TRUTH
VIRTUAL ISSUE NO. 1

Truth
P.F. STRAWSON
TRUTH

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J.L. Austin / Charles Travis
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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).
Truth

P. F. Strawson

Supplementary Volume XXIV

1950
The work of Sir Peter Frederick Strawson, FBA (23 November 1919 – 13 February 2006) spanned philosophy of language, metaphysics, epistemology and the history of philosophy, particularly Kant. He was the Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy at the University of Oxford (Magdalen College) from 1968 to 1987. Before that he was appointed as a college lecturer at University College, Oxford in 1947 and became a tutorial fellow the following year until 1968. On his retirement in 1987, he returned to University College and continued working there until shortly before his death. P.F. Strawson was president of the Aristotelian Society from 1969-1970.

“Truth” was originally published in the Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volume XXIV (1950).
MR. AUSTIN offers us a purified version of the correspondence theory of truth. On the one hand he disclaims the semanticists' error of supposing that "true" is a predicate of sentences; on the other, the error of supposing that the relation of correspondence is other than purely conventional, the error which models the word on the world or the world on the word. His own theory is, roughly, that to say that a statement is true is to say that a certain speech-episode is related in a certain conventional way to something in the world exclusive of itself. But neither Mr. Austin's account of the two terms of the truth-conferring relation, nor his account of the relation itself, seems to me satisfactory. The correspondence theory requires, not purification, but elimination.

1. Statements – It is, of course, indisputable that we use various substantial expressions as grammatical subjects of "true." These are, commonly, noun-phrases like "What he said" or "His statement"; or pronouns or noun-phrases, with a "that"-clause in apposition, e.g., "It ... that p" and "The statement that p." Austin proposes that we should use "statement" to do general duty for such expressions as these. I have no objection. This will enable us to say, in a philosophically non-committal way, that, in using "true," we are talking about statements. By "saying this in a non-committal way," I mean saying it in a way which does not commit us to any view about the nature of statements so talked about; which does not commit us, for example, to the view that statements so talked about are historic events.

The words "assertion" and "statement" have a parallel and convenient duplicity of sense. "My statement" may be either what I say or my saying it. My saying something is certainly an episode. What I say is not. It is the latter, not the former, we declare to be true. (Speaking the truth is not a manner of speaking: it is saying something true.) When we say "His statement was received with thunderous applause" or "His vehement assertion was followed by a startled silence," we are certainly referring to, characterising, a historic event, and placing it in the context of others. If I say that the same statement was first whispered by John and then bellowed by Peter, uttered first in French and repeated in English, I am plainly still making historical remarks about utterance-
occasions; but the word “statement” has detached itself from reference to any particular speech-episode. The episodes I am talking about are the whisperings, bellowings, utterings and repetitions. The statement is not something that figures in all these episodes. Nor, when I say that the statement is true, as opposed to saying that it was, in these various ways, made, am I talking indirectly about these episodes or any episodes at all. (Saying of a statement that it is true is not related to saying of a speech-episode that it was true as saying of a statement that it was whispered is related to saying of a speech-episode that it was a whisper.) It is futile to ask what thing or event I am talking about (over and above the subject-matter of the statement) in declaring a statement to be true; for there is no such thing or event. The word "statement" and the phrase "What he said," like the conjunction "that" followed by a noun clause, are convenient, grammatically substantival, devices, which we employ, on certain occasions, for certain purposes, notably (but not only) the occasions on which we use the word "true." What these occasions are I shall try later to elucidate. To suppose that, whenever we use a singular substantive, we are, or ought to be, using it to refer to something, is an ancient, but no longer a respectable, error.

More plausible than the thesis that in declaring a statement to be true I am talking about a speech-episode is the thesis that in order for me to declare a statement true, there must have occurred, within my knowledge, at least one episode which was a making of that statement. This is largely, but (as Austin sees) not entirely, correct. The occasion of my declaring a statement to be true may be not that someone has made the statement, but that I am envisaging the possibility of someone's making it. For instance, in discussing the merits of the Welfare State, I might say: "It is true that the general health of the community has improved (that $p$), but this is due only to the advance in medical science." It is not necessary that anyone should have said that $p$, in order for this to be a perfectly proper observation. In making it, I am not talking about an actual or possible speech-episode. I am myself asserting that $p$, in a certain way, with a certain purpose. I am anticipatorily conceding, in order to neutralize, a possible objection. I forestall someone's making the statement that $p$ by making it myself, with additions. It is of prime importance to distinguish the fact that the use of "true" always glances backwards or forwards to the actual or envisaged making of a statement by someone, from the theory that it is used to characterise such (actual or possible) episodes.
It is not easy to explain the non-episodic and non-committal sense of "statement" in which "statement" = "what is said to be true or false." But, at the risk of being tedious, I shall pursue the subject. For if Austin is right in the suggestion that it is basically of speech-episodes that we predicate "true," it should be possible to "reduce" assertions in which we say of a statement in the non-episodic sense that it is true to assertions in which we are predicating truth of episodes. Austin points out that the same sentence may be used to make different statements. He would no doubt agree that different sentences may be used to make the same statement. I am not thinking only of different languages or synonymous expressions in the same language; but also of such occasions as that on which you say of Jones "He is ill," I say to Jones "You are ill" and Jones says "I am ill." Using, not only different sentences, but sentences with different meanings, we all make "the same statement"; and this is the sense of "statement" we need to discuss, since it is, prima facie, of statements in this sense that we say that they are true or false (e.g., "What they all said, namely, that Jones was ill, was quite true."). We could say: people make the same statement when the words they use in the situations in which they use them are such that they must (logically) either all be making a true statement or all be making a false statement. But this is to use "true" in the elucidation of "same statement." Or we could say, of the present case: Jones, you and I all make the same statement because, using the words we used in the situation in which we used them, we were all applying the same description to the same person at a certain moment in his history; anyone applying that description to that person (etc.), would be making that statement. Mr. Austin might then wish to analyse (A) "The statement that Jones was ill is true" in some such way as the following: "If anyone has uttered, or were to utter, words such that in the situation in which they are uttered, he is applying to a person the same description as I apply to that person when I now utter the words 'Jones was ill,' then the resulting speech-episode was, or would be, true." It seems plain, however, that nothing but the desire to find a metaphysically irreproachable first term for the correspondence relation could induce anyone to accept this analysis of (A) as an elaborate general hypothetical. It would be a plausible suggestion only if the grammatical subjects of "true" were commonly expressions referring to particular, uniquely dateable, speech-episodes. But the simple and obvious fact is that the expressions occurring as such grammatical subjects ("What they
said," "It ... that p" and so on) never do, in these contexts, stand for such episodes.¹ What they said has no date, though their several sayings of it are dateable. The statement that p is not an event, though it had to be made for the first time and made within my knowledge if I am to talk of its truth or falsity. If I endorse Plato’s view, wrongly attributing it to Lord Russell ("Russell's view that p is quite true"), and am corrected, I have not discovered that I was talking of an event separated by centuries from the one I imagined I was talking of. (Corrected, I may say: "Well it's true, whoever said it.") My implied historical judgment is false; that is all.

