

Pluralism about truth?

In *Truth and Objectivity*, Crispin Wright makes numerous claims which commit him, either explicitly or implicitly, to the view that different discourses can and do have different truth predicates. This view—which I shall call *pluralism about truth*—is a crucial element in the standpoint which Wright recommends for observing contemporary metaphysical debates: it is the feature which he takes to distinguish his view from the kind of minimalism defended by Paul Horwich; and it is also the feature which he takes to ensure that he and Simon Blackburn are comrades in arms, fighting the good fight against the evil ‘deniers of difference’.

Although pluralism about truth is central to Wright’s position, it has also proven controversial: many commentators have claimed to find fault with Wright’s adoption of pluralism about truth. In turn, Wright has said that his critics have misunderstood what he means by the claim that different discourses can and do have different truth predicates. What follows is an examination of one of the major criticisms which have been levelled at Wright’s claim, and of his responses to them. Overall, the criticisms of Wright’s pluralism about truth are of two main kinds: first, that it is more economical—or otherwise theoretically desirable—to work with a single truth predicate and to attribute the diversity which Wright finds in truth to the diversity of discourses in which the single truth predicate has application; and second, that there are simple arguments about mixed

discourses which show that there cannot be a plurality of truth predicates. I shall here only be concerned with the second kind of objection.

I

In his review of *Truth and Objectivity* in the *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, Timothy Williamson notes that there has to be a single truth predicate in a language such as English. Suppose that one has two discourses D_1 and D_2 which are conducted in English, and that ‘ A_1 ’ and ‘ A_2 ’ are declarative sentences which belong to D_1 and D_2 respectively. Clearly ‘Either A_1 or A_2 ’ will also be a sentence which belongs to English. Moreover, there must be a single truth predicate which applies to both the disjunction and to its disjuncts—for otherwise, the platitude that a disjunction is true just in case one of its disjuncts is true would be vitiated by equivocation. So it plainly follows that it is a mistake to think that different discourses require different notions of truth—the word must mean the same thing no matter what the discourse in which it features.

In a recent article in *Analysis*, Christine Tappolet claims that there is a simple yet powerful objection to the claim that there is a plurality of truth predicates. Consider some inference which involves declarative sentences from different discourses and in which distinct truth predicates are to be found. How could any such inference be valid, given that validity requires necessary truth preservation (and hence requires that there be a

single notion of truth which applies to all of the premises and to the conclusion)? Surely it is plain that only a truth predicate shared by all sentences which can appear in inferences will satisfy the platitudes relating truth to inferences. (This argument is cited approvingly by Blackburn in his contribution to the recent symposium on Realism and Truth in *Mind*.)

These arguments are clearly closely related. According to Williamson, if there are different truth predicates which are appropriate to different discourses, then we shall be obliged to give up platitudes connecting truth and logical operations (conjunction, disjunction, and so on), on pain of equivocation involving our truth predicates. According to Tappolet, if there are different truth–predicates which are appropriate to different discourses, we shall be obliged to give up platitudes connecting truth and valid inference—in the case she considers, since the argument is plainly valid, we shall be obliged to say that its validity cannot be a matter of necessary truth transmission from premises to conclusion.

Wright has replied to Williamson (and he gives the same argument again in his contribution to the *Mind* symposium). I do not know whether he had read Tappolet's paper at the time that he wrote his contribution to the *Mind* symposium, but I assume that he would give exactly the same reply in this case as well. What he claims is that there is 'no tension' between the pluralism of *Truth and Objectivity* and the platitudinous connections between truth, validity and the logical particles to which Williamson and Tappolet draw attention. It is no part of his view that 'truth' is ambiguous—that it means

one thing in one context and a different thing in another. Rather, his view is that truth may be differently *constituted* in different discourses; but this different constitution has nothing to do with the meaning of ‘truth’ (which is rather a ‘formal’ matter, concerned with satisfaction of some minimal set of platitudes). Moreover, Wright suggests that there is a model for this kind of view in well-known—indeed, standard—treatments of identity.

