

TRUTH
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Truth

J. L. AUSTIN

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*Featuring classic papers from the archive &
commentaries by contemporary philosophers*

T R U T H

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ABOUT

In celebration of the 125th year of the *Proceedings* we are proud to announce our first ever *Online Conference of the Aristotelian Society*: a week-long event featuring a classic paper a day from our back catalogue, each accompanied by a commentary by a contemporary philosopher and an online forum open to all. The commentary will stimulate discussion by highlighting the paper's major themes and their continuing importance to current debates; signaling challenges to specific claims and arguments; and indicating thematic connections between the various papers.

Continuing in the Society's long tradition of publishing the proceedings of its live events, both the classic papers and commentaries will be published in our first ever *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, The Virtual Issue*, which will be free and available online following the conference.

The first Online Conference and Virtual Issue will focus on the theme of Truth. What is it for the things we say or believe to be true? Does truth depend on a relation between what we say or believe and the world? What are the natures of the things we say or believe, the bearers of truth? To what are the truth-bearers related when they are true: are they related to facts, ordinary objects, or something else? What is the required relation? We'll want an account of the nature of truth that addresses those questions also to fit with an account of truth's importance: why should it matter to us that what we say or believe is true rather than false? Our views about truth are liable to impact widely on our views about other things. Are moral claims or views apt to be true or false, or are they to be evaluated along different dimensions? Does truth figure in an account of the nature of belief or the nature of assertion? Is the acquisition of beliefs that are true amongst the fundamental aims of inquiry?

Each of the papers selected for the Online Conference were chosen for the distinctive answers that they advance to these questions. In some cases papers were chosen because they have had a decisive impact on later discussions, in others they were chosen because they present views and arguments that deserve more careful consideration than they have thus far received. In all cases, there is much to be gained from becoming acquainted, or reacquainted, with these important texts.

The Online Conference and Virtual Issue will be moderated and edited by Guy Longworth (Warwick).

BIOGRAPHY

John Langshaw Austin (26 March 1911 – 8 February 1960) was a British philosopher of language. He is remembered primarily as the developer of the theory of speech acts. He read *Literae Humaniores* at Oxford and graduated with a first class honours degree in 1933. After serving in MI6 during World War II, Austin returned to Oxford as White's Professor of Moral Philosophy at Oxford, a post he retained up until his death in 1960. J.L. Austin was president of the Aristotelian Society from 1956 to 1957.

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TRUTH

J.L. AUSTIN

1. "WHAT is truth?" said jesting Pilate, and would not stay for an answer. Pilate was in advance of his time. For "truth" itself is an abstract noun, a camel, that is, of a logical construction, which cannot get past the eye even of a grammarian. We approach it cap and categories in hand: we ask ourselves whether Truth is a substance (the Truth, the Body of Knowledge), or a quality (something like the colour red, inhering in truths), or a relation ("correspondence ")¹. But philosophers should take something more nearly their own size to strain at. What needs discussing rather is the use, or certain uses, of the word "true." In *vin*o, possibly, "*veritas*," but in a sober symposium "*verum*."

2. What is it that we say is true or is false? Or, how does the phrase "is true" occur in English sentences? The answers appear at first multifarious. We say (or are said to say) that beliefs are true, that descriptions or accounts are true, that propositions or assertions or statements are true, and that words or sentences are true: and this is to mention only a selection of the more obvious candidates. Again, we say (or are said to say) "It is true that the cat is on the mat," or "It is true to say that the cat is on the mat," or "'The cat is on the mat' is true." We also remark on occasion, when someone else has said something, "Very true" or "That's true" or "True enough."

Most (though not all) of these expressions, and others besides, certainly do occur naturally enough. But it seems reasonable to ask whether there is not some use of "is true" that is primary, or some generic name for that which at bottom we are always saying "is true." Which, if any, of these expressions is to be taken *au pied de la lettre*? To answer this will not take us long, nor, perhaps, far: but in philosophy the foot of the letter is the foot of the ladder.

I suggest that the following are the primary forms of expression : –

It is true (to say) that the cat is on the mat.

