

# The Conventional and the Analytic\*

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## 1. Introduction

Empiricist philosophers like Carnap invoked analyticity in order to explain a priori knowledge and necessary truth. Analyticity was “truth purely in virtue of meaning.” The view had a deflationary motivation: in Carnap’s proposal, linguistic conventions alone determine the truth of analytic sentences, and thus there is no mystery in our knowing their truth a priori, or in their necessary truth; for they are, as it were, truths of our own making. Let us call this “Carnapian conventionalism,” *conventionalism<sub>C</sub>* and cognates for short. This conventionalist<sub>C</sub> explication of the a priori has been the target of sound criticisms. Arguments like Quine’s in “Truth by Convention” are in our view decisive: the truth of conventionalism<sub>C</sub> requires that the class of logical truths and logical validities be *reductively* accounted for as conventionally established; however, no such reduction is forthcoming, because logic is needed to generate the entire class from any given set of conventions properly so-called.

Granted that conventionalism<sub>C</sub> is untenable, we want to take issue with a different, usually made criticism. Although the argument uncovers some difficulties for the way conventionalist claims are defended by

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some of its advocates, we will try to show that it fails. The criticism thus stands in the way of a proper appreciation of why the Carnapian account of the *a priori* is not correct. We will try to illustrate this by showing that the criticism we will dispute would dispose of conventionalist claims not only regarding philosophically problematic cases—logical and mathematical truths—but also regarding cases for which they have some *prima facie* plausibility. One such case is that of truths that follow from mere abbreviations, “nominal” definitions; ‘someone is a bachelor if and only if he is an unmarried adult male’ can serve at this point for illustration. We will try to articulate a clear sense in which the contents of assertion such as this can be truths by convention.<sup>1</sup> We do not need to prove that a conventionalist claim is true in those cases; it is enough for us to show that it is intelligible, for the arguments we will confront question even this.

The criticism we want to oppose was originally made by C. I. Lewis, Pap and others, and has been recently advanced by Lycan (1994), Boghossian (1997), and Bonjour (1998). In a nutshell, it goes as follows. The fact that a certain *sentence* expresses a true proposition justifiable *a priori* is, in a straightforward sense, a matter of linguistic convention: to that extent, conventional assignment of meaning results in truth. However, it is quite a different matter whether “the truth or *a priori* justifiability of the proposition thus expressed is itself somehow a result of such a convention” (Bonjour 1998, p. 54). This cannot be right: the truth-value of a necessary and *a priori* justifiable *proposition* cannot depend on our relating it to any particular sentence, nor does its *a priori* epistemic justification; for the straightforward dependence of sentential truth on convention is a contingent and empirical matter.

This argument indeed disposes of some arguments by conventionalist proponents of an account of apriority and necessity in terms of analyticity. The problem with it as a refutation of that view, we will argue, lies in that it assumes a dichotomy of candidates for the role of truth-bearer that is not exhaustive. It assumes two kinds of bearers of truth and modally qualified truth: on the one hand, linguistic items individuated merely by their “formal” (phonological or graphic, and syntactical) properties; on the other, Platonistic propositions—propositions

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<sup>1</sup> Lycan (1994, ch. 12) confronts an objection of this kind. It is unclear to us whether in the end, envisaging the sort of proposal we will make, he grants that there are some truths by convention and thereby some analytic truths according to the metaphysical conception (see below), but simply insists that they do not have enough philosophical weight to support the more general views of Kantians or empiricists; if so, we do not disagree. Lycan’s discussion includes an interesting original objection that we will examine after stating our proposal.

whose nature and properties do not depend on facts about thinkers, in particular facts about the intentions and conventions guiding them.

To make sense of conventionalism, however, a third and equally legitimate kind of truth-bearer should be acknowledged. Conventionalism requires that truth and their modalities are predicated of—to put it in a rough, impressionistic form at this stage—propositions as Wittgenstein understood them in the *Tractatus*: the *propositional sign* taken together with its interpretation, or—ignoring some nuances—*interpreted* sentences. When stating our own views, we will henceforth use ‘T(ractarian)-propositions’ for sentences understood according to the thicker conception and ‘P(latonic)-propositions’ for propositions as they are usually conceived, reserving ‘sentence’ for linguistic items in the thinner conception that individuates them by their spellings.<sup>2</sup> We will also need at different points ambiguous terms, especially when discussing claims by other writers. We will use ‘content’ to remain noncommittal whether T-propositions or P-propositions are meant (only using ‘proposition’ if we cannot avoid it, when presenting other writers’ views); and (somehow idiosyncratically, for want of anything better) ‘statement’ when either sentence or interpreted sentence could be meant.

A main claim of this paper is then that T-propositions should replace P-propositions in the context of the present debate, for only thus can both the strength of conventionalism and its real flaws be properly appraised.<sup>3</sup> To defend it, the most important task before us is to clarify the nature of T-propositions. We will characterize T-propositions as individuated by a *state of affairs* (the sort of thing modelled by Russellian propositions, more coarsely by sets of possible worlds) signified by the relevant linguistic expression, but also by conditions on the actual world (including speakers’ intentions and conventional agreements) where this linguistic expression is used, which must be in place for the state of affairs to be signified.

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<sup>2</sup> Given that indexicality and other forms of context-dependence are not easily avoidable, we should rather consider interpreted *utterances* instead. And given that utterances include conventional indicators of illocutionary force, which are truth-conditionally irrelevant, we would do even better by considering interpreted propositional signs—a propositional sign being an abstraction of full-fledged utterances: as it were, the utterance minus its specific force-indicator. But those refinements are not necessary for our discussion, and will be ignored.

<sup>3</sup> We share the feeling expressed in Geach’s complaint against the contemporary tendency to use ‘proposition’ in the Platonistic sense: “This use of ‘proposition’ is objectionable because it ousts the older, linguistic, application of the word and leaves people to grope after some substitute for that—and the substitutes they lay hold of, e.g. ‘sentence’ and ‘statement’, are obviously not good ones” (Geach 1980, 168).

In addition to this goal, already ambitious given what many contemporary philosophers appear to take for granted, we pursue a second one. Let the *analytic thesis* be the claim (of which conventionalism<sub>C</sub> is but a particular version) that a priori truths are analytic truths, true by virtue of meaning.<sup>4</sup> Notoriously, the appeal to analyticity in the phrase ‘true by virtue of meaning’ makes this thesis obscure. Boghossian distinguishes two interpretations of the analytic thesis, depending on two alternative elaborations of that phrase. The first constitutes an *epistemological* conception, and the second a *metaphysical* one. According to the first, a statement is analytic “provided that grasp of its meaning alone suffices for justified belief in its truth.” According to the second conception, a statement is analytic provided that “it owes its truth value completely to its meaning, and not at all to ‘the facts’” (*op. cit.*, 334).

Boghossian’s characterization of the two conceptions is curiously asymmetric. Given the way the contrast between epistemological claims and metaphysical or constitutive ones is usually made, one should have expected a characterization of the metaphysical conception along these lines: *a statement is analytic provided that facts constitutive of its meaning what it does suffice for, or necessitate, its truth.* This formulation sensibly allows that the truth of an analytic statement depends on facts: meaning-constituting facts determine the truth of analytic statements, in contrast with synthetic ones whose truth depends on additional facts. This can be put as a supervenience claim: the truth of analytic statements supervenes on meaning-constituting facts, including conventions. Boghossian’s characterization does not describe a view that any sensible philosopher could have sustained, unless we properly restrict those “facts” on which the truth of analytic statements is not supposed to depend to, say, “empirical” facts. However, Boghossian writes as if he intended to debunk reasonable metaphysical versions of the analytic thesis; for that purpose, something like our supervenience characterization should be preferred.

Aside from their rejection of conventionalism, Lycan, Bonjour and Boghossian do not share many views. Lycan holds a Quinean empiricism; Bonjour supports a form of rationalism that flatly dispenses with the analytic thesis, while Boghossian thinks that the epistemological conception is plausible as a promising approach to analyticity, and

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<sup>4</sup> Defenders of the analytic thesis in general (and obviously conventionalists in particular) will typically want to extend the thesis to necessary truth. Here the distinction between epistemic and metaphysical necessity, to which Kripke’s work has made us sensitive, imposes caution. A view with which we sympathize (defended by Jackson and Peacocke, and anticipated by Kripke) suggests that necessary truths are either a priori contents, or contents that follow a priori from a priori contents together with contingent truths.

illuminates the nature of some a priori truths, logical truths among them. He rejects the metaphysical conception as nonsense; he offers his criticism of conventionalism in support of this, because conventionalism presupposes a constitutive claim. Our second goal can now be stated as follows. Against Lycan and Bonjour, we agree with Boghossian that analyticity illuminates some interesting cases of a priori knowledge, over and above the issue of conventionalism—i.e., cases like that of logical truth, where there is little reason to think that conventionalism is true. However, against Boghossian we agree with Harman (1996) that to vindicate the analytic thesis on the epistemological conception is to vindicate it also on a metaphysical conception—albeit one understood as in our at least *prima facie* intelligible alternative formulation. If we are interested in making sense of conventionalism it is because we think that the rather limited cases for which the conventionalist claim is intelligible provide a model for the intelligibility of a metaphysical conception of analyticity in general, thus contributing to the vindication of the analytic thesis in which we are mostly interested.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. In the following section we will present the anti-conventionalist argument we want to oppose, drawing mainly on Boghossian's discussion.<sup>5</sup> In section 3 we will introduce a suggestion made by Quinton, of some analytic truths (deriving from definitional abbreviations) for which a conventionalist account seems acceptable. We will present our account of T-propositions in section 4, and, based on it, in section 5 our vindication of the intelligibility of conventionalism and of the plausibility of its truth in some very special cases, like those considered by Quinton. In section 6 we argue that, while our limited defence of conventionalism does not extend to the interesting cases, it does establish the intelligibility of the metaphysical conception of analyticity.