Here is what he says in his reply to Williamson:

The variety which truth predicates in different discourses may .. exhibit may be illustrated by a parallel with identity. In one sense the concept of identity does not vary as we consider different ranges of individuals, but is sustained by uniform inferential links, grounded in the twin platitudes that everything is self-identical, and that identicals share all their properties. Nevertheless what *constitutes* identity is subject to considerable variation as we vary the kinds of objects with which we are concerned. The identity of material objects is arguably constituted by spatio-temporal continuity; identity and distinctness among numbers, on Frege’s famous account, is directed by relations of one-one correspondence among associated concepts; the directions of lines are identified and distinguished by relations of parallelism between lines; and it is, notoriously, very difficult to say what constitutes identity for persons, though considerations of bodily and psychological continuity call the shots. The notion of ‘constitution’ applied here could no doubt be usefully clarified, but I see no reason to question the authenticity of the general idea that the instantiation of a certain

concept may be constituted in different ways, depending upon the kind of instantiators concerned. That at any rate is the contention of pluralism about truth.

And in his reply to Blackburn in the *Mind* symposium, we get the same story:

The kind of plurality that's envisaged may be brought out by a comparison with identity. Minimally, identity can be characterised as that relation which is universally reflexive and a congruence for an arbitrary property. To that extent, the concept of identity is uniform across varying kinds of object. But that uniformity had better be consistent with our recognising that what *constitutes* identity is subject to considerable variation depending on the kinds of objects concerned. The identity of material objects is constituted by spatial and temporal continuity; for cardinal numbers, according to Frege's famous proposal, identity is constituted by the one to one correspondence of an associated pair of concepts; for the directions of a pair of straight lines, identity is constituted by those lines being parallel; and for persons, identity is constituted by—well, it's notoriously difficult to say, but the case is different from each of the preceding. Identity, one might thus say, is *formally* uniform, but may vary in *constitution* as we consider different potential identicals. Clearly, there is space for a similar contention about truth: truth is formally uniform—in the sense determined by satisfaction of the platitudes—but its constitution may vary depending on the type of statement and subject matter concerned.

As Wright notes in the first of these passages, the notion of *constitution* which he is invoking here could do with some explication. However, leaving that point aside, there does seem to be some *prima facie* appeal to his proposal. It does *seem* to be the case that there is a very simple formal characterisation of identity in general, and yet that there is considerable room for debate about what makes for identity when particular subject matters are introduced. Nonetheless, I do not think that we should be too hasty in agreeing with Wright that we have here a decent explication and justification of his pluralism about truth. Appearances are often deceptive; perhaps they are so here as well.

2

It seems to me that Wright makes something like the following two claims about identity: first, that the formal properties of identity are fully captured by some version of the standard axioms or inferential rules for identity:

	$a=b$	$a=b$	$a=b$
		$b=c$	$S(a)$
_____	_____	_____	_____
$a=a$	$b=a$	$a=c$	$S(b/a)$

and, second, that there is considerable room for philosophical debate about how to complete analyses of the form:

x is the same F as y iff _____

for at least some substitution–instances of the predicate ‘F’ (e.g. ‘person’). (Perhaps a full account of the formal properties must also make mention of an axiom involving second–order quantification: $(F)(Fx \leftrightarrow Fy) \rightarrow x=y$. There are also hard questions about intensional, hyperintensional, and quotational properties and substitution instances which must be addressed both in this case and in the case of the last of the rules mentioned earlier.

Plainly, the precise details of the correct formal account of identity do not matter for present purposes.)

Taking this as the model for making our analogy, Wright’s view about truth is committed to something like the following two claims: first, that the formal properties of truth are fully captured by some version of the standard axioms or inferential rules for truth (more commonly referred to as ‘the disquotational properties of truth’):

Tr p	p
_____	_____
p	Tr p

and, second, that there is considerable room for philosophical debate about how to complete analyses of the form:

‘S’ is F true iff _____

for at least some admissible replacements for the expression ‘F’. (In one respect, this is a gross misrepresentation of Wright’s views, since it says next to nothing about ‘the basic set of platitudes’ which provides necessary and sufficient conditions for qualification as a truth predicate. One way to accommodate this point would be to include further inference rules which exhibit the appropriate connections between belief and truth, assertion and truth, and so on. And that, I think, shows that there are really two distinct but equally important differences between Wright’s pluralism and Horwich’s deflationism: Wright’s account of the formal properties of truth is more complicated—he does not think that the disquotational properties exhaust the ‘logical’ properties of truth—and Wright also rejects the idea that there is only one truth predicate. Since it does not matter for present purposes—and since my focus is on the pluralism rather than the expanded set of platitudes—I shall work with the over-simplified conception of Wright’s position.)

