

SPEECH ACTS, TRUTH AND REALITY

Jacques RUYTINX

Austin's and Searle's theory of speech acts has brought into the philosophy of language, among many other things, a conception of truth in which the concept of truth appears to be much less monolithic and uniform than it is said to be according to Tarski's criterion of material adequacy or criterion of satisfaction or according to the truth-functionality model or, of course, according to Logical Atomism. If a theory of meaning states that meaning is connected with some truth-conditions and depends on them⁽¹⁾, then the truth-conditions cannot be simple, and a purely semantical account of truth is not sufficient, there must also be a pragmatic approach to it: "It is essential to realize that "true" and "false", like "free" and "unfree", do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions"⁽²⁾. The pragmatic treatment of truth might go along the lines of the speech acts theory for, if reference or more precisely referring can be interpreted as a speech act, it is also possible to interpret in the same way the act of saying that something is true.

Searle has given a table of types of illocutionary acts⁽³⁾ and he scrutinizes in the same book the speech act of "promising". One type of illocutionary act is the "constative class", of which he notices that "there is a close connection between saying and the constative class of illocutionary acts"⁽⁴⁾. The verbs "assert, state, affirm" (any proposition *p*) belong to the same class, and when these verbs are correctly used, *S* has evidence, i.e. reasons for the truth of *p*, *S* believes *p*, and *p* represents an actual state of affairs. In fact all these verbs are used either to express true sentences or to express that some sentence is true, i.e. to report the truth of *p* or to insist on its truth. Searle makes the important distinction between the propositional content and the function-indicating element, the latter being the "illocutionary force indicating device" that has to be used by the speaker and recognized by the hearer, on grounds of both intentions and conventions, in order that the propositional content be com-

municated. There are many different such devices, with which requests, imperatives, questions, promises, thanks, warnings, advices, greetings, congratulations and the like can be formulated. It seems to us possible, in an analogous way, to separate (for the sake of theory) the propositional content which gives basic information from the illocutionary force indication device *in true sentences*, or shorter *in truths*, although in asserting a truth the device itself remains implicit, becoming explicit only in compound expressions like "It is true that *p*" or "I state *p*". Such assertions may occur either in ordinary language, in daily life, in dialogues, or in a scientific context ("I" can be an ordinary man or a scientist or both). Let us then call the device which is *significant* in the utterance of true sentences *the alethic illocutionary force indicating device*. It is a remarkable fact that the word "true" itself can be used, together with the true sentence itself, to endorse or concede statements (Strawson, Searle)⁽⁵⁾. Moreover, when the alethic illocutionary force indicating device is explicitly used (in this case the word "true") and if the sentence *p* is actually true, then a truth is *uttered*; and incidentally, for Searle "wherever the illocutionary force of an utterance is not explicit it can always be made explicit"⁽⁶⁾. The latter judgement can be combined with Searle's principle of expressibility, stating that whatever can be meant can be said (and whatever can be implied can be said): so whatever can be meant to be true can be said being true, and consequently each true sentence can be the object of an utterance.

The elements of our analysis should conduce presently to a normative purview of *the concept of truth*. To say that there are true sentences (and false ones) is not sufficient from the point of view of analytical metaphysics (or of transcendental pragmatics), nor are semantical approaches sufficient in the theory of meaning. There must be said more about the difference between truth and reality and about the connection between truth and language as a vehicle for expressing thoughts. Our thesis is that *in order to be, truth must be uttered*. The modality that it "must" has clearly no ethical bearing: we do not recall that it is our duty to *tell* the truth. We only propose that in order to exist, true sentences must be either uttered by speakers or read by readers or written by writers. There is no truth that is not *uttered* (strictly speaking, an utterance is something spoken, but broadly speaking it can also refer to something written or read). A tremendous amount of true sentences are uttered but an infinity of other true sentences are not, neither in conversation nor in scientific

discourse, therefore they do not exist. Occasional true sentences are by the very fact of the circumstances really uttered, but so-called eternal sentences (logical principles, mathematical axioms, physical laws, and also sentences expressing well-defined individual events) are eternal as far as they can be repeated forever, without change of their truth-value, which means that in order to exist or to represent truth they *have* to be repeated (used), i.e. uttered again and again. If not uttered, truth disappears, but in can reappears.

