

# WHY IS A TRUTH-PREDICATE LIKE A PRONOUN?

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“Why is a raven like a writing-desk?”, asked Lewis Carroll’s Mad Hatter. Philosophers sometimes quote this line to point to the metaphysical principle that everything is, in some respect, like everything else. The Prosentential Theory of Truth (PT) claims that truth-predicates are like pronouns, and presumably mean that this analogy is important for understanding the semantic workings of “true”. Following a brief synopsis of (PT), I will argue, first, that “true” and proforms are in fact quite unlike, even on the most plausible variants of (PT), and thus that this analogy breaks down, suggesting that a comparison with pronouns will not shed any light on the semantics of “true”. Secondly, I argue that all hitherto presented versions of (PT) fail to give a reasonably unified theory of “true”, and instead consist of separate accounts for different uses of “true”, which is to say that it contains various *ad hoc* assumptions needed to account for the linguistic data.

My third objection is simple, but still, I think, the most important one: that even if some version of (PT) could give a perfectly unified theory which accounted for the data accurately, the analogy would be *idle*, in that a more direct account of “true” could be given, which operates with the more general semantic notions of equivalence and consequence, rather than in terms of anaphora. I conclude the critique by considering a hypothetical language, of which (PT) would be a true, non-idle description, but note that this language is quite unlike English. Finally, I examine what I call Robert Brandom’s “metaphysical

motivation” for (PT), and try to show that the worry it is based on, namely, Paul Boghossian’s argument against deflationism, is unwarranted.

### **I The Prosentential Theories of Grover *et al.* and Brandom**

Pioneered by Dorothy Grover, Joseph Camp, and Nuel Belnap (1975), (PT) has its roots in Frank Ramsey’s Redundancy Theory of Truth (1927: 158f.). In particular, their theory is in part devised to vindicate Ramsey’s idea that universal truth ascriptions should be understood as sentences masking higher-order quantifications, in accordance with the equivalence between (1) and (2):

- (1) Everything he says is true,
- (2) ( $p$ ) If he says that  $p$ , then  $p$ .<sup>1</sup>

One problem with Ramsey’s theory is that it gives no unified theory of “true”, but rather gives paraphrases for truth claims as they come (Grover *et al.* (1975: 76)). (PT) is in part devised to rectify this limitation, by distinguishing a new grammatical category: the *prosentence*. Just as there are pronouns (“she”), proverbs (“do”) and proadjectives (“such”, “so”) (1975: 86), and perhaps other proforms, i.e., expressions referring anaphorically to antecedents of their respective grammatical category, there are also prosentences. An example of a prosentence in English, suggested by Grover *et al.*, is “so”, as in “I don’t believe Rachel is sick, but if *so*, she should stay at home” (1975: 88, 91). Grover *et al.* now suggest that the expressions “it is true” and “that is true” should be regarded precisely as prosentences. Although these expressions appear to be of subject-predicate form, Grover *et al.* rather wish to regard them as semantic atoms (tense aside, I suppose). Also, they can occupy all kinds of sentential positions, just as,

e.g., pronouns can occupy all noun positions (1975: 91).

The prosentential analysis is best explained by considering the relationships between first-order variables and pronouns, on the one hand, and propositional variables and the alleged prosentences, on the other. One can paraphrase, e.g., “ $(x)(Fx \supset Gx)$ ” into “Everything is such that if *it* is F, then *it* is G.” Sentence (2), however, cannot be rendered that way, since “Everything is such that if he said that *it*, then *it*” is ill-formed. In order to properly paraphrase sentences like (2) as we do with first-order sentences, we need an expression “which is like a pronoun, but which occupies a sentential position. What is wanted is a *prosentence*” (1975: 82). So, say the prosententialists, with the prosentence “it is true”, we can rephrase it:

(3)      Everything is such that if he said that it is true, then it is true.

(1975: 92). Here, “it is true” is thought to stand to the propositional variable “*p*” in (2) in the same way “it” stands to first-order variables.

Further, according to Grover *et al.*, although “it/that is true” is semantically atomic, it is syntactically complex, wherefore tense, modification and interrogatory modes (“Is it true?”) are possible (1975: 99f.). To elucidate this idea of semantic atomicity, a variant of English, English\*, is imagined, where syntactically atomic prosentences, “itt” and “thatt”, are added, functioning like “it is true” and “that is true”, respectively. Thus, “Thatt” would be used just like “That is true”, as uttered in response to someone’s assertion (1975: 89). More importantly, a quantified sentence like “Everything John says is true” could in this language be rendered both as “For every proposition, if John says that it is true, then it is true” and as “For every proposition, if John says that thatt, then thatt” (*ibid.*).