Various questions immediately arise. In particular, one might wonder what part of speech the ‘F’ is supposed to be in the theory about truth, and what is the range of admissible substitution instances. Expressions of the form ‘... is the same F as ...’ are a part of natural language; it seems doubtful that the same can be said of expressions of the form ‘is ... true’ (in the sense required by Wright’s account). Moreover—a more substantial

consideration—one might wonder whether the facts about ‘identity under a sortal’ undermine the claim that identity provides a model for the kind of view which Wright wants to develop about truth. Wright claims that there is only one truth predicate; but, at least on some views about ‘identity under a sortal’, there are actually many identity predicates (one for each appropriate substitution instance for ‘F’ in the schema above). True enough, we can say things like ‘a is the same as b; b is the same as c; so a is the same as c’; but it isn’t clear that this shows that there is just one identity predicate (expressed in English by the expression ‘.. is the same as ..’). For it may be that context is always required to supply a sortal, or, at any rate, to supply restrictions on sortals; and, in that case, ‘.. is the same as ..’ doesn’t really count as a single predicate (in the relevant sense). (Perhaps there is a default sortal—e.g. ‘thing’—which applies unless context says otherwise.)

Consider, for example, the following argument schema:

a is the same F as b

b is the same G as c

a is the same H as c

If there are substitution instances for this schema on which the argument is invalid, that should not be taken to undermine the claim that identity is transitive. The matter is complicated by the fact that one needs to decide whether or not to insist that names are

also sorted. If they are, then there will be no possibility of developing interesting counterexamples to transitivity. If names are not sorted, then we should be able to develop all kinds of interesting cases. Perhaps, though, it would be inconsistent to hold that names are unsorted and yet identity is always under a sortal. (This seems right to me.) In any case, the important point is that we don't need to insist that there is only a single identity predicate in order to preserve the formal inference rules for identity: those rules can be taken to be schematic for a large family of distinct predicates. Moreover, the role of sortals in restricting these predicates in different discourses ensures that we do not get trouble when we move to mixed discourses. (Suppose that I make a statue from a lump of pure copper. So the statue is the same lump of pure copper with which I started. Suppose I then make a mould from my statue, melt down the pure copper, replace a little bit of it with some other metal (to make an alloy), and then reset the molten metal in the mould. There is some plausibility to the claim that the statue I end up with is the statue that I started with—we can let the admixture of the new metal be very small—but we can't say that the statue that I end up with is the lump of pure copper with which I began (since, *a fortiori*, the statue I end up with is not made of pure copper). Acknowledging the role of sortals here provides a natural way of resisting the claim that the initial lump of pure copper is the final statue.)

But now compare with the case of truth. Let's focus on a simple case: &-elimination for truth.

Tr (A&B)

Tr A

Suppose A and B belong to discourses with quite different ‘standards’ for truth (so that the completion of the schema mentioned above is quite different in the two cases). Then one might wonder how it can possibly be that this is a valid inference. Clearly, the ‘standard’ of truth for the mixed discourse has to be something like the ‘intersection’—the common part—of the ‘standards’ for the individual discourses. But then, how can the fact that some sentence (A&B) satisfies a low standard entail the claim that some other sentence (A) satisfies a much higher standard? (Note, by the way, that conjunction plays no special role here; we could equally well have worked with compound qualifying terms: “It’s true that that’s a beautiful Edwardian house; so it’s true that that’s an Edwardian house”.)

Perhaps one might think that one can evade this argument by appealing to the (relatively) uncontroversial disquotational properties of truth:

1. Tr (A&B) (premise)
2. A&B (1, disq)
3. A (2, &E)
4. Tr A (3, disq)

Surely this shows that the above argument was innocent? Well, only if we are entitled to suppose that &E is innocent. But what reason do we have for supposing this *in the present context*? Ordinarily, one might say: &E is easily justified—a conjunction is true just in case both of its conjuncts are true. Hence, if the conjunction is true, so is a chosen one of its conjuncts. But this kind of justification—something which appeals only to platitudinous connections between truth and conjunction—is not available here: if the kind of truth appropriate to the conjunction is different from the kind of truth appropriate to the conjuncts, then we cannot straightforwardly claim that &E is justified in the regular way. (Indeed, by the argument given earlier, it seems that there is no justification to be given: in many cases, the standards for the conjuncts are more demanding than the standard for the conjunction.)