## 2. Boghossian's Objections to Conventionalism

Boghossian (1997) provides the most elaborated version of the criticism we want to confront. We will focus first on his arguments; in the next section we will discuss Bonjour's, which raise related issues. Boghossian's starting point is the already mentioned characterization

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<sup>5</sup> This is only because Boghossian presents in a very clear way arguments against conventionalism in particular and against the analytic thesis in the metaphysical sense in general that we ultimately want to uphold, which many other contemporary philosophers subscribe, not only those that we have already mentioned, Lycan and Bonjour; later we will also refer to similar considerations by Tarski and Peacocke. We feel that Boghossian is merely giving very clear expression to the majority view nowadays on these matters.

of the analytic thesis, assuming his distinction of the two conceptions of analyticity. He argues as follows against the metaphysical conception:

Consider the sentence ‘Either p or not p.’ It is easy, of course, to understand how the fact that we mean what we do by the ingredient terms fixes what is expressed by the sentence as a whole; and [...] how the fact that we mean what we do by the sentence determines whether the sentence expresses something true or false. [...] What is far more mysterious is the claim that the *truth of what the sentence expresses* depends on the fact that it is expressed by that sentence, so that we can say that what is expressed wouldn’t have been true at all, had it not been for the fact that it is expressed by that sentence. (*Op. cit.*, 336)

Boghossian argues that there is no plausibility in this idea. His argument is that, whereas most of the claims under consideration are clearly necessary, such an account would make their truth contingent, and contingent on an act of meaning at that. “Are we to suppose that, prior to our stipulating a meaning for the sentence ‘Either snow is white or it isn’t’, *it wasn’t the case that either snow was white or it wasn’t*?” (*ibid.*, p. 336).

The force of these considerations against a metaphysical conception of analyticity depends on the assumption that truth and modalized truth are either predicated of mind- and language-independent entities (primarily), or (derivatively) of sentences conceived as mere sequences of letters. Boghossian’s remarks show that he is interpreting the metaphysical conception of analyticity along the lines of this definition: S is an analytic truth iff the truth-value of the P-proposition expressed by S depends completely on the fact that S expresses it. The justification for using our term of art ‘P-proposition’ lies in Boghossian’s characterization of a proposition as “a mind-independent and language-independent abstract object that has truth conditions essentially” (Boghossian 1997, p. 333).<sup>6</sup> There is thus *prima facie* a gap in Boghossian’s reasoning. It is open to the conventionalist to resist his reading of the ambiguous term ‘truth’ in terms of P-propositions. A “truth,” in the required sense, should rather be understood—as one proponent of the analytic thesis puts it—so that it “consists of a form of words with a meaning attached” (Quinton 1963-4, 109). In itself, to posit P-propositions is not the problem. What is *prima facie* objectionable is resorting to them in stating the conventionalist understanding of analyticity, because it renders almost trivially empty the class of analytic statements, for the reasons that Boghossian gives.

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<sup>6</sup> Boghossian sometimes refers to what we are calling ‘P-propositions’ using phrases like ‘the claim that ...’ or ‘what the sentence expresses.’

Boghossian is aware that his argument might be disputed along the preceding lines, as we are about to see; this is why we have been hedging our claims with ‘prima facie.’ We will consider what he has to say in reply after examining his discussion of conventionalism. In addition to the general criticism of the metaphysical conception we have presented, Boghossian also examines critically the conventionalist doctrine that has traditionally gone with that conception of analyticity. In criticizing conventionalism, however, he makes the same sort of prima facie questionable move that we have just highlighted. According to Boghossian, conventionalism (as applied more specifically to logic) is “the view that, although the sentences of logic are factual—although they can express truths—their truth values are not objective, but are, rather, determined by our conventions” (p. 349). Notice that this definition shares the problems of Boghossian’s characterization of the metaphysical conception; while the latter assumed that the truth of analytic truths does not depend on any facts, this assumes that the determination of truth by convention is not “objective,” whatever that means. Let us call this “Boghossian’s conventionalism,” *convencionalism<sub>B</sub>* for short.

Conventionalists sometimes support their view on a thesis about how logical vocabulary is endowed with meaning. This thesis, which Boghossian calls ‘Implicit Definition,’ states (also with respect to logic) that “it is by arbitrarily stipulating that certain sentences of logic are to be true, or that certain inferences are to be valid, that we attach a meaning to the logical sentences” (p. 348). Boghossian argues that conventionalism<sub>B</sub> is independent of Implicit Definition: it could be false, even if Implicit Definition is true (as Boghossian thinks it really is, at least in the case of the logical expressions). We think he is right that conventionalism<sub>B</sub> does not follow from Implicit Definition. His argument, however, is unpersuasive, in that prima facie the thesis that he shows not to be entailed by Implicit Definition is only a question-begging formulation of conventionalism: the view that the truth-values of the P-propositions signified by the sentences of logic are somehow determined by our conventions. This rather bizarre object of criticism is the one at stake here:

All that is involved in the thesis of Implicit Definition is the claim that the conventional assignment of truth to a sentence determines what proposition that sentence expresses (if any); such a view is entirely silent about what (if anything) determines the truth of the claim that is thereby expressed—*a fortiori*, it is silent about whether our conventions determine it. (*Op. cit.*, 351)

Boghossian assumes the existence of a domain of abstract P-propositions, entities that we saw he characterizes as independent of human



mind and language. Linguistic entities on the other hand—words, entire sentences—are individuated according to a merely typographic criterion of identity; i.e., their semantic properties are not part of their nature; we can think of these linguistic signs, *before*, so to say, they have any meaning. Words and their syntactic modes of combination are assigned meanings through human conventions. As a result, a function from sentences to P-propositions is established; in this straightforward sense, *what each sentence expresses* is the product of conventions. This background of assumptions provides a model relative to which Implicit Definition can be true for the logical expressions, while conventionalism about logic is false. According to Implicit Definition, as a result of stipulating that certain logical sentences are true (or that certain sets of sentences are valid arguments), these sentences get to be correlated with specific P-propositions; before the stipulation, the sentences did not have meaning—since their logical expressions lacked meaning. Therefore, according to Implicit Definition, the truth values of logically true sentences are determined by our conventions; and it is also determined by our conventions what their meanings are—i.e., which P-propositions they express. But conventionalism<sub>B</sub> does not follow from this; for the P-propositions assigned to logically true sentences do not themselves possess their truth-values as a result of our conventional stipulation.

As before, what we find *prima facie* questionable are the theoretical assumptions adopted by Boghossian. If we countenance P-propositions, we should not understand conventionalism the way Boghossian does; for it is an obviously absurd doctrine. To have a chance, the conventionalist should be rather understood as saying that it is linguistically individuated propositions that have their truth-value fixed by the implicit definitions through which they are correlated with sentences. Let us call this “authors’ conventionalism,” *conventionalism<sub>A</sub>*. At this point, this is just a label to distinguish it from Carnap’s and Boghossian’s versions; we will proceed to clarify its nature in due course.

Boghossian, as we said, is not unaware of the sort of response we have been envisaging to his argument. He considers the complaint that “the entailment between Implicit Definition and Conventionalism is blocked only through the tacit use of a distinction between a sentence and the proposition it expresses, a distinction that neither Carnap nor Quine would have approved” (p. 351). There is, he concedes here, an alternative conception of “what a sentence expresses,” which on the face of it gives the conventionalist more chances. He also considers the alternative conception of truth-bearers available to the conventionalist. Given that the paper is mainly a polemic against Quine’s rejection of analyticity, he says that, although he himself takes (P-)propositions to



be the objects of beliefs (and does not think that assuming this would beg any question in the context of that polemic), “in the interest of keeping potential distractions to a minimum, I will work with a conception of belief that is far more hospitable to Quine’s basic outlook. According to this more ‘linguistic’ picture, the objects of belief are not propositions, but rather interpreted sentences” (*op. cit.*, 333).

Thus, it is not that Boghossian is not prepared to entertain, even if in a sketchy form, a notion of T-proposition like the one we think this debate needs. He thinks, however, that such a move will not achieve anything for the conventionalist. He points out that some distinction between a sentence and what it expresses is needed also in any conventionalist philosophy of language. Without some such distinction “it’s hard to see how distinctive content is to be given to Conventionalism,” given that “a conventionalism merely about linguistic expressions is trivial” (*op. cit.*, 365). Now, even “on a deflationary view of truth,” he says,

[...] there is presumably a distinction between the *sentence* ‘Snow is white’ and that which makes the sentence true, namely, snow’s being white. And the essential point for my purposes is that it is one thing to say that ‘Snow is white’ comes to express the claim that snow is white as a result of being conventionally assigned the truth-value True; and quite another to say that snow comes to be white as a result of our conventions. The first claim is Implicit Definition (however implausibly applied in this case); and the other is Conventionalism. Neither one seems to me to entail the other. (*Op. cit.*, 352)

Boghossian contends that his argument still works no matter what conception of contents we assume, only to the extent that we make the required distinction between sentences and contents. Let us use bold face to refer to the content (linguistically individuated, if required, as the conventionalist needs) associated in English with the bold-faced expression. His point is that it is one thing to say that ‘snow is white’ is conventionally correlated with **snow is white**, in part by being implicitly conventionally defined so that it should count as true, and another to say that **snow is white** owes its truth to any such convention. Now, the conventionalist agrees that not every fact obtains due to our conventions. Presumably **snow is white** is one of those contents whose truth does not depend on conventions in any interesting sense. Conventions, however, are in a straightforward sense involved in the nature of that true T-proposition as much as in that of any other: that a given expression has a certain meaning is determined by conventions, and T-propositions are supposed to be partly constituted by the relational fact that conventional regularities obtain concerning the expressions involved. The question then is whether the conventionalist can make the distinction between the innocuous sense in which the truth of *every* true T-proposition is dependent on the

prevailing of conventions involving the constituting expressions, and the discriminating sense in which, according to him, only some true T-proposition owe their truth to conventions.<sup>7</sup>

