Quine's semantic ascent and Austin's conventional account of truth

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The source of the concept of truth lies in our general conception of the linguistic practice of assertion. _M. Dummett_

In Word and Object, Quine proposes a linguistic device, what he calls semantic ascent, by virtue of which we can name a linguistic expression, taken as a whole, rather than use it as part of sentences. In doing so, we treat linguistic expressions of the kind as objects of a certain type, i.e. linguistic entities, so that the quantifier can range over these objects. In particular, Quine claims that applying semantic ascent to sentences, we could legitimately use the truth predicate 'is true'. Nonetheless, this usage of the truth predicate seems to be inconsistent with his disquotational account of truth. For on the disquotational account, the truth predicate is superfluous, or can be at most construed as an identity function. Quine ((1986):12) attempts to dissolve this latent inconsistency by arguing that the truth predicate is needed 'to restore the effect of objective reference when for the sake of some generalization we have resorted to semantic ascent.' This argument, as it stands, is not so convincing. In this paper I shall propose that Quine's resort to semantic ascent provides in essence a pragmatic treatment of the use of the truth predicate in ordinary discourse. Moreover, this pragmatic treatment can be extended to ordinary statements, e.g. 'Snow is white' is true. And this treatment suggests that truth should be construed as a pragmatic concept, rather than a purely semantic one. To justify this thesis, I draw a comparison between Quine's treatment of the truth predicate and Austin's conventional account of truth, which resorts to descriptive conventions and demonstrative conventions. For it strikes me that if the truth of a statement can be characterized by virtue of demonstrative conventions, as Austin so argued, then truth is essentially a pragmatic concept. As a matter of fact,
when we ascribe truth to a certain statement by means of demonstrative conventions, the required demonstrative conventions tell us nothing about the nature of truth, nor do they add any extra ingredients to the original statement. In short, the set of demonstrative conventions which would render the given statement to be true is not intended to serve as a semantic rule. Truth, thus characterized, should not be treated as a semantic concept. Instead, the set of demonstrative conventions involved would serve as a general principle or principles, which explain how to use the truth predicate when a speaker says that a statement is true.

1. Semantic ascent and the truth predicate

People use language to communicate one another. We use language by and large to talk about things in the world, whatever they are. And in due course, we also talk of linguistic expressions themselves such as words, phrases, sentences, and so on. Of course, in a communication in ordinary discourse, our main concern is with what objects they are, or there are, that we talk about. Likewise, mathematicians and scientists intend to formulate a variety of theories to talk about things in the world. And in formulating a theory, they also talk of linguistic expressions themselves as well although usually their primarily concern is with the objects to which the theory in question is supposed to be committed. However, when there are debates concerning whether there are non-linguistic objects to which the theory under investigation (e.g. a mathematical theory such as set theory) is committed, we may find that our main concern shifts from the non-linguistic objects under debate to the language in use. Inspired by Carnap's (1950) construction of 'linguistic framework,' Quine (1960: 272-4) proposes that when a debate of this kind arises, we must realize that we no longer talk in terms (namely, we would not use words such as names or individual constants to talk about objects), rather we are talking about terms themselves. And we may treat these linguistic expressions as if they are also objects of a certain type so that we can talk about them. For Quine, an application of this manoeuvre is to ascend our semantics to a level where there were indeed objects, namely linguistic objects such as terms or sentences, over which quantification can range. For example, a mathematical theory may involve a category of abstract terms, such as 0, 1, ; while a physical theory may involve a category of theoretical terms. And by now the dispute concerning whether these mathematical/theoretical terms do stand for mathematical/theoretical entities which are part of the world has not come to an end. Quine then suggests that by semantic ascent, we may simply treat these mathematical/theoretical terms themselves as objects so that quantification can range over, say numbers, regardless whether there are numbers in reality or not.
Now, Quine ((1960): 272-4; (1992): 81) takes a further step by claiming that the method of semantic ascent can be applied to some disputable philosophical issues. In particular, we may treat sentences as objects of some kind, and thereby apply the truth predicate to sentences straightforwardly. We can therefore meaningfully talk of a sentence, say 'Snow is white,' by uttering that the sentence 'Snow is white' is true, and then legitimately take the phrase 'is true' as a predicate (known as the truth predicate) to ascribe truth to the very sentence.