2. Facts – What of the second term of the correspondence relation? For this Mr. Austin uses the following words or phrases: "thing," "event," "situation," "state of affairs," "feature" and "fact." All these are words which should be handled with care. I think that through failing to discriminate sufficiently between them, Mr. Austin (1) encourages the assimilation of facts to things, or (what is approximately the same thing) of stating to referring; (2) misrepresents the use of "true"; and (3) obscures another and more fundamental problem.

In section 3 of his paper, Mr. Austin says, or suggests, that all stating involves both referring ("demonstration") and characterizing ("description"). It is questionable whether all statements do involve both,² though it is certain that some do. The following sentences, for example, could all be used to make such statements; i.e., statements in the making of which both the referring and describing functions are performed, the performance of the two functions being approximately (though not exclusively) assignable to different parts of the sentences as uttered:

The cat has the mange.
That parrot talks a lot.
Her escort was a man of medium build, clean-shaven, well-dressed and with a North Country accent.

¹ And the cases where such phrases might most plausibly be exhibited as having an episode-referring rôle are precisely those which yield most readily to another treatment; viz., those in which one speaker corroborates, confirms or grants what another has just said (see Section 4 below).

² See Section 5 below. The thesis that all statements involve both demonstration and description is, roughly, the thesis that all statements are, or involve, subject-predicate statements (not excluding relational statements).
In using such sentences to make statements, we refer to a thing or person (object) in order to go on to characterize it: (we demonstrate in order to describe). A reference can be correct or incorrect. A description can fit, or fail to fit, the thing or person to which it is applied. When we refer correctly, there certainly is a conventionally established relation between the words, so used, and the thing to which we refer. When we describe correctly, there certainly is a conventionally established relation between the words we use in describing and the type of thing or person we describe. These relations, as Mr. Austin emphasizes, are different. An expression used referringly has a different logical rôle from an expression used describingly. They are differently related to the object. And stating is different from referring, and different from describing; for it is (in such cases) both these at once. Statement (some statement) is reference-cum-description. To avoid cumbersome phrasing, I shall speak henceforward of parts of statements (the referring part and the describing part); though parts of statements are no more to be equated with parts of sentences (or parts of speech-episodes) than statements are to be equated with sentences (or speech-episodes).

That (person, thing, etc.) to which the referring part of the statement refers, and which the describing part of the statement fits or fails to fit, is that which the statement is about. It is evident that there is nothing else in the world for the statement itself to be related to either in some further way of its own or in either of the different ways in which these different parts of the statement are related to what the statement is about. And it is evident that the demand that there should be such a relatum is logically absurd: a logically fundamental type-mistake. But the demand for something in the world which makes the statement true (Mr. Austin's phrase), or to which the statement corresponds when it is true, is just this demand. And the answering a theory that to say that a statement is true is to say that a speech-episode is conventionally related in a certain way to such a relatum reproduces the type-error embodied in this demand. For while we certainly say that a statement corresponds to (fits, is borne out by, agrees with) the facts, as a variant on saying that it is true, we never say that a statement corresponds to the thing, person, etc., it is about. What "makes the statement" that the cat has mange "true," is not the cat, but the condition of the cat, i.e., the fact that the

3 Cf. the phrase "He is described as..." What fills the gap is not a sentence (expression which could normally be used to make a statement), but a phrase which could occur as a part of an expression so used.
cat has mange. The only plausible candidate for the position of what (in the world) makes the statement true is the fact it states; but the fact it states is not something in the world. It is not an object; not even (as some have supposed) a complex object consisting of one or more particular elements (constituents, parts) and a universal element (constituent, part). I can (perhaps) hand you, or draw a circle round, or time with a stop-watch the things or incidents that are referred to when a statement is made. Statements are about such objects; but they state facts. Mr. Austin seems to ignore the complete difference of type between, e.g., "fact" and "thing"; to talk as if "fact" were just a very general word (with, unfortunately, some misleading features) for "event," "thing," etc., instead of being (as it is) both wholly different from these, and yet the only possible candidate for the desired non-linguistic correlate of "statement." Roughly: the thing, person, etc., referred to is the material correlate of the referring part of the statement; the quality or property the referent is said to "possess" is the pseudo-material correlate of its describing part; and the fact to which the statement "corresponds" is the pseudo-material correlate of the statement as a whole.

