

Relaxed Naturalism and Caring About the Truth

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ABSTRACT

Can our caring about truth be rooted in “relaxed” naturalism? I argue that it cannot. In order to care about truth we need the universe to be capable of providing non-adventitious good, which relaxed naturalism cannot do. I use Michael Lynch’s work as a springboard to showing this claim.

In *True to Life: Why Truth Matters*¹ Michael Lynch argues that we should care about truth. Truth is, he argues, deeply normative and as such, worth caring about for its own sake. Lynch’s view is developed in an admittedly naturalistic environment. Not a reductive naturalism—he rejects that view—but what we might call “relaxed naturalism,” a naturalism that eschews the supernatural (such as God) but not nonphysical properties. I think Lynch is quite right about reductive naturalism. It simply won’t ground the value of truth. But I argue here that Lynch’s relaxed naturalism will not ground the value of truth either.

The basic reason is this. Lynch wants to say “I care about the truth” means “I care that my beliefs are true.” But he can’t do that consistently because his argument is founded on a notion of happiness. For happiness to obtain, the world needs to be a certain kind of place, one in which the way things are conspires, so to speak, with the way things ought to be. So “I care about the truth” needs to mean more than just “I care that my beliefs are true.” It must also make reference to the fact that I care that the world be some way rather than another. However, the relaxed naturalist qua naturalist has little ground to think that the world, in the big picture, conspires with any norms of goodness.

Now to the details. Lynch, following William Alston, provides a min-

1. Michael P. Lynch, *True to Life: Why Truth Matters* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

imal account of truth.² The Lynch/Alston minimalist view holds that truth is a real property that attaches to some propositions and not others. I'll take the Lynch-Alston basic account as a touchstone in what follows and eschew both epistemic and deflationary accounts. Truth, on the Lynch/Alston model, can be given account of minimally as follows: The proposition that *p* is true if, and only if, things are as the proposition that *p* says they are. Here I am ignoring Lynch's development and defense of the functional theory of truth to focus strictly on his claims about objective truth in *True to Life*.³ The important point is that this minimal account is a realist account of truth; that is, there is a property—a real (not a nominalist) property—of truth. That distinguishes the account from deflationary accounts, the development of which seems driven often by more or less strict naturalisms and their often concomitant nominalism about properties. The Lynch/Alston minimalist account is also not an epistemic account of truth. That is, truth is not (generally) dependent upon human cognitive input. A proposition is true because of the way reality is and not because of the way the ideal scientific community will someday epistemically structure it or any such related suggestion.⁴

So we begin by recognizing that if we are to care about truth, truth must be something other than redundancy or prosentential or simply an expression of approval (on the one hand) or an epistemic notion (on the other). A true proposition connects to reality, whatever the realist details, and its truth cannot be reduced to either linguistic maneuvering or epistemic triumphalism. Some propositions are true and are made so by the way reality is. When reality makes a proposition true, the real property “is true” attends accurately to the proposition and otherwise not.

Turning now to Lynch's own account of what makes truth worth caring about, it is important to note his claim that to say “I care about the truth” should not be confused with caring about gaining what the truth will get me. While it is important that I believe, truthfully, that the bus is careening down the street when I am about to cross the street (because it gains me a longer life), that is distinct from caring about the truth itself. This can be seen in a number of ways but most directly it can be seen when I'm 4 miles from the street and I form the true belief “the bus is careening down the

2. See William P. Alston, *A Realist Conception of Truth* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996); and Michael P. Lynch, *Truth in Context* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

3. See Michael P. Lynch, *Truth as One and Many* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

4. That is not to say that reality is not influenced by human conceptualizing, a point Alston, Lynch and I all defend.

street” because my friend sends me a text message to that effect. Surely I wouldn’t care one way or the other about the truth of that belief from a pragmatic point of view—my life is in no danger from that particular bus. Yet, given the option of having a true vs. a false belief about the bus, it is valuable to believe only the true ones. Or at least typically. Holding a true belief about the number of leaves on the tree in my front yard as opposed to a false one is valuable. But given a choice about believing truly about the number of leaves and believing truly about the trustworthiness of one’s retirement fund manager, the second one is worth more of one’s time to figure out. So in some ways, caring about the truth is context-dependent. Generally when we say we should care about the truth we don’t mean just any old truth but, perhaps, the important ones. And the ones that are important, of course, are themselves context-dependent—that is, their importance is context-dependent. The truth about the bus is important if I’m trying to cross the street and otherwise typically not as important. But that simply reflects that fact that some bits of reality are more pragmatically important to have accurate beliefs about than others. None of these observations about the instrumental value of holding true beliefs take away from the general value of holding beliefs if and only if they are true.

