

TRUTH  
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*As a Matter of Fact*

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

T R U T H

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## ABOUT

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

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

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

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

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



## BIOGRAPHY

Charles Travis received a BA in philosophy from Berkeley and a PhD from UCLA. He has taught in four or five countries (to take no stands on how to count), The US, Canada, The Netherlands, Scotland and England), and many more universities. His last three positions have been at the University of Stirling, Northwestern University and King's College London. He has had visiting appointments at, most notably, the University of Michigan and Harvard, and, recently, as a visiting researcher at the University of Sydney. He has also lectured in the Collège de France. He now lives in Portugal (Lavra) where he (mostly) writes, but is also co-organiser of a project, "The Bounds of Judgement", of the Mind Language and Action research group of the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Porto. In the beginning he wrote on philosophy of language, and is liable to do so again. At present he works primarily on Frege, Wittgenstein, philosophy of perception and philosophy of psychology. He is currently working on a book on Frege, to be titled: *Frege: The Invisible Realm*. He has published two books on Wittgenstein, one on propositional attitudes, and three collections of essays, the most recent titled, *Perception: Essays After Frege*.

## AS A MATTER OF FACT

CHARLES TRAVIS

THE word 'true', Frege tells us, is not a relation word. (1918: 59) Nor, he also tells us, is it *quite* right to call truth a property (though he will do so *pro tem*). Truth is not a relation. Fine. Though relations can degenerate. Being older than Methusaleh (if as reputed) is a property none of us has. If Methusaleh is history, then to have it would be to relate in a certain way to Methusaleh. No one else one might relate to would do the trick. Similarly, if to be true were to relate to something (what the truth-bearer was true of), what Frege's point suggests is that there could be only *one* thing for this relatum to be, no matter what the truth-bearer. And indeed, construing truth as a relation would leave only one such eligible candidate. Truth, in any case, comes on the scene along with a certain relation: that of (a representer) representing something as something. It is such representing which is done truly or falsely, the representing thus done accordingly true or false. There is truth, one might think, just where the third term in this relation—the way things were represented as being—related suitably to the second term—what was so represented. Where there is truth outright, there is but *one* thing for this second term to be. It is the way things are which is represented, truly or falsely, as (things) being such-and-such way. It is thus relating suitably (or as required) to *this* (the way things are) that makes for truth wherever there is truth outright. Always the same relatum, just as it is always the same relatum in being older than Methusaleh. One might give this relatum different names. Perhaps 'things' would do, construing 'things' catholicly enough. 'Things being as they are' might be more suggestive. One might also speak here of 'the world', or 'history'. In any case, one might enquire as to what *relating suitably* would be here. Such is Austin's question. Nothing in Frege's suggestion rules it out.

The role of what Frege calls a thought is to be, as he puts it, "that by which truth can come into question at all." (1918: 60) If representing is an act, or, as in representing to oneself, a stance, well, thoughts can neither act nor hold stances. But there is an aspect of the verb on which Frege's *Gedanke* might serve as a first term in the relation, representing-as. On this aspect, it is enough for expressing it (assertively) to be representing truly. By this avenue it lets itself in for truth or falsity. Unlike agents (or content-bearers), for it to be the one it is is for it to represent what it does as the way it does. A thought can so serve, though, only if, in this aspect, it stops nowhere short of representing-as. It thus contrasts with a concept, which *does* stop short. The concept *nonchalant* may well be of a way Sid is. We might thus say that it is true of him. But Sid is none of its business. It does not depend for its

existence on there so much as being Sid. It neither represents him as nonchalant or not. My example is a one-place concept. But the point would hold for any  $n$ . It would hold for  $n=0$  if we chose to recognise zero-place concepts. (Such a concept would, e.g., be of things being such that Sid is nonchalant—once again that catholic ‘things’.) In sum: for a thought to be true is (harmlessly) for it to be true of the way things are. There is *something* relational in that.