Many philosophers have doubted that any such distinction can be made; call this “the discrimination objection” to conventionalism. Famously, of course, Quine; but he is not alone in this. In support of the view that ‘true’ does not apply to factual sentences and to logically true sentences on different grounds, Tarski says in a letter to White dated in 1944: “in the semantic conception of truth (and this is, in my opinion, the only precise conception of truth which is now available) it seems to me ‘simpler’ and ‘more natural’ to define first [the class of true sentences] and then, with its help [the class of logical sentences] and [the class of extra-logical sentences]” (White 1987, p. 30). Tarski’s point here is more directly put by Peacocke thus: “Both the a priori and the a posteriori sentences are true, when they are, because their disquotational truth conditions are fulfilled. These truth conditions are consequences of uniform assignments of meaning to each of the words in the sentences. No special stipulations of meaning, or of truth, or other specific conventions, are required to explain why a logical truth is true” (Peacocke 1993, p. 183). This is the point that Boghossian was making in the previous quotation, and also here: “What could it possibly mean to say that the truth of a statement is fixed exclusively by its meaning and not by the facts? Isn’t it in general true—indeed, isn’t it in general a truism—that for any statement S, S is true iff for some p, S means that p and p? How could the *mere* fact that S means that p make it the case that S is true? Doesn’t it also have to be the case that p?” (*op. cit.*, 335). Boghossian takes this to refute any metaphysical conception of analyticity, not just the conventionalist’s. In sections 4 and 5 we will try to address the challenge posed by the discrimination objection, arguing that a less sketchy explication of T-propositions than the one Boghossian envisages can properly distinguish **snow is white** from **someone is a bachelor if and only if he is an unmarried adult male**.

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<sup>7</sup> That all statements owe their truth to conventions goes without saying in Quine’s reconstruction of the Carnapian view: “the truth of a statement is somehow analysable into a linguistic component and a factual component. Given this supposition, it next seems reasonable that in some statements the factual component should be null, and these are the analytic statements” (Quine 1951, ...). In the case of synthetic statements, thus, neither the contribution of the factual component *nor* that of the linguistic component is null. Carnap puts the matter even more perspicuously: “Logic and mathematics are (not in contradiction to physics) conventional, and indeed (in contradiction to physics) completely conventional. Physics on the other hand is a mixture of conventional and non-conventional empirical components.” (From Carnap’s reading notes on Quine’s “Truth by Convention” in the Rudolf Carnap Collection, quoted in Creath 1987, p. 495.)

### 3. Bonjour and Quinton on Conventionalism

Bonjour (1998) has also recently confronted the conventionalist version of the analytic thesis. As part of his argument for an account of apriority based on rational intuition, Bonjour opposes in general all the explanations appealing to the analytic thesis. While Boghossian accepts at least the correctness in some interesting cases of the analytic thesis on the epistemological conception, Bonjour squarely rejects that knowledge of meaning can ever account for a priori justification. One of his arguments (*op. cit.*, 54-56) addresses specifically the conventionalist version of the thesis; it relies on the discrimination objection. He contends that the conventionalist account of the a priori justifiability or truth of some statements is wrong because the dependence of their truth on a conventional link between sentences and the contents they express is a feature shared by *all* statements, even obviously empirical statements (*op. cit.*, 55). Carnap's conventionalist position, conventionalism<sub>C</sub>, declared that a statement is analytic just in case its truth-value is *completely* dependent on meaning-constituting linguistic conventions. There was no denying that linguistic conventions contribute also to determine the truth-value of all other statements. The contrasting criterion invoked to make the analytical-synthetic distinction was not whether or not convention plays any role in fixing truth-values, but rather whether or not truth-values are only partially determined by convention. For synthetic statements the other part involved is the extra-linguistic world, the extra-linguistic facts. The problem is to make sense of this distinction between truths "partially" conventional and truths "completely" conventional.

Bonjour presents the objection in the course of his rebuttal of Quinton's (1963-4) defence of a conventionalist account. This is convenient for our purposes, because Quinton provides the material for an appropriate reply—as Bonjour in part acknowledges, even if begrudgingly. By resorting to Quinton's argument, we do not mean to endorse his conventionalist conclusion. We disagree with Quinton on the point ultimately under dispute—i.e., whether conventionalism is right for the philosophically interesting cases, like logical and arithmetical truths—as we made clear at the outset. But Quinton's argument will allow us to vindicate our main points in this paper: that the metaphysical conception of analyticity in general is not incoherent, nor is incoherent conventionalism in particular.

Quinton confronts the line of criticism we have been considering so far, namely, that while "the fact that a sentence expresses a necessary proposition is conventional [...] it does not follow, and it is not the case, that the necessity of the proposition expressed is conventional" (Quinton 1963-4, p. 118). For his reply, he starts by suggesting that

“[s]ome of the force of this argument is removed by the consideration that if it applies to any necessary truth it applies to all of them” (*ibid.*). He then takes up the obvious rejoinder, which later Bonjour would put as follows: “that [Quinton] is quite right that this conclusion [i.e., that the argument applies to all necessary truths] follows, but wrong in supposing that there is anything implausible about it” (Bonjour, *op. cit.*, p. 55). In response, Quinton produces the argument that we find suggestive. By elaborating on it, we will argue that in some cases the conventionalist proposal is at the very least intelligible and in fact correct.

Quinton asks us to consider the application of the anti-conventionalist argument to “verbal definitions, as a way of showing that they are not conventional. Both sides agree that the identity of meaning of two synonymous expressions is established by stipulation. But the anti-conventionalist maintains that there is a non-conventional identity of concepts, lying behind the conventional synonymy of terms, which should exist even if no means of expressing the concepts had ever been devised” (*op. cit.*, p. 118). But this is incoherent in this case, he says: “the anti-conventionalist has seen two senses in statements of identity of meaning where in fact there is only one [...] But identity-statements do not correlate objects considered in themselves, they can correlate objects only under a certain description. The only way in which concepts can be identifyingly described is by reference to the words that express them” (*op. cit.*, p. 119). It is concerning this point by Quinton that Bonjour begrudgingly admits that it “may perhaps be correct for cases of this specific sort” (*op. cit.*, 56), and this is just what we want to argue for.<sup>8</sup>

Let us illustrate our own elaboration of this argument by means of an example. We will introduce an artificial one, to avoid potential distractions.<sup>9</sup> Suppose that A and B explicitly agree to have their dialect of English (‘English<sub>AB</sub>’) governed by the following stipulation:

(S<sub>0</sub>) Let us use in English<sub>AB</sub> ‘flurg’ for green squares.

Let us suppose also that S<sub>0</sub> is the only stipulation governing the use of that word. Now, compare two statements made by uttering in this dialect the following sentences:

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<sup>8</sup> We say “begrudgingly” because Bonjour goes on to suggest that there may yet be difficulties here, “in the vicinity of the ‘paradox of analysis’” (*ibid.*). We do not think this is the case, for reasons that we will provide presently.

<sup>9</sup> Due to the fact that it is arguable whether ‘bachelor’ is correctly considered to have been implicitly stipulatively defined as an abbreviation of ‘unmarried male.’ (The example, improving on the one we had before, was suggested by Boghossian.)

- (1) Something is a flurg just in case it is a green square.
- (2) Something is a green square just in case it is a green square.

Note that we are considering the statement made with (1) and not ( $S_0$ ) itself, which, not being an assertion, is not either true or false, let alone analytic or a priori. Nor are we considering an assertion about the sentence ‘something is a flurg if, but only if, it is a green square,’ to the effect that it is governed by the stipulation ( $S_0$ ) in a certain language; this is a true, but contingent and a posteriori statement.<sup>10</sup> Rather, what we are supposed to consider is a certain statement made with a sentence relative to the meaning it has received in part through ( $S_0$ ).

We take Quinton’s important point here to be that, if we thought of contents only as P-propositions, we could not account for the *semantic* difference between (1) and (2). Along the lines of the distinction between P-propositions and T-propositions, let us distinguish as *T-concepts* and *P-concepts* the two corresponding conceptions of the constituents contributed to content by lexical units and semantically significant syntactic traits.<sup>11</sup> Now, put in our terms Quinton’s point is that one reason why we need T-concepts, and thus T-propositions, is that ‘flurg’ and ‘green square’ signify one and the same P-concept. We should recognize a sense, however, according to which (1) and (2) express different contents. T-propositions allow us to capture this difference.

This claim can be disputed on the basis that it presupposes an unacceptable multiplication of “modes of presentation.” Even Fregeans who contemplate fine-grained contents count (1) and (2) as expressing the same content. We disagree. In the first place, the fact that ‘flurg,’ a lexical unit, is made to capture a complex meaning makes a difference;

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<sup>10</sup> One of the arguments that Bonjour uses against conventionalism (*op. cit.*, p. 52) is that the preceding two possibilities that we are here dismissing are the only available ones. Neither of them is any good for the conventionalist, although this is at times overlooked; Cassam (2000) is a case in point. He is as much sympathetic towards the analytic theory of apriority in the metaphysical conception as we are; having overlooked the real problem posed by the discrimination objection, unlike us he appears to be prepared to argue for a conventionalist account of the apriority and necessity of logical truths, perhaps on the basis of the flawed kind of argument illustrated by Quinton’s a few paragraphs below.