Lynch brings out the value of truth when he writes:

[T]he connection between belief and truth is so tight that unless you think something is true, you don’t even count as believing it. To believe is just to take as true. If you don’t care whether something is true, you don’t really believe it. . . . In believing, we operate under the norm of truth: *other things being equal, it is good to believe a proposition when and only when it is true*. Since what is good or correct comes in degrees, we can also put this “norm” or rule by saying that other things being equal, it is better to believe something when and only when it is true.⁵

In short, to value truth is to value truth itself; not necessarily what it will do for us. What truth will do for us, and hence the importance of spending time finding out the truth, falls under the *ceteris paribus* clause. So we should care about truth for its own sake, while of course recognizing that we can also care about it instrumentally.

Let’s now get Lynch’s naturalism in front of us. He writes:

5. Lynch, *True to Life*: 13. All subsequent references to this work are cited in text as *TL*.

“Naturalism” is a sticky word. The views that go under the title come in many shapes and sizes. In its original sense, it is simply the opposite of supernaturalism. It is the view that we can explain the hows and whys of the world without invoking supernatural deities or mysterious arcane forces. I count myself as a naturalist of this sort. But many calling themselves naturalists today supplement this attitude toward explanation with a metaphysical thesis, namely that ultimate reality is thoroughly physical in nature. On this view, there is nothing over and above the physical objects and properties of the world. Call this reductive naturalism. (*TL*, 76)

Lynch rejects reductive naturalism and supernaturalism. So Lynch is what I’ll call a relaxed naturalist (or a broad naturalist,⁶ or, following John McDowell, a relaxed platonist, perhaps—more on that below). That is, he is a naturalist willing to admit the existence of nonphysical things or at least nonphysical properties. But such things as are nonphysical are not “spooky.” I take the latter commitment to imply that whatever nonnatural things there may be are tied (probably via some sort of supervenience) to the natural. Thus, normative properties, while not reducible to natural properties, would not exist without them.

Lynch defends his view in part by using G. E. Moore’s “open question” argument. Lynch writes that this argument

[I]s a way of illustrating an entirely general problem that faces any attempt to reduce a normative property to a purely natural property. Applied to truth, that problem is this. Suppose that a belief’s being true consists in standing in some natural relation *N* to the world. What about a belief’s being *N* makes it good to believe, or correct? On the face of it, no amount of information about what physical properties my beliefs actually have logically entails anything at all about what sort of properties they ought to have, or it is good for them to have. If I am given only physical information, it seems entirely open as to what the normative status of my beliefs might be. Consequently, the normative properties of my beliefs are distinct from those natural properties. (*TL*, 90)

Lynch tells us that “Something is normative if it is worthy of aiming at, or caring about. But something is deeply normative, or a value properly so-called, when it is worthy of caring about for its own sake” (*TL*, 16). The

6. See Stewart Goetz and Charles Taliaferro, *Naturalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) for a discussion of various accounts of naturalism, including broad naturalism.

relaxed naturalist can recognize the deeply normative while the reductive naturalist cannot, although the latter is not bothered by instrumental norms. I agree with Lynch's conclusions about the reductive naturalist and the deeply normative. But it is less clear that he is right in his claims about the deep normativity of truth; on what grounds can the relaxed naturalist care about truth?

Here we turn to Lynch's positive reasons for caring about truth. His core argument flows out of the nature of happiness. The argument has two components, dealing with authenticity first and intellectual integrity second.

