

Analyticity Ontologised

Philipp Keller* Andri Töndury†

23rd October 2004

5th Swiss Philosophy Graduate Conference, Berne

Theory of Understanding and Theory of Meaning

What is the meaning of the expression “if . . . , then . . . ”?

- within the theory of understanding: what is it to know its meaning and to be competent in its use?
- within the theory of meaning: what is its meaning and its correct semantic theory?

Hence, distinguish competence- and meaning-constituting facts.

For “if . . . , then . . . ”, Paul Boghossian has proposed both:

- a theory of understanding: acceptance of the validity of MPP is necessary for competence with “if . . . then . . . ”
- a theory of meaning: MPP implicitly (partially) defines the meaning of “if . . . then . . . ”

advantage: allows for blind rule-following, fits in with 2D

disadvantage: interesting notion of the a priori? McGee problem

Epistemicising and Ontologising Analyticity

Boghossian distinguishes

- **epistemic analyticity**: knowledge of meaning suffices for knowledge of truth (e.g. of MPP)
- **metaphysical analyticity** meaning-facts are uniquely responsible for the truth

According to Boghossian, ontological analyticity meets two “insurmountable problems”: (i) it makes the truth of the sentence in question contingent and (ii) contingent on an act of meaning. Epistemic analyticity, on the other hand, can give us a priori justification of our belief in the validity of some logical argument-form A via the following inference:

1. If logical constant C is to mean what it does, then A has to be valid, for C means whatever logical object in fact makes A valid.
2. C means what it does.

A is valid

Does Quine’s criticism of conventionalism force us to abandon metaphysical analyticity? It is more plausibly interpreted as targeting epistemic analyticity!

An alternative?

An ontological notion of truth in virtue of meaning: there is something in virtue of which analytical claims are true and analytical inferences are valid – meanings. Analogy:

- (p1) We intend to denote by “pain” whatever makes true the best folk psychology.
- (p3) Necessarily, pain is neural state C .
- (p4) Hence, having pain is being in C .

*University of Geneva, Switzerland, philipp.keller@lettres.unige.ch.

†University of Fribourg, Switzerland, gian-andri.toendury@unifr.ch.

(p4) is contingent; despite the necessity of (p3), we can allow both for mad and martian pain. Mad pain (same realizer, different role) would correspond to McGee's heretical views of "if ... then ...", martial pain (different realizer, same role) to the "if ... then ..." of relevantist or constructivist logicians.

The identity of a word is given by the intentions of use associated (presupposed) with its uses. The existence of the word is contingent, but given it exists, the intentions are necessarily connected to it (essential properties of the thick word denoted by the expression in small capitals).

Some propositions may be taken to be true in virtue of words:

- (b1) We intend to denote by "bachelor" only unmarried adult males.
- (b2) Necessarily, BACHELOR denotes only unmarried adult men.
- (b3) Necessarily, all bachelors are unmarried.

Modus ponens

- (c1) We intend to use "if ... then ..." for what makes true the best theory of the ultimately acceptable inferences in our community.
- (c2) Necessarily, IF ... THEN ... denotes the conditional relation in the best theory of the ultimately acceptable inferences in our community.
- (c3) MPP is an ultimately acceptable form of conditional inference in our community.
- (c4) Necessarily, MPP is truth-preserving.

"Water is H_2O ":

- (h1) We intend to use "water" to denote the actual dominant transparent liquid in our environment.
- (h3) Necessarily, H_2O is the actual dominant transparent liquid in our environment.
- (h4) Necessarily, Water is H_2O .

"Stick s is 1 meter long"

- (m1) We intend to refer by "meter" to whatever is ultimately useful about stick S at t to define a unit of length.
 - (m2) Necessarily METER denotes the actual length of stick S at t .
 - (m3) Stick S is one meter long at t .
-
- (w1) We intend to use "water" for the salient kind in the true (acceptable) uses of "water" in the community.
 - (w2) Necessarily WATER denotes the kind which is most salient (important) in the uses of the expression (by so-and-so) which are ultimately acceptable (true).
 - (w3) Given that H_2O is the kind which renders the important uses of WATER true (explains the important properties, common characteristic structure), necessarily water is H_2O .
 - (w4) Given that H_2O is important, contingently water is watery.