

'Making true'

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If you are told or otherwise believe an *either-or* proposition, the question may easily arise what makes it true. 'The potato crop in Ruritania was halved by blight in 1928' – 'Well then, either the expected, planned-for crop was in excess of the people's needs, or there was a shortage of potatoes that year, or a lot were imported. ...' That seems a fair deduction, and we may ask which was true. If only one was, then we'd say it made the disjunction true. If all were, then all of them did.

Similarly, if it is said that some elements have a certain property, the question may arise which do. Suppose someone says that iodine and chlorine do. He purports to have told us what makes the 'some' proposition true. He wouldn't be contradicted by someone who gave other ones, but not iodine and chlorine.

Thus though an *either-or* proposition or a *some* proposition, if true, must be made true by the truth of some such other proposition, in general none of these *must* be true if the original proposition is. This shows that explanation by means of truth conditions does not provide an analysis in these cases. By an 'analysis' I mean something that is at least an equivalent proposition. For an *either-or* proposition neither the conjunction of all its elements nor one of its elements nor the conjunction of any subset of its elements up to the totality of them all is a proposition equivalent to the *either-or* proposition – though any subset up to the totality will make the *either-or* proposition true. And similarly for 'some' propositions.

'The proposition is explained by giving the totality of sets of elements whose conjunction (when there is more than one) makes it true.' Or: 'It is explained by giving the totality of rows in the truth-table for its elements, for each of which it is true.' Perhaps: but the explanation gives us no equivalent. Only if you form a disjunction of the whole set will you have an equivalent. But what's the good of that, when it was the sense of a disjunction that you wanted to explain? You could go on forever in that way.

Disjunctions and propositions with 'some' are somewhat favourable examples for a concept of what makes true. In finite cases giving the totality of sets of truth-conditions gives rather precise and unexceptionable information about the sense of a proposition of this sort. If it's a 'some' proposition there is a qualification

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to add: the case being finite, there can be a list, and when one says 'some' one is referring to the totality of sets of truth-conditions that are constructible using the list. One doesn't have to know the items which are members of the list. Neither all of them nor any of them.

However, to repeat, when one asserts a disjunction or a 'some' proposition, the question what *does* make it true is not a question about its sense. At best it may be a question about what one has in mind, a 'How d'you mean?' question. But one need not have anything in mind in that way. One may declare that someone has broken into one's desk, and have no one in mind. Similarly one may say, 'Jack or Tom or Jim did it', and not have it in mind that, e.g., Jack and Tom did.

If a disjunction is true because more than one of its elements is true, then more than one makes it true. Is this like more than one man hauling on a rope in the same direction? Each is strong enough to haul the weight that is hauled; so either they haul it quicker than either would alone, or they each have to do less work, the labour being shared. Perhaps we can answer questions about who really does the work or how much each does. But it can't be like that with two elements of a disjunction, both true. This warns us against the idea of a work done, or a force exerted, in making true. I shall return to this.

First, however, there are also other ways of making true besides the kind I have mentioned. One is to be seen in the question 'What makes *that* the French flag?' with the answer 'That it's 3 vertical stripes, that sort of width, of red, white and blue – only, by the way, it's upside down.' 'How *can* it be?' 'Sorry, I mean it's the wrong way round.' 'But then *it* isn't the French flag.'

This exchange brings out facts about flags – that you may describe them (if they aren't symmetrical about an axis parallel to the flag pole), going from the flagpole outwards.

'What makes this the French flag' is here understood to be the formal cause. But there is also a question whose answer is an historical account of the proceedings by which the French shifted from the Fleur de Lys to the tricolour. This gives us an efficient cause of this being the French flag.

There is another way of making true which is neither formal cause nor efficient cause nor fulfilment of a truth-condition. For example, the way assertions of hypocrisy are made true. I advance various facts about someone's actions, offering them as reason to call that person a hypocrite. This – taking it to be correct – is not a matter of formal cause, rather, I recount events and imply an interpretation apparently amounting to a description of hypocrisy. This

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description would be of a formal cause – but if it in turn amounts to an efficient cause, then this efficient cause will be a cause by way of habit, not of the alleged hypocrisy, but rather of future similar hypocritical behaviour.