Lynch writes that

authenticity, being true to yourself, requires having the will you want to have—identifying with the desires that guide your action. What you identify with is determined by what you care about. Thus, if you don't know which of your first-order desires you identify with, you cannot be acting authentically. Consequently, knowing what matters to you is partly constitutive of authenticity. (*TL*, 126)

Building on this account, he develops the following argument:

1. Self-respect and authenticity require a sense of the self.
2. Because it is required for self-respect and authenticity, which are part of happiness, having a sense of self is an important part of happiness.
3. Having a sense of self means having true beliefs about what you care about.
4. Therefore, having some true beliefs—about what you care about—is also part of happiness, other things being equal. (*TL*, 127)

This argument is not intended to show that we should care about truth in general but rather simply truths about ourselves.

To get a more universal claim about caring about truth Lynch moves to the issue of intellectual integrity. He writes:

Intellectual integrity is an aspect or part of integrity proper. It requires being willing to stand up for your best judgment of the truth by being willing to act in accordance with that judgment when the need arises. Like other intellectual virtues, intellectual integrity is a character trait. This means that you can have intellectual integrity even if you are never called on to stand up for what you believe and even if you are prevented from standing up for

what you believe. What matters is that you are *willing* to do so, that you are disposed, other things being equal, to try. (*TL*, 131 [*italics his*])

And further:

Are intellectual integrity and integrity as a whole a part of happiness? One reason for thinking so is that they are both tightly bound to self-respect. Other things being equal, one will be happier if one respects oneself, and it is hard to respect oneself when one lacks integrity, intellectual and otherwise. (*TL*, 135)

Note here that by something's being a constitutive good Lynch means that *y* is a constitutive good when something *x* is a good in itself and *y* is a necessary part of *x*. That is, *y* is not a means to *x* but rather necessary for *x*'s very being. He thus concludes that caring about truth is a constitutive good because it is essential to intellectual integrity and therefore integrity proper. Integrity itself is constitutive of the good life or happiness. Thus, caring about truth as such or in general is grounded in integrity.

He summarizes his argument this way:

1. If intellectual integrity is a constitutive good, then so is caring about the truth as such.
2. Intellectual integrity is a constitutive good.
3. Therefore, caring about the truth as such is a constitutive good.
4. If caring about the truth as such is a constitutive good, then truth as such is worth caring about for its own sake.
5. Therefore, truth as such is worth caring about for its own sake. (*TL*, 136)

Now that we have Lynch's argument before us, observe the following. To say: "I care about the truth" is ambiguous between "I care whether my beliefs are true" and "I care about the truth itself." The former, I submit, is generally what we mean when we say we care about the truth and it is most certainly what Lynch means to discuss and defend. But the latter—caring about truth itself—is somewhat odd. After all, truth is a property some propositions have whereas others do not. We don't, it would seem, typically care about properties *per se*. But perhaps that is to miss what we mean when we say we care about truth itself. Perhaps rather than caring about a property, caring about the truth itself is really caring about the way things are (e.g. the beauty of the picture rather than the truth that that picture is beautiful). On this second reading of "I care about truth," we

are expressing that what we care about is things in the world or the way the world actually is as opposed to whether a proposition is true. We can easily capture this distinction by talking about caring about the truth vs. caring about what is real. One of my claims is that we can only legitimately care about the truth if, indeed, the nature of reality supports caring about the truth. That seems true enough—nothing controversial there. But in Lynch's case—the case of the relaxed naturalist who appeals to happiness to ground caring about truth—it remains to be seen that the world actually does provide for happiness or, more circumspectly, the possibility of what I'll call "nonadventitious happiness." If it does not, then the argument from happiness to the value of truth simply fails.

Now it is clear, as I noted, that Lynch means to discuss and defend caring about believing true propositions. Recall Lynch's statement of the norm of truth: "Other things being equal, it is good to believe a proposition when and only when it is true" (*TL*, 13). The *ceteris paribus* clause, of course, handles those context-dependent cases noted above. But granting circumstance, we ought to hold true beliefs whenever we can because truth is valuable in its own right. Truth is, i.e., deeply normative. But why think that? I've already distinguished between caring about whether my beliefs are true and caring about the reality the truth presents. My goal is to show that these two are not separable at least if one defends caring about the truth of one's beliefs on the basis of happiness. If my argument is successful, it seems to impinge on Lynch's distinction between caring about the truth and caring about any gain that one might receive from believing the truth. Specifically, I have in mind any happiness one might derive from discovering the truth.