Grover *et al.*, however, only give the quite rough idea of the semantic rules governing “it is true” that can be sensed by comparison with other proforms, and not much is said

explicitly about what they are. It is fairly clear that their semantics is meant to be substitutional, as suggested by claims like: “‘thatt’ is *never* a referring expression” (1975: 89, original emphasis), and, “on the face of it, [...] questions about what ‘thatt’ ranges over are misplaced” (1975: 90). Furthermore, instead of speaking of the “range” of quantifiers, it is recommended that we speak of the *instances* of the relevant quantified sentences, where an instance of, e.g., “For each proposition, if John said that it is true, then it is true” is “If John said that Kate is a coward, then Kate is a coward” (1975: 92). Finally, it is explicitly stated that the former type of sentence should be understood as “a substitutional quantification, where the truth of [the sentence] is equivalent to the truth of all its substitution-instances” (1975: 113).<sup>2</sup>

Let us look closer at what could be said generally about proforms to see how their semantics might shed light on that of “true”. What will be relevant for the explanation of any proform is its relation to another expression or class of expressions. Somewhat pretheoretically, a proform stands *for* another expression (from the sense of “pro” in Latin as “in place of”). Such expressions are usually called “anaphoric substituends”. It would seem that a pronoun stands for its anaphoric substituend in the sense that the latter “might just as well” have taken the place of the former (1975: 84). This is the relation commonly called “cross-reference”.

However, the above pretheoretic picture is only correct for certain kinds of uses of pronouns, tellingly referred to as “pronouns of laziness” (after Peter Geach (1967: 627)). Here, the anaphoric substituend is an expression occurring in the same context as the proform itself, and being determined by its grammatical type (which should correspond to that of the proform). Such is the “she” in

- (4) If Mary is home from work, then *she* is sick.

Here, one says that “she” cross-refers to its antecedent, “Mary”. In this simple case, the cross-referring relation consists simply in the antecedent’s being an expression which “might as well” have been in the place of the pronoun, in the sense of “might without change of what is said”. However, as Grover *et al.* and others have noted, in the more important quantificational use of pronouns, for instance (to borrow an example from Grover *et al.* (1975: 85)):

- (5) Each positive integer is such that if *it* is even, adding 1 to *it* yields an odd number,

we cannot replace “it” by “each positive integer”, although the latter seems somehow to be the antecedent of the former. Though, again, Grover *et al.* are not very explicit on the semantics of sentences like (5), it seems that it is meant to be understood in relation to the totality of its instances, i.e., instances of the schema “If *t* is even, then adding 1 to *t* yields an odd number”, a sentence obtained by replacing “*t*” by a singular term (satisfying the quantifier restriction, I assume). Perhaps they mean that (5) is just equivalent to the conjunction of all these instances (cf. Beebe (2006: sec. 2)). We might also say that, rather than itself being an anaphoric substituent of “it”, the (restricted) quantifier *determines a set of substituends* (where a substituent is an expression that can substitute the proform so as to get a sentence that follows from the original sentence). In any case, the analysis of (1) now goes by taking its logical form to be that of (3), which, in analogy with the analysis of (5), is to be explained, one way or another, in terms of the instances of “If he said that *p*, then *p*”. On my proposed formulation, for instance, the idea is that the quantifier determines a set of substituends, namely the set of all sentences, whence every sentence can substitute the occurrences of the prosentence “it is true” to get a sentence that follows from (3).

Grover *et al.* propose analyses of three more classes of truth-ascriptions: (i) modified and tensed ascriptions like “That might be true”, (ii) sentences like “Goldberg’s conjecture is true”, i.e., where “is true” follows a nominalisation which does not contain a sentence (unlike, e.g., “that snow is white”), and, (iii) truth-ascriptions to foreign sentences, as in “‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true”. The first case, “That might be true” is to be understood as having the “deep structure” “It-might-be-true-that that is true”, or, as they also describe it, having the form PRO + MOD, where “PRO” stands for the prosentence and “MOD” for the modifying operation or function. This aspect of their theory has been heavily criticised (see, e.g., Kirkham (1992: 327f.)), but in my view, the only mistake here is to unnecessarily include a truth-operator in the sentence supposed to display the logical form. So, instead of “It-might-be-true-that that is true”, and “It-is-not-true-that that is true”, they should simply have “MIGHT(that is true)” and “NOT(that is true)”, where these semantically operate on the contents of the sentence operated upon, and syntactically follow the standard rule, yielding “That might be true” and “That is not true”.