These points are, of course, reflected in the behaviour of the word "fact" in ordinary language; behaviour which Mr. Austin notes, but by which he is insufficiently warned. "Fact," like "true," "states" and "statement" is wedded to "that"-clauses; and there is nothing unholy about this union. Facts are known, stated, learnt, forgotten, overlooked, commented on, communicated or noticed. (Each of these verbs may be followed by a "that"-clause or a "the fact that"-clause.) Facts are what statements (when true) state; they are not what statements are about. They are not, like things or happenings on the face of the globe, witnessed or heard or seen, broken or overturned, interrupted or prolonged, kicked, destroyed, mended or noisy. Mr. Austin notes the expression "fact that," warns us that it may tempt us to identify facts with true statements and explains its existence by saying that for certain purposes in ordinary life we neglect, or take as irrelevant, the distinction

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4 This is not, of course, to deny that there is that in the world which a statement of this kind is about (true or false of), which is referred to and described and which the description fits (if the statement is true) or fails to fit (if it is false). This truism is an inadequate introduction to the task of elucidating, not our use of "true," but a certain general way of using language, a certain type of discourse, viz., the fact-stating type of discourse. What confuses the issue about the use of the word "true" is precisely its entanglement with this much more fundamental and difficult problem. (See (ii) of this section.)
between saying something true and the thing or episode of which we are
talking. It would indeed be wrong – but not for Mr. Austin’s reasons –
to identify "fact" and "true statement"; for these expressions have
different rôles in our language, as can be seen by the experiment of
trying to interchange them in context. Nevertheless their roles – or those
of related expressions – overlap. There is no nuance, except of style,
between "That’s true" and "That’s a fact"; nor between "Is it true
that...?" and "Is it a fact that...?" 5 But Mr. Austin’s reasons for
objecting to the identification seem mistaken, as does his explanation of
the usage which (he says) tempts us to make it. Because he thinks of a
statement as something in the world (a speech-episode) and a fact as
something else in the world (what the statement either "corresponds to"
or "is about"), he conceives the distinction as of overriding importance
in philosophy, though (surprisingly) sometimes negligible for ordinary
purposes. But I can conceive of no occasion on which I could possibly be
held to be "neglecting or taking as irrelevant" the distinction between,
say, my wife’s bearing me twins (at midnight) and my saying (ten
minutes later) that my wife had borne me twins. On Mr. Austin’s thesis,
however, my announcing "The fact is that my wife has borne me twins"
would be just such an occasion.

Elsewhere in his paper, Mr. Austin expresses the fact that there is no
theoretical limit to what could truly be said about things in the world,
while there are very definite practical limits to what human beings
actually can and do say about them, by the remark that statements
"always fit the facts more or less loosely, in different ways for different
purposes." But what could fit more perfectly the fact that it is raining
than the statement that it is raining? Of course, statements and facts fit.
They were made for each other. If you prise the statements off the world
you prise the facts off it too; but the world would be none the poorer.
(You don’t also prise off the world what the statements are about – for
this you would need a different kind of lever.)

A symptom of Mr. Austin’s uneasiness about facts is his preference
for the expressions "situation" and "state of affairs"; expressions of
which the character and function are a little less transparent than those

5 I think in general the difference between them is that while the use of "true," as
already acknowledged, glances backwards or forwards at an actual or envisaged
making of a statement, the use of "fact" does not generally do this though it may do it
sometimes. It certainly does not do it in, e.g., the phrase "The fact is that..." which
serves rather to prepare us for the unexpected and unwelcome.
of "fact." They are more plausible candidates for inclusion in the world. For while it is true that situations and states of affairs are not seen or heard (any more than facts are), but are rather summed up or taken in at a glance (phrases which stress the connection with statement and "that"-clause respectively), it is also true that there is a sense of "about" in which we do talk about, do describe, situations and states of affairs. We say, for example, "The international situation is serious" or "This state of affairs lasted from the death of the King till the dissolution of Parliament." In the same sense of "about," we talk about facts; as when we say "I am alarmed by the fact that kitchen expenditure has risen by 50 per cent. in the last year." But whereas "fact" in such usages is linked with a "that"-clause (or connected no less obviously with "statement," as when we "take down the facts" or hand someone the facts on a sheet of paper), "situation" and "state of affairs" stand by themselves, states of affairs are said to have a beginning and an end, and so on. Nevertheless, situations and states of affairs so talked of are (like facts so talked of), abstractions that a logician, if not a grammarian, should be able to see through. Being alarmed by a fact is not like being frightened by a shadow. It is being alarmed because... One of the most economical and pervasive devices of language is the use of substantival expressions to abbreviate, summarize and connect. Having made a series of descriptive statements, I can comprehensively connect with these the remainder of my discourse by the use of such expressions as "this situation" or "this state of affairs"; just as, having produced what I regard as a set of reasons for a certain conclusion I allow myself to draw breath by saying "Since these things are so, then...," instead of prefacing the entire story by the conjunction. A situation or state of affairs is, roughly, a set of facts not a set of things.

A point which it is important to notice in view of Mr. Austin's use of these expressions (in sections 3a and 3b of his paper) is that when we do "talk about" situations (as opposed to things and persons) the situation we talk about is not, as he seems to think it is, correctly identified with the fact we state (with "what makes the statement true"). If a situation is the "subject" of our statement, then what "makes the statement true" is not the situation, but the fact that the situation has the character it is asserted to have. I think much of the persuasiveness of the phrase "talking about situations" derives from that use of the word on which I have just commented. But if a situation is treated as the "subject" of a statement, then it will not serve as the non-linguistic term, for which Mr. Austin is seeking, of the "relation of correspondence;" and if it is treated
as the non-linguistic term of this relation, it will not serve as the subject of the statement.

