

THE STRUCTURE OF AGREEMENT

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In this paper I propose to treat the old philosophical problem of truth in a new way. The novelty enters not by way of answering once and for all the question «What is truth?» but by showing that the question is not as complicated as some writers are prone to think. In particular the complication I will be concerned with is the dispute raised some years back by Austin and Strawson over the correct, fundamental account of truth. At root, and at the risk of oversimplifying, the difference between them is this: Austin maintains the classical stance that truth is the agreement of belief with reality, while Strawson takes the view that truth is the agreement of a use of 'true' with a (different) speaker's spoken belief. ⁽¹⁾ My thesis is that an emphasis upon one or other of these views as *fundamental* is ill-conceived. I will show that both views can be comfortably accommodated in a logical structure of an extensionalist sort without creating a syntactical problem within the language itself.

There is a problem of truth insofar as we are aware of a word 'true' which needs to be analyzed in relation to other words, or groups of words, in a language. (We may neglect any more abstruse problem of truth for the purpose of the fol-

⁽¹⁾ J. L. AUSTIN, *Philosophical Papers*, Second Edition, Oxford University Press, London, 1970; P. F. STRAWSON, «Truth», *Analysis*, IX (1949). According to Austin, there are words and there is the world. Words make up our sentences and statements correlate our words with the world. A statement is said to be true when it correlates words conventionally associated with types of states of affairs to actually existing (historical) states of affairs. According to Strawson, 'true' and 'false' say something about the speaker's *making* a statement. «So, in general,» he tells us, «in using such expressions, we are confirming, underwriting, admitting, agreeing with, what somebody has said» (p. 93). He advises: «Better than asking 'What is the criterion of truth?' is to ask: 'What are the grounds for agreement?' — for those we see to be not less various than the subjects on which an agreed opinion can be reached» (p. 94).

lowing analysis.) By a use of 'true', I mean simply that the word 'true' occurs in discourse in certain ways in relation to other words, whether they be spoken or written or simply intimated. And by «in certain ways» I mean, e.g., the following:

- (1) It's true that snow is white.
- (2) «Snow is white» is true if and only if snow is white.
- (3) What he says is true.
- (4) That's true.
- (5) True.
- (6) Truer words have never been spoken.

It may appear that, on our account, there is little difference between the use of a word and its occurrence in language. This is not quite correct. Words do not simply occur in the sense of falling into place by chance. Speakers put words into place in a set order, which order is said to reflect the grammar of the language. The purpose of analysis is to ferret out the structure inherent in grammar, so as to exhibit the relationships between the elements of the language. The word 'true' is one such element. If we can analyze 'true' in such way as to establish it as a coherent and consistent element of our grammar, then we can be said to have accounted for the use of 'true'. We can then move onto study other language elements in their relation to the overall structure, perhaps by appealing to an already established 'true' to give further substance to our analysis. ⁽³⁾

It should be evident from the list of sentences (1)-(6) that 'true' is not always used in the same way. Nor is the list intended to be all-inclusive. Of the definitions of 'true' (as an adjective) given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* our sentences touch upon only one; namely

(3) Further analysis may reflect back on 'true' and lead us to modify some previous conclusions. Thus «established» should be taken in a relative sense.

a) Of a statement or belief; Consistent with fact; agreeing with reality; representing the thing as it is. b) Often in phr. *it is true*, introducing a statement; also ellipt. or interjectionally, *true*, introducing or in reply to a statement; usually in concessive sense: =truly, verily, certainly, doubtless. c) Speaking truly, telling the truth: trustworthy in statement; veracious, truthful.

I will refer to the different senses of 'true' under discussion as *T* followed by either *a*, *b* or *c*, where *a*, *b* and *c* are correlated with senses a), b) and c), respectively, in the above definition. It is clear that Austin espouses the fundamentality of *Ta*, Strawson the fundamentality of *Tb*. (*Tc* will be treated in a later context of this analysis.)