The second and third cases are more problematic: the sentence “Goldberg’s conjecture is true” is analysed as

There is a proposition<sub>1</sub> such that Goldbach conjectured that it is true<sub>1</sub>, and for every proposition<sub>2</sub> if Goldbach conjectured that it is true<sub>2</sub>, then it is true<sub>1</sub>  $\Leftrightarrow$  it is true<sub>2</sub>, and it is true<sub>1</sub>.

Here, “A  $\Leftrightarrow$  B” is to be understood as “that A is-the-same-conjecture-as-that B” (1975: 95). This seems implausible and *ad hoc*, but there seems to be a way of analysing this sentence which is both simpler and more general. Since there can be other types of nominalisations, like “Relativity”, which do not allow an analogous treatment, the model had better take all

nominalisations, including “Goldbach’s conjecture” to work the same way. For instance, one could take a sentence “N is true” to mean,

There is a proposition<sub>1</sub> such that N is that it is true<sub>1</sub>, and for every proposition<sub>2</sub> if N is that it is true<sub>2</sub>, then it is true<sub>1</sub>  $\Leftrightarrow$  it is true<sub>2</sub>, and it is true<sub>1</sub>,

and let “A  $\Leftrightarrow$  B” to mean “the proposition that A = the proposition that B” (or just “that A = that B”). This amounts to taking “N is true” to have as its logical form “ $\exists p \forall q (N = \text{that } p \ \& \ (N = \text{that } q \supset \text{that } p = \text{that } q \ \& \ p))$ ”, together with a prosentential treatment of propositional quantifiers (cf. (1975: 75)). Of course, and as Brandom has argued, this quantificational reading of such truth-ascriptions is in any case quite strained, and he proposes a different analysis, which will be discussed below.

The prosententialists’ treatment of truth-ascriptions to foreign sentences, finally, is even more daring. They suggest that the foreign sentence itself is to be regarded as the substituent of the prosentence. In defence of this claim, they appeal to the lack of restrictions in using foreign languages mixed with our own (1975: 102f.). Thus, “‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true” simply means “Schnee ist weiss”.

Let us now turn to Robert Brandom’s development of (PT) in *Making It Explicit* (1994). Here, a whole range of expressions are explained as functioning, one way or other, like anaphors. These, in turn, are given a substitutional explanation. There are primarily three types of occurrences of “true” that Brandom mentions and tries to account for. In some cases, his solution is the same as for Grover *et al.*, in others, he goes beyond them. The occurrences are: ( $\alpha$ ) *redundant occurrences*: sentences of the form “It is true that *p*”, which are intersubstitutable with the corresponding “*p*” in all embeddings (1994: 299f.); ( $\beta$ ) *truth-ascriptions to “sentence nominalizations”*: Brandom exemplifies with the sentence “The first

sentence Bismarck uttered in 1865 is true”, and comments, “In this case [the sentence nominalisation] describes the sentence, but it could be a quote-name, a demonstrative, ‘that’-clause sortal, or any sort of nominalisation. Its function is just to pick out the antecedent on which the whole prosentence formed using ‘true’ is anaphorically dependent, and from which it accordingly inherits its content” (1994: 304). In brief, then, a sentence “N is true” has the same content as the sentence referred to by “N”, where by “refer”, he means *denote*, *not cross-refer*. Finally, ( $\gamma$ ) *quantified sentences*, such as “Everything the policeman said is true”, are treated as by Grover *et al.* ((1994: 301ff.) – though see also his (2002: 107)).

Brandom, however, discards the claim that “it/that is true” are the only prosentences in favour of treating “is true” separately. He still accords with them, however, in denying that truth-ascriptions are of subject-predicate form. On Brandom’s view, “is true” can be seen as

*a prosentence-forming operator*. It applies to a term that [...] picks out a sentence tokening. It yields a prosentence that has that tokening as its anaphoric antecedent. To take such a line is not to fall back into a subject-predicate picture, for there is all the difference in the world between a prosentence-forming operator and the predicates that form ordinary sentences. (1994: 305, original italics).

This does not mention quantified truth-ascriptions, but we may assume that the explanation is somehow meant to be extended to them.

## II Material criticisms

The original motivation behind (PT) was to vindicate Ramsey’s idea that the logical form of quantified truth-ascriptions involves propositional quantification. But what speaks in favour of this analysis in the first place? The sentences (1) and (2) are arguably inferentially equivalent, but this is hardly sufficient for one of them being the logical form of the other (as



we will see, there is a paraphrase that is incompatible with (PT) that is also inferentially equivalent to the target sentence). Secondly, there is no reason to suppose that a semantic analysis must provide paraphrases at all, rather than merely a semantic description of the target expression. Prior (1971: 16ff.) also holds the view that all sentences superficially appearing as first-order quantifications over propositions, e.g., sentence (1), have the logical form of propositionally quantified sentences. In support of this, he points to adjectival quantifications (1971: 37), such as

(6) He is something that I am not – kind.