<sup>11</sup> Although the identity of T-propositions and the T-concepts constituting them is in part linguistic, they do not need to be individuated by language-specific words. It is reasonable to assume that two different lexical units that play the same role in two different languages express the same T-concept. ‘Snow is white’ and ‘schnee ist weiss’ would then express the same T-proposition, constituted by the same T-concepts.

it is this difference which accounts for the further frequently made distinction that, while (2) is a *purely formal* logical truth, a logical truth in the narrow sense, (1) is rather an analytic non-logical truth, a logical truth only in an extended sense.<sup>12</sup> Secondly, Putnam and Burge have called attention to deference-based conceptions.<sup>13</sup> A speaker associating ‘flurg’ with such a deference-based conception could accept (2) while he refrains from accepting (1)—thus illustrating the need to ascribe different contents to both utterances. The deference-based conception envisaged might conceivably involve knowledge of the expression’s syntactico-semantic category, together with the metalinguistic notion that the linguistic community as a whole possesses further pieces of information associated with the lexical unit ‘flurg.’ Deference-based conceptions are metaphysically dependent on corresponding non-deference-based conceptions. Relative to the latter, we might capture any more coarse-grained concept of synonymy we might need, for instance to account for some ordinary propositional ascriptions in indirect discourse.<sup>14</sup>

These considerations only establish that there is a plausible sense in which (1) and (2) express different contents; but they do not suffice to establish in a philosophically fully compelling way the need to posit distinctive truth-bearers corresponding to that sense. However, our partial vindication of conventionalism against Boghossian’s considerations does not need this. Remember, the claim is that the analytic thesis in the metaphysical sense in general, and conventionalism in particular, *do not make sense*, are not even intelligible. Our reply is that the argument for this unfairly presupposes a conception of truth-bearers uncongenial to the conventionalist. It is enough for our response that there is an intelligible alternative that suffices to make sense of his claims, even if in the end they should be rejected. In the next section we are going to go beyond this, arguing that the alternative is not just intelligible, but in fact true—and thus, in effect, that there are good philosophical reasons to accept distinctive truth-bearers for (1) and (2). We do this mainly because it provides additional support to our main claim: the fact that a philosophically reasonable argument can be made for a

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<sup>12</sup> We owe this point to Josep Macià. Similar points can be made contrasting ‘every flurg is green’ with ‘every green square is green.’

<sup>13</sup> Alternatively, to what Higginbotham’s (1989) calls *partial knowledge of reference*. Surely, one could be in such a position vis-à-vis ‘flurg’ as much as we ourselves are regarding ‘charm’ as used in contemporary physics.

<sup>14</sup> Similarly, relative to those non-deference-based conceptions on which deference-based ones depend, criteria for correct analyses could be provided avoiding the “paradox of analysis.” We cannot go into this here, but we hope this remark is sufficient to assuage qualms like the similarly undeveloped one by Bonjour we mentioned in footnote 8 above.

conventionalist thesis, assuming our discriminating truth-bearers, additionally supports the previous plausibility considerations to take them seriously.

Interestingly, Quinton does not realize that to defend conventionalism<sub>A</sub> we need to go beyond what we have so far established. In all probability, this is because he does not appreciate the real force of the discrimination objection. He seems to think that once T-propositions are acknowledged as truth-bearers, conventionalism<sub>A</sub> is *eo ipso* vindicated:

The argument that necessary truth is a matter of convention is very simple. A statement is a necessary truth because of the meaning of the words of which it is composed. The meaning that words have is assigned to them by convention. Therefore it is a linguistic convention that makes a form of words express a necessary truth. This Hobbesian view makes necessity unmysterious by treating it, not as something objectively discoverable in the nature of things, but as a matter of human decision. The impossibility of falsification that is characteristic of necessary truths is not a brute ontological fact; it is brought about by our refusal from the start to let any falsification occur. (Quinton, *op. cit.*, 115-6)

This argument is fallacious, as Quine and his followers indicate. It fails to distinguish the innocuous sense in which every true T-proposition owes its truth to conventions, from some special sense required by conventionalism. The meaning that words have in empirical T-propositions has also been assigned to them by convention; given that “it is a linguistic convention that makes a form of words express” a truth, by Quinton’s reasoning that should make every truth “a matter of human decision.” But this is obviously false, by Quinton’s own lights. He therefore has failed to accord necessary T-propositions the discriminating conventionality that his conclusion needs. We will try to do better in the next two sections.

#### 4. The Nature of T-propositions

All T-propositions—contingent and a posteriori T-propositions too—are convention-involving: they all involve the relation between words and their contribution to the state of affairs that any T-proposition specifies, undisputedly conventional. Boghossian is right that conventionalism is not established just by taking T-propositions instead of P-propositions as contents. The conventionalist<sub>A</sub> needs to make a case that, firstly, some T-propositions, like the one asserted in an utterance of (1), involve not just “undiscriminating conventions”—as we will call them henceforth—like (the one created by) ( $S_0$ ) which are presupposed in all T-propositions, but some other conventions, with



semantic import; and, secondly, that they contribute to determine their truth. We will now indicate how that case can be made.

Our conception of T-propositions can be set up as follows. The assertoric utterance of a sentence that expresses a given T-proposition commits the speaker to the obtaining of a state of affairs (compositionally signified by the lexical units and significant syntactical features in the utterance); states of affairs are those entities whose obtaining make the T-proposition true, modelled by Russellian propositions, or sets of possible worlds.<sup>15</sup> For this state of affairs to be signified, however, some propositional attitudes (agreements, intentions, presuppositions) need be in place. They impose conditions that the actual world should satisfy for the relevant semantic relations between words and state of affairs to exist: without them, the sentence in that utterance would not signify a state of affairs. T-propositions are individuated by the signified states of affairs, and whatever connects the expressions with them. Fully grasping an actually expressed T-proposition involves not only conceiving a state of affairs, but also these requirements for such a state of affairs to have been signified.<sup>16</sup>

To illustrate, it is plausible that the reference of particular cases of demonstratives like 'he' is in part determined relative to a specific subclass of the speakers intentions.<sup>17</sup> Thus, for instance, if S utters 'he was Austrian' in a well-behaved context, in which biographical facts about the author of the *Tractatus* are discussed, the referent of the token of 'he' that S uses (to which we will henceforth refer with 'he') is in part determined on the basis that (3) is common knowledge in the context:

(3) S intends to refer with 'he' to the author of the *Tractatus*.

(3) states a fact required for S's utterance to signify a specific state of affairs. More general facts include the existence of conventional

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<sup>15</sup> In a fuller treatment, we would argue that states of affairs, not truth-values, are at the level of reference for sentence-like expressions. We are following the practice of using 'to express' for the relation between sentences and contents, and 'to signify' for the relation between sentences, statements and T-propositions, on the one hand, and states of affairs, on the other.

<sup>16</sup> As one of us has suggested elsewhere, the Fregean notion of conceiving a state of affairs *under a given mode of presentation* should be explained in those terms; see García-Carpintero 2000a. Following Wittgenstein, many contemporary writers argue that content is normative. Some philosophers (Boghossian among them) dispute this; they are prepared to grant that propositional acts like judging or asserting are normative, but not that contents themselves are normative. This is once more a consequence of thinking of contents in crude terms. If contents involve presupposed knowledge, commitments, decisions or intentions to use expressions in given ways, they may well be normative in a clear-cut sense.

<sup>17</sup> Bach (1992) includes arguments, distinctions and further references.

agreements among speakers regarding the use of the expression-type ‘he,’ and so on. All of them contribute to individuating the T-proposition.

With this brief outline of our conception of T-propositions in mind, let us now try and characterize a further semantic convention, over and above the indiscriminating ones, which, we will argue, accounts for the discriminating sense according to which (1) signifies a *conventional* fact—a fact guaranteed to obtain by a prevailing convention. Given linguistic facts about English<sub>AB</sub> that, for convenience’s sake, we will encompass under (LF<sub>1</sub>), without going into any further detail, in agreeing on stipulation (S<sub>0</sub>) speakers of the language we are considering have thereby also agreed on a further conventional agreement, (S<sub>1</sub>).

(S<sub>0</sub>) Let us use in English<sub>AB</sub> ‘flurg’ for green squares.

(LF<sub>1</sub>) Quantificational phrases like ‘all flurgs’ are grammatical in English<sub>AB</sub>.

(S<sub>1</sub>) Let us thereby use in English<sub>AB</sub> a lexical unit of the *noun* category for green squares.

Now, given a further linguistic fact about English<sub>AB</sub> (LF<sub>2</sub>), the undisputedly conventional (S<sub>0</sub>) introduces what we will argue is a further conventional agreement (S<sub>2</sub>), with semantic purport:

(LF<sub>2</sub>) Lexical units of the *noun* category are used in English<sub>AB</sub> for salient kinds.

(S<sub>2</sub>) Let us thereby circumscribe all and only green squares into a salient kind.

It remains to be argued that (S<sub>2</sub>) is correctly phrased as a further conventional decision constitutive of English<sub>AB</sub>, resulting from (S<sub>0</sub>) given (LF<sub>1</sub>) and (LF<sub>2</sub>); this is a task we will try to carry out later. Now we want to argue that, this granted, it is not merely indiscriminating conventional relations between words and meanings that are at stake in (S<sub>2</sub>), but meaning-constituting ones. A salient kind is not a natural kind (although natural kinds are among the salient kinds, paradigmatically so); nominal lexical units are used in natural languages for non-natural kinds too. Salience is an interest- and context-relative property, answering to many forms of interest; (LF<sub>2</sub>) assumes that nominal lexical units are used to isolate some portion

of the world significant for their users. Now, it is the presupposition of the semantic purport intended in ( $S_2$ ) which we think accounts for the difference between the T-propositions expressed by (1) and (2), repeated here:

(1) Something is a flurg just in case it is a green square.

