

Truth(making) by Convention

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Abstract

A common account of the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is that while the former are true solely in virtue of meaning, the latter are true also in virtue of the way of the world. Quine famously disputed this characterization, and his skepticism over the analytic/synthetic distinction has cast a long shadow. Against this skepticism, this paper argues that the common account comes close to the truth, and that truthmaker theory in particular offers the resources for providing a compelling account of the distinction that preserves the basic ideas behind it, and avoids the standard criticisms facing the distinction. In particular, it is argued that analytic truths are truths that ontologically depend in no way whatsoever upon what exists.

1. Introduction

A familiar gloss on the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is that while the former are true solely in virtue of meaning, the latter are true *also* in virtue of the way of the world. Quinean (1951) skepticism over the analytic/synthetic distinction has cast a long shadow, and many have been convinced that the distinction is untenable. I suspect, however, that something close to the familiar gloss is correct. Specifically, I shall argue that truthmaker theory offers a compelling account of the distinction that preserves the basic ideas behind it.

Truthmakers are the objects in the world on which propositions (and other truth-bearers) depend for their truth. If T makes true some proposition $\langle p \rangle$, then $\langle p \rangle$ depends for its truth upon the existence of T. The exact nature of this dependence is a matter of dispute; I shall refer to it as a kind of *ontological* dependence, as the truth of $\langle p \rangle$ depends on T's *existence*, and not any of its other features. The language of dependence also suggests that truthmaking is not simply necessitation; though I necessitate the truth of $\langle 2 \text{ is prime} \rangle$ (that is, necessarily, if I exist, then 2 is prime), presumably I do not make it true. Necessitation, then, is typically thought to be necessary but not sufficient for truthmaking. What else beyond necessitation is required for truthmaking to obtain is a matter of debate (see, e.g., Restall 1996), but is not relevant to my concerns in this paper.

It's also contentious as to which truths have truthmakers; it's been questioned, for example, whether negative existentials and contingent predications have truthmakers (e.g., Lewis 2001). For such theorists, though certain truths lack truthmakers, their truth is not thereby rendered metaphysically mysterious. Such propositions are still true in virtue of the world, though perhaps no particular entities (such as totality states of affairs or tropes) exist that necessitate their truth. In other words, these propositions are still ontologically accountable—they are true in virtue of what does or doesn't exist, and what properties those things have—though they may lack truthmakers. My interest concerns whether analytic truths require any form of ontological accounting. My suggestion is that they do not, and that this absence is the essence of analyticity.

My claim is that analytic truths do not possess truthmakers, or require any kind of ontological accounting whatsoever: their truth is in no way explained in terms of what does or doesn't exist, or what properties those things do or don't have.¹ Analytic truths, I claim, do not ontologically depend upon anything for their truth. So whereas $\langle \text{Bill is a bachelor} \rangle$ depends on the existence of Bill and certain of his features for its truth, $\langle \text{Bachelors are unmarried} \rangle$ does not depend on anything for its truth. Its truth doesn't depend on any particular bachelor: it would be

true regardless of whether or not there were ever any bachelors at all, just as <All unicorns are unicorns> is true in spite of there never having been any unicorns. As I shall argue, it's unclear just what sort of object could possibly be responsible for the truth of <Bachelors are unmarried> and other candidate analyticities. My thesis is that the appearances here are correct: there is nothing in the world whose existence is responsible for the truth of analyticities. Analyticities lack truthmakers. Hence, the best way to conceive of the analytic/synthetic distinction is metaphysically, in terms of what truths do or don't depend on for their truth.

I begin by rejecting one account—Armstrong's—of what the truthmakers for analyticities are. Understanding why this view fails will reveal some of the key insights that drive my positive view, which I articulate in section 3. I then turn to some of the most influential criticisms of my sort of account that have been offered by Quine, Harman, and Boghossian. I show why their objections are misplaced, and then conclude by considering some of the positive consequences of my account.