There are at least two good reasons for Quine to apply semantic ascent to sentences. The first, a negative one, is to reject the realist conception of meaning and truth, according to which, there are some non-linguistic entities (e.g. propositions) which are the meaning of sentences and which make sentences true. For example, the propositionalist maintains that propositions are needed because truth is intelligible only of propositions, not sentences. The propositionalist insists that at any rate, truth should hinge on reality not language; sentences are language. But the ontological status of propositions remains to be problematic. Quine then suggests that via semantic ascent, we can take sentences themselves as objects of a certain type: semantic ascent 'carries the discussion into a domain where both parties [in a debate] are better agreed on the objects (viz., words) and on the main terms concerning them', so Quine argues. We can then talk of the truth of sentences without appeal to some problematic or ad hoc entities, e.g., propositions.

A second reason for Quine to extend semantic ascent to sentences comes from the dimension of generality. Quine argues that when we are dealing with generalization of sentences of a certain type, we can expound logic in a general way only by talking of forms of sentences. And the only way to deal with forms of sentences is to take every sentence of a certain form, as a whole, as an object. For example, consider the truism 'If time flies then time flies', which is in essence an instance of a logical truth 'If p then p.' We may wish to say that this compound continues true no matter which sentence is used to substitute for the clause 'time flies.' This consideration leads to the requirement of a generalization on the clause 'time flies' in 'If time flies then time flies'. But, the desired generalization would not be implemented as in the case of generalization, say of the form "All men are mortal", from a collection of singular simple subject-predicate sentences, say "Socrates is mortal," "Aristotle is mortal," . . . , etc. This is because the clause 'time flies' is not a name of one of objects (of a given domain) over which the intended universal quantifier ranges. Now, applying semantic ascent, the required generality can be obtained by ascending to a level where sentences were indeed objects over which to generalize. For such a linguistic device enables us 'to mention an
expression by name instead of using it as a component clause'. (Also, Quine (1995): 92) Consequently, we can treat all sentences as objects of some type, to which the truth predicate can be applied, and over which a universal quantifier can be introduced to range. For example, we may now say that every sentence of the form 'If p then p' is true, or that every sentence of the form 'p or not p' is true. We can thereby 'express generalizations of the desired sort without appeal to propositions, by going up a step and attributing truth to sentences,' so Quine ((1986):12) argues.

So far so good. However, some might argue that should there be objects of the desired sort obtained in this way, these objects should be part of the ontology, to which a theory of truth would be committed. Then, why would we not simply take 'p or not p, for all things p of the sort that sentences are names of ' as a reading of the generalization of 'Tom is mortal or Tom is not mortal,' . . . , etc.? Yet, Quine ((1986):11-2) argues that sentences are by no means names of objects of some sort, which are part of the reality (the world). The suggested reading is essentially incoherent: as a matter of fact, it uses 'p' both in positions that call for sentence clauses and in a position that calls for a noun substantive. It is to be noted that according to Quine, what prompts this semantic ascent is not that 'Tom is mortal or Tom is not mortal' is somehow about sentences while 'Tom is mortal' and 'Tom is tom' are about Tom. Rather, Quine insists that all three sentences are about Tom. In other words, for Quine, the expression 'Tom is mortal or Tom is not mortal' is not a name of some object. This indicates that when applying semantic ascent to sentences, we are by no means to introduce some extra objects into our ontology; all that Quine has emphasized is, by semantic ascent, we go up one step and talk about sentence, e.g., 'Every sentence of the form 'p or not p' is true.'

