*Lynch on Truth**

"Our basic belief in truth's objectivity . . . [means that w]e know the job of true beliefs, even if we don't know exactly how they get that job done. True beliefs are those that portray the world as it is and not as we may hope, fear, or wish it to be" (12).

"*X*-properties can depend on *Y*-properties without particular *X*-properties depending on *the same* particular *Y*-properties. The particular underlying *Y*-properties that *X*-properties depend on can vary. . . . Philosophers typically put this by saying that, in these sorts of cases, the 'higher-level' property (e.g., the moral or mental property) can be *multiply realized*—the exact lower-level property it depends on may vary with context. . . .

"[I]t seems clear that truth could be understood in a similar way. Like moral properties, we don't think there is a logical, conceptual entailment between the natural properties of a belief and its truth. This is because, like moral properties, truth is a normative property. Nonetheless, the property of truth remains strongly dependent on other properties that a belief may have. More precisely, given a belief of a particular kind, if that belief is true, then it has some property *P* such that necessarily, if a belief of that kind has *P* then it is true, and if it doesn't have *P* it is not. Just like moral and mental properties, the property of truth can be seen as something over and above the properties on which it depends, but it depends on them just the same.

"If this suggestion is right, then we can think of truth itself as what philosophers call a *functional* property. . . . [T]rue propositions can be seen as having a certain job—or function—to perform in our mental life. True propositions are those that are good to believe, and that correctly portray the world as it is. This is truth's job description, as it were. Beliefs or propositions are true when they do that job. Thus the lower-level property of a given belief on which its truth depends can be thought of as what accomplishes the job of *being true* for that type of belief. It *does* the truth-job for that sort of belief, but it is not the property of being true itself. Being true is [not having, but *doing*!] a particular job, the job of correctly portraying things as they are. . . .

"[This] opens the door to a pluralism about the sorts of properties of beliefs on which truth depends, or which get the truth-job done. . . . Intuitively, what we want to say is this: beliefs can be true in different ways. And this point dovetails nicely with the current suggestion that the truth is a higher-level functional property. . . . A belief is true when, among other things, it gets things right. But what property of that belief does the job of 'getting things right' (or 'correctly portraying the world as it is') may differ depending on the type of belief in question. . . .

"[I]f truth is a deeply normative property—one that is more than instrumentally good for our beliefs to have—then it isn't reducible to a purely physical property of our beliefs. Yet the idea that truth is irreducible does not mean that truth is a mystery. It instead opens the door to a new possibility: that truth, much like courage, kindness, or love, is one thing that comes in many forms" (98 ff.).

"A belief in fundamental rights does not require that one believe in Natural, God-given Rights or other bizarre metaphysical entities. It requires only an objective notion of truth in the minimal sense of 'objective.'. . . In this sense, a belief is true just when the world is as that belief portrays it as being. Just because a belief passes for true among our peers, or is even justified by the available evidence, does not make it true. Believing . . . doesn't make it so. Crucially, then, truth's objectivity does not mean that beliefs can be true only if they 'correspond to mind-independent physical facts.' The minimal objectivity of truth is compatible with beliefs being true in different ways. Truth . . . depends or 'supervenes' on lower-level-properties of beliefs. These lower-level properties realize or accomplish the job of being true. But which properties realize that job may vary depending on the subject at hand. Consequently, when we say, '*X* is a fundamental human right,' there is no need to think that this must be made true by some mysterious *fact* out in the mind-independent physical world. In general, there is no reason that corresponding with a mind-independent fact is the only way a belief can be true" (171 f.).

"All [a belief in the existence of human rights] requires is the minimum objectivity that comes along with any account worth calling an account of 'truth': namely, that a belief is true when things are as that belief says they are, and not because, say, nine

out of ten people recommend it. The crucial point is simply that believing doesn't make it so" (173 f.).

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"[T]he very possibility of disagreement over opinions requires there to be a *difference* between getting it right and getting it wrong. When I assert an opinion on some question, I assert what I believe is *correct*. You do the same. And when we disagree, obviously, we disagree about whose opinion is correct. So if there is no such thing as reaching one (or none, or even more than one) correct answer to a given question, then we can't really disagree in opinion.

"[The] point is that we distinguish truth from falsity because we need a way of separating correct from incorrect beliefs, statements, and the like. In particular, we need a way of distinguishing between beliefs for which we have some evidence, or [that] are endorsed by the Pentagon, or denounced by the president, or make us money, or friends, or simply feel good, and those that actually end up getting it *right*. It is not that we can't evaluate beliefs in all those other ways—of course we can. We can and should criticize a belief for not being based on good evidence, for example. But that sort of evaluation depends for its force on a more basic sort of evaluation. We think it is good to have some evidence for our beliefs *because* we think that beliefs that are based on evidence are more likely to be true. We criticize people who engage in wishful thinking *because* wishful thinking leads to believing falsehoods.