Agreed, there are quantifications in natural language that are not first-order, but (6) does not support Prior's analysis of sentences like (1), because it differs in grammatical *surface features* from sentences like (1), which rather resemble paradigmatic first-order quantifications (like "Everything he owns is expensive"). For instance, (6) can be rephrased as "There is something such that he is it and I am not – kind". But we just saw that the analogous move with (1) yields the ill-formed "Everything is such that if he says that it then it". There are thus differences in surface structure here. Compare with the universal, adjectival quantification "He is everything that I am not", with instances like "If he is strong, I am not strong". Since it is clear that the "is" here is a copula, rather than an identity predicate, there is no way to see how to analyse it as first-order. It can only be analysed as having as instances sentences that exemplify a general term schema, namely, "If he is  $G$ , then I am not  $G$ ". Sentences like (1), on the other hand, can be, and is most naturally, analysed as paradigmatic first-order quantifications, why Prior's example fails to support his analysis. What would be needed to support it is a sentence that is superficially first-order, but which must, for some independent reason, be interpreted as having a second-order logical form.<sup>3</sup>

Why are sentences like (1) not only possibly, but “more naturally”, interpreted as first-order? Well, the sentence “Everything he owns is expensive” has all instances of the schema “If he owns  $x$ , then  $x$  is expensive” as instances. But then, by analogy, the instances of “Everything he says is true” should have as consequences all instances of the schema “If he says  $x$ , then  $x$  is true”.

According to (PT), it is rather the Ramseyan paraphrase “ $(p)$ (If he says that  $p$ , then  $p$ )” that exhibits the logical form of (1). As mentioned above, the idea here is that “it is true” stands to “ $p$ ” in the same way that “it” stands to “ $x$ ”. Thus, the prosententialists have to maintain that the Ramseyan paraphrase displays the logical form of (1), for otherwise, there would not be enough similarity between “it is true” and “it” to sustain the analogy-claim. But the sentence “Everything is such that if he said that it is true, then it is true” seems to be a sentence of the form “ $(x)$ (If he says that  $x$  is true, then  $x$  is true)”, rather than “ $(x)$ (If he says  $x$ , then  $x$  is true)”, and therefore doesn’t properly analyse (1).

But if it does not, one may wonder, why did the prosentential analysis seem to work at all? For the simple reason that the two sentences “Everything is such that if he says that it is true, then it is true” and “Everything is such that if he says it, then it is true” are semantically equivalent. To see this, note first that (a) the substituends of the variables in “ $(x)$ (If he says  $x$ , then  $x$  is true)” are “that”-clauses, i.e., expressions of the form “that  $p$ ”. In virtue of (a) (and consonant with this first-order interpretation), the instances of (1) are sentences of the form “If he said that  $p$ , then that  $p$  is true”. Further, suppose that (b) sentences of the form “that  $p$  is true” are always intersubstitutable with the corresponding “ $p$ ”. Then, an instance of

(7)      Everything is such that if he says that it is true, then it is true

will always be semantically equivalent to a corresponding instance of

(8) Everything is such that if he says it, then it is true.

In virtue of (a), instances of (7) and (8) are exemplified, respectively, by

(7-I) If he says that that snow is white is true, then that snow is white is true

and

(8-I) If he says that snow is white, then that snow is white is true.

These two sentences, further, are equivalent given (b). Since the same holds for any pair of instances of (7) and (8), it seems safe to say that (7) and (8) themselves are semantically equivalent, given (b). Some may of course want to object to principle (b), but rather than defending it (as in Båve (2006: 4.2)), I will be content here merely to point out that (PT) is committed to it, since it is committed to the equivalence between (7) and (8).<sup>4</sup> They are so committed because they take the logical form of (8) to be that of (7). Thus, given this commitment of (PT) (that is also mine) to (b), (7) and (8) are semantically equivalent. Grammatically, however, they have different structure, and their semantic equivalence gives no reason to doubt this natural idea. To explain quantified truth-claims with the principles (a) and (b) is not only more natural, but significantly clearer, and, since claim (b) can also be used to explain all other occurrences of “true” (as argued in Båve (2006: 4.3)), this explanation can be incorporated in a very simple theory of “true”. Judging by simplicity and scope, then, (PT) fares badly in comparison.<sup>5</sup>