¹ It is sufficiently obvious that "truth" is a substantive, "true" an adjective and "of" in "true of" a preposition.

That statement (of his, etc.) is true.

The statement that the cat is on the mat is true.

But first for the rival candidates.

(a) Some say that "truth is primarily a property of beliefs." But it may be doubted whether the expression "a true belief" is at all common outside philosophy and theology: and it seems clear that a man is said to hold a true belief when and in the sense that he believes (in) *something which is true*, or believes that *something which is true* is true. Moreover if, as some also say, a belief is "of the nature of a picture," then it is of the nature of what cannot be true, though it may be, for example, faithful.²

(b) True descriptions and true accounts are simply varieties of true statements or of collections of true statements, as are true answers and the like. The same applies to propositions too, in so far as they are genuinely said to be true (and not, as more commonly, sound, tenable and so on).³ A proposition in law or in geometry is something portentous, usually a generalisation, that we are invited to accept and that has to be recommended by argument: it cannot be a direct report on current observation – if you look and inform me that the cat is on the mat, that is not a proposition though it is a statement. In philosophy, indeed, "proposition" is sometimes used in a special way for "the meaning or sense of a sentence or family of sentences" : but whether we think a lot or little of this usage, a proposition in this sense cannot, at any rate, be what we say is true or false. For we never say "The meaning (or sense) of this sentence (or of these words) is true": what we do say is what the judge or jury says, namely that "*The words* taken in this sense, or if we assign to them such and such a meaning, or so interpreted or understood, *are true*."

(c) Words and sentences are indeed said to be true, the former often, the latter rarely. But only in certain senses. Words as discussed by philologists, or by lexicographers, grammarians, linguists, phoneticians, printers, critics (stylistic or textual) and so on, are not true or false: they

² A likeness is true to life, but not true of it. A word picture can be true, just because it is not a picture.

³ Predicates applicable also to "arguments," which we likewise do not say are true, but, for example, valid.

are wrongly formed, or ambiguous or defective or untranslatable or unpronounceable or misspelled or archaistic or corrupt or what not.⁴ Sentences in similar contexts are elliptic or involved or alliterative or ungrammatical. We may, however, genuinely say "His closing words were very true" or "The third sentence on page 5 of his speech is quite false": but here "words" and "sentence" refer, as is shown by the demonstratives (possessive pronouns, temporal verbs, definite descriptions, etc.), which in this usage consistently accompany them, to the words or sentence *as used by a certain person on a certain occasion*. That is, they refer (as does "Many a true word spoken in jest") to *statements*.

A statement is made and its making is a historic event, the utterance by a certain speaker or writer of certain words (a sentence) to an audience with reference to a historic situation, event or what not.⁵

A sentence is made *up* of words, a statement is made *in* words. A sentence is not English or not good English, a statement is not in English or not in good English. Statements are made, words or sentences are used. We talk of *my* statement, but of *the English* sentence (if a sentence is mine, I coined it, but I don't coin statements). The *same* sentence is used in making *different* statements (I say "It is mine," you say "It is mine"): it may also be used on two occasions or by two persons in making the same statement, but for this the utterance must be made with reference to the same situation or event.⁶ We speak of "the statement that S," but of "the sentence 'S'", not of "the sentence that S."⁷

⁴ Peirce made a beginning by pointing out that there are two (or three) different senses of the word "word," and adumbrated a technique ("counting" words) for deciding what is a "different sense." But his two senses are not well defined, and there are many more, – the "vocal" sense, the philologist's sense in which "grammar" is the same word as "glamour," the textual critic's sense in which the "the" in 1.254 has been written twice, and so on. With all his 65 divisions of signs, Peirce does not, I believe, distinguish between a sentence and a statement.

⁵ "Historic" does not, of course, mean that we cannot speak of future or possible statements. A "certain" speaker need not be any definite speaker. "Utterance" need not be public utterance – the audience may be the speaker himself.

⁶ "The same" does not always mean the same. In fact it has no meaning in the way that an "ordinary" word like "red" or "horse" has a meaning: it is a (the typical) device for establishing and distinguishing the meanings of ordinary words. Like "real," it is part of our apparatus *in* words for fixing and adjusting the semantics *of* words.