(2) Something is a green square just in case it is a green square.

We argued before that there is a difference in meaning between (1) and (2), responsible for the intuitions that only (2) is a formal logical truth, and that a competent speaker can suspend judgment regarding (1) while accepting (2). The present proposal is that the relevant semantic difference consists in that (1) includes the additional information that what as a matter of fact is the class of green squares counts for the speakers of the relevant language as a salient countable kind, by their having introduced in their language a nominal lexical unit for it. The proposal is not that this is information constituting the signified state of affairs; but it is information nonetheless, obtained from a proper understanding of (1). It is information that our sketched theoretical framework would locate together with the information that the referent of **he** in the utterance to which (3) relates is a male, who wrote the *Tractatus*.

Now, we will argue in the final section that conventions like ( $S_0$ ) do not generate in general stipulations with semantic purport analogous to ( $S_2$ ). However, we think that such generation does occur in this particular case. The considerations speaking for it are stated, of all people, by Quine in his classic on these issues “Carnap and Logical Truth,” while discussing a closely connected point. In section V of that article, Quine distinguishes a form of conventionality (‘legislative,’ he labels it) that, in opposition to another he also examines there, might at least *prima facie* serve, he grants, the purposes of conventionalism; and he indicates that some definitions (of which ( $S_0$ ) constitutes a good example) possess this legislative character. What smacks of convention in legislative definitions, he suggests, is that they constitute “deliberate choices set forth unaccompanied by any attempt at justification other than in terms of elegance and convenience” (Quine 1953, 121). It is also ultimately this (however it is further elaborated, relative to one’s preferred account of conventions) that constitutes the justification to count as conventional the semantic fact that ( $S_2$ ) purports to create: it results from a deliberate choice whose only justification is expediency.

A necessary requirement for conventionality is arbitrariness. An account of conventions and their arbitrariness that we accept is Lewis' (1969), but some writers find it over-intellectualistic; for present purposes, the characterization of one of the critics will do. Burge (1975) characterizes the arbitrariness of conventions thus: "As a matter of fact—whatever the participants may believe—it is within the power of the participants to have learned an incompatible regularity that would have served substantially the same social functions without demanding significantly greater effort on the part of the participants" (Burge, *op. cit.*, 254). Semantic relations establish regularities: the regular use of tokens of the word-type to make a specific contribution to speech acts. That an expression, 'flurg,' is used to make salient the class of green squares is an arbitrary regularity in Burge's sense, stemming from a Quinean legislative definition. Burge's account is vague—the very concept of convention is vague—but surely the semantic purport of (S<sub>2</sub>) is at least *prima facie* a case of application. At the very least, the claim that it is conventional is intelligible; and all that our argument needs is the intelligibility of such claims, not the truth of any of them in particular.<sup>18</sup>

Let us thus grant that this semantic purport of (S<sub>2</sub>) is a matter of convention. On the previously elaborated characterization of how conventions constitute T-propositions, for any T-proposition involving 'flurg' to be expressed in the actual world, conventional requirements on the expression-relation ought to hold in the actual world. The convention to use a lexical unit to apply to green squares, and the resulting conventions instituted by (S<sub>1</sub>) and (S<sub>2</sub>) should be operating. Let us see how this justifies the application of the analytic thesis to (1), firstly according to the epistemological conception. Conventions may or may not be reducible to intentions, but they at least constitutively involve intentions—intentions to act in specific ways in specific circumstances, conditional on others doing their parts. In legitimately intending to make a given content true, as with the complex intention expressed by (S<sub>0</sub>), we are justified to believe thereby the content to be the case. In committing ourselves to (S<sub>0</sub>) and to the further semantic intention it involves, (S<sub>2</sub>), we thereby acquire knowledge that, *together with that expressed by (2)*, suffices to justify a belief whose content is

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<sup>18</sup> As we said before, Lycan (1994, 263-73) considers an argument for conventionalism like ours, and appears to reject it. The main objections he makes are analogous to the ones by Quine, to be considered in the next section. Another (*op. cit.*, 271-3) is original with him; it is, essentially, a challenge to establish that a fact capable of contributing to determine the truth of the allegedly analytic content is conventional according to well-developed accounts of conventions like Lewis'. We have taken up this challenge here.

(the T-proposition expressed by, we suppress this qualification henceforth) (1).<sup>19</sup> This justifies the analyticity of (1), in the epistemological conception.<sup>20</sup>

Let us now see that (1) is also analytic on the metaphysical conception, in effect so as to vindicate a restricted conventionalist<sub>A</sub> claim. The metaphysical conception was this: *a statement is analytic provided that facts constitutive of its meaning what it does suffice for, or necessitate, its truth*; the truth of analytic statements supervenes on conventions. Now, the meaning-constituting facts, in particular conventions (S<sub>0</sub>)-(S<sub>2</sub>), cannot of course ensure the truth of most T-propositions involving ‘flurg’, with the meaning it has in English<sub>AB</sub>—say, that of ‘there are flurges in the Louvre.’ However, *provided that the state of affairs signified by (1) and (2) obtains in the actual world*, the existence of the conventions (S<sub>0</sub>)-(S<sub>2</sub>) and the obtaining of their contents suffice to make (1) true; not the P-proposition it signifies (identical to the one signified by (2)), but rather the T-proposition expressed by (1). Granted the logical fact also signified by (2), there are meaning-constituting conventions, including not only indiscriminating conventions like (S<sub>0</sub>) but also equally conventional but semantic ones like (S<sub>2</sub>), which suffice for the truth of (1). There are not similarly discriminating semantic stipulations that, taken the logical facts for granted, similarly suffice for the truth of (the T-proposition that) there are flurges in the Louvre; the status of (2) is still an open question.

Boghossian could correctly point out that our conclusion is no vindication of the form of conventionalism to which he strictly speaking objects to, namely, the view that the obtaining of some facts is “completely” due to conventions, and not to “the facts.” We made it clear in the introduction that we are not proposing any such vindication; for, as we said, unless further clarification is provided on what is meant by ‘the facts’, that is a *prima facie* self-refuting view. We are rather

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<sup>19</sup> As we said in fn. 11 above, the identity of T-propositions is in part linguistic, but they do not need to be individuated by language-specific words. Thus, if we introduce in German a lexical unit with the same purport as ‘flurg,’ we could provide a translation into German for (1) meeting strict constraints on translations such as that they respect the intuition, which we motivated in the previous section, that (1) and (2) differ in content. Given linguistic facts about German corresponding to (S<sub>1</sub>) and (S<sub>2</sub>), the truth of the translation would be similarly justified a priori in accordance with the analytic thesis. This further establishes that T-propositions are proper contents, linguistically individuated but not in a unduly narrow sense.

<sup>20</sup> Although this account depends substantially on our own proposal regarding the nature of discriminating semantic conventions, without which, we feel, it would not be equally compelling, we are indebted to Harman (1996, p. 393-4) for its elaboration. As we said at the beginning, we are of course in full agreement with Harman that “the epistemological notion [of analyticity] is not independent of the metaphysical notion” (*ibid.*, 394).

arguing that there are sensible forms of conventionalism that are not touched by the discrimination objection from Boghossian and others. The defence we have made of the conventional<sub>A</sub> character of (1) indeed grants that its truth depends also on the logical fact signified by (2). This leaves open whether (2) is analytic, in particular whether it is conventional<sub>A</sub>. As it will become clear in the final section, our own view is that it is analytic, but not conventional<sub>A</sub>.

It now emerges the importance of our supervenience characterization of the metaphysical conception alternative to Boghossian's. The distinction between (1) and 'there are flurfs in the Louvre' has been made taking for granted the logical facts. But how does that cast doubt on the claim that (1) is analytic in the metaphysical conception, indeed conventional, while the other synthetic? Not at all, according to our formulation, because necessary facts are properly taken for granted when discussing supervenience claims. What could anybody have in mind who says that analytic truths depend only on conventions, and not on necessary logical facts like that  $p$  iff  $p$ ? What sense does it make to say that analytic truths would obtain to the extent that the conventions exist, even if the logical facts did not? These are, of course, rhetorical questions.<sup>21</sup> The analytic thesis in the metaphysical conception is the view that meaning-constituting facts (conventions, in some cases) necessitate a priori truths; the latter depend on the former, and, of course, on whatever is necessarily the case.<sup>22</sup> If Boghossian elaborated on the scare quotes around 'the facts' in his mystifying formulation, he would have to acknowledge this; he would have to say that the facts on which analytic truths do not depend are the empirical, contingent, objective facts, or something of the sort.

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<sup>21</sup> Taking the facts about whether there are flurfs in the Louvre for granted, it of course can be established that there are flurfs in the Louvre. This shows that there is a notion of "conventional truth" given by a criterion based on considerations to a certain extent symmetrical and parallel to ours, which is indiscriminating and trivial; all truths come out as "conventional" in that sense. This is not to be disputed. Our point is that there is another notion, on which only necessary truths are taken for granted, which does discriminate among truths such as (the T-proposition) that there are flurfs in the Louvre, and (the T-proposition) that (1). In addition to the fact that our criterion makes for an interestingly discriminating notion, unlike the fully generalized version, which does not, as we indicate in the main text we think that there is a good reason to support it. Dependence on necessary truths is uninteresting: every truth depends on necessary truths; but whether there is a notion such that only a proper subset of truths depend on contingent facts, like conventions, is philosophically interesting; and our criterion appears to allow for this.

<sup>22</sup> For the conventionalist<sub>C</sub> this is no concession, for he thinks that necessities are conventional.