Let us now look at truth-ascriptions to “sentence nominalisations”. As we have seen,

Grover *et al.* analyse all such sentences as covert quantifications, but I agree with Brandom (1994: 303-5) that this seems unnatural and unnecessary (cf. also (Kirkham (1992: 325-9)). On his own proposal, such truth-ascriptions are instead regarded as prosentences whose antecedent is the sentence referred to by the nominalisation. In the trivial sense that the antecedent of a (lazy) proform is an expression that can replace the proform without change of semantic value, the analogy could be said to hold here, though in a rather watered-down sense. For instance, since “Goldbach’s conjecture” refers to “Any even number is the sum of two primes”, the sentence “Goldbach’s conjecture is true” should be at least *materially* equivalent to “Any even number is the sum of two primes”. But this is a rather weak claim, given these generous definitions of “proform” and “antecedent”. Brandom, however, speaks of prosentences as inheriting the *content* of their antecedents (1994: 304), but this clearly does not hold here. Further, there seems to be no other similarity between type ( $\beta$ ) uses and any of the traditionally recognised proforms in natural language; that is, no similarity other than the weak one mentioned, which concerns material equivalence between two different sentences. *A fortiori*, there is no proform in natural language such that it is the *referent* (in the sense of denotation) of its antecedent that serves as the proform’s substituend. But this was precisely how type ( $\beta$ ) uses were supposed to work, on Brandom’s account. So the analogy breaks down, and the appeal to paradigmatic proforms is directly misleading. (Arguing *ad hominem*, Brandom here also makes use of a non-deflationary notion of reference, contrary to his professed commitment to eschew such representational notions (cf. also Field (2001: 150)). It is difficult to see how “Goldbach’s conjecture is true” could be made sense of on (PT) without either introducing some such substantial notion of reference, or by some quantificational analysis à la Grover *et al.*, but none of these are plausible.

We may also note another weakness of (PT) in connection with truth-ascriptions to foreign sentences. How, for example, should “‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true” be dealt with?

Brandom says nothing about such cases, but Grover *et al.*, as we have seen, suggest that the foreign sentence itself is to be regarded as the substituent of the prosentence. Intuition has it, of course, that one can understand a truth-ascription to a sentence without understanding the sentence said to be true, and though it seems that they have not considered this problem, they might here bite the bullet with Quine (1981: 21f.), and hold that “true” is “immanent”, in the sense that if one does not understand a sentence, one does not understand a truth-ascription thereto. This is implausible as an account of ordinary speakers’ practice, of course, so is there any other way? Perhaps one could respond that the account may be saved by appealing to some notion of translation, so that, e.g., the antecedent of the alleged prosentence “‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true” is a correct *translation* of the named sentence. But here, the two previous objections levelled against Brandom can be restated: first, the two sentences cannot then be said to have the same content, and, secondly, this would make the alleged analogy break down, for there is certainly no proform in natural language with such a mechanism of translation built into it.

A final complaint about the prosentential treatment of truth-ascriptions to sentence-names is that it (alike disquotational theories) makes the inferences from “‘Snow is white’ is true” to “Snow is white” and back too strongly valid. By this, I mean that the inference in question is as strongly valid as that from “If Mary is sick, *she* should stay at home” and “Mary is sick” to “*Mary* should stay at home”. However, this is contrary to the intuition that you can infer “Snow is white” from “‘Snow is white’ is true” only with the further premise that “‘Snow is white’ means that snow is white. (See Wilson (1990) for a host of further “material” objections.)

### III Principal criticisms

In this section, I present two major lines of criticism, one concerning the *unity* of (PT), and the second concerning the explanatory value of describing “true” in terms of proforms, rather than in more general semantic terms. The issue of unity is this: does (PT) offer a sufficiently unified account of the uses of “true”, or does it, *ad hoc*, give separate accounts of different uses, so that the explanations, unacceptably, are not consequences of some single principle for its use? As we will see, the two criticisms are dialectically interconnected.

Grover *et al.* try to deal with the multitude of occurrences of “true” by paraphrasing them into propositional quantifications, and then translate these into sentences containing the alleged prosentences “it is true” and “that is true”. For one thing, it is strange that these alleged proforms only appear in the alleged deep structure of the target sentences. Why are *these* in the deep structure, rather than the propositional quantifications? And what happens to the analogy with other proforms, which are on the surface? There might be some way of making a connection between “it is true” and paradigmatic proforms, but it is tempting to predict that such remedies will only prompt more questions. Also, as others have complained (see Beebe (2006: sect. 7)), there seem to be too many uses of “true” for them all to be treated in terms of “it is true” and “that is true”.