It isn't a formal cause because there is a step between. Hypocrisy is pretending you are virtuous in ways you are not, or pretending you lack vices which you have. Lofty condemnation of someone for a vice is implicitly a claim not to have that vice; that is the intermediate step here. Or perhaps one should rather say: Lofty condemnation of someone for, e.g., not caring for the accuracy of what he says about someone else is implicitly a claim not to go in for that sort of thing oneself. – 'Ah, but it might just be a fit of temper.' Certainly – at least certainly it can very well be a fit of temper; but the *lofty* tone of condemnation makes it not *just* a fit of temper but also a stance of righteousness. 'Well, it's all a matter of interpretation.' – 'That is true; but so must be any accusation of hypocrisy; and can't the interpretation be right? – 'There might be some other account to give if you knew more facts.' Possibly; but one would like that illustrated, taking the description I have started with, and applying more facts which I might reasonably be supposed ignorant of. For example, the 'lofty condemnation' was a joke, or a deliberate attempt to annoy; A was only *pretending* to have the righteous stance. Or again it was a pre-arranged signal for some non-apparent purpose. 'If I write a letter with a snarl like that in it, that's to mean that your involvement in such-and-such a fraud has been discovered and you'd better get out of the country.'

Thus we can't say we have here a 'making true' which is a matter of the formal cause. Identifying these circumstances as making the statement about hypocrisy true is identifying them as falling under a description which in turn brings them under the description 'giving a formal cause'. That is, it does so in, or given, the circumstances and on the assumption that these are all the relevant circumstances. We could say: Here, if things are what they seem, we have proceedings which make it true that A is 'rather a hypocrite'.

There are many statements which are made true in such and similar ways.

A related expression is: 'true in virtue of'. This has to be understood in the right way, not, e.g., as referring to something that *brings it about* that something is true, e.g., 'The statement was true in virtue of a verbal alteration.' Similarly it might be said that someone paid in virtue of his resolute determination to discharge all debts. But since there is no such thing as pure acts of paying, if someone paid, then he did it in virtue of, e.g., handing over some

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coins, and there must always be some particular way in which he did it.

Here someone might say that ‘He paid in virtue of ...’ (understood in the right way) and “‘He paid” was true in virtue of ...’ are different. And similarly for another expression, namely, ‘consisted in’. ‘His paying *consisted in* his handing over some coins then’ contrasts with ‘The truth of “he paid” consisted in his handing over some coins then’. For the latter talks about a bit of language and the former does not. Then what about ‘Its being true that he paid consisted in ...’? Now I think I need not concern myself with the *oratio recta* form – I at least would translate it into a foreign language altogether, unless there was some particular purpose for which I needed to leave the quoted bits in English. I take Q , ‘ Q is true’, ‘it is true that Q ’ all to be equivalent.

There is just one point to be made here, though. I might be taught to utter a sentence and told that it means such-and-such, which I hold to be true, but have forgotten everything except how to utter the sentence and that it does mean something which I hold to be true. Then I can say ‘ Q is true’ or even ‘it is true that Q ’ and this not be meaningless in my mouth, though Q would be. This can be explained as follows: I am saying: For some p , Q says that p , and p .

If we ask what *that* consists in, or in virtue of what it is true, or what makes it true, it seems clear that an answer would depend on what Q was – for *ex hypothesi* my utterance ‘It is true that Q ’ can only be translated into another language leaving Q as it is. And similarly if I say ‘ Q is true’. For the rest, my remarks about ‘some’ propositions apply – even up to the possibility that there is more than one p such that: Q says that p , and p . The question falls apart: what makes it the case that Q says something? and given that it says something, i.e., that for some p it says p , what makes it the case that we can add *and* p ? The first question could be answered in a rather vague way, given the information that Q was a bit of Arabic, say: for those who know Arabic it has a *use* such that for some p it says p ; but we can go further only by giving (imaginary) illustrative examples, *or* by saying something that Q *does* say. This last would be like mentioning an element that did have a certain property. The second half of the question can really only be asked without total vagueness when we have got our p specified, and the questions ‘what makes it the case that etc.?’ about this will depend for their answer on what this p is. I may seem to have jumped a gap here – when the p is specified, what made it the case that the bit of Arabic said *that*? But that wasn’t our question; our question was: what made it the case that there was something said? – and that was adequately answered by giving something that *was* said.