Before I begin, allow me to make one preliminary, methodological point. My goal is to vindicate a particular distinction in the class of truths whose tenability many have doubted for decades. In vindicating the distinction, I take myself to be providing the resources for explaining a real difference between lots of cases that have been considered paradigm examples of analytic or synthetic truths; I rely on such truths in my examples. For example, I take 'Bachelors are unmarried' to be a paradigm case of analyticity, and go on to present my theory of what its analyticity consists in. Analyticity skeptics must show why my account fails to adequately distinguish, for example, 'Bachelors are unmarried' from 'Bill is a bachelor'. What I do not suppose is that there is some predefined class of analytic truths, all of which must be shown to be analytic by the lights of my account. To the contrary, I believe that there could be lots of cases where reasonable theoreticians might disagree: "spoils to the victor" for such cases, as Armstrong says. I do think there is a genuine notion of analyticity that philosophers for centuries have been exploring under one guise or another,

and that there are clear and less clear cases of it. I take myself to be giving a theory of that notion, one which correctly categorizes many paradigm instances of it while avoiding the standard objections to it.

2. A Flawed Account

There is one natural, but ultimately flawed, suggestion as to what might make analytic truths true. David Armstrong suggests that analytic truths are made true by their *meanings*, and, relatedly, that conceptual truths are made true by their constituent *concepts* (2004, pp. 109-110). In fact, those who subscribe to the idea that analytic truths are true in virtue of meaning may well have in mind the idea that analytic truths are made true by what they mean.

To defeat this proposal, I need to make two points. First, the proposal reveals that careful attention to truth-bearers is crucial. Let's suppose a basic framework in which sentences express propositions, which are what give those sentences their meaning. In that case, in saying that an analytic truth is made true by its meaning one must be supposing that the truth in question is a sentence, not a proposition. For propositions on this view *are* meanings, not things that have meanings. As a result, if anything is made true by meanings, it's analytic sentences, not propositions. And it does seem plausible that, at least in some sense, analytic sentences—that is, sentences that express analytic propositions—are made true by their meanings. After all, if we want to explain the truth of the *sentence* 'Bachelors are unmarried', we need to do so by way of the fact that it expresses the thought that bachelors are unmarried. If 'Bachelors are unmarried' meant instead that unicorns run rampant in Uig, then the sentence wouldn't be true.

Of course, this feature of being true in virtue of meaning applies to *all* sentences; that's why it's usually claimed that synthetic sentences are true in virtue of *both* meaning and the world. Hence, in general, it seems to me a very plausible principle that:

For any true sentence S, if S means that *p*, then S is made true by whatever makes $\langle p \rangle$ true together with whatever makes it true that S means that *p*.

For example, suppose S is 'Pangolins exist'. Any individual pangolin makes the proposition \langle Pangolins exist \rangle true. What makes the *sentence* true is any individual pangolin together with whatever makes it true that 'Pangolins exist' means that pangolins exist. The sentence meaning what it does together with worldly pangolins provide the proper grounds for 'Pangolins exist' to be true.

To put this principle to work in a particular example of a candidate analyticity, distinguish the following:

- (S) 'Bachelors are unmarried'
- (P) \langle Bachelors are unmarried \rangle
- (M) \langle 'Bachelors are unmarried' means that bachelors are unmarried \rangle .

(M) is what one might call, so long as one is appropriately cautious, a "semantic fact", where 'fact' here just means 'true proposition'. (M) is a true proposition concerning the semantics for a particular sentence of English. Don't confuse this kind of semantic fact with the kind of thing that makes (M) true, which one might also call, so long as one is appropriately cautious, a "semantic fact". To avoid confusion, I'll refer to true propositions like (M) as *semantic facts*, and to things that make propositions like (M) true *semantic truthmakers*. We don't need to dig into the unavoidably

ontologically contentious issue of what exactly the truthmaker for (M) is; to do so we'd have to take sides on separate issues such as the existence of states of affairs, tropes, nominalism, and the like. It's sufficient to note that (M) is a fairly ordinary contingent, empirical truth, and one whose truth is not particularly ontologically suspicious. Its truth ultimately depends upon the linguistic habits and conventions of the community of English speakers, however best those notions are ontologically spelled out.

Call the truthmaker for (M), whatever it turns out to be, 'T'. The existence of T guarantees that (M) is true. But T isn't responsible at all for (P)'s truth. The social conventions responsible for the meanings of English sentences don't make it true that bachelors aren't married. English has nothing to do with it, ontologically speaking. Had English never developed, and T not existed, (P)'s truth would be unaffected; the same holds for every other language that can express (P). Bachelors would be unmarried even if no language was ever developed.