For these reasons, my objection from unity is better presented in connection with Brandom’s theory, which is more consciously concerned with this possible critique. On his account, it is the claim that “is true” is a prosentence-forming operator that is supposed to explain the various uses of “true”. This seems like an attempt to achieve greater generality, but are the particular analyses similar enough for the generality to be more than merely titular? It may seem rather that the treatments of ( $\alpha$ ), ( $\beta$ ) and ( $\gamma$ ) have nothing in common except that they all operate with the expressions “prosentence”, “antecedent”, “cross-reference”, etc. Type ( $\alpha$ ) sentences are claimed to be equivalent to corresponding

denominalised sentence, type ( $\beta$ ) sentences are equivalent to the sentences referred to by the nominalisations, type ( $\gamma$ ) sentences, such as (1), have as consequences instances such as “If he policeman says that  $p$ , then  $p$ ”. But what single fact is it about “true” that explains these facts? It simply will not do to say that we are dealing with “anaphoric dependencies” in all cases, because in Brandom this expression takes such a wide and tenuous sense that it is difficult to see why he couldn’t as well state what equivalents or consequences the sentences have. We know that one way of explaining paradigmatic proforms goes by stating such relationships, but it obviously does not follow that every expression whose semantics should be given in terms of equivalence and consequence should also be given in terms of proforms (this broaches on the objection to be given in full below). The point is that *if* the account were given without use of “prosentence”, etc., then the lack of unity would be blatant, i.e., it would be impossible to see any connection between the explanations. In fact, it would only be a list of the data to be explained by some single general principle. It seems clear to me that, unless some very ingenious response is available here, we must say that the introduction of the notion of a prosentence conceals this problem of generality rather than solving it.

All that can be extruded from (PT) in existent versions is that sentences of the form “ $x$  is true” will stand to some sentence in some relation similar or identical to that which pronouns bear to their antecedents (though we have seen that in many cases, it is not even very similar). We could now imagine Brandom wanting to make type ( $\alpha$ ) sentences converge with the others by saying that “It is true that snow is white” is a prosentence whose antecedent is whatever comes after “It is true that”. Surely, this is correct, on some suitable definition of “prosentence” and “antecedent”, but it does no more than restate a datum using an unnecessary terminology, the datum being that “It is true that snow is white” is equivalent with “Snow is white”. I conclude that Brandom’s version of (PT) is not duly unified, and that the fact that the various occurrences of “true” can be described in terms of prosentences does

not solve the problem, because for all cases of equivalences and consequences, one can extend the notion of a proform, antecedent, etc., so as to express these relationships.

This brings us to a more important, because more general, criticism. I was claiming that the failure to find sufficiently similar explanations of the uses of “true” was masked by the use of “prosentence”, “antecedent”, etc. This was possible because these expressions, given how they have been introduced in analogy with recognised proforms, can serve to express a number of data, without, strictly speaking, explaining them. These data include the fact that sentences “It is true that  $p$ ” and “ $p$ ” are equivalent, that the instances of “If he believes that  $p$ , then  $p$ ” follow from (1), and so on. From this insight, it is not far-fetched to suspect that any use of these (admittedly ingenious) neologisms will be explanatorily idle. That the theory seems to “work” should not move us, if, as seems to be the case, the “working” only means “truly describing the data”.

To rub this in, let us give a particular example of how such a non-explanatory but true description might look. One datum for any truth-theory to explain is that the instances of “If he said that  $p$ , then  $p$ ” follow from (1). First, Grover *et al.* claim that (1) is “of the form” “Everything is such that if he says that it is true, then it is true”, and then claim that “everything” here stands to “it is true” the same way it stands to “it”, *mutatis mutandis*. A striking fact about an ordinary quantification is that every instance hereof follows from it, where the instances are produced by substituting the proform with an expression of the right category, the substituend(s), which, because the antecedent is “everything”, is every term. The datum we started out with is now “explained”, first, by a paraphrase, and, next, by the claim that “it is true” is a proform, which, given the antecedent “everything”, can be replaced by any sentence (expression of the right category) to get a consequence of the original sentence.

However, it seems strange to claim that it shouldn’t be possible to describe what is going on here without mention of “prosentence” – after all, it is not likely that “pronoun”,



“proadjective”, etc. will appear as primitives in our best semantic theory. A better guess is that they will all be explained in more general semantic terms. But, again, by considering roughly how an explanation of “it is true” in those more general semantic terms would look, we see clearly the lack of unity. Thus, assuming (PT), the “final” semantic theory, i.e., where only primitives are used, would display such lack of unity as well, which only means that (PT) is unacceptable.

