set

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7 See Misak (2016; 2020) for a full accounting of how Ramsey is a pragmatist and how he influenced Wittgenstein.

out the deflationary definition, Ramsey immediately followed it by saying that once we have laid out the matter in this way, the problem of truth doesn't disappear. In fact, we are just getting started. Ramsey prefaced his deflationary remarks by saying that he should briefly discuss truth "before we proceed further with the analysis of judgment", and he finished his discussions by concluding that "if we have analysed judgment we have solved the problem of truth" (Ramsey, 1927 [1991], 39). That is, the deflationary move must be followed by an examination of belief, judgement, and assertion, which will provide us with a complete theory of truth. Simon Blackburn puts my reading of Ramsey nicely: Ramsey's "famous dismissal of the idea that there is a separate problem of truth is but a prelude to his hurling himself at problems of meaning and assertion".[8] In doing that more difficult work—in analysing the relationship between truth, belief, and action—Ramsey delivered a unified but pluralist account of belief and truth.

He argued that we should do philosophy in a "realistic" way, keeping it connected with our practices and with what is important to us as human beings (Ramsey, 1929a [1991], 160). Being realistic is being pragmatist, the "essence" of which is that "the meaning of a sentence is to be defined by reference to the actions to which asserting it would lead, or, more vaguely still, by its possible causes and effects" (1927 [1991], 51). With respect to the meaning of belief and truth, Ramsey thought that it is not possible to understand the "truth or falsity of thoughts without considering the effects they have on our acting either directly or indirectly through dispositional beliefs" (1929c [1991], 101). A belief is a habit of action and we can assess such habits by whether or not they lead to successful action. For instance, what it is to believe that all humans are mortal is: "Partly to say so, partly to believe in regard to any x that turns up that if he is a man he is mortal" (1929a: [1991], 148). The belief—the open generalization—"consists" in being disposed to enunciate *All men are mortal* and being disposed or to treat every human you meet as mortal. The belief "expresses an inference we are at any time prepared to make" (1929a [1991], 146). Generalizations, causal hypotheses and inductive conclusions are "rules for judging" or rules with which we meet the future or rules we "trust" (1929a [1991], 151).[9]

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[8] `https://316am.site123.me/articles/strawson-evans-the-usefulness-of-slipping-to-the-propositional?c=flickering-shadows-truth-in-16mm-edited-by-huw-price`

[9] The question of whether Ramsey took beliefs to be truth-bearers is thorny. I read him as a global pragmatist who says that a belief-habit is a "cognitive attitude" that differs from the cognitive attitude of believing *that p* is true (Ramsey, 1929a [1991], 146). It is the cognitive

One of Ramsey's most fruitful points is that there are many different kinds of action: that found in scientific contexts, ethical contexts, and much more. Once we see that, we can see how a diversity of beliefs can aim at truth. He considered another tricky kind of belief which we think we can evaluate but which doesn't sit well within any kind of representationalist metaphysical picture—conditionals, including counterfactual conditionals. How do we fit 'if *p* had happened, *q* would have happened' into such a metaphysics? On Ramsey's view, even a counterfactual conditional can be a cognitive, evaluable, attitude. He considered a man who doesn't eat a certain cake, because he thinks that were he to eat it, he would be made ill. He argued that we have different "degrees of expectation" as to the outcome, and in disputing about the proper degree of expectation we can "introduce any fact we know, whether he did or could know it". If the man knew that I carefully baked the cake with the finest ingredients, that I'm an excellent baker, that I know he has no food allergies or aversions, and that I bear no ill will toward him, we might judge that he is irrational in maintaining his worry about the cake. If all these things hold, but he doesn't know them, then we might merely judge him mistaken. The fact that we can "dispute with him or condemn him" requires explanation, which is unavailable to those who think of conditionals in terms of strict logic, as opposed to human logic (1929a [1991], 154–55). In a now-famous footnote, Ramsey suggested that when someone evaluates a conditional 'if *p*, then *q*' they are hypothetically adding the antecedent *p* to their stock of knowledge and then seeing if *q* would also be in their stock of knowledge. Robert Stalnaker (1968) proposed a theory of truth conditions for counterfactuals on the basis of that footnote. What is now known as the Ramsey Test for Conditionals is a method for determining whether we should believe a conditional. We add *p*, hypothetically, to our given body of belief. If the acceptance of *p* leads to a contradiction within that body of belief, we make adjustments, as minor as possible, within the existing body of belief in order to restore consistency. Then we ask whether *q* is acceptable in the revised body of belief. This is another payoff for Ramsey's theory of belief and truth in terms of habits of action: we have a way of understanding how conditionals and counterfactual conditionals might be true or false.