Now, I'm happy to grant that T *is* a truthmaker for (S). Without T, there's no accounting for the truth of (S). If T (or any other suitable truthmaker for (M)) didn't exist, leaving (M) false, then there would be no accounting for why (S) is true. It *wouldn't* be true, if it didn't mean something that was true. Something needs to exist in order for (S) to be true; there must be objects like T around that make sentences meaningful. So it appears that analytic *sentences* do need truthmakers. This is the sense in which *all* true sentences need truthmakers, since all sentences need to be meaningful in order to be true.

So according to the principle offered above, the truthmaker for (S) is the truthmaker for (P) plus the truthmaker for (M), namely, T. But what is the truthmaker for (P)? My original contention, now suitably refined, is that true analytic *propositions* do not have truthmakers, and so (P) has no truthmaker. Hence the truthmaker for (S) is identical to the truthmaker for (M). What makes 'Bachelors are unmarried' true is whatever it is that makes it true that 'Bachelors are unmarried'

means that bachelors are unmarried. On this account, everything lines up correctly: possibilities with T are possibilities where ‘Bachelors are unmarried’ means that bachelors are unmarried, and so are possibilities where ‘Bachelors are unmarried’ is true. Nothing else is ontologically required for (S) to be true; once (S)’s meaning is settled, it’s true. For (S) to be true, the world needs to be no other way beyond being such that (S) means what it does. Any possibility without T (or anything else suitable to make (M) true) is one where ‘Bachelors are unmarried’ doesn’t mean that bachelors are unmarried, and so there is no guarantee that it is true.

Does this analysis vindicate the idea that analytic truths are true in virtue of meaning? Yes and no. Armstrong’s claim is that analytic propositions are made true by their meaning (for he takes propositions to be the primary target of truthmaker theory). More specifically, he claims that analytic propositions are made true by the meanings of the words used to express the proposition (2004, p. 109). My account denies that. It does, however, suppose that analytic *sentences* are made true by certain contingently existing semantic truthmakers. But even still, analytic sentences are *not* made true by their meaning: that would be to suggest, falsely, that (S) is made true by (P). (P)’s existence does not guarantee (S)’s truth, for (P) could exist alongside (S)’s having meant something false. Nor is (S) made true by (M). (M) is a contingently true proposition; its mere *existence* doesn’t guarantee the truth of (S). Had (S) meant something else, (M) would have existed but been false, so (M)’s existence does not necessitate the truth of (S). Instead, (S), on my analysis, is made true by the truthmaker for (M). In effect, analytic sentences are made true not by meanings, but by meaning-makers, whereas analytic propositions are not made true at all.

My second criticism of Armstrong’s account is that by maintaining that conceptual truths are made true by their constituent concepts, it allows contingent objects to serve as truthmakers for necessary truths. Like Armstrong, one might think that a conceptual truth like (P) is true in virtue of its constituent concepts, BACHELOR and UNMARRIED. But if the relationship is understood as a kind

of ontological dependence—which is what truthmaking is—then it does not obtain between concepts and the truths that involve them. Bachelors would be unmarried, regardless of whether anyone conceptualized that thought. Or consider other examples. <All red things are colored> would still be true, as would <Rocks are rocks>, even if there never evolved creatures with the capacity for forming concepts. What these counterfactuals reveal is that analytic propositions do not depend for their truth upon the *existence* of their constituent concepts. Concepts enable us to form thoughts; they do not make those thoughts true. If concepts are understood as contingent existences, things that came into being fairly recently in the Earth’s evolutionary history, then they are not suitable truthmakers for necessary truths.²

Now, earlier I admitted that necessarily true (S) is made true by contingently existing T, so haven’t I fallen foul of my own objection? Not if we are careful in our thinking about (S). (S) does indeed express the necessary truth (P). But it’s not necessary that (S) is true, since (S) could have expressed something false. The idea of a necessarily true *sentence* is pure magic: how could a set of physical marks, motions, or sounds necessarily end up expressing something true? The marks, motions, or sounds would have to somehow be essentially meaningful, and that’s just supernatural semantics.