We think that conventionalists are mistaken about the philosophically interesting cases, but not on the basis of the discrimination objection; we think we have by now conclusively disposed of that argument. Hence, the disquotational facts about truth cannot in fact support the objection. A full account of the disquotational truth-conditions of sentences should distinguish different ways in which they obtain: discriminating semantic conventions account for the obtaining of (1)'s disquotational truth-conditions, while they do not account for the obtaining of the disquotational truth-conditions of 'there are flurges in the Louvre.'

In the preceding discussion we have not been using the simplest available sort of example for strategic reasons; we can offer it now, with very little discussion. We would make about (1') below the claim we made about (1), that it is an analytic truth by convention. We would argue that there is, also in this case, a discriminating semantic convention ( $S'_1$ ), derived from the undiscriminating corresponding convention ( $S'_0$ )—which, for purposes of the example, we take to express a *de re* claim about a particular Robert—relative to linguistic facts like ( $LF'_1$ ). The argument that there is a semantic distinction between (1') and (2'), crucially dependent on ( $S'_1$ ), and that, while they signify the same state of affairs, the truth of the T-proposition that (1') expresses thus depends on the discriminating convention ( $S'_1$ ) (given the logical state of affairs they both signify) would be exactly parallel.<sup>23</sup>

( $S'_0$ ) Let us use in English<sub>AB</sub> 'Bob' as a familiar nickname for Robert.

( $LF'_1$ ) 'Bob' is, like 'Robert,' a referential expression in English<sub>AB</sub>.

( $S'_1$ ) Let us thereby use in English<sub>AB</sub> an alternative referential expression to corefer with 'Robert.'

(1') Bob is identical to Robert.

(2') Robert is identical to Robert.

In summary, we have so far unveiled contents more hospitable to conventionalist claims than P-propositions. In the case of (1), it is a distinctive part of this content that green squares are made into a salient kind by applying to them a certain lexical unit; in the case of (1'), that a

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<sup>23</sup> We have refrained from presenting this example before now feeling that the influence of Millian views in contemporary thought makes it more difficult to accept that there is a semantic difference between (1') and (2'), captured by the content of the discriminating convention ( $S'_1$ ), than it is to accept the corresponding claims concerning (1), (2) and ( $S_2$ ).



referring expression alternative to the standard name of a person is used to refer to him. But these content-features are the kind of thing that can be created by stipulation, and in fact the stipulations have been agreed upon; so, taken for granted the (knowledge of) the truth of the necessary facts which are also part of the content of those claims, (knowledge of) the relevant conventions determine (knowledge of) their truth. This at the very least establishes the intelligibility of a restricted conventionalist version of the analytic thesis, both in the epistemological and the metaphysical conceptions—if not its truth, as we also think it does.

## 5. Objections and Replies

A source of uneasiness about our proposal concerns the issue whether T-propositions can be necessary, given that they are convention-involving. To confront this uneasiness, it suffices to consider the indiscriminating conventions that all T-propositions involve, as even this non-discriminating convention-dependence already makes our proposal fall prey to Boghossian's argument discussed in the second section. If the T-proposition expressed by (1) involves conventions, how can it be necessary, given that conventions are contingent? In our proposal the truth-value of a T-proposition relative to any given world, given the satisfaction of the requirements on the actual world constituting the relation between expression and state of affairs, only depends on whether the state of affairs obtains at that world; and the truth values of ascriptions to T-propositions of (metaphysical) modalities only depend on the obtaining of the state of affairs at the relevant worlds. The T-proposition expressed by (1) can thus very well be necessary, for this depends only on whether the state of affairs obtains at every relevant world, not on matters concerning the requirements imposed on the actual world for the connection between words and state of affairs to have been established; and we can take the state of affairs in question to be exactly the same as that signified by (2).

Schiffer (1996) argues for a reconciliation of a minimalist (anti-realist really) conception of truth-conditions and propositions, with the traditional Platonistic view that propositions are abstract mind-independent, language-independent entities which have truth-conditions absolutely and essentially (*op. cit.*, 150-1).<sup>24</sup> In so doing, he provides an argument

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<sup>24</sup> We think that his attempt is unsuccessful, but it would take us too far afield to explain why. The minimalist would be better off by adopting the framework proposed here, along the lines of Thomasson (2001). That would not be enough; he should also reject our Platonistic states of affairs, which fit only in an inflationary conception of truth. There are some considerations in that direction by Crispin Wright (Wright 1992, 224-5, fn.). We sympathize at least with Wright's reservations regarding customary assumptions about propositions, along the lines of Geach's (fn. 4).

for P-propositions, related to Boghossian's. Like P-propositions, our T-propositions trivially have truth-conditions essentially; for it is in the constitutive nature of a T-proposition to embody a truth-value-conferring state of affairs. They also trivially have truth-conditions absolutely, as opposed to relatively, to a language; for the identity of the T-proposition involves already the language-constituting relations. In other words, there is no single T-proposition that signifies a given state of affairs relative to a language, and a different one relative to a different language; T-propositions satisfying this description are of necessity different. Finally, whether or not T-propositions are "abstract" depends on how this equivocal term of art is used. They are "abstract" at least in that they are property-like: the same T-proposition can in principle be expressed by different utterances of non-indexical sentences. They are not "abstract" in that they constitutively involve conventions, intentions and so on; T-propositions are explicitly intended not to be mind- and language-independent.

This can be the target for an argument against the existence of T-proposition. Take a sentence '*S*.' Then, *necessarily, S or not S* is true; hence, also *necessarily, that S is true or that not S is true*; and hence also *necessarily, (the proposition) that S is or isn't true*. This Schiffer takes to imply "the existence of the proposition that *S* in all possible worlds" (*op. cit.*, 160), independently of the psychology and linguistic practices of their inhabitants, if any. In reply: propositions are, pretheoretically, the contents of our assertoric utterances, determining their truth-conditions; also, that which we mention when we ascribe propositional attitudes. We have been arguing, on behalf of conventionalism<sub>A</sub>, that such entities involve the duality of state of affairs and conditions on the actual world required for the state of affairs to be signified. Operators expressing metaphysical modalities operate in fact on the state of affairs; the state of affairs is therefore the only entity whose existence in all possible worlds and language-independence can be concluded from Schiffer's premises. We thus reject Schiffer's assumption that the truth of contents with respect to a possible world implies the existence of the content at that world. That the truth in the actual world of the T-proposition expressed by (1) is secured by the existence in the actual world of the semantic convention we have highlighted is compatible with that T-proposition being true relative to every possible world, and thus necessary. All that is required in general for the truth of that T-proposition relative to an arbitrary possible world is the obtaining

at that world of the state of affairs signified in the T-proposition; and the state of affairs in question is in fact the same one signified by (2).<sup>25</sup>

In “Carnap and Logical Truth,” Quine argues that the existence of such stipulations as (S<sub>0</sub>)-(S<sub>2</sub>) does not suffice to establish the analytic-synthetic distinction. He gives three specific reasons, and a more general consideration; we shall grant the specific reasons, which we take to be harmless for our claims, but reject the general anti-conventionalist consideration. The latter is just an appeal to semantic holism. Statements resulting from acts with the legislative character we have been canvassing “contribute truth which become integral to the corpus of truths; the artificiality of their origin does not linger as a localized quality, but suffuses the corpus” (*op. cit.*, 120). Any defender of the analytic-synthetic distinction, of course, will reject holism, independently of the issue whether some analytic truths are conventional.

The first specific reason we grant Quine is that the distinction as we have formulated it is not sharp. For strategic reasons we have been illustrating our defence of conventionalism with examples like Quinton’s, which we hope will provoke little controversy. Once the limited plausibility of conventionalism we are vindicating is appreciated, many more examples that come easily to mind could be acknowledged as giving rise to more interesting conventional truths.<sup>26</sup> What gives strategic advantage to Quinton’s case is precisely the highly unsettled character of the distinction between conventional and unconventional matters: is it conventional that tokens of some lexical unit are used in a language to refer to the month before the one when the token occurs? There is no fact of the matter to establish many such questions whether

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<sup>25</sup> This reply can be put in terms close to those of Adam’s (1981) celebrated distinction to resist arguments such as Plantinga’s (1983) and more recently Williamson’s (2001) for the necessity of existence, as follows: a T-proposition can be true *at* a world, which does not require its constituents to exist in that world, without its being true *in* that world, which does—even though perhaps the distinction does not apply to the signified states of affairs.

<sup>26</sup> It is surely a conventional semantic fact that in Spanish the most common lexical unit applying to ships, ‘barco,’ combines with morphemes that signify masculine gender, and agrees with masculine pronouns. Given a watered-down notion of *gender* such that this is understood to be a non-natural, fully extrinsic property, this conventional matter suffices for the truth of relevant T-propositions predicating “masculinity” (in the watered-down sense) of ships. The conventionality of these truths is of course revealed in that ships belong in a different “gender” relative to English, say. More interesting cases might include the precise boundaries that colour-terms in different languages impose on the colour spectrum, some of the boundaries that different linguistic communities impose on time, or the indexical means of signification that different linguistic communities conventionalize. (Say, whether a language includes an expression tokens of which refer to a salient female of high social rank.)

semantic facts in specific languages are conventional. Nevertheless, to the extent that the very notion that there are some such cases makes sense, this does not go against the point we are making. For their sheer conceptual possibility, the very intelligibility of disputes whether an alleged case is or not to be accepted, suffices to make our point.