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There is, then, that amount of reason to distinguish between saying that Q and saying that Q was true, or that it was true that Q . It depends on a quite particular situation. But if one can say that ..., it is all one to do so and to say that ... is true. (I leave on one side the case where "' Q ' is true' is false, not because ' Q ' is false, but because it lacks a truth-value because it contains a vacuous name.)

It is sometimes said that the equivalence – i.e., between p and *it is true that p* – can't be combined with a truth-condition account of meaning. The argument for this might be represented as follows:

What is the meaning of a proposition; say p ?

Its meaning is given by a comprehensive account of the conditions on which it is true.

But what does ' p is true' mean?

It means the same as p .

But that's what I wanted to know in the first place, that is, what p *does* mean.

In short, if p and *it is true that p* are equivalent and you tell me conditions on which it is true that p , I don't know what you've given me conditions of, if I don't *already* know what it means to say that p . – This argument is based on a misunderstanding. You don't know till told them perhaps, either the conditions on which it is true that p , or the conditions given which, p – but they are the same. It is correct to say that, not knowing these conditions, you don't know what '*it is true that p* ' means (except in the sense that it, I mean p , says something which *is* so). But to say you don't know what '*it is true that p* ' means is the same as to say you don't know what it comes to to assert p . What you perhaps do know, or at least what is the presupposition of your question, is that there is something it comes to, and that that is the same as it comes to to assert ' p is true', and if you know the latter you know the former.

'Truth-conditions' is just a convenient locution. So 'truth-conditions of p ' = 'conditions of p ', that is to say: what is, or what is the range of possibility of what is, when p . Of this, there *may* be an explanation of the various kinds I've been considering – and there may not.

But in the particular case we may ask: 'What does it consist in, that ...?'

What does it consist in, that p ? – in this case? or ever?

There are plenty of cases where we know there must be an answer to the first question, and plenty where we can give some 'for example' answers to the second, though it is obvious that there isn't a complete list of possible answers which could tell what it might consist in.

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But there are also cases where there doesn't seem to be an answer. For example, 'believing that there was a step there'. One has stumbled, perhaps, or nearly stumbled, at any rate trodden oddly, and one says, 'I thought there was a step there.' *When* did one think that? Obviously when one was making that step, and stepped wrong. Now does *that* mean: stepped as if for a step up, or a step down, when there wasn't one? Possibly; but has anyone ever investigated? One's reason for saying one or the other is precisely that one 'thought there was a step there', and would be able to say whether the step one thought was there was a step up or a step down. We believe that in such a case one *did* step as if for a step up, or for a step down, because it is part of one's verbal reaction (or mental description, if one merely thinks it) that one thought there was a step, and it was (say) *down*. – If one considers just what happened at the moment, inasmuch as one 'thought there was a step there', one can find nothing except the set to step down. But *that* of course will have been present at the other steps down if one was going down some steps. And that leaves out the fact that 'I thought there was a step there!' is a reaction characteristic of mis-stepping. But not of just *any* mis-stepping. We might say: that it is a characteristic reaction *defines* the special sort of mis-stepping that is in question. The reaction – the verbal reaction – doesn't have to occur; but it can still be used to define the mis-stepping. In what, then, did it consist, that 'one thought there was a step there'? We ought not to go on looking once we have realised the facts of this sort of case. That one 'thought there was a step there' belongs to a (particular kind of) mis-stepping. That is to say, the sense of it that we are considering does so. It is for example quite unlike *this* case: one passes by a narrow passage-way, and says 'I thought there was a step there but I see there isn't'.