Someone might now say "No doubt 'situation,' 'state of affairs,' 'facts' are related in this way to 'that'-clauses and assertive sentences; can serve, in certain ways and for certain purposes, as indefinite stand-ins for specific expressions of these various types. So also is 'thing' related to some nouns; 'event' to some verbs, nouns and sentences; 'quality' to some adjectives; 'relation' to some nouns, verbs and adjectives. Why manifest this prejudice in favour of things and events as alone being parts of the world or its history? Why not situations and facts as well?" The answer to this (implicit in what has gone before) is twofold.

(i) The first part of the answer\(^6\) is that the whole charm of talking of situations, states of affairs or facts as included in, or parts of, the world, consists in thinking of them as things, and groups of things; that the temptation to talk of situations, etc., in the idiom appropriate to talking of things and events is, once this first step is taken, overwhelming. Mr. Austin does not withstand it. He significantly slips in the word "feature" (noses and hills are *features*, of faces and landscapes) as a substitute for "facts." He says that the reason why photographs and maps are not "true" in the way that statements are true is that the relation of a map or a photograph to what it is a map or a photograph of is not wholly (in the first case) and not at all (in the second) a conventional relation. But this is not the only, or the fundamental, reason (The relation between the Prime Minister of England and the phrase "the Prime Minister of England" *is* conventional; but it doesn't make sense to say that someone uttering the phrase out of context is saying something true or false.) The (for present purposes) fundamental reason is that "being a map of" or "being a photograph of" *are* relations, of which the non-photographic, non-cartographical, relata are, say, personal or geographical *entities*. The trouble with correspondence theories of truth is not primarily the tendency to substitute non-conventional relations for what is really a wholly conventional relation. It is the misrepresentation of "correspondence between statement and fact" *as a relation, of any kind, between events or things or groups of things* that is the trouble.

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\(^6\) Which could be more shortly expressed by saying that if we read "world" (a sadly corrupted word) as "heavens and earth," talk of facts, situations and states of affairs, as "included in" or "parts of" the world is, obviously, metaphorical. The world is the totality of things, not of facts.
Correspondence theorists think of a statement as "describing that which makes it true" (fact, situation, state of affairs) in the way a descriptive predicate may be used to describe, or a referring expression to refer to, a thing.\footnote{Suppose the pieces set on a chessboard, a game in progress. And suppose someone gives, in words, an exhaustive statement of the position of the pieces. Mr. Austin's objection (or one of his objections) to earlier correspondence theories is that they would represent the relation between the description and the board with the pieces on it as like, say, the relation between a newspaper diagram of a chess-problem and a board with the pieces correspondingly arranged. He says, rather, that the relation is a purely conventional one. My objection goes farther. It is that there is no thing or event called "a statement" (though there is the making of the statement) and there is no thing or event called "a fact" or "situation" (though there is the chessboard with the pieces on it) which stand to one another in any, even a purely conventional, relation as the newspaper diagram stands to the board-and-pieces. The facts (situation, state of affairs) cannot, like the chessboard-and-pieces, have coffee spilt on them or be upset by a careless hand. It is because Mr. Austin needs such events and things for his theory that he takes the making of the statement as the statement, and that which the statement is about as the fact which it states.

Events can be dated and things can be located. But the facts which statements (when true) state can be neither dated or located. (Nor can the statements, though the making of them can be.) Are they included in the world?}

(ii) The second objection to Mr. Austin's treatment of facts, situations, states of affairs as "parts of the world" which we declare to stand in a certain relation to a statement when we declare that statement true, goes deeper than the preceding one but is, in a sense, its point. Mr. Austin rightly says or implies (section 3) that for some of the purposes for which we use language, there must be conventions correlating the words of our language with what is to be found in the world. Not all the linguistic purposes for which this necessity holds, however, are identical. Orders, as well as information, are conventionally communicated. Suppose "orange" always meant what we mean by "Bring me an orange" and "that orange" always meant what we mean by "Bring me that orange," and, in general, our language contained only sentences in some such way imperative. There would be no less need for a conventional correlation between the word and the world. Nor would there be any less to be found in the world. But those pseudo-entities which make statements true would not figure among the non-linguistic correlates. They would no more be found; (they never were found, and never did figure among the non-linguistic correlates). The point is that the word "fact" (and the "set-of-facts" words like "situation" "state of affairs") have, like the words "statement" and "true" themselves, a certain type of word-world-relating discourse (the informative) built in
to them. The occurrence in ordinary discourse of the words "fact" "statement" "true" signalizes the occurrence of this type of discourse; just as the occurrence of the words "order" "obeyed" signalizes the occurrence of another kind of conventional communication (the imperative). If our task were to elucidate the nature of the first type of discourse, it would be futile to attempt to do it in terms of the words "fact," "statement," "true," for these words contain the problem, not its solution. It would, for the same reason, be equally futile to attempt to elucidate any one of these words (in so far as the elucidation of that word would be the elucidation of this problem) in terms of the others. And it is, indeed, very strange that people have so often proceeded by saying "Well, we're pretty clear what a statement is, aren't we? Now let us settle the further question, viz., what it is for a statement to be true." This is like "Well, we're clear about what a command is: now what is it for a command to be obeyed?" As if one could divorce statements and commands from the point of making or giving them!

Suppose we had in our language the word "execution" meaning "action which is the carrying out of a command." And suppose someone asked the philosophical question: What is obedience? What is it for a command to be obeyed? A philosopher might produce the answer: "Obedience is a conventional relation between a command and an execution. A command is obeyed when it corresponds to an execution."

This is the Correspondence Theory of Obedience. It has, perhaps, a little less value as an attempt to elucidate the nature of one type of communication than the Correspondence Theory of Truth has as an attempt to elucidate that of another. In both cases, the words occurring in the solution incorporate the problem. And, of course, this intimate relation between "statement" and "fact" (which is understood when it is seen that they both incorporate this problem) explains why it is that when we seek to explain truth on the model of naming or classifying or any other kind of conventional or non-conventional relation between one thing and another, we always find ourselves landed with "fact," "situation," "state of affairs" as the non-linguistic terms of the relation.