⁷ Inverted commas show that the words, though uttered (in writing), are not to be taken as a statement by the utterer. This covers two possible cases, (i) where what is to be discussed is the sentence (ii) where what is to be discussed is a statement made elsewhere in the words "quoted." Only in case (i) is it correct to say simply that the token is doing duty for the type (and even here it is quite incorrect to say that "The cat

When I say that a statement is what is true, I have no wish to become wedded to one word. "Assertion," for example, will in most contexts do just as well, though perhaps it is slightly wider. Both words share the weakness of being rather solemn (much more so than the more general "what you said" or "your words"), – though perhaps we are generally being a little solemn when we discuss the truth of anything. Both have the merit of clearly referring to the historic use of a sentence by an utterer, and of being therefore precisely not equivalent to "sentence." For it is a fashionable mistake to take as primary "(The sentence) 'S' is true (in the English language)." Here the addition of the words "in the English language" serves to emphasize that "sentence" is not being used as equivalent to "statement," so that it precisely is not what can be true or false (and moreover, "true in the English language" is a solecism, mismodelled presumably, and with deplorable effect, on expressions like "true in geometry").

3. When is a statement true? The temptation is to answer (at least if we confine ourselves to "straightforward" statements): "When it corresponds to the facts." And as a piece of standard English this can hardly be wrong. Indeed, I must confess I do not really think it is wrong at all: the theory of truth is a series of truisms. Still, it can at least be misleading.

If there is to be communication of the sort that we achieve by language at all, there must be a stock of symbols of some kind which a communicator ("the speaker") can produce "at will" and which a communicatee ("the audience") can observe: these may be called the "words," though, of course, they need not be anything very like what we should normally call words – they might be signal flags, etc. There must also be something other than the words, which the words are to be used to communicate about: this may be called the "world." There is no reason why the world should not include the words, in every sense except the sense of the actual statement itself which on any particular occasion is being made about the world. Further, the world must exhibit (we must observe) similarities and dissimilarities (there could not be the one without the other): if everything were either absolutely indistinguishable from anything else or completely unlike anything else,

is on the mat" is the *name* of an English sentence, – though possibly *The Cat is on the Mat* might be the title of a novel, or a bull might be known as *Catta est in matta*). Only in case (ii) is there something true or false, *viz.* (not the quotation but) the statement made in the words quoted.

there would be nothing to say. And finally (for present purposes-of course there are other conditions to be satisfied too) there must be two sets of conventions: –

Descriptive conventions correlating the words (= sentences) with the types of situation, thing, event, etc., to be found in the world.

Demonstrative conventions correlating the words (= statements) with the historic situations, etc., to be found in the world.⁸

A statement is said to be true when the historic state of affairs to which it is correlated by the demonstrative conventions (the one to which it "refers") is of a type⁹ with which the sentence used in making it is correlated by the descriptive conventions.¹⁰

3a. Troubles arise from the use of the word "facts" for the historic situations, events, etc., and in general, for the world. For "fact" is regularly used in conjunction with "that" in the sentences "The fact is that S" or "It is a fact that S" and in the expression "the fact that S," all of which imply that it would be true to say that S.¹¹

⁸ Both sets of conventions may be included together under "semantics." But they differ greatly.

⁹ "Is of a type with which" means "is sufficiently like those standard states of affairs with which." Thus, for a statement to be true one state of affairs must be like certain others, which is a natural relation, but also sufficiently like to merit the same "description," which is no longer a purely natural relation. To say "This is red" is not the same as to say "This is like those", nor even as to say "This is like those which were called red". That things are similar, or even "exactly" similar, I may literally see, but that they are the same I cannot literally see – in calling them the same colour a convention is involved additional to the conventional choice of the name to be given to the colour which they are said to be.