Frege argues against a correspondence theory of truth—something Austin will have no truck with. On such an ill-begotten theory, there is a domain of truth-bearers (thoughts, or what plays their role); and there is a distinct domain of multitudinous items of some other sort. There is then a relation between these domains such that a truth-bearer is true just in case there is an item in this second domain to which it so relates. Such a theory gets grammar all wrong at the very start. We will soon see why Austin *could have* no truck with it.

Frege tells us that the content of the word ‘true’ is unique and undefinable. (1918: 60) not that ‘true’ has no, or no identifiable, content. He tells us, for a start, that its content is unfolded (in most general respects) by the laws of truth (that is, of logic). (1897: 139) At the same time, he also asserts that truth is an identity under predication: predicate truth of a thought, and you get that thought back. So, if ‘is true’ *adds* nothing, perhaps after all it has no content? Or is the point rather that looking at predication is looking in the wrong place to find that content? Here is Frege on this:

Thus it is to be observed that the relation of thoughts to truth is not to be compared to that of subject to predicate. Subject and predicate are, to be sure, thought-elements (understood in the logical sense); they stand on the same level with respect to knowledge. By putting together subject and predicate one always arrives only at a thought, never from a *Sinn* to its *Bedeutung*, never from a thought to its truth value. One moves around on the same level, but never steps from the one level to the next. A truth value cannot be a thought-element, just as little as, say, the sun, because it is not a *Sinn*, but rather an object. (1892: 34–35)

Representing something *as* something is one thing. To represent something *to be* something is to take a further step; one which need not be taken merely to take the first. If Sid were suave, he might be rich. Such is not to suppose he *is* suave. Part of Frege’s point is: one can never get from representing-as to representing-to-be merely by engaging in more representing-as. Add all the representing-as you like to that with which you started, and the result is only more of it. The step to representing-to-be remains untaken. As Frege puts this, one never thus takes ‘the step from *Sinn* to *Bedeutung*; from a truth-bearer to its truth-value.’

To step from *Sinn* to *Bedeutung* is, where the *Sinn* is a thought, to commit, or acknowledge (*anerkennen*) the thought's credentials; its faithfulness to the way things are. This is something one does, if at all, only under a certain kind of compulsion: he must see there as nothing else for one suitably informed (thus for one in his position) to think. What is *felt* is rational compulsion. The only thing to think *can* be read: the only thing to think in pursuit of the goal truth. Frege (1897 loc cit) portrays the laws of logic as a *partial* answer to the question 'How must I think to reach the goal truth?'. One aims to take the step from *Sinn* to *Bedeutung* as directed by the answer to that question—not just the *partial* answer logic gives, but the full thing. Logic concerns itself with relations between ways for things to be represented as being. When one takes Frege's step, e.g., *in re* the thought that Sid smokes, his interest is in the whole story, but, most pressingly, the part logic (of necessity) leaves undiscussed: how pursuit of the goal truth is to go where it is a question of relating that which is represented as some way or other to ways for it to be represented—relating, that is, things (catholic reading) to ways to represent them. The difference between Frege and Austin on truth, viewed one way, parallels that between these two sorts of concerns.

Laws of logic concern exclusively items distinguished by a certain sort of generality. For each there is something it would be (for an item) to be, not identical with, but a case of it (not that way for things to be, such that Sid smokes, but a case of something being such as to smoke). A case—something which might be represented as being some way—has no such generality. Nor, accordingly, does it entail or probablify anything. Only its instancing one thing or another could do that. There had better be such a thing as what it would be to proceed so as to reach the goal truth in matters of what is a case of what—of just when a given generality is to be counted as instanced. Otherwise there is never such a thing as the (worldly) thing to think; truth is abolished. There must, that is, be such a thing as when that Sid smokes Murads would be the thing to judge in pursuing truth. Austin's interest is in what there is to say as to what pursuit of truth would be, particularly in connecting the above two terms of the representing-as relation.