But why should the problem of Truth (the problem about our use of "true") be seen as this problem of elucidating the fact-stating type of discourse? The answer is that it shouldn't be; but that the Correspondence Theory can only be fully seen through when it is seen as a barren attempt on this second problem. Of course, a philosopher concerned with the second problem, concerned to elucidate a certain
general type of discourse, must stand back from language and talk about the different ways in which utterances are related to the world (though he must get beyond "correspondence of statement and fact" if his talk is to be fruitful). But – to recur to something I said earlier – the occurrence in ordinary discourse of the words "true," "fact," etc., signalizes, without commenting on, the occurrence of a certain way of using language. When we use these words in ordinary life, we are talking within, and not about, a certain frame of discourse; we are precisely not talking about the way in which utterances are, or may be, conventionally related to the world. We are talking about persons and things, but in a way in which we could not talk about them if conditions of certain kinds were not fulfilled. The problem about the use of "true" is to see how this word fits into that frame of discourse. The surest route to the wrong answer is to confuse this problem with the question: What type of discourse is this?8

3. Conventional Correspondence – It will be clear from the previous paragraph what I think wrong with Mr. Austin’s account of the relation itself, as opposed to its terms. In section 4 of his paper he says that, when we declare a statement to be true, the relation between the statement and the world which our declaration "asserts to obtain" is "a purely conventional relation" and "one which we could alter at will." This remark reveals the fundamental confusion of which Mr. Austin is guilty between:

(a) the semantic conditions which must be satisfied for the statement that a certain statement is true to be itself true; and

(b) what is asserted when a certain statement is stated to be true.

Suppose A makes a statement, and B declares A’s statement to be true. Then for B’s statement to be true, it is, of course, necessary that the words used by A in making the statement should stand in a certain conventional (semantical) relationship with the world; and that the "linguistic rules" underlying this relationship should be rules "observed" by both A and B. It should be remarked that these conditions (with the exception of the condition about B’s observance of linguistic rules) are

8 A parallel mistake would be to think that in our ordinary use (as opposed to a philosopher’s use) of the word "quality," we were talking about people’s uses of words; on the ground (correct in itself) that this word would have no use but for the occurrence of a certain general way of using words.
equally necessary conditions of A's having made a true statement in using the words he used. \textit{It is no more and no less absurd to suggest that B, in making his statement, asserts that these semantic conditions are fulfilled than it is to suggest that A, in making his statement, asserts that these semantic conditions are fulfilled} (i.e., that we can never use words without mentioning them). If Mr. Austin is right in suggesting that to say that a statement is true is to say that "the historic state of affairs to which it [i.e., for Mr. Austin, the episode of making it] is correlated by the demonstrative conventions (the one it 'refers to') is of a type with which the sentence used in making the statement is correlated by the descriptive conventions," then (and this is shown quite clearly by his saying that the relation we assert to obtain is a "purely conventional one" which "could be altered at will") in declaring a statement to be true, we are either:

\begin{itemize}
  \item (a) talking about the meanings of the words used by the speaker whose making of the statement is the occasion for our use of "true" (i.e., profiting by the occasion to give semantic rules); or
  \item (b) saying that the speaker has used correctly the words he did use.
\end{itemize}

It is \textit{patently} false that we are doing either of these things. Certainly, we use the word "true" when the semantic conditions described by Austin\textsuperscript{9} are fulfilled; but we do not, in using the word, \textit{state} that they are fulfilled. (And this, incidentally, is the answer to the question with which Mr. Austin concludes his paper.) The damage is done (the two problems distinguished at the end of the previous section confused) by asking the

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item In what, owing to his use of the words "statement" "fact" "situation," etc., is a misleading form. The quoted account of the conditions of truthful datemnt is more nearly appropriate as an account of the conditions of correct descriptive reference. Suppose, in a room with a bird in a cage, I say "That parrot is very talkative." Then my use of the referring expression ("That parrot") with which my sentence begins is correct when the token-object (bird) with which my token-expression (event) is correlated by the conventions of demonstration is of a kind with which the type-expression is correlated by the conventions of description. Here we do have an event and a thing and a (type-mediated) conventional relation between them. If someone corrects me, saying "That's not a parrot; it's a cockatoo," he may be correcting either a linguistic or a factual error on my part. (The question of which he is doing is the question of whether I would have stuck to my story on a closer examination of the bird.) Only in the former case is he declaring a certain semantic condition to be unfulfilled. In the latter case, he is talking about the bird. He asserts that it is a cockatoo and not a parrot. This he could have done whether I had spoken or not. He also \textit{corrects} me, which he could not have done if I had not spoken.
\end{itemize}

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question: *When* do we use the word "true"? instead of the question: *How* do we use the word "true"?

Someone says: "It's true that French Governments rarely last more than a few months, but the electoral system is responsible for that." Is the fact he states in the first part of his sentence alterable by changing the conventions of language? It is not.

4. Uses of "that"-clauses; and of "statement," "true," "fact," "exaggerated," etc. – (a) There are many ways of making an assertion about a thing, X, besides the bare use of the sentence-pattern "X is Y." Many of these involve the use of "that"-clauses. For example:–

How often shall I have to tell you  
Today I learnt  
It is surprising  
The fact is  
I have just been reminded of the fact  
It is indisputable  
It is true  
It is established beyond question

that X is Y.

These are all ways of asserting, in very different context and circumstances, that X is Y. Some of them involve autobiographical assertions as well; others do not. In the grammatical sense already conceded, all of them are "about" facts or statements. In no other sense is any of them about either, though some of them carry implications about the making of statements.