Suppose, contrary to what I have argued, that we had a recognisably prosentential theory that gave a unified and materially adequate theory of “true”. Imagine also that we had a full account of how proforms in general work. In this case, it seems, we could *dispense* with the analogy with paradigmatic proforms, for we would then have an account, from which we could deduce a description of how “true” affects the meaning of the sentences where it occurs, and there would be no reason to mention any similarity with the functioning of proforms. And when we are at that stage, adding that there are certain similarities between “true” and paradigmatic proforms does nothing additional by way of explanation. Thus, there is yet no evidence that there is anything essentially *proformal* about the word “true”.

We may in fact imagine a variant of English such that the above hypothesis held for it. This variant is like English, except there is only one type of occurrence of “true”, namely, the redundant one in “It is true that snow is white”. Here, (PT) holds that the sentence following “It is true that” is the anaphoric antecedent, which is meant to explain why the sentence is equivalent to “Snow is white”. Should we say, under such circumstances, that the theory is successful? Well, *if* the use of “prosentence” and “antecedent” could be made sense of properly, so that the equivalence would indeed follow *and* paradigmatic proforms *cum* antecedents would be correctly classified on the definitions in question, then the theory would of course be materially adequate in the sense that no speaker disposition would be violated. It would also be unified, though rather trivially. Even so, I think this idealised example shows

precisely what is wrong with (PT). In this imagined circumstance, the simplest and therefore best theory would only claim that sentences “It is true that  $p$ ” and “ $p$ ” are equivalent; mentioning some similarity with pronouns would be superfluous and misleading.

(PT) is misleading because it suggests some less than trivial relationship with pronouns, whereas all we have reason to claim is that both expressions must be given a semantics that makes use of the general notions of equivalence and consequence. Is there any way at all that (PT) could be supported, in view of this possibility of trivialisation? I believe there might be, namely, if it could be shown that proforms share certain idiosyncrasies, i.e., surprising and irregular features, which are also shared by “true”. If it could be shown that “true” and paradigmatic proforms each had unexpected, surprising features paralleling each other, there would perhaps be reason to believe that there is some causal link between our processing of the one and our processing of the other, and then, the claim that there is something essentially proformal about “true” might be sustained. Of course, what emerged in the “material criticism” above is that the analogy limps and breaks down in various ways. Thus, these expressions do not converge in idiosyncratic, unexpected, or surprising ways, because they do not converge at all.

#### **IV On Brandom’s Metaphysical Motivation for (PT)**

I will close with a discussion of an alleged benefit that Brandom finds in his version of (PT), in particular, in the claim that “is true”, being a “prosentence-forming operator”, is not a predicate. The alleged advantage of this view is that if we took it to be a predicate, we would either have to live with a property of truth, or we would have to grant a robust notion of truth. One underlying premise here is, of course, that only predicates stand for properties. Why, according to Brandom, would it be wrong to grant a property of truth? Brandom first says that such a property is “bound to be ‘queer’” (1994: 203). Such an entity, Brandom holds, is only

believed by philosophers to exist because they “have misconstrued ordinary talk using ‘true’ [...] on the basis of a mistaken grammatical analogy”. Further, by denying that “is true” is a predicate, Brandom can remain a “deflationist” in the special sense that he can deny of “is true” that it corresponds to a property, while consistently affirming it of “has a mass of more than ten grams” and other expressions that one wants to take to refer to properties. This, one might think, would otherwise be impossible, since, as Brandom goes on, “such contrasts seem to presuppose a robust correspondence theory of the contents of some predicates and claims – at least those the semantic deflationist finds unproblematic, paradigmatically those of natural science.” (1994: 326).

Brandom’s point, then, is that by denying that “is true” is a predicate, he can deny that there is a property of truth without having to distinguish between predicates that do and those that do not stand for properties. It is thus presupposed that distinguishing predicates in this respect can only be done in terms of “robust truth-conditions”. The explanation of why there is no property of truth, according to Brandom, is not that sentences containing “is true” do not have “robust” truth-conditions, but, rather, that this expression “is not even of the right grammatical form to do so – anymore than ‘no one’ is of the right form to pick out an individual, although there are some features of its use that could mislead one on this point” (1994: 327).

The objection against deflationism that Brandom is here trying to respond to is originally Boghossian’s (1990). This objection is directed against the view (A) that “is true” is not used to state facts and does not refer to a property. Crucially, however, he assumes (B) that a predicate’s being used to state facts or referring to a property must be explained in terms of “robust” truth-conditions. The upshot is that *if* the only way to distinguish predicates that stand for properties from those that do not is by claiming that sentences containing the former have robust (correspondence) truth-conditions, while the latter do not, then

deflationists can deny that truth is a property only if they have already assumed a “robust” (correspondence) theory of truth, viz., one according to which truth *is* a property.