Could one reply to this objection by insisting that there is no question of justifying the rule of &E in the way suggested; insisting, rather, there is nothing more to conjunction than is given in the introduction and elimination rules for that connective? That is, could one be a Horwich–style minimalist about both truth and conjunction, and then insist that the platitudinous connections between truth and conjunction are simply entailed by the basic minimalist schemas? Clearly, we can derive the following:

Tr (A&B)

—————

Tr A, Tr B

Tr A, Tr B

—————

Tr (A&B)

but we need more; in particular, we need some principles about negation in order to get, for example:

Tr A, Tr not B

—————

not Tr (A&B)

Perhaps we can fix this up: perhaps there are Horwich–style minimalist principles for negation, falsity, truth and negation which together entail all of the platitudinous relations which hold between these concepts. However, there are two reasons why it seems that we really ought not to be pursuing this line of thought in the present context. Firstly, Wright himself does not espouse this kind of view: he doesn't think that some platitudes are more basic than others. As far as I can see, on his view, there can be no question of justifying some of the platitudes in terms of others; rather, it should just emerge that what are claimed to be platitudes are really platitudinous. But that's precisely what the objection is denying: how can there be a platitudinous connection between truth and conjunction if truth is plural in the way that Wright allows? Secondly, as I noted earlier, conjunction plays no special role in the argument: there seems to be no parallel move which could be made to effect a rescue in the case of arguments involving compound qualifiers.

Although what I have given hardly amounts to a demonstration, it seems to me that these observations do lend some credence to the claim that Wright's pluralism about truth is

refuted by considerations concerning mixed discourses. Perhaps, though, there is a different line of reply. Suppose that it is the case that we can ‘mark’ our truth predicates (in something like the way that explicit inclusion of sortals marks identity predicates). For simplicity, consider two discourses with marked truth predicates T_{hard} and T_{easy} . Suppose, further, that the standards for T_{easy} are just a subset of the standards for T_{hard} , so that the marked truth predicate for the mixed discourse is also T_{easy} . The question which we have been asking is how to justify the inference:

$$\begin{array}{c} T_{\text{easy}} (A\&B) \\ \hline T_{\text{hard}} A \end{array}$$

Couldn’t we just insist that $T_{\text{easy}} (A\&B)$ entails $T_{\text{hard}} A$; i.e. that part of what’s required in order for it to be the case that $T_{\text{easy}} (A\&B)$ is that it should also be the case that $T_{\text{hard}} A$? More generally, couldn’t we insist that there is a compositional story to be told, according to which the appropriate kind of truth for atomic sentences determines the appropriate kind of truth for compound sentences in mixed discourses? (In our example, the reason why the entailment holds is that we only get $T_{\text{easy}} (A\&B)$ if we have $T_{\text{easy}} B$ and $T_{\text{hard}} A$.) I don’t think so. Even if we allowed that this move is satisfactory in the case of conjunction, it seems clear that it doesn’t work in the case of compound qualifiers: it’s not the case, for example, that ‘This is a fake inferior Rembrandt’ decomposes into ‘This is a fake’ and ‘This is inferior’ and ‘This is by Rembrandt’—and so it seems that there can be no parallel story to tell about the truth–predicate appropriate to the original

sentence. (Note that our target sentence entails ‘This is a fake’ and ‘Some of Rembrandt’s paintings are inferior’.) More generally, if there can be ‘atomic’ sentences which belong to mixed discourses but not to any of the pure discourses which are combined in the mixed discourses, then there are no prospects for rescuing Wright’s position in the manner proposed. But it seems highly plausible to think that there are ‘atomic’ sentences of the kind in question.