3. The Positive Account

So far, I’ve argued that analytic sentences are made true by “meaning-makers”, that is, something in the neighborhood of linguistic conventions. This feature is shared by synthetic sentences, though they require more. The sentence ‘Koalas can catch chlamydia’ is made true by whatever makes <Koalas can catch chlamydia> true together with whatever makes <‘Koalas can catch chlamydia’ means that koalas can catch chlamydia> true. The former is not sufficient to

guarantee the truth of the sentence, for it does not itself guarantee that the sentence expresses the relevant proposition. So synthetic sentences have more “involved” truthmakers than analytic sentences, since the propositions they express will generally³ have non-semantic truthmakers (i.e., objects that have nothing to do with the meanings of words). Based on these observations, the following pattern emerges:

- (i) Analytic propositions have no truthmakers.
- (ii) Analytic sentences have merely semantic truthmakers.
- (iii) Synthetic propositions (usually) have non-semantic truthmakers.
- (iv) Synthetic sentences have truthmakers that are partly semantic and (usually) partly non-semantic.

From these meager resources we have the ability to vindicate the long-derided notions of truth by convention and analyticity. I propose that an analytic proposition is a proposition whose truth or falsity ontologically depends on nothing whatsoever. A synthetic proposition is a proposition whose truth or falsity does ontologically depend on something. Sentences are analytic or synthetic in virtue of whether they express, respectively, analytic or synthetic propositions.⁴ This account, I suggest, goes a long way toward correctly capturing many of our judgments regarding which propositions are analytic or synthetic.

Note first two preliminary remarks on ontological dependence. First, for X to ontologically depend on Y is not necessarily for X to be made true by Y. Above, I have been supposing “maximalism” about synthetic propositions, namely, that all synthetic propositions have truthmakers. But maintaining that, say, negative existential propositions (e.g., <There are no unicorns>) do not have truthmakers is not tantamount to maintaining that the truth of such

propositions does not depend in any way upon the world. Their truth does depend upon what does and doesn't exist, even if no particular entity (such as a totality state of affairs, absence, or negative fact) exists that guarantees its truth.⁵ Whether non-maximalism about synthetic truths is tenable is a further question that I cannot attempt to answer now. The important point is that even non-maximalists about the synthetic may maintain that all synthetic truths ontologically depend on the world (supposing that they can make clear how something can be ontologically dependent without having a truthmaker). What distinguishes the analytic truths for such theorists is not that they lack truthmakers, but that they are not ontologically dependent upon anything at all—they are true completely independently of what does or does not exist.

Second, the notion of ontological dependence is obviously in need of an account. Whether it can be analyzed any further is contentious. Rodriguez-Pereyra (2005) insists that it cannot, and Schaffer (2010) subsumes it under the primitive notion of grounding that he detects in other metaphysical corners of philosophy (such as Euthyphro questions). It's not my present ambition to offer any such account, so for the moment I am taking it as a theoretical primitive. That said, it seems plausible that the notion is not going to end up being defined in terms of analyticity (so no threat of circularity obviously looms), and it is a relatively familiar notion. Hence, there is no particular reason to be antecedently skeptical about its legitimacy. Earlier I asserted that had no concept-users ever evolved, <There are concepts> would have been false, though <Rocks are rocks> would have been true. Those assertions derive from my idea of ontological dependence, which concerns how what's true depends on what exists. Such assertions seem quite reasonable by my lights, and my notion of analyticity that is parasitic on that notion of ontological dependence is on equally good footing.

What about truth by convention? Well, I have offered a sense in which analytic sentences are made true by linguistic conventions. Because those conventions exist, certain marks, motions, and

sounds are true. But analytic propositions, being the necessarily true things that they are, are not fit to be made true by contingent entities like linguistic conventions. In fact, I've argued that they're not made true by *anything*. This admission does not concede that the truth of such propositions is brute fact, or mired in mystery. Why are bachelors unmarried? I'm not sure what the best explanation is of this quite trivial fact, or even if it really needs one. What I am sure of is that positing the existence of some entity is irrelevant to explaining it; any such posit will fail the ontological dependence test: X can't explain the truth of the proposition because it still would have been true had X (or anything like it) never existed. I am happy to admit that appealing to our concepts BACHELOR and UNMARRIED can aid in explaining the truth of the proposition (I'm not sure how else one might proceed); what I do not concede is (*contra* Armstrong) that the concepts in any way make the proposition true, such that the proposition depends on the existence of the concepts for its truth. Ultimately, the role of conventions in truthmaking boils down to their role as meaning-makers for sentences. What they don't ever do is make true propositions—save for those propositions, of course, that are specifically about conventions.