Ramsey was explicit about his theory being pragmatist. It was built on the work of the founder of pragmatism, C. S. Peirce, who argued that a true belief is a habit of action that would be "indefeasible"—no matter

attitude of accepting a rule with which to meet the future—a kind of knowing how. See Misak (2025) and Holton and Price (2003) for a competing expressivist reading.

how much further we were to investigate and debate, it would not be overturned by recalcitrant experience and argument (Peirce, 5.569).We aim at beliefs that would be unshakable or would be forever stable—we aim at getting the best beliefs we can.

One important feature of Peirce's version of pragmatism is that propositional attitudes aimed at truth must be answerable to something—to experience or to the facts as they present themselves to us. Peirce set himself against James who tended to say that truth is what works or satisfies one here and how. Peirce's thought that "if Truth consists in satisfaction, it cannot be any actual satisfaction, but must be the satisfaction which would ultimately be found if the inquiry were pushed to its ultimate and indefeasible issue" (Peirce, 6. 485). If you discover that a belief "is determined by any circumstance extraneous to the facts", you "will from that moment not merely admit in words that that belief is doubtful, but will experience a real doubt of it, so that it ceases to be a belief" (Peirce w 3, 253; 1877). One of "the essentials of belief, without which it would not *be* belief" is that if "the facts remain lamentable" or speak against your belief, it is thrown into doubt. Of course, not everyone keeps their beliefs responsive to facts, and even those who try don't always succeed. Moreover, we may be wrong about what is in fact successful, indeed, confused about it, since assessing successful action is difficult and complex. The point is that, if we are to see our beliefs as aiming at truth, we commit ourselves to keeping our beliefs responsive to the way things are, to consistency with our other confirmed beliefs, etc.[10]

Ramsey followed Peirce on this point as well. In the book he was writing when he died, he argued as follows. The pragmatist account of belief holds that "To say a man believes in hell means, according to the pragmatists that he avoids doing those things which would result in his being thrown into hell". That is the pragmatist account of belief content that Ramsey accepts. He goes on: "Such conduct will be useful to the man if it really saves him from hell, but if there is no such place it will be a mere waste of opportunities for enjoyment" (Ramsey, 1929c [1991], 91). The belief in hell had better attend to the object of the belief—whether there is really is a hell—otherwise it will not turn out to be successful.

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[10] Peirce was holist who argued that even mathematics is connected to experience in the requisite way. We expect certain things to be the case if mathematical beliefs are true or false. Not only might we have practical bridge-building kinds of expectations with respect to applied mathematics, but also hypotheses in pure mathematics have consequences. They have consequences in diagrammatic contexts. When we manipulate diagrams, we can find ourselves surprised.

Ramsey noted that, while he hadn't used the word 'correspondence', those so inclined will latch onto his requirement that "A belief is true if and only if there is a way it says things are and they are thus" and mistake his view for a correspondence theory. (Ramsey, 1929c [1991], 19). But "this talk of correspondence, though legitimate and convenient for some purposes, gives [. . .] not an analysis of truth but a cumbrous periphrasis, which it is misleading to take for an analysis" (Ramsey, 1929c [1991], 19). If we are to have a complete analysis of truth, we need to ask what is it for a belief to be a belief *that p*. "Only when we know the structure of belief can we say what type of correspondence it is that unites true belief and facts". Once we've set out the deflationary "truism", we must look for a complete account of "the kind of merit in a belief to which we refer in calling it true" (Ramsey, 1929c [1991], 19). This won't be an analysis of truth in the Wittgensteinian or Russellian sense, where we break the concept down to its logical constituents. It will be a pragmatist analysis, where we draw out all the aspects of the truth predicate, all the kinds of merit in belief that can make a belief true.