Quine's second specific remark is that even the alleged truth of statements dependent on acts of legislation might in principle be revised. This can also be granted, in connection with the point already accepted. It is a consensus among contemporary philosophers who are prepared to accept an analytic-synthetic distinction that even analytic truths are to be considered revisable in principle. In cases like the one we are canvassing, this might happen because the term, which was initially introduced for simple reasons of expediency, acquired later further meaning-giving connections: compare Quine's famous example, 'momentum is mass times velocity,' initially a convenient stipulation like ( $S_0$ ), and nowadays considered false. From our perspective, what happens in cases like this is that, as the term acquires new meaningful connections, it becomes indeterminate whether the initially conventional specifically semantic fact (that some lexical unit applies to mass times velocity) is still conventional. For, as we will see in the next section, not all matters required by the meaning-relation to obtain in the actual world for a given T-proposition to be expressed are matters of conventional decision. The issue is thus again orthogonal to our present worry, namely, whether some analytic truths are "true by convention."

Quine's final important point is that the truth of a statement like (1) does not depend solely on convention, but also on whatever made true the statements that could be already expressed in the language previous to the introduction of the new sign 'flurg' by stipulation ( $S_0$ ); for instance, on whatever makes (2) true. This is certainly the case. As we have insisted, we are not trying to vindicate the contention that some contents have their truth-values somehow fixed "completely" by conventions, which we think barely intelligible.

In a series of papers,<sup>27</sup> Fine has argued that metaphysical necessity is too coarse-grained a concept to capture by means of it the intuitive notion of *truth in virtue of the essence of an object*. He has argued that the latter notion should be tied to the idea of real definition. Fine suggests in addition that, when a thicker conception of expressions (coinciding with our *T-concepts*) is adopted, "the two cases [defining a term and giving the essence of an object] are not merely parallel but are, at bottom, the same" (Fine 1994, p. 13). He says:

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<sup>27</sup> See Fine 1994, 1995a and 1995b.

On one common view it is an empirical fact about linguistic usage that ‘bachelor’ means what it does and hence is correctly definable as unmarried man. But this is to accept a particular conception of a word as a mere sequence of letters. On a thicker and perhaps more natural conception, a word would be constituted in part by its meaning [...]. Under this alternative conception, what would be an empirical fact is that the word, or a token of it, existed. But given the word, it would be essential that it meant what it did. A definition, on this view, would therefore state an essential property of a word. (Fine 1994, p. 13)

Correspondingly, there is a thicker conception of sentences that individuates these as does Fine with words. It provides truth-bearers allowing to make sense of conventionalist views—and to be in a position to evaluate their real flaws. Fine argues that his framework allows one to say intelligibly that ‘all bachelors are unmarried men’ “is true in virtue of the meaning of the term ‘bachelor’ but not in virtue of the meanings of the terms ‘unmarried’ and ‘man’” (*op. cit.*, 10). That is to say (put in our terms), it is only in virtue of the essence, or real definition of the T-concept *bachelor*, but not in virtue of that of the T-concepts *unmarried* or *man*, that the T-proposition is true. On a similar basis, we are suggesting that the T-proposition expressed by (1) is specifically true in virtue of the meaning of ‘flurg.’ It is not that (1) is made true *solely* by conventions. It is rather that the distinct T-proposition which (1) expresses is true in virtue of the T-concept which makes it distinct (from (2), say); for, in virtue of its essence, the existence of this T-concept requires a semantic convention to be in place, ( $S_2$ ), which (given other facts, in particular the logical fact signified by (2)) guarantees the truth of (1). It is in this sense that we countenance *conventional* true (T-)propositions: propositions, not necessarily about conventions (the state of affairs signified by (1) only concerns green squares and the identity relation), whose truth discriminately depends on conventional matters.

The gist of our proposal is this. There are T-concepts expressed in the language of which the truth of some T-propositions is constitutive. These are the truths in virtue of meaning. Some among them (but, as we will argue in the next section, not all) are convention-dependent truths. That they are true in virtue of meaning, in this sense, does not mean that their truth is independent of the nature of the objective world. To vindicate in this way the existence of convention-dependent truths is compatible with a fully-fledged realist attitude, according to which the truth of any thinker-dependent truth requires the obtaining of objective facts. So truths in virtue of meaning are not truths “solely” in virtue of meaning; for their obtaining requires the extralinguistic

world to be some way. Nonetheless, there is an ontological difference between the analytic truths and the non-analytic truths. This cannot be captured when operating in a coarse framework that only recognizes expressions and language-independent propositions, but only by acknowledging T-propositions.

The ontological picture of content thus suggested is then as follows. There are states of affairs that are fully objective. They have natures (derived from the natures of the objects and properties constituting them) that are independent of the consciousness and coordinated activities of human beings. Contents concerning these states of affairs are well modelled by P-propositions. Meaning-relations in T-propositions corresponding to sentences signifying them are convention-involving only in the indiscriminating sense that cannot account for any of those T-propositions being conventional truths. For those conventions are not in any way constitutive of the nature of the entities with which the relevant expressions are correlated; on the contrary, those meaning-relations will be ontologically subordinate to the independently given nature of those entities. These T-propositions correspond to the paradigm fully factual truth-conditions of a realist picture of language.<sup>28</sup> However, no plausible form of semantic realism should be so radical as to deprive itself of acknowledging the non-objective, conventional truths we have been canvassing. These will include truths resulting from human explicit or implicit semantic agreements, such as that something is a flurg just in case it is a green square. T-propositions (and their mental analogues) are required to represent accurately these less-than-fully-objective contents—ontologically attenuated truth-conditions.<sup>29</sup>

For all we have said, analytic truths might well include truths in our first category, the fully objective ones; in the next section we will in fact suggest that this is the case. We think that conventionalism is wrong

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<sup>28</sup> For reasons given by Boghossian (1990)—but notice Wright's (2002) qualifications—deflationists about content, who are sceptical of contents whose nature is independent of mind and language, should nonetheless look for a way of distinguishing "quasi-objective" from non-objective contents. Field (1994) illustrates the strategies deflationists can pursue.

<sup>29</sup> Creath formulates the conventionalist point in terms close to our proposal: "Previously it was imagined that there was a domain of truths independent of ourselves to which we were gaining some mysterious access via intuition. Unfortunately there was no way to defend the idea that that access was genuine. On Carnap's proposal the basic claims are in some sense truths of our own making" (Creath 1990, p. 6). Unfortunately, Creath goes on to elaborate on this in the following way: "It is not that we make objects and features thereof, rather we construct our language in such a way that those basic claims are true. No question of fidelity to independent fact arise in choosing a language." Creath seems to be trading on the ambiguity of 'claim' (acts of claiming vs. contents thereof); the only conventionalism he appears to have clearly in mind is again the harmless one affecting every act of claiming.

regarding the main point under dispute, which is whether logic and mathematics are constituted by conventional truths (in a sense of “conventional truth” acceptably discriminating for the discussion to proceed). But conventionalists were right that there is such a discriminating sense—our conventionalism<sub>A</sub>. Conventions of language include conventions of spelling, phonology, capitalization, use of punctuation marks, grammatical structures, and, of course, the indiscriminating conventions by which expressions receive their semantic properties. There are also, we have argued, other semantic conventions, over and above these indiscriminating conventions, of the sort illustrated by (S<sub>2</sub>). This makes intelligible a claim that some truths result from conventions, and even plausible that there are instances of those truths. In not acknowledging this, we run the risk of refuting conventionalism with considerations that will be correctly felt as weak. All this can only be properly acknowledged when we substitute T-propositions for P-propositions.<sup>30</sup> What we want to show in the final section is how limited this concession to conventionalism is; for our proposal allows us to better appreciate that it is very doubtful that philosophically interesting a priori truths, even if they are analytic, are truths by convention.

## 6. The Proper Rejection of Conventionalism

Boghossian correctly points out that the conventionalist conclusion that Quinton extracts from the fallacious argument discussed at the end of section 3 is even disputable for T-propositions that are not adequately counted as “empirical.” Boghossian’s remark is based on Kripke’s famous discussion concerning ‘one meter’; consider analogously an utterance of (4):

- (4) Something is a quantity of water just in case it is a quantity of the colourless, odourless, tasteless liquid substance found in our rivers and lakes.

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<sup>30</sup> As we indicated earlier, the argument for T-propositions we are deploying here is not the only one available. For instance, a convincing defence of the semantic account of vagueness would also need to help itself to them. Briefly put, the idea would be that in the case of vague sentences (utterances) the relations linking words and state of affairs to constitute T-propositions do not fix a unique state of affairs, but a class of them; if some obtain at the actual world and others do not obtain, the sentence is as a result neither true nor false. Schiffer’s argument (1996, 163-4) that bivalence holds even for vague sentences, a straightforward rejection of the semantic account of vagueness, also overlooks that contents are more complex matters than he envisages; see García-Carpintero 2000b, and forthcoming. For the relevance of T-propositions to Tarski’s semantic conception of truth, see García-Carpintero 1999.



In order to count (4) as analytic, we assume that knowing the “reference-fixing” material mentioned in (4) is required for full, non-deferential understanding of ‘water.’ There are contentious issues here, but let us grant the assumption, just for the sake of illustrating the point we want to make.<sup>31</sup> Even granting it, there are good reasons not to consider the T-proposition asserted with (4) as true by convention—except in the indiscriminating way of no service to the conventionalist. Bonjour gives an important consideration in support of this:

Ordinary conventions are *optional*: they represent choices, whether deliberate or not, from a wider range of possible conventions that could have led to significantly different results—a feature which is often, though it need not be, reflected in variation over time or place or community ... the most obvious conventions of language ... are similarly optional ... But the conventions that generate *a priori* justification, if they exist at all, do not seem to be optional in this way, for the results of such conventions do not vary in any apparent way from language to language, and there is no reason to think that there are possible alternative conventions that would achieve different results. (Bonjour, *op. cit.*, 53.)