¹⁰ The trouble is that sentences contain words or verbal devices to serve both descriptive and demonstrative purposes (not to mention other purposes), often both at once. In philosophy we mistake the descriptive for the demonstrative (theory of universals) or the demonstrative for the descriptive (theory of monads). A sentence as normally distinguished from a mere word or phrase is characterised by its containing a minimum of verbal demonstrative devices (Aristotle's "reference to time"); but many demonstrative conventions are non-verbal (pointing, etc.), and using these we can make a statement in a single word which is not a "sentence". Thus, "languages" like that of (traffic, etc.) *signs* use quite distinct media for their descriptive and demonstrative elements (the sign on the post, the site of the post). And however many verbal demonstrative devices we use as auxiliaries, there must *always* be a non-verbal *origin* for these coordinates, which is the point of utterance of the statement.

¹¹ I use the following *abbreviations* : –

S *for* the cat is on the mat.
ST *for* it is true that the cat is on the mat.
tst *for* the statement that.

This may lead us to suppose that

- (i) "fact" is only an alternative expression for "true statement." We note that when a detective says "Let's look at the facts" he doesn't crawl round the carpet, but proceeds to utter a string of statements we even talk of "stating the facts";
- (ii) for every true statement there exists "one" and its own precisely corresponding fact – for every cap the head it fits.

It is (i) which leads to some of the mistakes in "coherence" or formalist theories; (ii) to some of those in "correspondence" theories. Either we suppose that there is nothing there but the true statement itself, nothing to which it corresponds, or else we populate the world with linguistic *Doppelgänger* (and grossly overpopulate it – every nugget of "positive" fact overlaid by a massive concentration of "negative" facts, every tiny detailed fact larded with generous general facts, and so on).

When a statement is true, there is, *of course*, a state of affairs which makes it true and which is *toto mundo* distinct from the true statement about it: but equally of course, we can only describe that state of affairs in *words* (either the same or, with luck, others). I can only describe the situation in which it is true to say that I am feeling sick by saying that it is one in which I am feeling sick (or experiencing sensations of nausea)¹²: yet between stating, however, truly that I am feeling sick and feeling sick there is a great gulf fixed.¹³

"Fact that" is a phrase designed for use in situations where the distinction between a true statement and the state of affairs about which it is a truth is neglected; as it often is with advantage in ordinary life,

I take *tstS* as my example throughout and not, say, *tst* Julius Caesar was bald or *tst* all mules are sterile, because these latter are apt in their different ways to make us overlook the distinction between sentence and statement: we have, apparently, in the one case a sentence capable of being used to refer to only one historic situation, in the other a statement without reference to at least (or to any particular) one.

If space permitted other types of statement (existential, general, hypothetical, etc.) should be dealt with: these raise problems rather of meaning than of truth, though I feel uneasiness about hypotheticals.

¹² If this is what was meant by "'It is raining' is true if and only if it is raining," so far so good.

¹³ It takes two to make a truth. Hence (obviously) there can be no criterion of truth in the sense of some feature detectable in the statement itself which will reveal whether it is true or false. Hence, too, a statement cannot without absurdity refer to itself.

though seldom in philosophy – above all in discussing truth, where it is precisely our business to prise the words off the world and keep them off it. To ask "Is the fact that S the true statement that S or that which it is true of?" may beget absurd answers. To take an analogy: although we may sensibly ask "Do we *ride* the word 'elephant' or the animal?" and equally sensibly "Do we *write* the word or the animal?" it is nonsense to ask "Do we *define* the word or the animal?" For defining an elephant (supposing we ever do this) is a compendious description of an operation involving both word and animal (do we focus the image or the battleship?); and so speaking about "the fact that" is a compendious way of speaking about a situation involving both words and world.¹⁴

3b. "Corresponds" also gives trouble, because it is commonly given too restricted or too colourful a meaning, or one which in this context it cannot bear. The only essential point is this: that the correlation between the words (= sentences) and the type of situation, event, etc., which is to be such that when a statement in those words is made with reference to a historic situation of that type the statement is then true, is *absolutely and purely* conventional. We are absolutely free to appoint *any* symbol to describe *any* type of situation, so far as merely being true goes. In a small one-spade language *tst nuts* might be true in exactly the same circumstances as the statement in English that the National Liberals are the people's choice.¹⁵ There is no need whatsoever for the words used in making a true statement to "mirror" in any way, however indirect, any feature whatsoever of the situation or event; a statement no more needs, in order to be true, to reproduce the "multiplicity," say, or the "structure" or "form" of the reality, than a word needs to be echoic or writing pictographic. To suppose that it does, is to fall once again into the error of reading back into the world the features of language.