(b) There are many different circumstances in which the simple sentence-pattern "X is Y" may be used to do things which are not merely stating (though they all involve stating) that X is Y. In uttering words of this simple pattern we may be encouraging, reproving or warning someone; reminding someone; answering, or replying to, someone; denying what someone has said; confirming, granting, corroborating, agreeing with, admitting what someone has said. Which

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10 One might prefer to say that in some of these cases one was asserting only by implication that X is Y; though it seems to me more probable that in all these cases we should say, of the speaker, not "What he said implied that X is Y," but "He said that X was Y."
of these, if any, we are doing depends on the circumstances in which, using this simple sentence-pattern, we assert that X is Y.

(c) In many of the cases in which we are doing something besides merely stating that X is Y, we have available, for use in suitable contexts, certain abbreviatory devices which enable us to state that X is Y (to make our denial, answer, admission or whatnot) without using the sentence-pattern "X is Y." Thus, if someone asks us "Is X Y?", we may state (in the way of reply) that X is Y by saying "Yes." If someone says "X is Y," we may state (in the way of denial) that X is not Y, by saying "It is not" or by saying "That's not true"; or we may state (in the way of corroboration, agreement, granting, etc.) that X is Y by saying "It is indeed" or "That is true." In all these cases (of reply, denial and agreement) the context of our utterance, as well as the words we use, must be taken into account if it is to be clear what we are asserting, viz., that X is (or is not) Y. It seems to me plain that in these cases "true" and "not true" (we rarely use "false") are functioning as abbreviatory statement – devices of the same general kind as the others quoted. And it seems also plain that the only difference between these devices which might tempt us, while saying of some ("Yes," "It is indeed," "It is not") that, in using them, we were talking about X, to say of others ("That's true," "That's not true") that, in using them, we were talking about something quite different, viz., the utterance which was the occasion for our use of these devices, is their difference in grammatical structure, i.e., the fact that "true" occurs as a grammatical predicate.11 (It is obviously not a predicate of X.) If Mr. Austin’s thesis, that in using the word "true" we make an assertion about a statement, were no more than the thesis that the word "true" occurs as a grammatical predicate, with, as grammatical subjects, such words and phrases as "That," "What he said," "His statement," etc., then, of course, it would be indisputable. It is plain, however, that he means more than this, and I have already produced my objections to the more that he means.

(d) It will be clear that, in common with Mr. Austin, I reject the thesis that the phrase "is true" is logically superfluous, together with the thesis that to say that a proposition is true is just to assert it and to say

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11 Compare also the English habit of making a statement followed by an interrogative appeal for agreement in such forms as "isn't it?", "doesn't he?" etc., with the corresponding German and Italian idioms, "Nicht wahr?", "non è vero?" There is surely no significant difference between the phrases which do not employ the word for "true" and those which do: they all appeal for agreement in the same way.
that it is false is just to assert its contradictory. "True" and "not true" have jobs of their own to do, some, but by no means all, of which I have characterized above. In using them, we are not just asserting that X is Y or that X is not Y. We are asserting this in a way in which we could not assert it unless certain conditions were fulfilled; we may also be granting, denying, confirming, etc. It will be clear also that the rejection of these two theses does not entail acceptance of Mr. Austin's thesis that in using "true" we are making an assertion about a statement. Nor does it entail the rejection of the thesis which Mr. Austin (in Section 4 of his paper) couples with these two, viz., the thesis that to say that an assertion is true is not to make any further assertion at all. This thesis holds for many uses, but requires modification for others.

(e) The occasions for using "true" mentioned so far in this section are evidently not the only occasions of its use. There is, for example, the generally concessive employment of "It is true that \( p \). . . \( p \) . . .\", which it is difficult to see how Mr. Austin could accommodate. All these occasions have, however, a certain contextual immediacy which is obviously absent when we utter such sentences as "What John said yesterday is quite true" and "What La Rochefoucauld said about friendship is true." Here the context of our utterance does not identify for us the statement we are talking about (in the philosophically non-committal sense in which we are "talking about statements" when we use the word "true"), and so we use a descriptive phrase to do the job. But the descriptive phrase does not identify an event; though the statement we make carries the implication (in some sense of "implication") that there occurred an event which was John's making yesterday (or Rochefoucauld's making sometime) the statement that \( p \) (i.e., the statement we declare to be true).

We are certainly not telling our audience that the event occurred, e.g., that John made the statement that \( p \). for (i) we do not state, either by way of quotation or otherwise, what it was that John said yesterday, and (ii) our utterance achieves its main purpose (that of making, by way of confirmation or endorsement, the statement that \( p \)) only if our audience already knows that John yesterday made the statement that \( p \). The abbreviatory function of "true" in cases such as these becomes clearer if we compare them with what we say in the case where (i) we want to assert that \( p \); (ii) we want to indicate (or display our knowledge that) an event occurred which was John's making yesterday the statement that \( p \); (iii) we believe our audience ignorant or forgetful of the fact that John said yesterday that \( p \). We then use the formula "As John said yesterday, \( p \)" or "It is true, as John said yesterday, that \( p \)" or "What John said yesterday, namely that \( p \), is true." (Of course the words represented by
the letter $p$, which we use, may be – sometimes, if we are to make the same statement, must be – different from the words which John used.) Sometimes, to embarrass, or test, our audience, we use, in cases where the third of these conditions is fulfilled, the formula appropriate to its non-fulfilment, *viz.*, "What John said yesterday is true."