Since Brandom for this reason wants to deny that there is a property of truth, his further view that a predicate necessarily stands for a property forces him to deny that “is true” is a predicate. But all appearances suggest that “is true” is a predicate, of course, and it is not obvious why a “prosentence-forming operator”, as explained by Brandom, could not be a predicate. Brandom’s two criteria for being a predicate, laid out in *Making It Explicit*, also do not exclude “is true” (p. 371f., 404) – see also Lance (1997) and Båve (2006: 2.7) for further details on this matter. Here, however, I will focus rather on the *need* for these measures to ensure that “is true” is not a predicate, and argue that there is none, since Boghossian’s argument contains premises that a deflationist should deny.

It may well be that (A) is incompatible with (B), but not only is (A) not necessarily essential to deflationism (such prominent deflationists as Paul Horwich (1998: 37) denies (A), and holds that “true” is special only in not referring to a substantial, naturalistic property, and Hartry Field regards it as independent of deflationism (1994: 265n.19)). Also, claim (B) is something that deflationists typically deny, both since they would object to there even being such a thing as a robust truth-condition, but also, and more importantly, because they do not think that one should use the notion of truth at all in spelling out the difference between factual and non-factual discourse, or in dealing with any other substantial linguistic or metaphysical matter. Of course, one can also hold that there are no properties at all, so that the demarcation of “true” from certain other predicates should be explained differently, perhaps in terms of (naturalistic) analysability. Unless someone can establish both that there are properties, and there is no property of truth, and the claim (B), then, this argument should not worry a deflationist (see Soames (1999: 251ff.) for a more detailed criticism of Boghossian’s arguments). Therefore, there is no need, either, to argue that “is true” is not a predicate, and

thus Brandom's motivation for (PT) is unfounded.

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<sup>1</sup> Ramsey's proposal, of course, was "For all  $a, R, b$ , if he asserts  $aRb$ , then  $aRb$ ", but given the obvious limitations of such paraphrases, his view is usually presented as above.

<sup>2</sup> Somewhat confusingly, they previously explained the workings of lazy pronouns by claiming that they take the *referent* of their antecedent (1975: 85). However, it would seem that since they give a substitutional account of prosentences, other proforms must have such a semantics as well, lest the analogy must be abandoned.

<sup>3</sup> A major motivation for Priorian analyses of such quantified sentences is nominalism. In Båve (2006: Ch. 5), however, it is argued that the naïve, relational syntactic analysis can be had without commitment to propositions. Prior's analysis is naturally coupled with a conception of singular attitude ascriptions, of the form " $x$  *Vs that*  $p$ " on which "*Vs that*", rather than "*that*  $p$ ", is regarded as a syntactic unit, a function from a term and a sentence to a sentence. This idea has its roots in Russell's "multiple relations" theory (1910), (1912: XII), and similar views have more recently been defended by, e.g., Tye (1989), and Matthews (1994), and it receives a very elaborated treatment in Moltmann (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Brandom also explicitly acknowledges the intersubstitutability of "it is true that  $p$ " and " $p$ " in *all* occurrences (1994: 299f.).

<sup>5</sup> Brandom describes other deflationary theories as "cruder" than his own (2002: 119) – as if simplicity were a vice – and then claims that it cannot cover as many types of occurrences of "true" ((1997: 211), (2002: 108)). In fact, however, principle (b) explains every occurrence of "true" with only very plausible or "obvious" assumptions (see Båve (2006: 4.3)). Concerning the critique against the prosentential analysis of (1), though, Brandom has more recently (2002) given a syntactic analysis that accords with my own. Here, the role of "is true" in "Everything he says is true" seems to be explained rather by first rephrasing the sentence as "Everything is such that if he says it, then it is true", and then considering "is true" as having the quote-names instantiating the first "it" as antecedent. For instance, in the instance "If he says 'Snow is white', then it is true", "it is true" is a lazy prosentence and has the quote-name of the sentence "Snow is white" as antecedent (2002: 107). (This idea also seems to extend naturally to cases of indirect speech.) Brandom thus seems to have rid himself of the Ramseyan heritage of the original prosententialists. He also gives a more plausible account of tensed and modified truth-claims (2002: 108), so as to save (PT) from objections on that score (e.g., in Kirkham (1992: 327f.)), and about anaphoric uses of "that" in truth-claims (i.e. "That is true"). This does not, however, save him from the generic objections against (PT) to be given below.

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