The more rudimentary a language, the more, very often, it will tend to have a "single" word for a highly "complex" type of situation: this has such disadvantages as that the language becomes elaborate to learn and is incapable of dealing with situations which are non-standard, unforeseen, for which there may just be no word. When we go abroad

¹⁴ "It is true that S" and "It is a fact that S" are applicable in the same circumstances; the cap fits when there is a head it fits. Other words can fill the same role as "fact"; we say, e.g., "The situation is that S."

¹⁵ We could use "nuts" even now as a code-word: but a code, as a transformation of a language, is distinguished from a language, and a code-word despatched is not (called) "true".

equipped only with a phrase-book, we may spend long hours learning by heart –

A¹-moest-fa¹nd-^etschâ^rwoum^en,
Ma¹-hwîl-iz-wau^rpt (bènt),

and so on and so on, yet faced with the situation where we have the pen of our aunt, find ourselves quite unable to say so. The characteristics of a more developed language (articulation, morphology, syntax, abstractions, etc.), do not make statements in it any more capable of being true or capable of being any more true, they make it more adaptable, more learnable, more comprehensive, more precise and so on; and *these* aims may no doubt be furthered by making the language (allowance made for the nature of the medium) "mirror" in conventional ways features descried in the world.

Yet even when a language does "mirror" such features very closely (and does it ever?) the truth of statements remains still a matter, as it was with the most rudimentary languages, of the words used being the ones *conventionally appointed* for situations of the type to which that referred to belongs. A picture, a copy, a replica, a photograph – these are *never* true in so far as they are reproductions, produced by natural or mechanical means: a reproduction can be accurate or lifelike (true *to* the original), as a gramophone recording or a transcription may be, but not true (*of*) as a record of proceedings can be. In the same way a (natural) sign *of* something can be infallible or unreliable but only an (artificial) sign *for* something can be right or wrong.¹⁶

There are many intermediate cases between a true account and a faithful picture, as here somewhat forcibly contrasted, and it is from the study of these (a lengthy matter) that we can get the clearest insight into the contrast. For example, maps: these may be called pictures, yet they are highly conventionalised pictures. If a map can be clear or accurate or misleading, like a statement, why can it not be true or exaggerated? How do the "symbols" used in map-making differ from those used in statement-making? On the other hand, if an air-mosaic is not a map, why is it not? And when does a map become a diagram? These are the really illuminating questions.

¹⁶ Berkeley confuses these two. There will not be books in the running brooks until the dawn of hydro-semantics.

4. Some have said that –

To say that an assertion is true is not to make any further assertion at all.

In all sentences of the form "p is true" the phrase "is true" is logically superfluous.

To say that a proposition is true is just to assert it, and to say that it is false is just to assert its contradictory.

But wrongly. TstS (except in paradoxical cases of forced and dubious manufacture) refers to the world or any part, of it exclusive of tstS, *i.e.*, of itself.¹⁷ TstST refers to the world or any part of it *inclusive* of tstS, though once again exclusive of itself, *i.e.*, of tstST. That is, tstST refers to something to which tstS cannot refer. TstST does not, certainly, include any statement referring to the world exclusive of tstS which is not included already in tstS – more, it seems doubtful whether it does include that statement about the world exclusive of tstS which is made when we state that S. (If I state that tstS is true, should we really agree that I have stated that S? Only "by implication."¹⁸) But all this does not go any way to show that tstST is not a statement different from tstS. If Mr. Q writes on a noticeboard "Mr. W is a burglar," then a trial is held to decide whether Mr. Q's published statement that Mr. W is a burglar is a libel: finding "Mr. Q's statement was true (in substance and in fact)." Thereupon a second trial is held, to decide whether Mr. W is a burglar, in which Mr. Q's statement is no longer under consideration: verdict "Mr. W is a burglar." It is an arduous business to hold a second trial: why is it done if the verdict is the same as the previous finding?¹⁹

¹⁷ A statement may refer to "itself" in the sense, *e.g.*, of the sentence used or the utterance uttered in making it ("statement" is not exempt from all ambiguity). But paradox does result if a statement purports to refer to itself in a more full-blooded sense, purports, that is, to state that it itself is true, or to state what it itself refers to ("This statement is about Cato").