What Austin has to say about this is found primarily (but not exclusively) in two places: the essay, "Truth" (1950) and his treatise on the subject, *How To Do Things With Words*. (1962 (*Nachlass*).) In the treatise he announces his intention to 'play Old Harry' with two traditional distinctions: true/false, and fact/value. The Old Harry he plays is the upshot of a failure to draw another dichotomy: a supposed one between two sorts of acts of representing-as: 'constatives' (acts of representing-to-be) and 'performatives' (bringing something about in, or by, saying something). Here is the conclusion Austin draws:



The doctrine of the performative/constative distinction stands to the doctrine of locutionary and illocutionary acts in the total speech act as the *special* theory to the *general* theory. And the need for the general theory arises simply because the traditional ‘statement’ is an abstraction, an ideal, and so is its traditional truth or falsity. ...

Stating, describing, etc., ... have no unique position over the matter of being related to facts in a unique way called being true or false, because truth and falsity are (except by an artificial abstraction which is always possible and legitimate for certain purposes) not names for relations, qualities, or what not, but for a dimension of assessment—how the words stand in respect of satisfactoriness to the facts, events, situations, etc., to which they refer. (1962: 147–8)

It is essential to realise 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. (op. cit.: 144)

By the same token, the familiar contrast of ‘normative or evaluative’ as opposed to the factual is in need, like so many dichotomies, of elimination. (op. cit.: 148)

What we are dealing with here, Austin concludes, is a continuum; most notably a continuum in terms and standards of evaluation of acts of representing as successes or failures, and of the terms in which particular ones are to be evaluated. Notions with some evaluative core, such as fair or just, or close relatives, show up, for example, in questions as to whether something was a fair description of how things were, or ‘true to the facts’, or, in the circumstances of the act, would give a just impression, or well serve the purposes to which the act might be expected to be put. Should the description, ‘The street is lined with eating establishments’, e.g., given of a street full of soup kitchens interspersed with gin mills affording the odd free pickled egg, count as a just enough account of how things were to merit the title ‘true’?—a question whose answer is more than likely to depend on the circumstances in which the description was, or would be, given.

Here we see how it is essential to the picture Austin tries to paint that correspondence theories of truth be non-starters. For, as such theories conceive things, there are two distinct autonomous domains, each of whose denizens are what they are independent of any such considerations as what it would be fair, or just to say, or what would mislead, or what might be a better or worse description of the facts. Truth is then merely a matter of whether, for an item in the first domain, there is an item in the second which is a match. There is no room here for evaluations to depend on Austinian considerations.

Frege focussed on the demands of logic: the demands it imposes on pursuit of truth, hence on thinking altogether; so, too, the demands imposed on there being anything for truth to impose demands on. On this last topic he wrote,

A concept that is not sharply defined is wrongly termed a concept. Such quasi-conceptual constructions cannot be recognized as concepts by logic; it is impossible to lay down precise laws for them. The law of excluded middle is really just another form of the requirement that the concept should have a sharp boundary. Any object  $\Delta$  that you choose to take either falls under the concept  $\Phi$  or does not fall under it, *tertium non datur*. (Frege, 1903, §56)

The point applies to n-place concepts for any n, hence to zero-place concepts, hence to thoughts. Thoughts to which logic applied would then be ones tailored so as to respect it. Does such rule out room in the notion of truth for Austinian considerations?

Frege introduces a thought as ‘that by which truth can come into question at all.’ The ‘that’ here should be read as ‘precisely that’—no more nor less. A thought, so to speak, is, or fixes, a *pure* question of truth. (The trouble with judgeable content—the notion *thought* replaced—is precisely that it failed this condition, since more (e.g., a truth value) was involved in being one of these than worked to fix a question of truth.) A further idea: if a thought has done this, then the answer to that question (‘True or false?’) can depend on *nothing* extra to the thought itself except that which the thought represents *as* something—things (catholically), the world. This *would* leave no room for Austinian considerations. Or at least none in matters of the truth of a *thought*, once that thought is identified properly as the one it is.