Following this line of thought, it is not surprising to find that Quine insists that we can attribute truth to sentences. As the above examples illustrate, we can actually assert that 'Every sentence . . . is true.' Doubtless, the expression 'is true' in the clause 'Every sentence . . . is true' is intended to serve as a predicate (known as the truth predicate) which is supposed to be predicated of every sentence of a certain form.

However, it is noteworthy that this usage of the truth predicate appears to be inconsistent with Quine's disquotational account of truth, according to which truth is disquotation (Quine (1992): 80); or more specifically, the truth predicate is a device of disquotation. (Quine (1986) :12). This needs a further explanation.

As is widely agreed, amongst a variety of perplexing philosophical concepts, perhaps the concept of truth is the most intractable one. In particular, at the core lies a seemingly paradoxical relationship between the truth of a sentence and its meaning.
Given a sentence S (or statement, or utterance, or whatever it is to be taken as the truth-bearer), when claiming that S is true, it is presupposed that S has a meaning; and we can know whether S is true or not only when we have known in advance what S is supposed to mean. Thus, it seems beyond reasonable doubt to say that truth presupposes meaning. On the other hand, when we ask, or are asked, what S is supposed to mean (or what a speaker non-naturally means by an utterance (of a certain sentence S), in Grice's terms), we have to assume that S is true. It then appears fairly sensible to claim that meaning presupposes truth. In other words, it would make no sense to say of the truth of a sentence unless its meaning is presupposed; nor would it make a sense to say of the meaning of a sentence unless its truth is presupposed. We are thus on the horns of a dilemma.

In view of such a seeming paradoxical connexion between meaning and truth, philosophers are roughly divided into two groups. On the one hand, a group of philosophers assume that we have a hunk of meaningful sentences, and then try to characterize the nature of truth by figuring out what makes a sentence to be true. This is precisely what the traditional accounts of the concept of truth is seeking for, such as the correspondence theory of truth, or the idealist coherence theory of truth. Unfortunately, so far no satisfactory account of the nature of truth have been given as yet. On the other hand, a group of some other philosophers, leading by Frege, claim that we should take truth as primitive and then analyses what the meaning of a sentence is. However, this approach would trivialize the concept of truth: the notion of truth is redundant.

Tarski's ((1933); (1944)) characterization of the semantic conception of truth, as the well-known T-schema so formulated, can be viewed as an attempt to reconcile this dilemma:

(T) 'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white.

where the quotation 'Snow is white' is to serve as a name of the sentence Snow is white.

Surprisingly enough, philosophers have a variety of interpretation of Tarski's T-schema. For example, Davidson intends to identify what makes 'Snow is white' to be true with the truth-conditions of the sentence Snow is white. Hence, to know the truth-conditions of a sentence is to know its meaning. But, notice that Davidson takes the concept of truth as primitive and then claims that knowing the meaning of a sentence is knowing what the truth-conditions are to be satisfied. By contrast, the deflationalist maintains that the statement "Snow is white" is true' says the same thing as Snow is
white does. Along this line of thought, Quine maintains that when we say that 'Snow is white' is true, what we assert is to ascribe truth to the sentence 'Snow is white', which in turn says no more than to ascribe whiteness to snow. One could see that truth, thus construed, is no longer an objective property of sentences. As a result, the predicate 'true' is superfluous when truth is ascribed to a given sentence; you could just utter the sentence. To say of a sentence true is just to reaffirm it, and by affirming or reaffirming a sentence we express our acceptance of it; and that 's that. (Quine, 1986: 12; 1990: 80; also R. Barrett and R. Gibson 1990: 229 ) Thus, ascription of truth to a sentence, e.g. 'Snow is white', just cancels the quotation marks. Quine takes this as the gist of Tarski's T-scheme. Tarski's T-scheme can be thereby viewed as a formulation of the cancellatory force of the truth predicate in ordinary discourse. For the quotation in an instance of T-schema (e.g., 'Snow is white') is a name of a sentence (i.e. the sentence Snow is white) that contains a name, namely 'snow', of snow. The quotation marks (e.g., 'Snow is white') thus make all the difference between talking about words (say, the sentence Snow is white) and talking about the world (say, snow). Quine ((1986):12; also, (1992: 80)) therefore concludes that:

'The truth predicate is a device of disquotation. We may affirm the single sentence by uttering it, unaided by quotation or by the truth predicate,’ or more straightforwardly, 'truth is disquotation'.