Nor is it like the case where it looks to one as if there was a step, when there isn't, as one realises by keeping on looking. For in that case one has had the thought, or impression, 'there's a step'. But in our case one has mis-stepped, and it was *that sort* of mis-stepping and not another sort. – If one can say what deceived one, what presented the *appearance*, like a trompe l'oeil doorway, then one had the belief after the presentation. But just that is lacking in the case of simple mis-stepping, when one exclaims, 'I thought there was a step there!' It was no doubt this feature that led Russell to call this a minimal case, which furnished the minimal definition of belief as 'muscular preparedness for action'.

If what makes something true is something else – that is to say, the truth of a proposition which is not equivalent to the first – then it looks as if we had to say: 'This can't go on forever: we must come

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at last to the case where what makes " p " true is just that p '. Now I want to say that this is not right. If making true were like hauling, we might reasonably consider that there it must come to something that hauls without being hauled by something else – though even there we would not suppose it to haul itself, but simply to be an unhailed hauler. And the analogue would be that what makes true must itself be made true by something else, until we come to something that makes true without being made true. But making true isn't exercising a sort of force; we saw we couldn't speak of a division of labour when a disjunction was made true by the truth of all its elements. We can't ask which really does the work, or whether the disjunction is made truer, like an object being moved more quickly or further. Therefore we can't reason analogously to the argument that there must be an unhailed hauler, which is *the* hauling source of all this hauling force that is exercised. Nor is it any defence of the analogy to say that there may be more than one ultimate hauler, because if there is the force of each can be lessened or the hauling is done more quickly or a greater load is hauled.

If we did pursue the analogy while forgetting this point of contrast, then when we ascribed the truth-making to something that makes true without being made true, we should be forgetting about the other elements of the disjunction we are considering. If the truth of p consists in the truth of q or q makes it true that p , then how will we be able to accommodate the fact that it is also made true by r 's being true – r being sufficient, and independent of p ? Well, we *can* do so precisely because q has not done a work which must not be usurped, and can't be shared by r . But that means that the argument to the first truth-maker is not like an argument to the first, i.e., unhailed, hauler in a series of haulers each of which is hauled by its predecessors till we come to an object which hauls without being hauled.

Nevertheless, any making true must come to an end, or to several ends: a relation of making true cannot be supposed to be repeated *ad infinitum*. For if it runs in a circle, then p will be made true by q as much as it makes q true. And if it doesn't run in a circle then there never is a completed series of terms of the series. But unless we *finish* somewhere, and so indicate a finite series of terms if it doesn't run in a circle, we don't reckon to have given what makes true except in a partial way: for if r is made true by q and q by p and we simply stop at p while admitting that no doubt something else makes p true, then we have only given an incomplete account of *this* way in which r is made true. So we not merely must stop at some p , but there must be some p stopping at which finishes that particular account.

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Since this is so, we must allow the termination in a proposition that makes true without being made true by something else – I mean by the truth of a non-equivalent proposition. This however does not yet give us the idea of a proposition whose truth makes true without itself being made true; for unlike hauling ‘making p true’ might be done by p itself. So we would have our terminus when we came to what is made true, but not by the truth of any *other* proposition. However a proposition can’t make itself true: we have to gloss the statement and say ‘ p is made true by the *fact that* p ’. If we have a Tractatus-like metaphysic of facts this would be possible: we would have reached an elementary proposition, made true by the existence of an atomic fact. But without such a metaphysic we are only saying p is made true by its being the case that p , or by its being true! That is an empty statement, with only a false air of explanation.

And so in the end we’d have to accept as termini propositions which are true without being made true. If this seems shocking, that is because of a deep metaphysical prejudice. If we take ‘making true’ in any of the senses that I have mentioned for it, there is no reason to be shocked. A disjunction is made true by the truth of any of its elements; but *they* don’t have to be disjunctions in their turn and usually aren’t. When they aren’t we’ve got to the terminus *for that sort of making true*. There is a formal cause of this being the French flag, namely the arrangement of vertical stripes of certain colours and proportions; there may be a formal cause of the vertical but it is unlikely that it too will have a formal cause in its turn. And so the termination of truths being made true by other truths, in truths not made true in any sense that has been introduced, is not so bad after all; in fact it is altogether to be expected, or rather it is inevitable. The general principle, that what is true must be made true by something, can’t be rebutted by calling in question *any* idea of making true, but it is rebutted if we demand that the particular manner of making true be given for the question that is being asked when one asks what, if anything, makes a certain proposition true.