¹⁸ And "by implication" tstST asserts something about the making of a statement which tstS certainly does not assert.

¹⁹ This is not quite fair: there are many legal and personal reasons for holding two trials, – which, however, do not affect the point that the issue being tried is not the same.

What is felt is that the evidence considered in arriving at the one verdict is the same as that considered in arriving at the other. This is not strictly correct. It is more nearly correct that whenever *tstS* is true then *tstST* is also true and conversely, and that whenever *tstS* is false *tstST* is also false and conversely.²⁰ And it is argued that the words "is true" are logically superfluous because it is believed that generally if any two statements are always true together and always false together then they must mean the same. Now whether this is in general a sound view may be doubted: but even if it is, why should it not break down in the case of so obviously "peculiar" a phrase as "is true"? Mistakes in philosophy notoriously arise through thinking that what holds of "ordinary" words like "red" or "growls" must also hold of extraordinary words like "real" or "exists." But that "true" is just such another extraordinary word is obvious.²¹

There is something peculiar about the "fact" which is described by *tstST*, something which may make us hesitate to call it a "fact" at all; namely, that the relation between *tstS* and the world which *tstST* asserts to obtain is a *purely conventional* relation (one which "thinking makes so"). For we are aware that this relation is one which we could alter at will, whereas we like to restrict the word "fact" to *hard* facts, facts which are natural and unalterable, or anyhow not alterable at will. Thus, to take an analogous case, we may not like calling it a fact that the word elephant means what it does, though we can be induced to call it a (soft) fact – and though, of course, we have no hesitation in calling it a fact that contemporary English speakers use the word as they do.

An important point about this view is that it confuses falsity with negation: for according to it, it is the same thing to say "He is not at home" as to say "It is false that he is at home." (But what if no one has said that he *is* at home? What if he is lying upstairs dead?) Too many philosophers maintain, when anxious to explain away negation, that a negation is just a second order affirmation (to the effect that a certain first order affirmation is false), yet, when anxious to explain away falsity, maintain that to assert that a statement is false is just to assert its negation (contradictory). It is impossible to deal with so fundamental a

²⁰ Not *quite* correct, because *tstST* is only in place at all when *tstS* is envisaged as made and has been verified.

²¹ *Unum, verum, bonum*, – the old favourites deserve their celebrity. There is something odd about each of them. Theoretical theology is a form of onomatolatriy.

matter here.²² Let me assert the following merely. Affirmation and negation are exactly on a level, in this sense, that no language can exist which does not contain conventions for both and that both refer to the world equally directly, not to statements about the world: whereas a language can quite well exist without any device to do the work of "true" and "false." Any satisfactory theory of truth must be able to cope equally with falsity²³: but "is false" can only be maintained to be logically superfluous by making this fundamental confusion.

5. There is another way of coming to see that the phrase "is true" is not logically superfluous, and to appreciate what sort of a statement it is to say that a certain statement is true. There are numerous other adjectives which are in the same class as "true" and "false," which are concerned, that is, with the relations between the words (as uttered with reference to a historic situation) and the world, and which nevertheless no one would dismiss as logically superfluous. We say, for example, that a certain statement is exaggerated or vague or bald, a description somewhat rough or misleading or not very good, an account rather general or too concise. In cases like these it is pointless to insist on deciding in simple terms whether the statement is "true or false." Is it true or false that Belfast is north of London? That the galaxy is the shape

²² The following two sets of logical axioms are, as Aristotle (though not his successors) makes them, quite distinct: –

(a) No statement can be both true and false.

No statement can be neither true nor false.

(b) Of two contradictory statements –

Both cannot be true.