One might think to object to the above that the notion of a ‘discourse’ may require clarification before we can be sure that the above line of reasoning is cogent. How can we be so sure that there are ‘mixed discourses’ and that the standards of truth appropriate to them are formed by ‘intersecting’ the standards of the constituent discourses? And how are discourses supposed to be individuated in any case? These are good questions, of course—but they are really questions for Wright, rather than for those who wish to pursue the line of objection which we have been following. If we suppose—as Wright seems to do—that discourses are something like collections of sentences devoted to particular subject matters, then it seems that we have good reason for thinking that the analogy which he suggests between identity and truth will not serve to save his pluralism about truth.

In conclusion, let me try to collect together the arguments of this section. Wright claims that truth might be like identity: formally uniform but diversely constituted. I reply that there is no good reason to think that this claim rescues pluralism about truth from the difficulties concerning mixed discourses. There is no reason to think that there is one

thing—identity—which is both formally uniform and diversely constituted; even if there is an identity predicate (property), there are many sortally restricted identity predicates (properties)—the former is the proper subject of claims about formal uniformity; the latter are the proper subjects of claims about diverse constitution. If there is a parallel between identity and truth, then the same holds true in this case; it is one thing—the truth predicate (property)—which is the proper subject of claims about formal uniformity; it is other things—‘sortally restricted’ truth predicates (properties)—which are the proper subjects of claims about diverse constitution. Once this is recognised, it seems clear that the force of the worries about mixed discourses remains undiminished.

Suppose, for example, that we take the ‘F’ in our schema for analysis of kinds of truths to range over subject matters: e.g. ‘S’ is a moral truth iff _____ ; ‘S’ is a modal truth iff _____ ; ‘S’ is a mathematical truth iff _____ ; and so on. (I’m playing a bit fast and loose with the form of the analysis here. Does this matter?) Clearly, we can allow that there is diversity in these analyses without committing ourselves to any kind of pluralism about truth—for the diversity here is just due to the different subject matters involved. Since there is no doubt that a single truth predicate can apply to sentences which contain a mix of moral, mathematical, and modal vocabulary, we have a reason for sheeting home the diversity to the subject matters, while holding that the property of truth remains the same. (We can make exactly the same kind of argument if we take the ‘F’ in our schema for analysis of kinds of truths to range over ‘marks’ of truth: e.g. ‘S’ is a response–dependent truth iff _____ ; ‘S’ is a truth which exhibits cognitive command iff _____ ; ‘S’ is a truth with wide cosmological role

iff _____ ; and so on. Since there is no doubt that a single truth predicate can apply to sentences which contain a mix of vocabulary for which different ‘marks’ are appropriate, we have a reason for sheeting home this diversity to the diversity of subject matters, while holding that the notion of truth remains the same.¹) In any case, even if this is denied, perhaps the most important point is that there is nothing in the case of identity which supports this denial—for there is nothing which corresponds to the problem of mixed discourses in the case of identity. (Recall the example given earlier: we won’t accept the argument from the premises that the lump of copper is the earlier statue, and the earlier statue is the later statue, to the conclusion that the lump of copper is the later statue. But we do accept ‘mixed’ arguments involving the truth predicate.²) So it seems—despite the initial appearances—that the appeal to the case of identity does not support Wright’s claim that truth might be formally uniform and yet diversely constituted.

¹ In the case of sortally restricted identity predicates—‘... is the same F as ...’—there is some temptation to say that ‘non-F’ substitutions for ‘...’ give rise to category errors. (Is the moon the same cat as Henry Moore?) But, in the case of ‘mark’-restricted truth predicates, there seems to be no corresponding temptation: meaning claims just don’t have wide cosmological role; moral claims are just not response-independent; and so on. (Contrast with domain-restricted truth-predicates: perhaps there is some kind of category error involved in the claim that it is a moral truth that electrons are much less massive than neutrons.) This might well be taken to be an important disanalogy in the present context.