But perhaps there are other places to look? Perhaps the notion of truth is already involved, essentially, in there being any question of a thought having been expressed, or of it being one thought rather than another which was expressed on some occasion. Such an idea would fit well with what Austin has to say. Austin’s starting point differs from Frege’s. His focus is on historical acts of representing rather than on thoughts. This suggests a development for the above idea. First an observation. *Expressing* thoughts differs from having, or thinking, them: two different forms of representing-as. Expressing a thought is (an act of) making representing recognisable. A plausible thought: for *such* representing to be *is* for it to be recognisable; for it to be the representing it is is for it to be recognisable as that. Recognisable by whom? By those competent enough and suitably placed to do so. In the case of *our* representing, presumably by *us*, if suitably placed, and suitably *au fait* with the relevant ways for things to be (those in terms of which things were represented as they were). No *analysis* is on offer

here. But let us try to use what we know.

To engage in representing-as is to represent something as some way there is for things to be; thus as something with a certain sort of generality—something instanced (or counter-instanced) by a range of cases (some determinate range, one might hope). To grasp what way things were represented as being is (*inter alia*, perhaps) to grasp to what range of cases it would reach—when there would be a case of things being that way. Suppose, then, that Pia, lamenting Sid's love of lager, remarks to Zoë, 'Sid waddles'. Since for this form of representing-as to be is for it to be made recognisable, we must ask what *was* made recognisable in Pia's speaking as she did?

To answer this, we might turn first to the words she used. Those of us who know (enough) English will recognise these as speaking of the one named (if such there is) as a waddler. Of those of us who thus know what way for a thing to be is (so far) in question one may ask: what do we thus know as to to what cases this way reaches—as to what would, what would not, be a case of a thing so being? There *are* things we do know—perhaps for a start, say, that *penguins* waddle; so that if you choose a normal enough penguin, *there* will be a case of a waddler. Austin argues, though, that inevitably we will come up against cases where all there is (for the knowledgeable) to say—the *right* thing to say—can only be: 'Well, you *could* call that being a waddler. Or you could refuse to. Either would be compatible with all there is to know as to what being a waddler is.' If, in this domain, to be is to be recognisable, then so far there is all this to say, and no more. So far, Pia represented things as a way which some things would be cases of, some things would not; and, as for the rest, neither the answer 'Yes', nor the answer 'No', is mandated by the facts.

Such is stage one of our development. For stage two, a further observation. Just as with every human birth a new multitude of thoughts come into existence—thoughts of that new human that *he* is thus and so—so with every act of representing-as, a new way for things to be comes into existence: being as thus represented. So it is with Pia's act, of which we can now ask whether there is any more to say as to what it would be to be this new way for things to be—being as *she* represented them—than has been said already in discussing the words she used and what they speak of—being a waddler. Austin's answer is that there may well be. If one *could*, say, call what Sid does waddling, or doing it as much as he does being a waddler, and one could refuse to do so, either compatible with those words meaning what they do, perhaps, using words in the particular way Pia did, Sid's comporting himself as he does *ought* to be called being a waddler. Or ought not to.

What should count as waddling as *Pia* spoke of this? What would be a case? To answer this is to fix the demands on things being as she said; thus the standards of *truth* to which she is to be held. It is just here where Austinian considerations come into play. If Sid waddles when drunk, but only as his variant to putting a lampshade on his head, is it really fair to the facts to describe him as a waddler—say, in a discussion of the dire effects of alcohol’s hidden calories? If Sid ceases to waddle when encased in sufficient ‘supportive’ garments, is it really fair to hold Pia responsible, in describing him as she did, for things being otherwise? If, for the sort of representing Pia’s was—representing-as in *expressing* thoughts—to be is to be recognisable, then here is the arena in which Austin’s points need, and seem, to hold good.