Nonetheless, this does not imply that there is no room at all for the concept of truth in philosophical discourse. But, what are the places where, though still concerned with non-linguistic reality, we can move to proceed indirectly and talk of sentences? According to Quine ((1986):11), they are places where we are seeking generality, and seeking it along certain oblique planes that we cannot sweep out by generalizing over objects, for examples, when we want to affirm some infinitely many sentences that we can demarcate only by talking about the sentences, or when we are talking about sentences that are not given. For in these cases, we are no longer talking about what a given indicative sentence is about (viz., objects to which the subject(s) of the sentence refers), but about sentences as a whole. And when we want to make a generalization from sentences of these kinds, the truth predicate has its use. Recall the aforementioned example in which we want to assert that any sentence of the form 'If p then p' is true. Admittedly, in such a context, when analyzed logically, exhibit the truth predicate in application not to a quotation but to a pronoun, or bound variable which takes sentences as objects to range over. (Quine (1992): 80). Therefore, the best way we can achieve this generality is to take sentences as objects _ a kind of linguistic entity. It is in this sense that Quine ((1986):12) proposes that when for the sake of some
generalization we have resorted to semantic ascent, the truth predicate is needed to restore the effect of objective reference. Moreover, when the truth predicate is applied to sentences, treated as objects of certain type via semantic ascent, the ascription of truth to sentences does not imply that truth is a property of sentences. As Quine ((1992): 81) emphasizes that 'what is true is the sentence, but its truth consists in the world's being as the sentence says; hence the use of the truth predicate is accommodating semantic ascent.' Quine then concludes that the truth predicate is indispensable: not as an ordinary predicate, but rather as a linguistic device for semantic ascent.

2. Semantic ascent as a pragmatic treatment of the use of the truth predicate

From a purely semantic point of view, Quine's proposal that by resorting to semantic ascent we could treat sentences as objects of some type, to which the truth predicate can be applied. This approach therefore not only indicates a way of achieving the desired generality with regard to the truth of sentences of some type but also justifies the use, and a fortiori, the indispensability of the truth predicate.

So far so good, however, it strikes me that should we follow Quine's footstep, then we would have a two-tiered usage of the truth predicate. At the bottom level where sentences are used to talk about the world, when we are uttering that a certain particular sentence is true, the truth predicate is superfluous and hence eliminable; at the upper level where sentences are treated as objects, when we are speaking of some generalization of sentences, the truth predicate is indispensable. Things would become worse, when we further take into account the predication of the truth predicate to sentences with a certain desired generality. For the ascription of truth to sentences in this case appears to be inconsistent with his realist/empiricist orientated conception of truth.

It is to be noted that although Quine has cast his doubt on the propositionalist's way of producing a reality for truth to hinge on, he ((1986):10) agrees that 'truth should hinge on reality, and it does.' After all, 'no sentence is true but reality makes it so,' so Quine ((1986):10) insists. Consequently, for Quine, in speaking of the truth of a given sentence, we do speak about the world when we are saying of a certain sentence. And he believes that this is precisely where the truth predicate has its utility:

'Here the truth predicate serves, as it were, to point through the sentence to the reality; it serves as a reminder that though sentences are mentioned, reality is till the whole point.' ((1986):11)
Doubtless, we may resort to semantic ascent to restore the effect of objective reference by treating sentences as objects, and then we can apply the truth predicate to objects of this sort to obtain the desired generalization. Thus, we could use the truth predicate and state that:

(1) Every sentence of the form 'p or not p' is true.