It might be argued that this applies to the alleged conventionality of the true T-proposition expressed with (4). Its truth is conventional, in the innocuous sense that the expression of that fact assumes the obtaining of a conventional relation between the word ‘water’ and its meaning, established by the presumed stipulation. This relation is conventional in that a different word could have been chosen for that purpose (and it is indeed chosen by different linguistic communities) and that the very same word could have been used for different semantic purposes. However, as the anti-conventionalists correctly insists, this is not enough to justify that a discriminating form of conventionalism applies even to T-propositions which, like the one asserted with (4), we could be prepared to consider analytic.

The statement (4) illustrates cases where the conventional choice of a specific expression has been made to capture by means of it

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<sup>31</sup> The issue is made more complicated than we can properly discuss here, because of the following reason. Unlike (1), in the case of (4) there is a significant distinction between its externally individuated *de re* content, and a descriptive proposition (akin to the “primary intensions” of two-dimensional frameworks) with which it can be associated. There is thus an issue whether knowledge of the former or only of the latter can be *a priori*; García-Carpintero (2006) defends the second option. For the sake of avoiding additional complications, the ensuing discussion evades this important matter, because in our view the points we want to make would stand once it is properly decided.

instances of an independent feature of the objective world, a natural kind. Given the nature of the rational activity of producing linguistic representations, that feature of the extralinguistic world might well be worth labelling for a wide range of rational beings, quite independently of any system of conventions specific to their linguistic community. It might well be the case that a rationally optimal way for labelling the feature, given that they are endowed with a certain psychological constitution, is for them to rely on the very observable features mentioned in our assumed definition. If these conditions obtain, the relation between expression and meaning giving rise to the analyticity of (4) will only be conventional in that other expressions might have been in a corresponding relation. The semantic fact here corresponding to (S<sub>2</sub>), that a kind is identified in that way, does not seem at all conventional, for the reasons Bonjour gives:

(S'<sub>2</sub>) Let us circumscribe all and only quantities of the colourless, odourless, tasteless liquid substance found in our rivers and lakes into a salient kind by using a lexical unit for them.

(S'<sub>2</sub>) feels odder to me than (S<sub>2</sub>). A linguistic stipulation gives expression to a complex intention, comprising a range of more basic intentions. Those intentions create conventions, among other things in virtue of possessing a characteristic arbitrariness. One such stipulation expresses the purport of using expressions belonging to a specific graphic and phonetic kind in a certain meaningful way; this produces the sort of indiscriminating convention introduced by (S<sub>0</sub>) that cannot serve the purposes of conventionalism. It is at least intelligibly arguable that there is a further semantic decision that (S<sub>0</sub>) puts into effect, given relevant linguistic facts, which can also be correctly counted as conventional: namely, the decision (S<sub>2</sub>) to count green squares as a salient kind. The corresponding semantic decision involved in the analogous stipulation governing 'water' that (S'<sub>2</sub>) purports to express, which would found on the present view the analyticity of (4), is that of circumscribing a kind with such-and-such superficial traits, which is already, independently salient. This suggests why (S'<sub>2</sub>)'s content cannot be the object of an arbitrary convention, thus explaining its oddness. In the case of 'flurg,' our circumscribing a kind by means of a lexical unit makes it salient; in cases like 'water,' our having a lexical unit for the relevant kind is instead explained by its independently being salient to us. Indeed, it can be argued that if natural languages give us resources for arbitrarily making salient certain kinds, it is because those resources

have evolved for the purpose of allowing us to refer to independently, objectively salient kinds.<sup>32</sup>

The specific T-proposition expressed by (1) is true as a result of the implementation of a semantic stipulation ( $S_2$ ) constitutive of that T-proposition; this is why it is *analytic*, true distinctly in virtue of the T-concept *flurg*. That stipulation created a convention; this is why (1) is a *conventional* truth. In making the conventional semantic decision ( $S_2$ ) involved in ( $S_0$ ), we have thereby committed ourselves to the truth of the T-proposition expressed by (1). Any candidate semantic stipulation distinct from the mere relational intention to use the word ‘water’ in a certain way, capable of accounting for the truth of the T-proposition expressed by (4), appears to lack the arbitrariness of conventions; thus, as far as we can tell, (4) is not a conventional truth by the lights of the conventionalism<sub>A</sub> that we have argued for here.<sup>33</sup>

The claims we have just made for the sake of illustration on the contrast between (1) and (4) might be disputed, but we think we have made them intelligible; this is the only requirement for our argument here to succeed. Their intelligibility depends essentially on considering T-propositions as truth-bearers, in contrast to sentences on the one hand and P-propositions on the other. Our proposal also allows, we think, for a clearer understanding of implicit definition than

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<sup>32</sup> Corresponding claims could be made comparing cases like ‘Phosphorus is Hesperus’ vs. Hesperus is Hesperus’ to the example involving (1’) and (2’) at the end of section 4; the problem is that, unlike in that case, here coreference is not determined conventionally, but on the basis of descriptive reference-fixing stipulations *and* empirical facts. This point disposes of an interesting objection by an anonymous referee: “Here is a convention: let ‘E79’ apply to any and only quantities of the element with atomic number 79. Do the meaning-constituting facts for ‘E79’ necessitate the truth of the T-proposition expressed by ‘all gold is E79’? I’d suppose that they do; but still, it would seem that it shouldn’t be considered analytic.” Arguably, we cannot find in this case properly semantic stipulations, corresponding to ( $S_2$ ) and ( $S'_1$ ) in the examples given at the end of section 4, which would necessitate the T-proposition expressed by ‘all gold is E79.’

<sup>33</sup> In the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein states the main assumption leading to his logical atomism as follows: whether a proposition has sense cannot depend on whether another proposition is true (2.0211). Wittgenstein is working with a conception of propositions close to the one we have advanced. As we have emphasized, whether a sentence expresses a proposition in this sense depends at the very least on certain indiscriminating conventions being in force in the actual world. According to Wittgenstein, it also depends on the sentence and the signified state of affairs sharing certain logical properties—a matter which he does not take to be at all conventional. What we take Wittgenstein to be rhetorically conveying in 2.0211 is that meaningfulness cannot depend on any *substantive* matter of fact concerning the actual world—on the assumption that neither conventions nor logical matters are substantive. No matter how the rejected *substantiveness* is to be characterized, it is clear that Wittgenstein’s point in 2.0211 was to resist suggestions like ours that the meaningfulness of statements involving **water** could depend on the presumed truth of (4).

Boghossian's. A T-concept is implicitly defined when it depends on a semantic decision to use an expression on the presumption that certain T-propositions involving the T-concept are true. This leaves open the issue whether the T-propositions in question are conventional truths (in any discriminating sense). Boghossian's claim that conventionalism does not follow from the fact that some meanings are given by implicit definitions is also true of our conventionalism<sub>A</sub>. But it is T-propositions, not orthographically individuated sentences or P-propositions, whose truth is secured by implicit definitions.

The most ambitious goal of our argument has been to make it clear that there is nothing conceptually amiss with a metaphysical conception of analyticity. The conventionalism<sub>A</sub> we have defended is rather modest. Its main philosophical interest lies for us in the model it offers for analyticity in general. Boghossian accepts an epistemological conception of analyticity; analytic truths are contents that can be justifiably established on the basis of knowledge of meaning. The notion of implicit definition, applied to the case of logical constants, justifies how there could be analytic truths in a philosophically fundamental case.<sup>34</sup> However, on general grounds one can find this conception of analyticity acceptable (as indeed we do) only by accepting as intelligible a metaphysical conception of analyticity. For, if one is justified in establishing the truth of a content on the basis of knowledge of meaning, this can only be because the facts of meaning suffice for the relevant fact.

Boghossian rejects this general argument, conceding that it sounds convincing; for, while his account of Implicit Definition offers a model for the epistemological conception of analyticity, he thinks that no coherent model can be provided for a metaphysical conception. In the presence of our defence of conventionalism<sub>A</sub>, the force of the argument stands. The goal was not so much to vindicate conventionalism, even if only partially, as to show how the facts on which meaning-relations depend (be they conventional decisions, or rather presuppositions concerning objective facts about the actual world) can determine the truth of some contents. Our ultimate aim was to defend the analytic thesis, both on the epistemological and on the metaphysical conceptions of analyticity. As we said, we find Bonjour's position on this area more coherent than Boghossian's, even if more wrong. He is wrong both in rejecting that some semantic facts can suffice for other facts, and also that knowledge of semantic facts can provide epistemic justification; but his is at least a stable position. Their arguments, we have argued, are flawed in the same way; they are based on the fallacious assumption that a dichotomy of sentences vs. P-propositions is exhaustive.

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<sup>34</sup> See Boghossian (2003) and Peacocke (1987) for elaborations of the idea.

After concluding his anti-Quinean *tour de force*, Lewis writes: “Why should it be human conventions that create and destroy facts about what is possible?” (Lewis 1969, p. 207). Why, indeed? That notion is the most unfortunate dogma of empiricism (albeit closely followed in the ranking by the dogma that there are no facts about what is possible). Lewis, however, goes on to say:

All that human convention can do is to select one verbal expression rather than another to enjoy the privilege of truth by virtue of the facts about the possibility of worlds. In just the same way, human convention selects one verbal expression rather than another to enjoy the privilege of truth by virtue of the facts about tomorrow’s weather. Say, if you like, that it is by convention that there are no *rightly so-called* married bachelors. But do not say that it is by convention that there are no married bachelors, in this world or any other. There couldn’t be. (*ibid.*)

Lewis is discussing necessity here; but this is what he means by *analyticity*. While being in agreement with the ultimate philosophical point Lewis is making, we think our discussion suggests why that specific modal fact, that there couldn’t be married bachelors, depends on conventions over and above the uncontroversial ones which Lewis, together with the other writers here discussed, is prepared to acknowledge.

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