Sentence (2) is Tarski's exemplification of the material adequacy of truth. ⁽³⁾ The use of 'true' in (2) is metalinguistic. Strictly speaking, nothing more is needed for accounting for the structure of *Ta*. Austin does not approve of the use of quotation marks in (2), but this lack of approval simply indicates a failure to appreciate the structure at issue. In point of fact Austin is curiously silent about the nature and structure of the correlation or agreement of our words with the world. G.J. Warnock ⁽⁴⁾ comes to Austin's defense on this matter by pointing out that people often use language in ways that, while perfectly successful, they cannot explain. The point is well-taken but very unsatisfying. Structural analysis seeks to make explicit what is implicit in language, and this is what Tarski's thesis has done for 'true' as the agreement of belief with reality. Once the metalinguistic structure of 'true' is accepted, the often conveniently overlooked ambiguity of sentences (1), (3) and (4) becomes clear. (1) can be taken to express the agreement of belief with reality, in which case it is more clearly expressed as (2); or, (1) can be taken to express agreement with a speaker's spoken belief. The same can be said for (4)

⁽³⁾ Alfred TARSKI, «The Semantic Conception of Truth», *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, V (1943-44).

⁽⁴⁾ «A Problem About Truth», in *Truth*, ed. George Pitcher, Englewood Cliffs, 1964.

when the 'That's' of «That's true» is specified unambiguously. Similarly for (3). With the metalinguistic structure of 'true', we have at our disposal a second-order use of 'true'.

Strawson's arguments show convincingly that *Tb* is not metalinguistic. *Tb* can be analyzed as a first-order element. The reader will recall that *Tb* used in a concessive sense is equated in *O.E.D.* with «truly, verily, certainly, doubtless», i.e., with adverbial constructions. With this in mind, all one need do is appeal to the work recently done on the logic of grammatical modifiers, specifically of adverbs, for a convincing structural analysis of *Tb*. The rest is easy.

The simplest kind of analysis for handling *Tb* is of a Davidsonian sort.⁽⁵⁾ It consists in adding on a modifier to an event which has already been expressed (structuralized) in an extensionalist language. For instance, to take a modification of a Davidson example, the sentence «It's true that Shem kicked Shaun», where 'true' is used in the sense of *Tb*, can be written:

(7) (Ee) (<Shem, Kicked, Shaun> e & *Tb* (e)).

(Literally, and awkwardly, «There is an event *e* such that *e* is the event of Shem kicking Shaun and *e* is true in sense *b*).»)

Now though (7) is correct as it stands, it is much too simple for the problem at hand. While (7) tells us that agreement is had, it does not capture the various degrees of agreement possible, a point which Strawson emphasized. That is, strictly speaking, (7) tells us that there is agreement, but tells us nothing whatever about the content of agreement. It is the content or degree of agreement which is at issue in the analysis of *Tb*.

To correct this deficiency we can turn to a suggestion of Wallace⁽⁶⁾ and treat *Tb* as a modular predicate. The point here

(5) Donald DAVIDSON, «The Logical Form of Action Sentences», in *The Logic of Decision and Action*, ed. Nicholas Rescher, University of Pittsburgh Press, Pittsburgh, 1966. I have adopted a notational variation suggested by R. M. Martin («On Events and Event-Descriptions», in *Fact and Existence*, ed. Joseph Margolis, University of Toronto Press, 1969) to facilitate the analysis of *Tb*.

(6) John Wallace, «Positive, Comparative, Superlative», *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXIX (1972).

is to establish a scale of relative degrees of *Tb*. With this convention we can treat different degrees of agreement from Very High to Very Low (or Very Much to Very Little), or from Very Very High to Very Very Low (or Very Very Much to Very Very Little), and so on. Thus any use of *Tb* can be structuralized as

$$(Ee) \text{ Mod}(e, Tb \{e': \langle -e - \rangle e'\}),$$

which we can read as «There is an event *e* which occupies a place on the scale of relative degree of agreement *Tb* for any event of its kind.» (7) (7) becomes on this more informative formulation

$$(7') (Ee) (\langle \text{Shem, Kicked, Shaun} \rangle e \ \& \ \text{Mod}(e, Tb, \{': (Ex) (Ey) \langle x, \text{Kicked, } y \rangle e' \})).$$