Ramsey's book (eventually published in the form of three incomplete drafts with the title *On Truth*) was also going to consider whether statements of ethics and aesthetics are beliefs that can be evaluated as true or false. That is, Ramsey's account of truth, which had already taken in general propositions and counterfactuals, was going to extend to ethics and aesthetics. Ramsey saw that beliefs about values might well be oriented towards, or assessible in terms of, the way things are.[11] He left it open in the book manuscript whether ethical beliefs have a determinate enough kind of merit so that we can judge them as true or not. That seems right. Only those under the grip of an absolutist ethics, such as a religious dogma or effective altruism, think that it's obvious that all or most ethical judgements admit of truth.

Notice that there is no need, on Ramsey's account, to try to give an impossible metaphysics which strains to account for judgments such as the causal, general, philosophical, or ethical. That was Wittgenstein's problem and it is a problem for today's alethic pluralist. Ramsey avoided it by saying that, sure, a true belief corresponds to the facts, but we cannot

[11] Ramsey engaged in considerable ethical deliberation—about equality of income, intergenerational justice, and socialist politics. (See Misak, 2020). Bringing ethics under the scope of truth makes Ramsey closer to Peirce's immediate successor in American pragmatism, C. I. Lewis. For while I have argued (Misak, 2000) that Peirce's account of truth provides the resources for thinking of ethical judgments as aiming at truth, although he himself did not think that his account of truth was suited for practical ethical problems

specify that any further than to say that correspondence is the type—"or types, since [it] may be different with different forms of belief"—of relation between thinking that such-and-such is the case and such-and-such's actually being the case (Ramsey, 1929c [1991], 11) This is the pragmatist advantage. Peirce and Ramsey can gesture at the way things are without delivering a metaphysics of how things are in this or that domain. What they offer is a set of ways of assessing beliefs and if they are assessible, they are truth apt. The line the pragmatist attempts to walk is a fine one. But staying on it is the difference between an undifferentiated account of truth that allows us to think of truth as applying to a wide range of beliefs and resorting, as the alethic pluralist does, to an differentiated concept of truth. I think the former is worth pursuing.

Ramsey could have confined the word *truth* to the strict domain of the *Tractatus* and called reliable beliefs in the secondary domain correct, or right, or assertible. But he didn't do that. He used the word *truth* to mark the aim of all propositions, and argued that each science must answer for its own "domain" the question "what is true?" Notice that he said *what is true* rather than *what is truth*. There is one concept of truth and each kind of inquiry must sort out what counts as true in that domain. He thought that "the whole purpose of argument is to arrive at truth" (1929c [1991], 84). What it is to aim at truth in various domains will differ, but truth is indefeasible belief or habits that would always serve us well.

New Pluralist Pragmatism

David Wiggins and I have each been putting forward pragmatist conceptions of truth which allow for ethical judgments to be true. Our views are rooted in Peirce and more recently, mine in Ramsey, further modernized by being set against current trends towards disquotationalism. Let me make the argument in Wiggins's terms, as it appears in papers such as "Truth, and Truth as Predicated of Moral Judgments," "Reflections on Inquiry and Truth Arising from Peirce's Method for the Fixation of Belief," and the revised "Marks of Truth: An Indefinibilist cum Normative View".[12] Wiggins argues that the idea of bare disquotation is not the key to anything. Like all pragmatists, he thinks that a theory of truth must show how and why assertions aim at truth. If we are to understand the concept of truth, we should place truth in its conceptual neighbourhood and

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[12] For my own contributions, in addition to the current offering, see, for instance, Misak (1991, 2015, and 2016)

seek to establish within that neighbourhood something like the Fregean "marks" of the concept: if all *F*s are *G*s, then *G* is a mark of *F*. Wiggins offers the following as the marks of truth:

1) Truth is a primary dimension of assessment for beliefs;

2) If *p* is true, then it will, under favourable circumstances, command convergence, the best explanation of which will turn upon the actual truth of *p*;

3) In order to interpret *x* as the belief it is, there must be something distinct from *x*, namely how thing have to be for *x* to succeed in its aim to be correct;

4) Every true belief is true in virtue of something;

5) the conjunction of any true beliefs is true

<div align="right">Wiggins (1987 [1991], 152).[13]</div>

Wiggins gets marks 2 and 3 from Peirce. Propositional attitudes aimed at truth (as opposed to mental states such as wishful thinking and idle supposition) see themselves "on pain of extinction" as not extraneous to the facts or as "answerable to something" (Wiggins, 1987 [1991], 344). The kind of convergence that is a mark of truth is not "a mere intersubjectivity or chorus of agreement [...] If the convergence in the belief that item *t* is *F* is to be relevant to truth [...] then what put that belief there and holds it there has to be nothing more and nothing less than the fact that the item *t* really *is F*" (Wiggins, 1987 [1991], 150–51). What is the best explanation of my belief that SARS-CoV-2 was rare in Lethbridge Alberta on July 10, 2020 and what is the best explanation of the convergence of my belief with that of others? If the best explanation of why I arrived at my belief is that SARS-CoV-2 was indeed rare at that time and place, then the belief is oriented towards truth. If not—if I arrived at it only because I wanted to travel there to see my parents—then it was something like wishful thinking.

The first thing to notice about this approach is that it does not try to define truth in terms of a single property being necessary and sufficient for explaining why all true propositions are true, whatever they happen

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[13] While Mark 4 might seem to be a return to truth-makers, Wiggins, like Peirce and Ramsey mean something weaker than the claim that every truth is made true by a distinct fact. Every truth is true in virtue of the way things are and there can be a way things are with respect to what is right or wrong, causal or a mere association, and so on.

to be about. Hence it is on the surface not open to what Lynch calls the "scope problem"—the inability to go beyond the scope of the paradigm examples for which the concept of truth is suited (Lynch, 2004). This was part of Ramsey's objection to Wittgenstein—the picture theory of the *Tractatus* made truth terribly limited in scope. On a pragmatist account such as mine, Ramsey's, Peirce's, and Wiggins', where we are not seeking an analytic definition of truth, but the various marks of truth, it turns out that truth's scope is extended. In setting out the characteristics of true judgments, we happen not to close off questions about what kinds of judgments might admit of truth and falsity. We don't adopt a heavy-handed metaphysics that says that truth is that which corresponds to the facts, and facts are constituted by mind-independent objects and relations between them. That approach expels from the outset, as we have seen, ethical, general, and other kinds of judgments from the orbit of truth. As Wittgenstein (and the Vienna Circle) eventually saw, this approach rules out, or at least requires an explanation as to why they aren't ruled out, a host of seemingly important discourses—those about causal and lawlike hypotheses, open generalisations, counterfactual conditionals, as well as philosophy itself.

The second thing to notice about this kind of pragmatist theory of truth is that it does not say that truth is a different thing in different cases—one thing for chemistry, another for ethics, another for philosophy. Truth is marked out by a set of characteristics and satisfying that set of characteristics, in the way that is appropriate to the kind of belief, is what it is for any kind of belief to be true. The pragmatist account of truth is unified, not scattered. We can say something general about truth, while retaining the ability to say particular things about different sorts of belief.