² Could one object that there is something fishy about ‘mixed’ arguments involving the truth predicate? Isn’t there something seriously artificial—if not grotesque—about the claim that it’s true that $2+2=4$ and the proton and neutron are approximately equal in mass and you shouldn’t commit murder and the sunset is lovely today? Two replies. First, there may be all kinds of Gricean reasons why assertions of sentences of this kind will be inappropriate—but that’s got nothing to do with whether or not they are true. Second, in any case, there are ‘mixed’ sentences which do not exhibit the apparently grotesque features of conjunctions—‘There are two, and there could be as many as four, superbly beautiful Edwardian houses in Surrey Lane threatened by the crazed and evil monster with the dynamite (modal, moral, aesthetic, mathematical, factual)—but which clearly have implications which belong to distinct ‘pure’ or ‘less mixed’ discourses—‘There are houses in Surrey Lane’, ‘Some houses in Surrey Lane are beautiful’, and so on. ‘Mixed’ arguments in the case of identity are plainly invalid; but that’s not so in the case of ‘truth’.

(Note that I have not committed myself to any theses about the ‘relativity’ of identity. Given that Wright’s position is partly supported by the Frege–Geach argument, it would have been nice to find something else in the Geachian corpus which could be used to argue against it. However, Geach’s claims about the ‘relativity’ of identity are too controversial for my purposes here.)

3

Even if the arguments given in the previous section are more or less correct, I do not suppose that matters end here. Moreover, there is at least one bit of unfinished business which remains to be addressed before we can have much confidence that those arguments are correct.

The unfinished business concerns the claim that it is just obvious that inferences of the form $T_{\text{easy}}S$ to $T_{\text{hard}}S$ cannot be any good. Why is this obvious? Couldn’t there be a story which one could tell which would explain why these inferences are O.K.? Perhaps there could; but it seems to me that it would have to be a story which did not suppose that truth was the primitive semantic property (and that sentences are the basic units in theories of meaning). If you suppose that truth is fundamental—and that notions like reference are free to be adjusted so as to meet the demands of a theory of truth (cf. the views of Davidson, Quine, and numerous others)—then it is very hard to see that there is anything

to which appeal could be made in order to explain how this inferential move could be justified. If you accept anything like Frege's context principle, or anything like the various Quinean theses about the inscrutability of reference, or anything like Davidson's claims about the status of truth-theories for languages, then it is very hard how one could justify the view that the inferential move in question is not simply invalid. Moreover—of course—Wright stands pretty firmly in this kind of tradition: the fact that his discussion is all framed in terms of 'discourses' is just one manifestation of this point. (*I'm fairly sure that he has enthusiastically discussed Frege's context principle elsewhere.*) That's not to say that one couldn't hope to justify the move in question from a pluralist standpoint; rather, it's to say that perhaps the pluralist had better take (say) reference rather more seriously than many recent theorists have been inclined to do.

I said that, even apart from the unfinished business, the discussion of the previous section is inconclusive. Now I want to suggest that further examination of this point will take us in exactly the same direction. One reason why that earlier discussion seems inconclusive is that, even if I am right that the analogy with the case of identity does not support Wright's claim that truth is formally uniform yet diversely constituted, it may be that there is some other way of understanding and justifying this claim. Moreover, it may also be that there is some other way of replying to the problem about mixed discourses which does not go *via* the claim that truth is formally uniform yet diversely constituted (while nonetheless being consistent with something which deserves to be called 'pluralism about truth'). However, it is rather hard to see how the latter trick might be turned—if truth is both conceptually and metaphysically uniform, in what respect could it turn out to be

plural?—so it seems that we ought to turn our attention to the question whether, consistent with the facts about inferences in ‘mixed’ discourses, it could be that truth is ‘diversely constituted’.

At least *prima facie*, it is tempting to think that the answer is bound to be ‘No!’. Talk about ‘formal uniformity’ and ‘diverse constitution’ is not entirely clear, but perhaps we understand it well enough to mount the following argument. One of the platitudes which any decent philosophy of language must respect is that there should be an appropriate fit between syntax and semantics, or between proof theory and model theory. In particular, for logical connectives and sentential operators, there should be an appropriate fit between the formal or inferential rules which govern their operation, and the semantics which is assigned to them. (Think about the connection between the introduction and elimination rules for $\&$, and the familiar Boolean valuation rules.) In view of this, there is some temptation to think that simplicity on the one side must be correlated with simplicity on the other, and that complexity on the one side must be correlated with complexity on the other. But, if that were right, then it feels as though we should have the makings of an objection to Wright’s ‘formal simplicity but diverse constitution’—the proof theory for truth would be very simple, and yet the semantic story is extremely complicated indeed. (Perhaps some tendency to think along these lines is manifested in the thought that one couldn’t really appeal to a compositional story in order to explain the validity of the inference from $T_{\text{easy}}(A\&B)$ to $T_{\text{hard}}A$.)