"So a primary point of having a concept of truth is that we need a very basic way of appraising and evaluating our beliefs about the world. Indeed, this is built right into our language: the very word 'true' has an evaluative dimension. Part of what you are doing when you say something is true is commending it as something good to believe. Just as 'right' and 'wrong' are the most basic ways to evaluate actions as correct or in correct, so 'true' and 'false' are our most basic ways to evaluate beliefs as correct or incorrect.

"Indeed, the connection between belief and the truth is so tight that unless you think something is true, you don't even count as believing it. To believe just is to take as

true. If you don't care whether something is true, you don't really believe it. William James put this by saying that truth 'is the good in the way of belief.'. . . [T]ruth is a property that is good for beliefs to have. Since propositions are the content of beliefs, and it is the content of a belief and not the act of believing that is true, we can also say that truth is the property that makes a proposition good to believe. In believing, we are guided by the value of truth: *other things being equal, it is good to believe a proposition when and only when it is true*. Since what is good comes in degrees, we can also put this 'norm' or rule by saying that other things being equal . . . it is better to believe what is true than what is false. [This doesn't mean] that it is necessarily *morally* better. Things can be better or worse, good or bad in different ways. Clear writing is an æsthetic good; tasty food is a culinary good; and believing true propositions, we might say, is a cognitive or intellectual good" (12 f.).

"Simple relativism, were we able to make complete sense of it, would obviously undermine truth's value. If everything you believe is true anyway, there is not much point in saying that you ought to believe the truth. A basic point of even having a truth concept . . . is to help us evaluate some statements as right and others as wrong. But if no one ever makes a mistake, such a concept would be pointless.

"Luckily for us, simple relativism is simpleminded. Not every belief is true. Some are false, as attested by anyone foolish enough to believe simple relativism" (34).

"[T]he most obvious reason we need an idea of truth is that we need a way of distinguishing good opinions from bad. This is not to say that 'true' and 'false' are the only concepts we use for this purpose. We can and do evaluate beliefs for their correctness in other ways: as justified or unjustified, as reasonable or unreasonable, as based on evidence or not, and so on. But . . . these latter sorts of evaluation are always linked to truth. We think it is good to have some evidence for our views *because* we think that beliefs that are based on evidence are more likely to be true[, and so on]. . . .

"So the point of having an idea of truth is to sort correct judgments from incorrect ones. . . .

"One of the things humans like to do when they are together is disagree with each other. Yet . . . the possibility of disagreement over opinions requires there to be a difference between getting it right and getting it wrong. In asserting an opinion, I assert what I believe is correct. When you disagree, you disagree about whose opinion is correct. So if there is no such thing as being right, wrong, or even in-between, then we can't really disagree in opinion. We may of course still differ in all sorts of ways—in our hopes and fears and desires. But we aren't disagreeing over who is right and who isn't. When there is no question of being correct or incorrect, there is nothing to disagree about" (160 f.).

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"That true belief is a goal worthy of pursuit does not mean that we pursue this goal directly. The pursuit of truth is in fact always indirect. This is because belief isn't something we have direct control over, We can't believe on demand. . . .

"Nonetheless, we certainly do have *indirect* control over what we believe, and this is control enough. I can affect what I believe by putting myself in certain situations and avoiding other situations. That is, I can control how I *go about pursuing the truth*, by paying careful attention to the evidence, giving and asking for reasons, doing adequate research, remaining open-minded, and so on. In short, in saying that truth is a worthy goal, we imply that you ought (other things being equal) to adopt policies, methods, and habits of *inquiry* that are reliable, or that are likely to result in true beliefs. We ordinarily think that it is good to give and ask for reasons, good to be open-minded, good to have empirical evidence for one's scientific conclusions, because these are methods of inquiry that lead us to the truth. If we didn't value true beliefs, we wouldn't value these sorts of activities; and we value these sorts of activities because we think that they, more often than not, lead us to believing truly rather than falsely.

"So we pursue true belief via engaging in inquiry. . . .

"[S]ince it is good to believe what is true, truth is worthy of pursuit, of being a goal of inquiry" (14 f.).

"[T]rue beliefs are best described as cognitively, as opposed to morally, good. Typically, it is persons, desires, characters, and actions that are most often called morally good or bad. This is because such things are the subject or object of responsibility; that is, they are fit for praise or blame. Beliefs, on the other hand, are not strictly speaking within our control. When you open your eyes in the morning, you just start forming beliefs about your environment. You can't help it, and therefore your belief's being true wouldn't typically be called morally good. In this sense we think of beliefs like feelings. Consider the feelings of pleasure or pain, for example. Experiencing pleasure is *prima facie* good, but like a belief's being true, it is not *morally* good. You don't have control over the pleasurable feeling itself, just as you don't have control over the belief itself. Nonetheless, you do have control over how you pursue or avoid pleasure. And the same goes with belief. You have control over how you pursue forming beliefs. And in *that* sense, you are responsible for what you believe. Consequently, just as true belief is a *prima facie* cognitive good, so pursuing true beliefs is a *prima facie* cognitive good in its own right. But because we have control over the ways in which we pursue truth and avoid error, the *pursuit* of truth can be both cognitively and morally good" (49).

*All quotations are from Michael Lynch, *True to Life: Why Truth Matters*.