Both cannot be false.

The second set demands a definition of contradictories, and is usually joined with an unconscious postulate that for every statement there is one and only one other statement such that the pair are contradictories. It is doubtful how far any language does or must contain contradictories, however defined, such as to satisfy both this postulate and the set of axioms (b).

Those of the so-called "logical paradoxes" (hardly a genuine class) which concern "true" and "false" are not to be reduced to cases of self-contradiction, any more than "S but I do not believe it" is. A statement to the effect that it is itself true is every bit as absurd as one to the effect that it is itself false. There are other types of sentence which offend against the fundamental conditions of all communication in ways distinct from the way in which "This is red and is not red" offends, – e.g., "This does (I do) not exist," or equally absurd "This exists (I exist)." There are more deadly sins than one; nor does the way to salvation lie through any hierarchy.

²³ To be false is (not, of course, to correspond to a non-fact, but) to mis-correspond with a fact. Some have not seen how, then, since the statement which is false does not describe the fact with which it mis-corresponds (but misdescribes it), we know which fact to compare it with: this was because they thought of all linguistic conventions as descriptive, – but it is the demonstrative conventions which fix which situation it is to which the statement refers. No statement can state what it itself refers to.

of a fried egg? That Beethoven was a drunkard? That Wellington won the battle of Waterloo? There are various *degrees and dimensions* of success in making statements: the statements fit the facts always more or less loosely, in different ways on different occasions for different intents and purposes. What may score full marks in a general knowledge test may in other circumstances get a gamma. And even the most adroit of languages may fail to "work" in an abnormal situation or to cope, or cope reasonably simply, with novel discoveries: is it true or false that the dog goes round the cow?²⁴ What, moreover, of the large class of cases where a statement is not so much false (or true) as out of place, *inept* ("All the signs of bread" said when the bread is before us)?

We become obsessed with "truth" when discussing statements, just as we become obsessed with "freedom" when discussing conduct. So long as we think that what has always and alone to be decided is whether a certain action was done freely or was not, we get nowhere: but so soon as we turn instead to the numerous other adverbs used in the same connexion ("accidentally," "unwillingly," "inadvertently," etc.), things become easier, and we come to see that no concluding inference of the form "Ergo, it was done freely (or not freely)" is required. Like freedom, truth is a bare minimum or an illusory ideal (the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth about, say, the battle of Waterloo or the *Primavera*).

6. Not merely is it jejune to suppose that all a statement aims to be is "true," but it may further be questioned whether every "statement" does aim to be true at all. The principle of Logic, that "Every proposition must be true or false," has too long operated as the simplest, most persuasive and most pervasive form of the descriptive fallacy. Philosophers under its influence have forcibly interpreted all "propositions" on the model of the statement that a certain thing is red, as made when the thing concerned is currently under observation.

²⁴ Here there is much sense in "coherence" (and pragmatist) theories of truth, despite their failure to appreciate the trite but central point that truth is a matter of the relation between words and world, and despite their wrong-headed *Gleichschaltung* of all varieties of statemental failure under the one head of "partly true" (thereafter wrongly equated with "part of the truth"). "Correspondence" theorists too often talk as one would who held that every map is either accurate or inaccurate; that accuracy is a single and the sole virtue of a map; that every country can have but one accurate map; that a map on a larger scale or showing different features must be a map of a different country; and so on.

Recently, it has come to be realized that many utterances which have been taken to be statements (merely because they are not, on grounds of grammatical form, to be classed as commands, questions, etc.) are not in fact descriptive, nor susceptible of being true or false. When is a statement not a statement? When it is a formula in a calculus: when it is a performatory utterance: when it is a value-judgment: when it is a definition: when it is part of a work of fiction – there are many such suggested answers. It is simply not the business of such utterances to "correspond to the facts" (and even genuine statements have other businesses besides that of so corresponding).