(‡) In criticism of my view of truth put forward in *Analysis*, and presumably in support of his own thesis that "true" is used to assert that a certain relation obtains between a speech-episode and something in the world exclusive of that episode, Mr. Austin makes, in Section 7 of his paper, the following point. He says: "Mr. Strawson seems to confine himself to the case when I say "Your statement is true" or something similar – but what of the case when you state that S and I say nothing, but *look and see* that your statement is true?" The point of the objection is, I suppose, that since I say nothing, I cannot be making any performatory use of "true"; yet I can see *that* your statement is true. The example, however, seems to have a force precisely contrary to what Mr. Austin intended. Of course, "true" has a different rôle in "X sees that Y’s statement is true" from its rôle in "Y’s statement is true." What is this rôle? Austin says in my hearing "There is a cat on the mat" and I look and see a cat on the mat. Someone (Z) reports: "Strawson saw that Austin's statement was true." What is he reporting? He is reporting that I have seen a cat on the mat; but he is reporting this in a way in which he could not report it except in certain circumstances, *viz.*, in the circumstances of Austin’s having said in my hearing that there was a cat on the mat. Z's remark also carries the implication that Austin made a statement, but cannot be regarded as reporting this by implication since it fulfils its main purpose only if the audience already knows that Austin made a statement and what statement he made; and the implication (which can be regarded as an implied report) that I heard and understood what Austin said. The man who looks and sees that the statement that there is a cat on the mat is true, sees no more and no less than the man who looks and sees that there is a cat on the mat, or the man who looks and sees that there is indeed a cat on the mat. But the settings of the first and third cases may be different from that of the second.

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12 Vol. 9, No. 6, June, 1949.
13 If I report: "I see that Austin's statement is true," this is simply a first-hand corroborative report that there is a cat on the mat, made in a way in which it could not be made except in these circumstances.
This example has value, however. It emphasizes the importance of the concept of the "occasion" on which we may make use of the assertive device which is the subject of this symposium (the word "true"); and minimizes (what I was inclined to over-emphasize) the performatory character of our uses of it.

(g) Mr. Austin stresses the differences between negation and falsity; rightly, in so far as to do so is to stress the difference (of occasion and context) between asserting that X is not Y and denying the assertion that X is Y. He also exaggerates the difference; for, if I have taken the point of his example, he suggests that there are cases in which "X is not Y" is inappropriate to a situation in which, if anyone stated that X was Y, it would be correct to say that the statement that X was Y was false. These are cases where the question of whether X is or is not Y does not arise (where the conditions of its arising are not fulfilled). They are equally, it seems to me, cases when the question of the truth or falsity of the statement that X is Y does not arise.

(h) A qualification of my general thesis, that in using "true" and "untrue" we are not talking about a speech-episode, is required to allow for those cases where our interest is not primarily in what the speaker asserts, but in the speaker’s asserting it, in, say, the fact of his having told the truth rather than in the fact which he reported in doing so. (We may, of course, be interested in both; or our interest in a man’s evident truthfulness on one occasion may be due to our concern with the degree of his reliability on others.)

But this case calls for no special analysis and presents no handle to any theorist of truth; for to use "true" in this way is simply to characterize a certain event as the making, by someone, of a true statement. The problem of analysis remains.

(i) Mr. Austin says that we shall find it easier to be clear about "true" if we consider other adjectives "in the same class," such as "exaggerated," "vague," "rough," "misleading," "general," "too concise." I do not think these words are in quite the same class as "true" and "false." In any language in which statements can be made at all, it must be possible to make true and false statements. But statements can suffer from the further defects Mr. Austin mentions only when language has attained a certain richness. Imagine one of Mr. Austin’s rudimentary languages with "single words" for "complex situations" of totally different kinds. One could make true or false statements; but not
statements which were exaggerated, over-concise, too general or rather rough. And even given a language as rich as you please, whereas all statements made in it could be true or false, not all statements could be exaggerated. When can we say that the statement that \( p \) is exaggerated? One of the conditions is this: that, if the sentence \( S_1 \) is used to make the statement that \( p \), there should be some sentence \( S_2 \) (which could be used to make the statement that \( q \)) such that \( S_1 \) and \( S_2 \) are related somewhat as "There were 200 people there" is related to "There were 100 people there." (To the remark "We got married yesterday," you cannot, except as a joke, reply: "You're exaggerating.")

Mr. Austin's belief, then, that the word "exaggerated" stands for a relation between a statement and something in the world exclusive of the statement, would at least be an over-simplification, even if it were not objectionable in other ways. But it is objectionable in other ways. The difficulties about statement and fact recur; and the difficulties about the relation. Mr. Austin would not want to say that the relation between an exaggerated statement and the world was like that between a glove and a hand too small for it. He would say that the relation was a conventional one. But the fact that the statement that \( p \) is exaggerated is not in any sense a conventional fact. (It is, perhaps, the fact that there were 1,200 people there and not 2,000.) If a man says: "There were at least 2,000 people there," you may reply (A) "No, there were not so many (far more)," or you may reply (B) "That's an exaggeration (understatement)." (A) and (B) say the same thing. Look at the situation more closely. In saying (A), you are not merely asserting that there were fewer than 2,000 people there: you are also correcting the first speaker, and correcting him in a certain general way, which you could not have done if he had not spoken as he did, though you could merely have asserted that there were fewer than 2,000 people there without his having spoken. Notice also that what is being asserted by the use of (A) – that there were fewer than 2,000 there – cannot be understood without taking into account the original remark which was the occasion for (A). (A) has both contextually-assertive and performatory features. (B) has the same features, and does the same job as (A), but more concisely and with greater contextual reliance.

Not all the words taken by Austin as likely to help us to be clear about "true" are in the same class as one another. "Exaggerated" is, of those he mentions, the one most relevant to his thesis; but has been seen to yield to my treatment. Being "over-concise" and "too general" are not ways of being "not quite true." These obviously relate to the specific
purposes of specific makings of statements; to the unsatisfied wishes of specific audiences. No alteration in things in the world, nor any magical replaying of the course of events, could bring statements so condemned into line, in the way that an "exaggerated assessment" of the height of a building could be brought into line by inorganic growth. Whether the statement (that \( p \)) is true or false is a matter of the way things are (of whether \( p \)); whether a statement is exaggerated (if the question arises – which depends on the type of statement and the possibilities of the language) is a matter of the way things are (e.g., of whether or not there were fewer than 2,000 there). But whether a statement is over-concise\(^{14}\) or too general depends on what the hearer wants to know. The world does not demand to be described with one degree of detail rather than another.