I turn then to my main question: can Lynch as a relaxed naturalist legitimately care about truth? In relaxed naturalism, beliefs and properties are not reducible to the physical and hence the relaxed naturalist doesn't face the challenges that afflict the reductionistic naturalist. But beliefs and properties are, it seems, supervenient on the physical world; supervenient on the physical yes, but not identical to it. Thus a belief could be true (that is, a proposition could have the properly "is true") in a realist sense. The property of truth attaches to a proposition, in other words, because of the way the world is (both in its natural and its nonnatural aspects). So it seems we can recognize that beliefs could be true and that we should care about their truth. We can care about truth *because* values (even though tied to the physical world in some way relaxed naturalistic philosophers still need to explain) are nonnatural and *not* reducible to the physical.

But that, I believe, is too quick a move on the relaxed naturalist's part. Here I want to introduce two examples to be followed below by a third.

Example 1: Suppose you are totally in love with someone and so, apparently, is he (or she) with you. Suppose this relationship has brought you a great deal of genuine happiness—a sense of security, of being loved and cared for, accepted for who you are and so forth. Unbeknownst to you, however, he (or she) doesn't love you one bit but is an excellent actor in training for a new theatrical role. The reality is, your "lover" cheats on you regularly and, in fact, makes fun of you and your love behind your back. Suppose further that your best friend discovers the truth about your lover's unfaithfulness and his (or her) cruelty toward you. Finally, suppose that the only way you can now or ever will find out about the falsity of your "lover's" love is if your friend tells you of it. That is, there is no way you will ever suspect on your own the falseness of your "lover's" heart.

There's the example. Now here's the query: If you could pick, would you choose, within those limitations, to be told the truth or live life under the false circumstances?

Example 2: Suppose much of what you know about the world in which you've lived your life is false (the fact of your existence as a conscious being is not false) but that you have believed the falsities because of the work of Cartesian-like daemon. Nothing about the physical world is the way it seems to you. And nothing you think about the world in terms of how good (or how bad) your life is is accurate. This framework (albeit false), of course, brings with it the apparent promise that you might flourish as a human person with freedom, creativity, and some significant pleasures. Suppose further that the real world is one of terrible pain and suffering that will last at least as long as your earthly life and, indeed, for eternity. Suppose further that the daemon is not without sympathy for the human plight and so is motivated by some "kindness" to allow your false set of beliefs and experiences to continue. Nevertheless, suppose he is obligated (by the daemonic code of ethics) to let you (briefly) experience the reality of which you have been thus far unaware and then to allow you to choose which "world" you will live in: the real world of suffering and torture or the false world with the possibility of its (merely) apparent good will. It is important, here, to know that if one chooses the latter, one will never know or even suspect the truth once the choice is made. One will believe, as if it were true, and it will seem true, that the world is capable of providing at least some human flourishing.

There's the example. Here's the query: which would you choose; to know the truth or live with the deception?

Given the first example, it seems that most people will choose the truth. No one likes to be duped (certain kinds of self-deception, perhaps, aside), and as much as it hurts to find out that one's "lover" is not actually one's lover, we have a sense that truth is better than false happiness or false flourishing. False flourishing, we might suggest, is bad because it circumvents both authenticity and integrity. This concern for authenticity and intellectual integrity can be captured in this context by noting that one's commitment to happiness or flourishing assumes, at some fairly deep level, that knowing the truth really will make one happy (in the sense of flourishing). The second example, however, seems to undermine our response to the first example. Here we know that the truth is not, in fact, going to make us happy. Just the opposite: it will make us miserable, and not just for a while but forever. So we are tempted to take the happiness option and let the truth be as it actually is: damnable.