The third advantage of the unified pragmatist account of truth is that it explains our feeling that many statements in some domains of inquiry are *not* truth-apt. In ethics, for instance, there is much indeterminacy. Some ethical quandaries might be unresolvable. But others might admit of truth or falsity. If I have \$1 000 to give to charity, it may be that there is no truth of the matter whether I should support Oxfam, the local foodbank, or Doctors Without Borders. Effective altruists would disagree here, for their extreme brand of utilitarianism gives a strict account of truth and evidence for ethics, such that we must maximize utility and give to the likes of the mosquito net charities, which will save the most lives. The pragmatist, with the more expansive notion of truth as that which will best meet the future, can bring into the picture one's own characteristics

and aims, for it is Cheryl Misak who is meeting the future with her belief that she should give her $ 1 000 to one or another charity. I can do the right thing by supporting what is most pertinent, what is lit up, for me. Here we might have an instance of a disjunctive statement being true: It is right for Cheryl Misak to give her $ 1 000 to Oxfam, to the local foodbank, or to Doctors Without Borders, but not right for her to give it to a local or international white supremacist organization.

Many ethical judgements can be seen as truth apt on this account. The best explanation of my belief that it was cruel, racist, and reprehensible of the Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin to kneel on George Floyd's neck until he died is that it was in fact cruel, racist, and reprehensible. The fact that others, such as the police union, might see the act otherwise does not make the matter relative and unsuitable for a truth value. There is disagreement, but the question is whether we will reach a point where, as Wiggins puts it, "there is nothing else to *think*" (Wiggins, 1987 [1991], 348). That involves taking into account all the available evidence, scrutinizing the motives for people making various claims, and deliberating about the matter. If the upshot of this inquiry is that there is nothing else to think, then that is the kind of convergence which is a mark of truth. Sometimes, as in this instance, a judge will weigh in, but that needn't be the case.

There is much more to be said about how the pragmatist account of truth plays out in ethics, but I hope I have given a flavour of the promise it holds in this domain. It makes sense of our aiming at truth in ethics. It does not commit us into an impossible metaphysics which says that there are ethical facts in the world. It allows for indeterminacy. A further advantage is that it allows us to criticize those who ignore or denigrate the experience of others. They show themselves to not be engaged in the search for truth, for that search is to get a belief that best stands up to experience. This is why the question about my charitable giving has false answers. It is wrong for me to give my $ 1 000 to the neo-Nazi party, for the neo-Nazi has adopted a method that ignores the fact that the future will not go well for many if their policies are adopted.[14]

It is important to note that we find persistent disagreement in other domains of inquiry as well as in ethics. We find them with counterfactual conditionals. 'Had Boris Johnson imposed vaccine mandates and not lifted mask requirements in the spring of 2022, fewer people would have contracted COVID-19' is a counterfactual that we can assess as true. 'Had Boris Johnson not missed five Cobra meetings in the spring of 2020, fewer

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[14] See Misak (2000) for the extended pragmatist argument about ethics.

people would have contracted COVID-19' is a counterfactual that is probably too complex to assess as true or false. Too many unknowns need to be known. Perhaps if Johnson had attended those meetings, public health measures would have been put in place at an even slower pace and more people would have contracted COVID-19. Perhaps the opposite.

There is disagreement even about whether the earth is round. The question for the pragmatist of the sort I have been commending is whether the explanations of the competing beliefs are answerable to something. The answer is *yes*. The explanation of the belief that the earth is flat has to do with conspiracy theories and politics, whereas the explanation of the belief that the earth is round has to do with a great diversity of empirical evidence. The flat earthers fix their beliefs in a manner extraneous to the evidence and our best understanding of facts, and hence their beliefs don't work well. They cannot get on a round-the world flight without a great deal of cognitive dissonance. They cannot explain why Polaris appears high in the sky in northern latitudes and low (or completely disappears) in the sky in southern latitudes. They will also have a difficult time explaining why the moon appears flipped upside down from one hemisphere to the other. These are the ways we assess the truth or falsity of their claims.

I hope I have said enough to show that the branch of pragmatist pluralism about truth I have been proposing is a powerful account of truth. It makes room for a vast range of beliefs, including singular perceptual judgments, causal generalizations, ethical judgments, and counterfactual conditionals. It does not commit us to a bizarre ontology in which there are concrete objects, causes, goods, and counterfactual facts existing in the world. Once we view truth as a habit of action that would forever serve us well, and once we view serving us well along all its dimensions, we get a pluralism about truths without the pain of having to invent a world full of mysterious objects or to postulate different truth properties.[15]

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