4. Quine, Harman, Boghossian

Not only does my modest account vindicate some much-maligned notions, it avoids some of the objections that have historically underwritten the current skepticism facing them. In discussing the sort of idea I defend, Quine complained that we can say that the sentence 'Everything is self-identical'

depends for its truth on traits of the language [...] and not on traits of its subject matter; but we can also say, alternatively, that it depends on an obvious trait, viz., self-identity, of its subject matter, viz., everything. (1966, p. 106)

This is a shocking remark for *Quine* to make, given that he, a nominalist concerning properties, doesn't believe in traits. Traits are nothing, according to the nominalist, so we *can't* say that 'Everything is self-identical' is made true by them. Those who believe in metaphysically robust, *sparse* properties—in the form of universals, tropes, or natural classes—can put them to work in truthmaker theory. But it's certainly optional to think of self-identity as one such property (every account of sparse properties that I know of would reject this claim), and optional to take it (or states of affairs involving it) to be the truthmaker for logical truths.

Quine, basically, is challenging the idea that supposed analyticities like 'Everything is self-identical' are made true in a different way from how supposed synthetic truths like 'Every human resides on Earth' are made true. If the truthmaking story applies the same way in both cases (i.e., truths being made true by features of reality), we lose the contrast I aim to draw, and thus lose the hoped-for distinction between analytic and synthetic. Harman approvingly echoes this Quinean idea, asking "what is to prevent us from saying that the truth expressed by "Copper is copper" depends in part on a general feature of the way the world is, namely that everything is self-identical?" (1967, p. 128). In short, plenty. "That everything is self-identical' looks to me to name a true proposition if it names anything. Calling it a "feature" is a stretch, and citing a true proposition as a truthmaker for another true proposition is bad truthmaker theory. (The only propositions made true by propositions are propositions about propositions like <There are propositions>.) Nor is copper itself a good truthmaker for <Copper is copper>. For the proposition would still be true even had copper never existed, much as <Phlogiston is phlogiston> is true without benefit of any phlogiston.⁶

One way to reconstruct the Quine-Harman view is that supposedly analytic generalities like ‘Everything is self-identical’ depend upon the summation of their instances: what makes it true are A’s being self-identical, together with B’s being self-identical, together with C’s being self-identical, and so on.⁷ (I’m assuming for the moment that sense can be made of some entity named by ‘A’s being self-identical’. Again, it seems to presume that self-identity is a sparse property, and to require a metaphysics uncongenial to Quine and Harman.) But it strikes me that this sort of account is not a plausible theory of what the truth of ‘Everything is self-identical’ depends on. For the sentence’s truth doesn’t depend upon what in fact exists; its truth in no way relies on A or B or C or any of their features. Even had our world contained a completely disjoint set of objects from the ones that in fact exist, it would still be true that everything is self-identical. The Quine-Harman account is more acceptable for contingent generalities. If ‘All Cretans are liars’ is true, that would indeed depend upon each individual Cretan being a liar; it’s a contingent matter whether all Cretans are liars, one which depends upon each individual case. It’s not contingent whether all bachelors are male, or whether everything is self-identical, and so it doesn’t depend on the individual cases. The Quine-Harman suggestion collapses the distinction between two very different kinds of generalities, much as the “naïve regularity view” of laws of nature collapses the distinction between accidental and law-like generalizations. (It also succumbs to my earlier objection of citing a contingent existence as a truthmaker for a necessary truth.)⁸