And intuitively, in uttering (1), truth is ascribed to every sentence of the form 'p or not p'. However, from a logical point of view, the truth of a sentence of the form 'p or not p' is entirely determined by virtue of the logical connective involved, i.e. 'either ... or...'. Hence, it is hard to envisage in what sense the truth of a sentence of the form 'p or not p' hinges on reality.

It is striking that appealing to semantic ascent, Quine can successfully explain the legitimacy of the use of the truth predicate to sentences, but he may not be able to explain in what sense truth hinges on reality. Some might therefore reject such a two-tiered usage of the truth predicate. Sticking to the original motivations for the disquotational account of truth, some might suggest that even when we are seeking for generalization, the truth predicate in a statement used to display a certain generality such as (1) can be reduced to some other statement in which the truth predicate would not appear; hence the truth predicate is eliminable. For example, consider a statement of such a kind, say

(2) Whatever John said is true.

Prior (1971) and later Hugly and Sayward (1996) propose that (2) can be reformulated as:

(3) Everything John said is true

which can be in turn reformulated in terms of the following:

(4) For every x, if x is a sentence and John uttered x, then for some p, x says that p, and p.

Clearly, if (4) is equivalent to (2) or (3), then the truth predicate occurring in (2) is thus eliminable. Therefore, it can be argued that if the truth predicate, when applied to a particular simple ordinary sentence, is used in an indirect way to show that truth hinges on reality, and hence it is dispensable; we are in no good position to claim that it is indispensable when applied to sentences as a whole to achieve certain desired
It is to be noted that Prior has distinguished the use of 'true' as the truth-predicate 'is true' from the use of 'true' as a truth-connective 'It is true that . . .' And for Prior, the use of the truth predicate in (2) is eliminable because it is reducible to a sentence of the form 'It is true that' wherein the truth connective is in essence a null connective. None the less, Prior also maintains that if the truth predicate is used in sentences in which it is predicated of sentences or utterances, such as "'Snow is white' is true", then the truth predicate involved is not reducible. For Prior could find no deep theoretical reason for denying that the truth predicate can function as a predicate when attached to terms for sentences. (For a further discussion, see Hugly and Sayward (1996), Chapter 15.) Now, one can see that what Prior has in mind is merely to resort to semantic ascent even though no generality is to be tackled.

It strikes me that if we follow Prior's approach by resorting to semantic ascent so as to treat any given sentence as an object of some sort, of which the truth predicate can be predicated. Then the truth predicate is indispensable. But it is noteworthy that for Prior, truth is ineliminably intensional. It is of course a somewhat interesting topic to discuss whether truth is an extensional (semantic) concept, or after all, an intensional one. But that is a topic beyond the scope of this paper; hence I would like to put it aside. For it strikes me that there is a more straightforwardly approach to tackle the seemingly inconsistent that Quine's two-tiered usage of the truth predicate may give rise to. That is, we had better take Quine's semantic ascent as a pragmatic treatment of the use of the truth predicate.

As is well known, pragmatics has been widely accepted as the part of the study of a given language that concerns the relationship between speakers and the linguistic expressions they are using. The primary concern of pragmatics lies in the study of some general principles which govern the use of language in general and some special kinds of linguistic behaviours. Thus, by a pragmatic treatment of the use of a linguistic expression, it is meant a treatment to explain the feature of the use of that expression in terms of some general principles governing appropriate utterances. On the basis of such a general conception, it is not difficult to realize that Quine's semantic ascent in fact provides certain general principles to explain the use of the truth predicate. It illustrates that the truth predicate can be applied to sentences only if sentences are to be taken as objects of some sort by the resort to semantic ascent. It is worth mentioning that from a pragmatic point of view, in speaking of the use of the truth predicate to be predicative of sentences, we would never ascribe truth to sentences. As a matter of
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fact, we could only apply the truth predicate to those sentences which already have a truth value. It would be unintelligible to claim that the truth predicate can be applied to sentences of the kind which have no truth value. It is therefore beyond reasonable doubt to say that not the use of the truth predicate ascribes truth to sentences; rather the reality makes sentences true already. I think this would be congruous with Quine’s realist thesis that truth hinges on reality.

