

## NOTAS E DISCUSSÕES NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

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### IS THE T-SCHEME TRUE?

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**Abstract.** In this note I consider the question of whether the T-scheme is true. Though the T-scheme does not itself have a truth-value, its specific instances do have a truth-value. They are true. Indeed, they are analytically true. It is argued that instances of the T-scheme are analytic in both the epistemological and metaphysical senses of analyticity.

**Keywords.** truth • T-scheme • Tarski • Boghossian

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RECEIVED: 09/07/2024

ACCEPTED: 20/08/2025

#### I

The T-scheme is as follows:

‘P’ is true iff P.

The T-scheme is widely held to express a core insight about truth. A sentence is true if and only if what the sentence says is in fact the case. Some think that the T-scheme tells us most (perhaps all) of what there is to know about truth. Others think that the T-scheme must be supplemented in some way to arrive at a full-blown account of truth.

But is the T-scheme itself true?

#### II

An initial point of clarification is in order. Strictly speaking, the T-scheme is not a sentence at all. It is only a scheme or schema which can be employed to form a sentence. It is only once the symbol ‘P’ is replaced in both occurrences by an actual sentence that we arrive at a sentence capable of bearing a truth-value.

Let us take, for example, Tarski’s own paradigm (Tarski 1972):



(S) ‘Snow is white’ is true iff snow is white.

Unlike the T-scheme, this sentence makes an assertion that bears a truth-value. It says of a particular sentence that that sentence is true just in case a particular state of affairs obtains. That assertion is itself one that may be true or false. And in fact it is true.

If this is right, then it is not the T-scheme itself that may bear a truth-value. It is specific instances of the T-scheme. Only instances of the T-scheme in which the symbol ‘P’ is replaced by a sentence are capable of being true.

With that clarification, let us proceed.

### III

The clarification brings with it some limitation of scope. The T-scheme appeared to tell us something about truth in general. A particular instance of the T-scheme tells us something only about the truth of a particular sentence.

But never mind. Let us focus on the truth of (S). What makes it true? Surely not snow’s being white. For (S) does not assert that snow is white. So, the fact that snow is white does not make (S) true.

What then? Surely what makes (S) true is that, if snow is white, then ‘Snow is white’ is true, and, if ‘Snow is white’ is true, then snow is white. It is that pair of conditional circumstances that makes (S) true.

Where is that state of affairs located? With the sentence ‘Snow is white’, the circumstance that makes it true is an observable state of affairs in the world. It is the fact that snow is actually white in reality that makes the sentence true. But where is the pair of conditional states of affairs located?

Asking the question this way may lead one to look for a state of affairs in the world that makes (S) true. It might lead one, for example, to look for a dispositional state of affairs which would underpin the pair of conditional state of affairs. Or perhaps it would lead one to look for an empirical correlation between the truth of ‘Snow is white’ and snow’s being white.

But this would be a mistake. There is no state of affairs in the world that is solely responsible for the truth of (S). Another way of putting the point is that (S) is not an assertion about the way that the world itself is. It is a statement of a condition under which a particular sentence would be true. It is not an assertion that that condition obtains.

### IV

What makes (S) true is the fact that snow’s being white is just what it means for ‘Snow is white’ to be true. What does it mean to say that ‘Snow is white’ is true? Precisely that snow is white. That is exactly what “‘Snow is white’ is true” means.<sup>1</sup>

The reason that there is no state of affairs in the world that makes (S) true is that it is an analytic truth. (S) is true as a matter of meaning. It is because the word ‘true’ means what it does that (S) comes out true.

(S) is an analytic truth, true in virtue of meaning. It is not a synthetic truth made true by the way the world, independent of language, happens to be.

## V

Here the plot thickens.

The notion of analyticity itself admits of a well-known ambiguity (cf. Boghossian 1996). We need to distinguish epistemic from metaphysical analyticity. On the one hand, a sentence is epistemically analytic if one who understands the sentence is thereby justified in believing the sentence. On the other hand, a sentence is metaphysically analytic if the sentence is true in virtue of the meaning of the sentence.

The first form of analyticity entails no commitment to the truth of the analytic sentence in question. It is simply a matter of one who understands a sentence thereby being justified in believing that the sentence is true. The sentence may itself be false. But the very act of grasping the content of the sentence makes one justified in believing the sentence.

By contrast, the metaphysical form of analyticity does traffic in truth. It is not a question of whether one is justified in believing the sentence. Rather, the very meaning of the sentence makes it the case that the sentence is true. The sentence is true, whether or not one believes it, merely because of what it means.

## VI

If one understands what is meant by (S), then one is justified in believing that it is true. This is simply a matter of grasping what is meant by the word ‘true’. Once one understands what ‘true’ means, one immediately sees that, if ‘Snow is white’ is true, then snow is white. That’s just what it means for ‘Snow is white’ to be true. Conversely, once one understands what ‘true’ means, one will see immediately that, if snow is white, then the sentence ‘Snow is white’ is true.<sup>2</sup>

We may conclude that (S) is analytic in the epistemic sense. But what of the metaphysical sense?

## VII

Does the fact that ‘true’ means what it does make (S) true? Is (S) true by virtue of meaning alone?

What it means to say that ‘Snow is white’ is true is that snow is white.<sup>3</sup> In saying that a sentence is true what one is saying is that what the sentence asserts to be the

case is in fact the case. To be true is precisely for what the sentence asserts to be the case to in fact be the case.

But (S) is true precisely because of what is meant by 'true'. It is precisely because snow must be white for 'Snow is white' to be true that (S) is true. It is in virtue of what 'true' means that (S) is true. So (S) is also analytic in the metaphysical sense.

## VIII

In sum, strictly speaking the T-scheme is not true because it does not possess a truth-value. However, instances of the T-scheme are true. They are analytic truths both in the epistemic sense and the metaphysical sense.

## References

- Boghossian, Paul. 1996. Analyticity Reconsidered. *Nous* 30(3): 360–391.  
 Tarski, Alfred. 1972. 'The Semantic Conception of Truth'. In: L. Linsky (ed.), *Semantics and the Philosophy of Language*, p. 13–49. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In the text I write as if the truth-predicate is redundant. But I do not wish to say that the sentence "'Snow is white' is true" means exactly what the sentence 'Snow is white' means. The former attributes the property of truth to a sentence. The latter does not. But for simplicity of expression, I shall ignore this nicety.

<sup>2</sup>It is important to note that this does not mean that snow's being white depends on there being a sentence, 'Snow is white', that is true. Snow is white whether or not the sentence 'Snow is white' exists, and, indeed whether or not the truth-predicate exists. The point is simply that, if the sentence 'Snow is white' is true, then it must be the case that snow is white. Equally, given that the state of affairs that snow is white obtains, a sentence that asserts that state of affairs to obtain is true. There is no dependence of reality on language here.

<sup>3</sup>Again, bear in mind that I do not take truth to be redundant, so that this form of words is only for ease of expression. A more accurate way of putting the point would be to say that a central part of what is meant by saying that 'Snow is white' is true is that snow is white, though saying that 'Snow is white' is true is not just to say that snow is white.