Here it should be noted that authenticity and intellectual integrity seem to play a role in one case but not in the other. In the lover case, one is motivated to choose truth partly, at least, because one wants to live authentically—to have the will one wants to have and to live according to one's desires. One wants to will a flourishing life and to live according to that desire. Once knowing that one's "lover" is false, one could not live authentically and continue in the lie. Further, intellectual integrity seems to push us toward finding out as much truth (especially such personal ones) as we can (all other things being equal). But in the second case, one cannot, in fact, will to flourish unless one recognizes that flourishing will be based on a believed untruth. The ontology of the situation undermines any attempt at an actually good life and the reason seems to be that intellectual integrity demands that the truth be told. But if we tell the truth, we will live a life—an eternal life—of misery. So if one is to have the will one wants to have and to live according to it, one will have to settle for a flourishing which is, in a way, entirely of one's own making. It has, indeed, little to do with the truth. One will have to know painfully, if only for a short while, that one lacks intellectual integrity. I submit that the likelihood of retaining one's intellectual integrity and hence choosing to live forever in a tortured state seems highly unlikely. The roots of intellectual integrity, at least when stripped of an appropriate ontology (one that accounts for a reality that provides for happiness based on believing the truth), simply don't seem deep enough on such a scenario.

Now admittedly there is something unfair about comparing the two examples: they are substantially incommensurable. In the first case, the truth one is discovering is limited. It is not the final, absolute truth of

the universe. It still leaves room, in effect, for hope and specifically for the hope that the truth will, in the end, lead to one's flourishing. Perhaps one will have a new lover and that new relationship will do everything and more than did the false one. The second example, however, leaves no such option. It is only believing falsely that leaves open the possibility of flourishing. Such flourishing, should one call it so, is purchased at the cost of one's intellectual integrity. To make the examples more parallel, the first one needs to be replaced by an example upgraded in its sweep.

So here's another example:

Example 3: Suppose that most everything you know about the world in which you've lived your life is true. Here are the facts. You have a terrific family, you are surrounded by good friends who believe in you and love you. Sure, life has its ups and downs, but you can and do sometimes experience the good things of life. So everything you think about the world in terms of its goodness (and its badness) is fairly accurate. This framework, of course, brings with it the promise that you will flourish as a human person with freedom, creativity, and some significant pleasures. Still, for all you know, at the end of your life, it is all over. There is nothing more to it but the threescore and ten one is given. Now suppose further that the final and absolute state of the world is not one in which only threescore and ten is possible but rather the world is such that one simply continues to grow and develop in the afterlife and that the flourishing you've experienced while on earth is only a very limited sampling of what flourishing in the afterlife will be like. Here it is God, rather than the daemon, who has sympathy for the human plight and so is motivated by love to add to your hope of flourishing on earth the real knowledge of its expanded form in the afterlife. Suppose God shows up in your living room and explains the situation but notes that there is a daemon who will be more than willing to let you continue in your current life experience. It is a true life, recall, but just incomplete.

There's the example. Now the query. Which would you choose? Life with God and final and ongoing flourishing or life with the daemon and partial flourishing? It is important, here, to know that if one chooses the latter, one will never know or even suspect the expanded truth. One will believe truly that the world is capable of providing some human flourishing. But one will fail to believe the whole truth, viz., that humans can fully flourish with God.

In the third example, it seems obvious that most of us would choose to be with God. That is, most of us would choose to live with a more completely true account of the world rather than an incomplete one. I propose that

this is because of what reality can do for us rather than simply that one cares about having true beliefs. I propose further that it is, in fact, *because* the reality behind the truth is deeply normative that we even care about what reality can do for us. Since God has, in example 3, made us capable of utterly rich flourishing, intellectual integrity is rooted in an utterly rich account of the universe. But this is not the case in the second example where most everyone would choose the false alternative of living in the daemonic world of fake happiness, completely unaware of the truth and having reached this choice by denying one's intellectual integrity. So we chose to believe in both cases what will make us happy. But if believing the truth is valuable in its own right (intrinsically), it must be because reality provides ontological ground for happiness. Only then can one claim that believing the truth is valuable in itself.

Another observation. Authenticity would seem to prefer us to choose life with God in the third example and life with the daemon's torture in the second. But perhaps that's not right either. Since authenticity is defined in part as being true to oneself, telling oneself the truth about oneself is important. But on example 2, part of the truth about oneself is that one is actually being tortured. Authenticity also requires that one has the will one wants to have and that includes wanting to be happy. But I've already noted that on example 2 this aspect of authenticity will be, in some sense, entirely of one's own making. Not to put too fine a point on it, one will have the will one wants to have only at the expense of permanent self-deception.