To sum up, Austin’s concern is with that form of representing for which to be is to be recognisable. To render that concern in terms of Frege’s notion of a thought (or the version of that tailored to meet Frege’s demands on logic’s applicability), one *could* say: it is a concern with what it would be for a given thought (in either of these senses) to have been expressed (or not) in a given such act of representing. The thought is to abstract from the act just that which determines when it would be (or have been) a case of representing *truly*. Austin’s question is to what standards what is abstracted from—the concrete act—is to be held accountable for this. One might also ask for what representing it is to be held accountable; just what representations it is to be held responsible for having made. Is it to be held committed to more than is so in things being as the are? If, e.g., in the act Sid was described as a smoker, is the act to be held to have committed to more than is so given the way things are, or, e.g., more than would be so if Sid smoked only at his club on Fridays, on the balcony, after dinner? The answers to such questions, Austin plausibly enough holds, depend on the kinds of considerations he gestures at: whether, in the circumstances, it would be *fair* to describe Sid as a smoker if this is all he does, or whether one would have had the right to suppose that *more* than this was so if what she said were so; whether, in the circumstances, it would be fair to hold the agent (*Pia*) to have committed to more than is so if things are thus; that is, to have incurred liability to any failure here suffered, where this is, more specifically, failure to be representing truly. Questions like this, the point is, *are* questions as to what is to count as true. It is just that answers to them are already presupposed when we come to talk in terms of thoughts, in either of the above senses, at all.

At which point Frege and Austin can be seen as, as to the facts, not fundamentally at odds. Frege and Austin are equally concerned with what truth is, and *thereby* with questions of the form ‘How must I think to reach the goal truth?’. They are just concerned with different places in which such questions can arise: Frege with relations among items with that certain sort of generality discussed above: for Frege, ways to

represent things as being, and what so represents them; for Austin relations between *what* is so represented and cases of so representing it.

Frege once suggested that we could “understand by the existence of a thought that it can be grasped by different thinkers as the same.” (1919:146). A thought, on this conception, is *just* that (anything) which can be agreed to or disputed, whose truth can be investigated or wondered over, by many. A thought so conceived is identified by what is thus of interest to us—e.g., whether penguins mate in the spring. There is thus a thought identifiable as the thought that they do. The generality of such a thought is just that which relevant agreement can identify. It is then a *substantial* question whether such a thought fixes a *pure* question of truth on either of the notions of purity scouted above. *Perhaps* Frege and Austin disagree on the answer to this last question. Whether this is so or not, the concerns of each with truth are recognisable as legitimate, and in each case pursuable in the way each undertakes, provided one sees correctly how those very different ways connect with each other.

All of the above can be summed up as follows. A thought, one idea is, is *precisely* that by which truth comes into question at all, no more no less; so to speak, a *pure* question of truth. A further extension: Frege’s step from *Sinn* to truth-value—from mere representing-as (as, e.g., in wondering) to full representing-to-be (as, e.g., in judging)—thus starts from something which leaves *nothing* undetermined as to when things would be as represented; it remaining only for the world, what *is* so represented, to speak. Holding fast to this conception, and looking for truth’s content in its role in Frege’s step, there *should* be little for us to find—certainly nothing like a role for truth in weighing up Austinian considerations. But if all this *defines* ‘pure question of truth’ whether there *are* any such becomes a substantial matter. It is now a *thesis* that such can be identified in speaking of, e.g., the thought that Sid smokes (or that penguins waddle)—or, for that matter, in any way which makes no reference to a concrete act of expressing the thought in question.

Such is one form of Austin’s point. Holding fast to the above conception, the point can take another form. If there is a role for truth in Frege’s step from *Sinn* to *Bedeutung*, then such is *one* place to look for truth’s content. But if thoughts are thus abstracted from acts of representing, another place to look is in the abstracting. To know what thought Pia expressed in describing Sid as a smoker is to know *all* as to when she would thus have represented truly. The right thought (on this conception) is one which *would* be true just when she *would* have been representing truly. When is that? Here there is room for Austinian considerations. Ought one who represented as Pia did be held responsible for representing things as any other than they are, or would be if ...? When, that is, would it be fair to hold Pia to have fallen anywhere short of the truth? If Sid never inhales, would it be fair/true to

the facts to describe him as a smoker? One understands *what* questions these are only in understanding them as ones about truth's requirements. Abstraction, including Frege's, has its place, but must know it.

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