Mod in (7') has been left unspecified. But it can be specified by appeal to the scale. Without delving into a given speaker's mind, we can assign his use of *Tb* a value on the scale by arbitrarily establishing a correlation between a given use and a value. In the creation of the scale, certain factors are agreed upon as determining when a given use is to be allowed a higher or a lower rating on the scale. For a primitive example: a speaker's past uses of *Tb* may be studied in relation to the pitch of his voice in using them (the pitch scale acts here as a parameter). The findings can then be compared with findings of tests run on other speakers and correlations drawn between a number of speakers. The results of these correlations can be used to establish a general scale in which voice pitch variations (in varying circumstances) (8) are matched one to one with

(7) This is not quite the way Wallace would put it. But I believe that everything that Wallace claims must be handled intensionally can in fact be handled extensionally; e.g. this analysis.

(8) In speaking of «varying circumstances», we need not succumb to Strawson's insistence on context or occasion, with its overtones of intentionality. Assuming a fixed set of circumstances, categorically distinguished in some agreed way, we can go further and correlate pitch variation with

graduated variations of the *Tb* scale. Then any given speaker's use of *Tb* can be referred to the *Tb* scale, and a value assigned to *Mod*.

An example in which a value is assigned to *Mod* is at hand in (6). «Truer words have never been spoken» may be written (8) $(Ee) (\langle W, S \rangle e \ \& \ \text{Very High}(e, Tb \ \{e': (Ex) (W(x) \ \& \ \langle x, S \rangle e')\}))$. Of course, it is assumed in the example that the speaker is in full accord with what has been said. (He may be being ironic; thus the necessity of the assumption.) From (8) it is clear that our scale allotted a Very High to uses of *Tb* in full accord.

An interesting offshoot of this analysis concerns a semantic consequence of the structure itself. From (7) we can move to

(9) *Tb* (e)

or an equivalent modular construction, the point being that what we have structuralized in (9) is (5). This is a welcome result. We can now claim that we can handle all of (1)-(6) in terms of the structures of *Ta* and *Tb*.

This result is a significant one from the philosopher's point of view. My contention throughout this analysis has been that there is no fundamental use of 'true'. We are now in a position to understand why this is so. The structures of statements involving *Ta* and those involving *Tb* are radically different. The structure of statements involving *Ta* are handled according to Tarski's thesis. Those statements involving *Tb* are handled according to our analysis. Statements involving *Ta* cannot be translated into the structure of *Tb*, and the statements involving *Tb* cannot be translated into the structure of *Ta*. Yet the two structures are not incompatible. Since the structure of *Ta* is second-order and the structure of *Tb* first-order, the two can exist concurrently in the same language. This means that the nature of language in general is to be gleaned from its struc-

circumstantial variation. The resulting *Tb* scale may become very complex. (Pitch may be an element of one use of *Tb*; another use may consist in a nod.) But such complexity may be necessary if a thorough empirical study is demanded.

tural content. Different structures may underlie the use of the same word in a language without that language being torn from within. But we must keep in mind at all times that no one structure is fundamental. This in essence is Austin's and Strawson's mistake, and this is why they disagree so fundamentally.

The philosopher's concern should be with structure. It is only when the structure of a use of a word is fully articulated that we can say the use is wholly justified. The philosopher should not be satisfied with an appeal to authority, such as *O.E.D.* Such an appeal may be helpful, as it has been here, in offering a guide to analysis. But it should not be our final resting place. Rather, if we find that our analysis of structure is a convincing one, but that it conflicts with that of, say, *O.E.D.*, we should scrap it only if we find a better one. Otherwise it is *O.E.D.* that we should ignore as not rigorous enough.

With this method in mind, a further remark concerning *Tc* is in order. It is not clear why *O.E.D.* includes *Tc* in the definition of 'true' under consideration. As *O.E.D.* itself tells us, *Tc* is not always distinguishable from a definition of 'true' as «honest, knowable, upright, virtuous, trustworthy; free from deceit, sincere, truthful». When it is distinguishable we can treat *Tc* as an instance of either *Tb* (e.g. Tennyson's «O true in word, and tried in deed») or of *Ta* (e.g. Milton's «This way the noise was, if mine ear be true»).

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