This view is not current and it is generally assumed that truth is independent of being expressed or discovered. We can see what truth is for normal science in a quotation from Paul Gochet's last book⁽⁷⁾, where the author rejects as Quine does Frege's platonism, commenting on Tarski's well-known semantic theory of truth: " 'X is true in L if and only if p' makes no allusion at all to an observer... In other words, it is necessary and sufficient for the truth of the sentence quoted that snow be white; it is not, therefore, also necessary that there exist men to see that it is indeed white, or to say that it is". We would say, on the contrary, that men must exist in order to get true sentences, because they must exist already simply to get sentences (uttered, heard, read or written, and here we shall not make any difference between conversation and science). Gochet seems to be prepared to accept at least a closely related view since he himself points out that⁽⁸⁾ "At this point it might be objected that Tarski's definition is committed to the existence of a language, and that it is impossible to conceive of a language existing independently from its speakers (past, present and future)". Those who do not agree with our thesis probably mistake truth for *reality*, in that it is obvious that reality exists quite independently from people and their language (although reality can be interpreted in knowledge, there is an objective reality which is no *Ding an Sich* and they probably mistake the property of being independent from time (in the case of "standing" true sentences) for being independent from any utterance. So we believe that Putnam⁽⁹⁾ is right when he states that "to call a statement true is just to reaffirm it". As a matter of fact to contest a truth or to grant a truth the contested or granted truth must be effectively uttered. If there is to be a "pursuit of truth", there is no necessity to state that truth is preexisting to our knowledge, our statement or our reassertion of it. Truth is always communicated truth. There is no special problem about the identification of a true sentence as the same true sentence. True sentences show a normal

discontinuity in their being uttered, for the concept of a continuous truth ("truthhood") is metaphysical in the speculative sense of the word, as the concept of the set of all truths is⁽¹⁰⁾. True sentences are available, but must be used to exist. This is the way to avoid platonism, mentalism, bad intensionalism and the like.

There are several interesting indications in favour of our thesis in some of Quine's works, although Quine does not put his behaviourism and his naturalism far enough in this respect. In *Word and Object*, he writes: "Insofar as some utterances of a sentence can be true and other utterances of it false, demands are placed on our knowledge of the circumstances of utterance; and such knowledge is scarcer for script than for speech"⁽¹¹⁾. So written sentences are considered as uttered ones, the circumstances of utterance of which should be known. But Quine dare not say that also standing eternal sentences which are true are necessarily true only when they are uttered, as well as observation sentences, for if they are not uttered, they do not exist, or rather they exist only (in textbooks) as chains of material signs: "Though scientific data go back to observation sentences which are true only utterance by utterance, the sentences of the theory that is projected from those data tend to be eternal"⁽¹²⁾. Of the utmost importance on this point is what he writes in *Ontological Relativity*: "the plan I now propose is to take as truth vehicles not eternal sentences but eternal-sentence utterance events: utterances of sentences that are eternal sentences for the utterer at the time"⁽¹³⁾. But later he hesitates before a difficulty which is no real one for us: "But utterance events present a new difficulty as truth vehicles: the difficulty that only a finite and therefore infinitesimal proportion of our sentences ever get uttered, even if we count writing as uttering"⁽¹⁴⁾, and remorseful he concludes: "let the truth vehicles be the eternal sentences after all, as they were in *Word and Object*, and then just find a way of tolerating the tacit dependence of truth and eternity upon a language parameter"⁽¹⁵⁾. Language is very important for Quine: notice however that it may not be transformed in a kind of hypostasis, it is something spoken and used. In *Philosophy of Logic* we find: "When we call a sentence eternal, therefore, we are calling it eternal relative only to a particular language at a particular time... we are concerned simply with the language of the speaker or writer as of the time of speaking or writing"⁽¹⁶⁾. More directly: "Truth is a property of sentences, it is the trait shared equally by all that would be rightly affirmed"⁽¹⁷⁾.