Sentences and propositions

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Does truth attach to sentences, or to what sentences express? If to sentences, then certainly not to type sentences, such as 'I am going to London tomorrow', but only to token sentences, that is, sentences considered as uttered by a particular speaker at a particular time. It would, however, be inconvenient to restrict truth to utterances that are actually made; we may therefore adopt the device and terminology of Davidson, and speak of a 'statement' constituted by a triple $[s, i, t]$ of a type sentence s , an individual i and a time t , the existence of which does not depend on whether i in fact uttered s at t . I shall presume that the identification of a type sentence depends on identifying the language to which it belongs. A familiar, irritating obstacle prevents our explaining that, when i did not utter s at t , the 'statement' is to be said to be true just in case he would have said something true if he had done so; the obstacle consists in sentences like, 'I am not now speaking.' The difficulty is not serious. What more is needed in order to obtain, from a type sentence s , something apt to be characterised as true or false is an assignment of references to indexical and demonstrative expressions occurring in s ; we may say that s 'comes out' true or false under such an assignment. We may therefore take a 'statement' $[s, i, t]$ to be true or false according as s comes out true or false under the assignment of t to the word 'now', i to the words 'I', and 'me', the place where i is at t to the word 'here', and so on. There is no reason to be disconcerted by the fact that this will yield as true a 'statement' involving the sentence, 'I have been dead for a hundred years.' Demonstrative expressions like 'that house', 'this country', etc., are less easily dealt with. Many should be regarded as devoid of reference unless, at t , i actually makes a pointing gesture or the equivalent; but the question need not be pursued here. For convenience, however, we may continue to speak of the ascription of truth to sentences, as long as we bear in mind that it is to 'statements', in our special sense, to which it is really to be ascribed.

The alternative is to treat truth as attaching to what a 'statement' expresses. This is usually called a 'proposition'. The ontological status of propositions, in the philosophical tradition, is, however, ambiguous, even when they are not identified with sentences: do they belong, in Frege's terminology, to the realm of sense or to the realm of reference? It is better to consider them as

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unequivocally belonging to the realm of sense, and I shall therefore use Frege's term 'thoughts' in place of 'propositions'. A thought, if it is to be that to which truth attaches, cannot, in general, be the sense of a type sentence, for the same reason that truth cannot, in general, attach to type sentences. We accordingly need to consider a thought as involving not only the sense of a type sentence, but also a determination of the references of indexical expressions occurring in it; and there is no reason why we should not adopt the same expedient as before, taking a thought to be a triple $[s^*, i, t]$, where s^* is the sense of a type sentence, i an individual and t a time.

All the same, objections to this option are likely to be heard from philosophers who, impelled by a dread of what they call 'reification', doubt whether there are such entities as thoughts, that is, whether there are such items as senses of type sentences capable of forming constituents of triples. If we can avoid it, it is better to discuss the question without having to argue this issue. Let us therefore simply observe that the language notoriously uses 'that'-clauses in opaque contexts such as 'George believes that some fungi are poisonous', 'a proof that some fungi are poisonous', 'the hypothesis that some fungi are poisonous' and many others. An opaque context is one in which replacement of an expression by an extensionally equivalent one will not, in general, preserve truth-value: as Frege observed, its replacement by a synonymous expression *will* normally do so. Opaque contexts are perplexing, and no generally acceptable account of them has been put forward. They can, however, neither be eliminated nor dispensed with, and must therefore be explained somehow. For this reason, there can be no objection to using them to give the correct form for ascribing truth. We can accordingly reframe our question whether truth attaches to sentences or to thoughts as the question whether 'is true' is properly to be used in such a context as:

'Some fungi are poisonous' is true

or in one such as:

It is true that some fungi are poisonous,

where the 'that'-clause is understood as constituting an opaque context. In the latter case, there can now be no question of an ordered triple; rather, the references must be specified in the part of the sentence outside the 'that'-clause, as in:

It was true of John on Monday that he was going to London the next day.