I suspect the best way to think about these situations is that we can care about truth (in the final analysis) *only when the reality it points to is itself a deeply normative thing*; that is, when what we believe (the content) embraces a reality that is itself ontologically good and good for us. Happiness or the possibility thereof cannot be adventitious to the deep structure of the world. Of course, we can (and sometimes do) believe falsely and it is to our advantage. This is writ large in example 2. But insofar as such false belief comes about by a choice against our own intellectual integrity, it can only be the basis for a sham flourishing.

So in the end, I propose that whether believing the truth is valuable depends on what is actually real. That brings us back to the distinction noted earlier between caring about the truth vs. caring about what is real.

For the relaxed naturalist, what is real is physical stuff plus the nonnatural but supervenient stuff. However, the supervenient stuff is severely limited. At most, the relaxed naturalist can only very modestly hope that her or his reality is pleasant enough. Since there is nothing more to re-

ality than this life, the relaxed naturalist had better hope that things go well for her *in this life*. Should the naturalist suddenly find herself in the plight of a truly negative existence (deep and painful illness, the consequent abandonment of all one's friends and family, etc.) then believing the truth about oneself and one's situation is not something one really wants to do. If there were a way out, perhaps many would take it at the cost of intellectual integrity. Believing the truth is not a valuable thing if one's life is nasty, brutish and long (to paraphrase). Better to be in denial or in deep deception. Living authentically and with intellectual integrity in the face of an evil but entirely natural life seems to lack good ontological grounds for intellectual integrity. That is, indeed, the central point. The nature of the world on relaxed naturalist grounds cannot be assured of anything but adventitious happiness or flourishing. Hence, intellectual integrity and authenticity seem not to be rooted in a significantly rich and normative ontological situation. The truth of the matter under the unfortunate circumstances of an evil and natural life is that existence is not all that good; who would choose it, should an experientially better, if false, alternative arise? Even when the naturalist's life is comfortable (not too poor or lacking in education, etc. to make and do some interesting things), the final truth is that when one dies, it's all over. As such, any happiness connected to truth is adventitious at best; it's just happenstance whether one is born into a good situation. In example 1, people choose truth because they believe truth and happiness are linked. But there is no obviously necessary connection between these two things for the relaxed naturalist. In the end, it looks as if the relaxed naturalist can care about truth (about her own life, at any rate) only if she happens to luck out with a comfortable existence. Further, when we're talking about the really big picture of the world, the relaxed naturalist can only hope for a modestly comfortable existence. The hope that truth and happiness are linked can founder (and sometimes does) on the shores of a naturalist reality. Hope, to be rational, needs to be rooted in a reality strong enough and good enough to sustain it.

The supernaturalist seems to be in better shape than the naturalist. Supposing, for example, the Christian story to be true, we have a reason to value believing the truth, for what is true actually picks out a life worth living, even in the apparent short run. For the theist, significant flourishing will occur at some future point because it is linked to an ultimately rich and normative reality. That hope can make a more or less miserable life on earth bearable. That is, on the Christian story intellectual integrity and authenticity have an ontological root in the way God constructs the

world, including humans. Thus, whether one's life is a good one doesn't just depend on the apparent happenstance of one's life (good education, decent health, enough food, shelter and clothing, etc.) but on the value of one's eternal being in relation to God.

Here is it worth noting something else Lynch says. He writes:

Suppose I had a machine that allowed you to experience whatever you want. Once inside, floating in the tank, you live in a virtual reality of your own design—one filled with experiences of adoring friends, marvelous adventures, spectacular food, good sex, and deep conversations. None of it would be real, of course, but it would seem to be. It could even be arranged so that once inside the machine, you completely forget that you *are* inside the machine. There is only one catch. Once inside, you can *never come out*. (*TL*, 15)

Lynch asks: would you enter the machine? His reply is that most of us would probably say no, although he admits that some of those whose lives are filled with tragedy and poverty might opt for the machine long term. But even for these people, Lynch says, "most would prefer having their problems truly disappear to living a life where they only *seem* to disappear" (*TL*, 15). But Lynch's claim strikes me as odd for he then writes: "The machine produces beautiful illusions, but we want more than illusions. We want the truth, warts and all" (*TL*, 15).