More indications in favour of our point of view can be found in several authors, in Hacking e.g., who after commenting on Tarski, declares that "In the end, perhaps, what is true is not the sentence but what is said by the speakers of a language" ⁽¹⁸⁾, or even in Strawson for whom "it is not the invariant type-sentences themselves that are naturally said to be true or false, but rather the systematically varying things that people say, the propositions they express, when they utter those sentences on different particular occasions" ⁽¹⁹⁾. Commenting on Strawson, Grice is confident enough to write: "Let me assume (and hope) that it is possible to construct a theory which treats truth as (primarily) a property of utterances" ⁽²⁰⁾.

In the outline we have given here, truth exists *so far as it is uttered*, an assertion which takes for granted that there are minds to know the truth. For Josiah Royce, the idealist philosopher, "All concrete or genuine, and not barely possible truth is, as such, a truth somewhere experienced... truth is, so far as it is known" ⁽²¹⁾. The question might arise now whether we have not committed ourselves to idealism when stating that truth is as far as there are true utterances? The answer is in the negative, for we do not understand mind and knowledge as they are understood in the idealist tradition: our point of view does not accept reality as a product of the mind, nor does it accept an Absolute Being to maintain the truths, nor the internality of relations, nor the conception that only knowledge of the whole reality can be true. We do not say that to be is to be spoken about (extreme linguistic idealism) ⁽²²⁾, but only that *to be true* is to be spoken about, and to be rightly spoken about.

University of Brussels
Bosweg 57
1970 Wezembeek-Oppeem

Jacques RUYTINX

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AUSTIN, J.L., 1962, *How to do Things with Words*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press.
 EWING, E.C., 1957, *The Idealist Tradition*, Glencoe, Illinois, The Free Press.
 GOCHET, P., 1986, *Ascent to Truth. A Critical Examination of Quine's Philosophy*, München, Wien, Philosophia Verlag.

- GRICE, H.P., 1978, *Further Notes on Logic and Conversation, Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 9, Pragmatics, New York, Academic Press.
- GRIM, P., 1984, *There is no set of all Truths*, *Analysis*, 44, pp. 206-7.
- HACKING, I., 1975, *Why does Language Matter to Philosophy?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- JACQUES, F., 1985, *L'espace logique de l'interlocution*, Paris, P.U.F.
- QUINE, W.V.O., 1960, *Word and Object*, Cambridge, M.I.T. Press.
- 1969, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- 1970, *Philosophy of Logic*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.
- QUINE, W.V.O., ULLIAN, J.S., 1970, *The Web of Belief*, New York, Random House.
- SEARLE, J.R., 1969, *Speech Acts*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- STRAWSON, P.F., 1971, *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, London, Methuen.

NOTES

(¹) F. JACQUES reverses the relation: "Loin que le sens se définisse d'emblée par les conditions de vérité, la proposition de sens précède la proposition de vérité (*L'espace logique de l'interlocution*, p. 538). And also "L'évaluation d'une proposition de la langue parlée est soumise à des conditions pragmatiques et dialogiques" (p. 236).

(²) AUSTIN, *How to do Things with Words*, p. 144.

(³) *Speech Acts*, p. 66.

(⁴) Op. cit., p. 68.

(⁵) See Searle, op. cit, p. 137.

(⁶) Op cit., p. 68.

(⁷) GOCHET, *Ascent to Truth*, p. 40.

(⁸) Ibid.

(⁹) Quoted by Gochet, op. cit., p. 114.

(¹⁰) See Grim, *There is no set of all truths*, *Analysis*, 1984, 44, pp. 206-7.

(¹¹) QUINE, *Word and Object*, pp. 226-7.

(¹²) Ibid.

(¹³) QUINE, *Ontological Relativity and other Essays*, p. 143.

(¹⁴) Ibid.

(¹⁵) Ibid.

(¹⁶) QUINE, *Philosophy of Logic* p. 14.

(¹⁷) QUINE, Ullian, *The Web of Belief*, p. 13.

(¹⁸) HACKING, *Why does Language matter to Philosophy?*, p. 135.

(¹⁹) STRAWSON, *Logico-Linguistic Papers*, p. 179.

(²⁰) GRICE, *Further Notes on Logic and Conversation*, pp. 125-7.

(²¹) See EWING, *The Idealist Tradition*, pp. 201-2.

(²²) See HACKING, op. cit., p. 84.