It is a matter for decision how far we should continue to call such masqueraders "statements" at all, and how widely we should be prepared to extend the uses of "true" and "false" in "different senses." My own feeling is that it is better, when once a masquerader has been unmasked, *not* to call it a statement and *not* to say it is true or false. In ordinary life we should not call most of them statements at all, though philosophers and grammarians may have come to do so (or rather, have lumped them all together under the term of art "proposition"). We make a difference between "You said you promised" and "You stated that you promised": the former can mean that you said "I promise," whereas the latter must mean that you said "I promised": the latter, which we say you "stated," is something which is true or false, whereas for the former, which is not true or false, we use the wider verb to "say." Similarly, there is a difference between "You say this is (call this) a good picture" and "You state that this is a good picture." Moreover, it was only so long as the real nature of arithmetical formulae, say, or of geometrical axioms remained unrecognised, and they were thought to record information about the world, that it was reasonable to call them "true" (and perhaps even "statements," – though were they ever so called?): but once their nature has been recognized, we no longer feel tempted to call them "true" or to dispute about their truth or falsity.

In the cases so far considered the model "This is red" breaks down because the "statements" assimilated to it are not of a nature to correspond to facts at all, – the words are not descriptive words, and so on. But there is also another type of case where the words *are* descriptive words and the "proposition" does in a way have to correspond to facts, but precisely not in the way that "This is red" and similar statements setting up to be true have to do.

In the human predicament, for use in which our language is designed, we may wish to speak about states of affairs which have not been observed or are not currently under observation (the future, for example). And although we *can* state anything "as a fact" (which statement will then be true or false²⁵) we need not do so: we need only say "The cat *may be* on the mat." This utterance is quite different from *tstS*, – it is not a statement at all (it is not true or false; it is compatible with "The cat *may not be* on the mat"). In the same way, the situation in which we discuss whether and state that *tstS* is *true* is different from the situation in which we discuss whether it is *probable* that *S*. *Tst* it is probable that *S* is out of place, inept, in the situation where we can make *tstST*, and, I think, conversely. It is not our business here to discuss probability: but is worth observing that the phrases "It is true that" and "It is probable that" are in the same line of business,²⁶ and in so far incompatibles.

7. In a recent article in *Analysis* Mr. Strawson has propounded a view of truth which it will be clear I do not accept. He rejects the "semantic" account of truth on the perfectly correct ground that the phrase "is true" is not used in talking about *sentences*, supporting this with an ingenious hypothesis as to how meaning may have come to be confused with truth: but this will not suffice to show what he wants, – that "is true" is not used in talking about (or that "truth is not a property of") *anything*. For it is used in talking about *statements* (which in his article he does not distinguish clearly from sentences). Further, he supports the "logical superfluity" view to this extent, that he agrees that to say that *ST* is not to make any further assertion at all, beyond the assertion that *S*: but he disagrees with it in so far as he thinks that to say that *ST* *is* to *do* something more than just to assert that *S*, – it is namely to *confirm* or to *grant* (or something of that kind) the assertion, made or taken as made already, that *S*. It will be clear that and why I do not accept the first part of this: but what of the second part? I agree that to say that *ST* "is" very often, and according to the all-important linguistic occasion, to confirm *tstS* or to grant it or what not; but this cannot show that to say that *ST* is not also and at the same time to make an assertion about *tstS*. To say that I believe you "is" on occasion to accept your statement; but it is also to make an assertion, which is not made by the

²⁵ Though it is not yet in place to call it either. For the same reason, one cannot lie or tell the truth about the future.

²⁶ Compare the odd behaviours of "was" and "will be" when attached to "true" and to "probable."

strictly performatory utterance "I accept your statement." It is common for quite ordinary statements to have a performatory "aspect": to say that you are a cuckold may be to insult you, but it is also and at the same time to make a statement which is true or false. Mr. Strawson, moreover, seems to confine himself to the case where I say "Your statement is true" or something similar, – but what of the case where you state that S and I *say* nothing but "*look and see*" that your statement is true? I do not see how this critical case, to which nothing analogous occurs with strictly performatory utterances, could be made to respond to Mr. Strawson's treatment.

One final point: if it is admitted (*if*) that the rather boring yet satisfactory relation between words and world which has here been discussed does genuinely occur, why should the phrase "is true" not be our way of describing it? And if it is not, what else is?



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