What's the oddity? Note that Lynch can say we want the truth "warts and all" only because of his earlier admission that one typically wants life's problems to get worked out rather than living an illusory life. Such a hope needs to be rooted in an ontology of the world that actually links reality and flourishing. What if life's problems never get worked out? What if the connection between truth and happiness simply doesn't exist? The warts of the truth may be more like a very painful cancer and the relaxed naturalist here is relying on a bit of reality that he or she simply doesn't have (unless by accident) or at least a reality that hasn't been shown to us. Just how can nonphysical properties supervenient on the natural order provide for a reality that is conducive to human flourishing? At best the relaxed naturalist seems left with the notion that flourishing is either entirely of our own making (reminiscent of choosing the daemonic fake life of example 2 except one doesn't even have the daemon's help) or just happenstance (and one had better hope to be lucky). Adventitious happiness is good, if you can get it, but it's not obviously connected to truth, intellectual integrity or authenticity on naturalist grounds.

Thus, so far as the norm of truth goes, there is quite a lot built into the *ceteris paribus* clause—more than the context-dependent nature of the value of the truths “of the moment” or even that some truths are personally more important than others. If the reality about a substantial amount of the world were, in fact, horribly grotesque and terribly unpleasant, we would not prefer to believe the truth if there were a more pleasant alternative, even a deceptive one. Indeed, if the world can actually produce eternal flourishing, that would be a better state of affairs and hence a “better” truth—that is, a better reality.

Here is the central question. Is (ultimate) reality itself deeply normative? That is, do we have built into our notion of the value of truth the fact that the world itself is worth aiming at or worth caring about? It seems that many of us hope so, for in example 1, people seem to choose the truth because in the long run they think truth will make them happy. But here “truth” seems ambiguous. It seems we mean reality rather than a relationship between a proposition and a truth maker. We hope reality is actually “on our side.” That is, we hope reality is itself deeply normative and structured to be good for us. But given our examples, it seems that relaxed naturalism is less likely to be compatible with valuing believing the truth than supernaturalism, at least on the grounds Lynch lays out.

Three final comments. First, there is perhaps an option between supernaturalism and relaxed naturalism. That is a sort of Platonism—the forms of the good, the beautiful, and the just *sans* God. Whether such a view will ground caring about truth will depend, it seems, on how much is built into the Platonism. John McDowell urges us toward a relaxed Platonism in which meaning is found (created?) in the cultural and educational enterprise.⁷ So perhaps it matters if one is a relaxed naturalist rather than a relaxed Platonist. But the proof, as well as the truth, is in the details of how ultimate reality is and not just believing the truth itself.

Second, perhaps there is something to the Platonic notion that in the Good all forms reside or the Aristotelian claim that all the virtues are one. Perhaps one has to have goodness in order to have the truth and vice versa. Needing the truth to have goodness seems right (a fact Lynch counts on) but truth’s being worth having seems to depend much more deeply on the core goodness of the world than is provided for by relaxed naturalism.

7. See John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996). In regard to Platonism, it is telling that a central aspect in Plato’s account is the eternality of a soul and the possibility of eternally pleasant and good existence that both Lynch and McDowell would almost certainly reject as “spooky.”

My final point springs off Lynch's last and very insightful comment in his book. He writes:

The question, "What is truth?" is not going to go away. Mysteries are like that. And that is good. Hard questions remind us not to take ourselves too seriously. We are historical creatures; we are products of a culture, and our conclusions, after all, are only our conclusions. We are apt to be fools, to get things wrong even by our own lights. The key is to appreciate this fact—which I have argued is part and parcel with appreciating the possibility of objective truth—without slipping into cynicism. If we are bound to be fools, let us be fools with hope. (*TL*, 181)

If we are bound to be fools and yet being fools with hope is better than being fools full of cynicism, are we not bound to hold an ontology of the world that includes a strong and firm center for the hope we need and, in fact, to which the relaxed naturalist seems to appeal unwittingly? Isn't what we need a nonadventitious happiness, one linked to a thoroughly normative account of the world, our human nature, and truth? So I leave this question on the table: If truth is mysterious and even the relaxed naturalist is willing to admit it, then why not take a further step toward hoping for a theistic ground for flourishing where the truth is firmly connected to a deeply normative reality, God who is not only the basis for human flourishing but, indeed, Flourishing Itself? Nothing could be more deeply normative than that.⁸

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