5. The scope of "statement," "true," "false" and "fact" – Commands and questions, obviously do not claim to be statements of fact: they are not true or false. In Section 6 of his paper, Mr. Austin reminds us that there are many expressions neither interrogative nor imperative in form which we use for other purposes than that of reportage or forecast. From our employment of these expressions he recommends that we withhold (suspects that we do, in practice, largely withhold) the appellation "stating facts," the words "true" and "false." Philosophers, even in the sphere of language are not legislators; but I have no wish to challenge the restriction, in some philosophical contexts, of the words "statement," "true," "false," to what I have myself earlier called the "fact-stating" type of discourse.

What troubles me more is Mr. Austin's own incipient analysis of this type of discourse. It seems to me such as to force him to carry the restriction further than he wishes or intends. And here there are two points which, though connected, need to be distinguished. First, there are difficulties besetting the relational theory of truth as such; second, there is the persistence of these difficulties in a different form when this "theory of truth" is revealed as, rather, an incipient analysis of the statement-making use of language.

\(^{14}\) "Concise" is perhaps less often used of what a man says than of the way he says it (e.g., "concisely put," "concisely expressed," "a concise formulation"). A may take 500 words to say what B says in 200. Then I shall say that B's formulation was more concise than A's, meaning simply that he used fewer words.
First then, facts of the cat-on-the-mat-type are the favoured species for adherents of Mr. Austin's type of view. For here we have one thing (one chunk of reality) sitting on another: we can (if we are prepared to commit the errors commented on in Section (2) above) regard the two together as forming a single chunk, if we like, and call it a fact or state of affairs. The view may then seem relatively plausible that to say that the statement (made by me to you) that the cat is on the mat is true is to say that the three-dimensional state of affairs with which the episode of my making the statement is correlated by the demonstrative conventions is of a type with which the sentence I use is correlated by the descriptive conventions. Other species of fact, however, have long been known to present more difficulty: the fact that the cat is not on the mat, for example, or the fact that there are white cats, or that cats persecute mice, or that if you give my cat an egg, it will smash it and eat the contents. Consider the simplest of these cases, that involving negation. With what type of state-of-affairs (chunk of reality) is the sentence "The cat is not on the mat" correlated by conventions of description? With a mat simpliciter? With a dog on a mat? With a cat up a tree? The amendment of Mr. Austin's view to which one might be tempted for negative statements (i.e., "S is true" = "The state of affairs to which S is correlated by the demonstrative conventions is not of a type with which the affirmative form of S is correlated by the descriptive conventions") destroys the simplicity of the story by creating the need for a different sense of "true" when we discuss negative statements. And worse is to follow. Not all statements employ conventions of demonstration. Existential statements don't, nor do statements of (even relatively) unrestricted generality. Are we to deny that these are statements, or create a further sense of "true"? And what has become of the non-linguistic correlate, the chunk of reality? Is this, in the case of existential or general statements, the entire world? Or, in the case of negatively existential statements, an ubiquitous non-presence?

As objections to a correspondence theory of truth, these are familiar points; though to advance them as such is to concede too much to the theory. What makes them of interest is their power to reveal how such a theory, in addition to its intrinsic defects, embodies too narrow a conception of the fact-stating use of language. Mr. Austin's description of the conditions under which a statement is true, regarded as an analysis of the fact-stating use, applies only to affirmative subject-predicate statements, i.e., to statements in making which we refer to some one or more localized thing or group of things, event or set of events, and characterize it or them in some positive way (identify the
object or objects and affix the label). It does not apply to negative, general and existential statements nor, straightforwardly, to hypothetical and disjunctive statements. I agree that any language capable of the fact-stating use must have some devices for performing the function to which Mr. Austin exclusively directs his attention, and that other types of statements of fact can be understood only in relation to this type. But the other types are other types. For example, the word "not" can usefully be regarded as a kind of crystallizing-out of something implicit in all use of descriptive language (since no predicate would have any descriptive force if it were compatible with everything). But from this it does not follow that negation (i.e., the explicit exclusion of some characteristic) is a kind of affirmation, that negative statements are properly discussed in the language appropriate to affirmative statements. Or take the case of existential statements. Here one needs to distinguish two kinds of demonstration or reference. There is, first, the kind whereby we enable our hearer to identify the thing or person or event or set of these which we then go on to characterize in some way. There is, second, the kind by which we simply indicate a locality. The first ("Tabby has the mange") answers the question "Who, which one, what) are you talking about?" The second ("There's a cat") the question "Where?" It is plain that no part of an existential statement performs the first function; though Austin's account of reference-cum-description is appropriate to reference of this kind rather than to that of the other. It is clear also that a good many existential statements do not answer the question "Where?" though they may license the enquiry. The difference between various types of statement, and their mutual relations, is a matter for careful description. Nothing is gained by lumping them all together under a description appropriate only to one, even though it be the basic, type.

6. **Conclusion** – My central objection to Mr. Austin's thesis is this. He describes the conditions which must obtain if we are correctly to declare a statement true. His detailed description of these conditions is, with reservations, correct as far as it goes, though in several respects too narrow. The central mistake is to suppose that in using the word "true" we are asserting such conditions to obtain. That this is a mistake is shown by the detailed examination of the behaviour of such words as "statement," "fact," etc., and of "true" itself, and by the examination of various different types of statement. This also reveals some of the ways in which "true" actually functions as an assertive device. What supremely confuses the issue is the failure to distinguish between the task of elucidating the nature of a certain type of communication (the
empirically informative) from the problem of the actual functioning of the word "true" within the framework of that type of communication.
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