Boghossian distinguishes metaphysical from epistemological analyticity: truths are metaphysically analytic when they owe their truth entirely to their meaning, and epistemologically analytic when grasp of their meaning is sufficient for being justified in believing them (1996, p. 363). Boghossian attempts to refute the plausibility of the former by presenting it as “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” (1996, p. 365). As argued earlier, this view is a non-starter. It suggests that the truthmaker for (P) is (M), assuming that Boghossian means ‘true proposition’ by ‘fact’. (If his idea is that it is instead some state of affairs of (M)’s *being true* that makes (P) true, he owes us an account of what this state of affairs is. No truthmaker theorist I know of makes use of such dubious entities.) If we charitably interpret the suggestion so that it’s (M)’s truthmaker T, not (M) itself, that makes true (P), then I agree that the view is no good; it would suggest that bachelors are unmarried because of how English developed. But why think that the only “metaphysical” account of analyticity must accept this absurdity? Mine doesn’t, and Boghossian offers no argument against my suggestion, which certainly deserves the label ‘metaphysical’.⁹ Boghossian rightly identifies T as being the wrong truthmaker for (P); (P) has no truthmaker, and has no need of any truthmaker. But there is no absurdity in holding that (S) is true in virtue of T: it’s T that ensures that (S) expresses something analytically true. The right metaphysical account of analyticity is that (propositional) analyticity is the *absence* of ontological dependence, not its dependence on linguistic convention. Sentential analyticity does depend on linguistic convention, but this is entirely unobjectionable.

5. Conclusion

Some of the traditional objections to analyticity, it seems, rest on naïve or sloppy interpretations of the ideas underlying truthmaker theory. Quine’s and Harman’s attempts to offer truthmakers for analyticities do not stand up to criticism, and Boghossian’s characterization of the only avenue for metaphysical analyticity is an uncharitable dead end.¹⁰ Plus, as I shall now show, my account enjoys a number of virtues, including the ability to distinguish analyticity and necessity, and respect for the traditional epistemological role that analyticity has played.

First, my account does not collapse the distinction between necessary and analytic truths. My view admits the possibility of synthetic, necessary truths. Such truths would be necessarily true, but also depend on the existence of the objects in the world. Earlier, I argued that necessary truths are unfit to be made true by contingent objects. So a synthetically necessary truth would be one whose truth depended upon necessary objects. If <God exists> is true, its truth would depend on the existence of God. So, if true, <God exists> is both necessary and synthetic. Similarly, if Platonism about mathematics is correct, then <2 is prime> would depend (at least in part) for its truth on the existence of the necessarily existing 2. The debate over whether mathematical truth is analytic or synthetic is indispensably connected, on my view, to the question of whether mathematical truths depend for their truth upon the existence of objects in the world, necessary or not.

A final virtue of my view is that it upholds one of the principal philosophical roles for analyticity to play: accounting for one way in which *a priori* knowledge is possible. It seems a plausible epistemological principle that knowledge generally requires some appropriate cognitive connection to whatever it is that makes propositions true. (Such a principle is the key to one of Gettier's (1963, p. 122) famous examples.) 'Bachelors are unmarried' is knowable *a priori* because all one needs to know in order to know that what it expresses is true is what the words express. The truthmaker for the sentence is just the relevant linguistic convention, acquaintance with which is needed for me to understand the sentence. Once I understand the sentence, there's nothing more I need to learn, for there is no extra matter of fact that makes the sentence true. The proposition expressed depends on no matter of fact, and so there is no matter of fact with which I need to acquaint myself in order to know its truth-value.

At the end of the day, a decent case can be made for the tenability of the analytic/synthetic distinction, and in a metaphysically relevant way. With the resources of truthmaker theory in hand, we can easily make sense of the idea that an analytic sentence's truthmaker is no more than whatever

it is that establishes its meaning. Every sentence is true, at least in part, in virtue of what makes it mean what it does. Some sentences require more—those that express substantive, synthetic propositions. Hence, the truthmaking approach to analyticity vindicates the idea that analyticities are, in Quine’s words, a kind of “limiting case” where the world contributes nothing to their truth beyond establishing their meaning (1966, p. 106).¹¹

The skeptic about analyticity might dispute the intelligibility or acceptability of the notion of “being true in virtue of”, here understood in terms of the familiar notion of ontological dependence. Or the skeptic might question whether any truth actually fits the model of analyticity I have presented. The first kind of skeptic calls into question the entirety of truthmaker theory, and its basic thought that truth depends on reality, and not vice versa. One can adopt that line, but one shouldn’t just so as to avoid accepting analyticity. Worries about the analytic/synthetic distinction are not independent grounds for rejecting truthmaker theory. To the second skeptic, I offer the invitation to simply look. It seems to me that <Bachelors are unmarried> depends on no entity for its truth; the skeptic must disagree, and provide the relevant truthmaker. I do contend that it doesn’t depend on Phil the unmarried bachelor, Bill the unmarried bachelor, or any other unmarried bachelor. After all, it would be true even if there were no bachelors. Now, the truth of, say, <There are duck-billed platypus> doesn’t depend on any *particular* duck-billed platypus, but it does depend on there being some duck-billed platypus or other. <Bachelors are unmarried> doesn’t depend on any particular bachelor’s being unmarried either, but it doesn’t depend on there being any unmarried bachelors at all. There’s no “way” the world needs to be for <Bachelors are unmarried> to be true, other than, I suppose, the trivial way of being logically consistent. It is up to the skeptic to tell us what it is that makes <Red things are colored> and <Unicorns are unicorns> true.