Of course, this line of objection makes some rather large assumptions. Worse, at least as presented here, it's rather vague and woolly. Still, it may not be immediately obvious that it is also probably mistaken. The crucial point, I think, is that something like Tarski's story about truth might be correct: it might be that, while truth obeys some very simple inferential rules, it nonetheless has a quite complicated analysis in terms of other relations (namely, reference and satisfaction). If those relations could be taken to be diversely constituted, then presumably we would have an explanation of how it is that truth can be both formally simple and yet diversely constituted. And that seems to bring us back, once again, to the point that pluralism about truth seems likely to need to take reference seriously.

If this is right, it seems to be both good and bad news for Wright. It's good news because, since there are platitudinous connections between truth and reference—e.g. that an atomic declarative sentence 'Fa' is true just in case the object referred to by 'a' has the property expressed by 'F'—it seems highly plausible to think that Wright's overall position will entail claims about the 'diverse constitution' of the reference relation. If that's right, then Wright is already committed to the very materials which it seems are needed to solve the problem about inferences concerning mixed discourses. (Moreover, proceeding in this way also seems to offer the prospects of escape from the difficulties about individuation of discourses which were alluded to in the previous section. If we suppose that reference to objects and properties in different domains can be diversely constituted, then perhaps we can give a compositional account of the standards of assessment for truth which are appropriate to different sentences—and perhaps this might

then provide some help with the problem about inferences in mixed discourses.)

However, it's bad news because Wright also seems to have at least some inclination not to take reference seriously (in the required way): he certainly seems to give indications that he would throw in his hat with the 'truth is more fundamental than reference' brigade.

Perhaps the line of thought in this section has gone wrong in some way which I can't detect. However, it does seem to me to be plausible to think that, if pluralism about truth is to be saved, it will only be because it can be made to depend upon a suitable pluralism about reference. At any rate, this is the idea which I propose to say a few things about in the next section. (I wish the argument of this—and the preceding—section were more rigorously developed; I can't help feeling that all that readers are getting here is Swiss cheese.)

4

There is considerable plausibility, I think, to the claim that objects and properties are diversely constituted: it's a truism that there are different kinds of objects and properties in the world! But what reason could there be to affirm—and, indeed, what would it be like to affirm—that the reference relation is differently constituted for different domains of objects and properties?

One way to make out the claim that the reference relation is differently constituted for different domains of objects and properties would be to insist that reference is like identity. However, it seems doubtful that we do any better with analyses of the form:

‘a’ F refers to a iff _____

than we did with the corresponding analyses in the case of truth. Moreover, there are going to be ‘mixed discourse’ cases which raise just the same kinds of questions which seemed to arise before:

‘a’ & ‘b’ refer_{easy} to a and b

‘a’ refers_{hard} to a

(If you think that there can be plural reference, then you can replace ‘a’ & ‘b’ with ‘a & b’ to make what looks like an even more difficult case.) Since there is no obvious reason to think that there is anything improper with the premise, we seem to confront exactly the same kind of difficulty which we had before. So I doubt that there is any headway for pluralists here.

How else might one seek to develop a pluralism about reference? Should we look for something else which might be ‘diversely constituted’, which can be used to analyse reference, and which is suitably analogous to identity? That seem unlikely. Should we try

to find some other sense in which reference can be said to be ‘diversely constituted’?

Perhaps; but it’s hard to know where to begin.

One suggestion which presents itself is that we should think that there are different kinds of existence—i.e. that we should go the route of Quine’s McX. (A moment’s thought should convince you that the analogy between identity and existence is no better than the analogy between identity and truth, or the analogy between identity and reference. At this point in the argument, perhaps this should come as no surprise. After all, it is a platitude that all of these ‘transcendental terms’ transcend subject categories.) The idea is that different kinds of existence require different kinds of reference relations. But if that is what lies behind pluralism about truth, then it really does seem that we shall be forced back to the idea that there are many different truth predicates—‘exists’, ‘refers’ and ‘is true’ will not have any proper use across different discourses (cf. Carnap’s claims about these matters).