The better view is to accept that some propositions owe their truth to nothing whatsoever in existence, when we properly understand this claim ontologically.¹² That some truths lack

truthmakers is no strike against the basic motivations behind truthmaker theory. Truthmaker theory advocates ontological accounting and responsibility; but we don't need ontology to properly account for why it's true that bachelors are bachelors, and that existing things exist. Those truths can be explained without reference to ontology—what's easier to explain than why bachelors are bachelors?—and so they need not fall under the umbrella of truthmaking.

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Notes

1. Henceforth, I shall drop the talk of ontological accounting, and refer just to truthmakers and ontological dependence. In effect, I shall speak as if “synthetic maximalism” is true—that all synthetic truths have truthmakers. But my subsequent claims can be reformulated in terms of ontological accounting, for the benefit of those theorists (like Lewis) who suspect that some synthetic truths are ontologically accountable, though lacking in truthmakers.
2. Views about concepts that render them necessary existences would indeed avoid this objection, but I find such views ontologically implausible on independent grounds. A related concern is that if propositions are composed by concepts, then propositions themselves must also be treated as contingent existences. Some have argued that necessarily existing propositions are an essential commitment of truthmaker theory (e.g., Merricks 2007), but I have significant doubts that must be rehearsed elsewhere. I believe truthmaker theory can be sustained without commitment to propositions at all, but this raises questions ultimately orthogonal to the main issues at hand.
3. The hedge here is due to the fact that synthetic truths like (M) are themselves semantic, and so obviously have semantic truthmakers.

4. I imagine Russell (2008) would contest that the sentence ‘I am here now’ is analytic, though it only ever expresses propositions that are synthetic. (Russell argues that analyticity applies to sentences only, not propositions.) I don’t believe that the sentence is a clear, uncontroversial case of analyticity, so it strikes me as a case of “spoils to the victor”.
5. See, respectively, Armstrong 2004, Martin 1996, and Russell 1985.
6. The simplest way to appreciate this point is to read ‘Copper is copper’ as a universal generalization: all things made of copper are made of copper. If nothing is made of copper, the universal is true.
7. Hofmann and Horvath (2008) accept the analytic/synthetic distinction, but maintain that analytic truths are made true in this Quine-Harman kind of way, exactly parallel to how synthetic truths are made true.
8. This difference in the metaphysical foundations for the different kinds of generalities is, naturally, reflected in the different epistemology for the two. To verify the truth of ‘All Cretans are liars’, we need to investigate each and every last Cretan. Those who adopt the Quine-Harman line need to verify that every individual bachelor is unmarried before accepting the general claim (assuming they accept at the least that there is *some* connection between what makes a proposition true and how we come to know it), and that is a false epistemological consequence. A virtue of my account is that the uncontroversial asymmetry in the epistemology of these different kinds of generalities is reflected by the asymmetry I have suggested to be underwriting their metaphysics.
9. See Hofmann and Horvath 2008 for a different diagnosis of how Boghossian’s argument fails. They, too, defend analyticity by way of truthmaker theory, but their approach is diametrically opposed to mine, seeing as how they always provide truthmakers for analyticities, whereas I never provide them.

10. Of course, there are many more objections to analyticity that cannot be engaged in a single paper. My hope is to have offered a positive view that avoids the major objections that aim to thwart any view of the kind I offer. I am under no illusions that what I say here is sufficient to convince any thoroughgoing analyticity skeptic.

11. Russell (2008) abandons this idea in her defense of analyticity, which does not make use of truthmaker theory. I see my concurrence with it as a reason in favor of my view, as it makes it less revisionary.

12. Cf. Schulte 2011, pp. 428-429.

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