At this point, it should be noted that for Quine, in speaking of a sentence, we are speaking of an eternal sentence. And by an eternal sentence for Quine is meant a sentence in a certain established theory (either a theory of the world or a manual which is to serve as a translation of some primitive language in radical translation). Moreover, we must remind ourselves that for Quine, on an occasion of radical translation, when the linguist learns of a new (observation) sentence of the Jungle language via the assent of some primitive, or when a child learns of a new sentence via the assent of his/her parents, he/she knows not only the meaning of the sentence under investigation, but also that the sentence in question is true. Presumably, this is the main reason why Quine would insist that truth is disquotation.

On the basis of this analysis, we may say that for Quine the truth of a sentence is one thing but the use of the truth predicate is another. Reality makes sentence true but we use the truth predicate to talk of true statements. If this line of reasoning is acceptable, then it is not surprising to find that Quine ((1975): 327) notes:

Whatever we affirm, after all, we affirm as a statement within our aggregate theory of nature as we now see it; and to call a statement true is just to reaffirm it. Perhaps, it is not true, and perhaps we shall find that out; but only in any event there is no extra-theoretic truth than the truth we are claiming or aspiring to as we continue to tinker with our system of the world from within.

In other words, when we treat sentences as objects, the truth predicate would indicate that the very sentence to which the truth predicate applies is a statement that expresses a certain truth which in turn hinges on reality already. As Quine ((1986): p.316) remarks,

I can attribute reality and truth only within the terms and standards of the scientific system of the world that I now accept; only immanently.

And it seems to me that only when the resort to semantic ascent is to be understood as a pragmatic treatment of the use of the truth predicate then we can have a
clear picture why Quine ((1986):12) claims that the truth predicate is a reminder that, despite a technical ascent to talk of sentences, our eye is on the world.

Some might feel uneasy over this pragmatic treatment of the use of the truth predicate. In fact, this line of thought is by no mean a brand-new one. Austin (1950) has proposed a similar approach in his account of the concept of truth. I will therefore devote the remainder of this paper to his account.

3. Austin's conventional account of truth

Austin (1950) offers a purified version of the correspondence theory of truth (Strawson's phrase). Starting with the assumption that statements are truth-bearers, together with his sympathises with the correspondence account of truth, Austin ((1950): 21) claims that a true statement is one which 'corresponds to the facts.' None the less, Austin has never believed that facts are pseud-entities, let alone entities of some kind; nor would he accept the legitimacy of any correspondence relation between the language in use and the world, whatever it could be. But this does not imply that the notion of facts is superfluous. According to Austin ((1950): 23),"when a statement is true, a state of affairs which makes it true and which is toto mundo distinct from the true statement about it." But, 'fact that' is a phrase designed for use in situations where the distinction between a true statement and the state of affairs about which it is a true is neglected. Therefore, "speaking about 'the fact' is a compendious way of speaking about a situation involving both words and world." ((1950):24.) And the notion of 'fitting the facts' is thus useless. To avoid this notion, Austin ((1961): 183) argues that in speaking of correspondence with the facts with regard to true statements, the whole expression 'correspondence with the fact' should be understood as 'a description of the conditions which must be satisfied if we are to say of a statement that it is true.'

Following this line of reasoning, Austin maintains that in a successful communication, apart from the language in use and the world which the language is used to communicate about, there must be two sets of conventions:

(a) Description conventions correlating the words (=sentences) with the types of situation, thing, event, etc., to be found in the world.

(b) Demonstrative conventions correlating the words (= statements) with the historical situations, etc., to be found in the world.
Austin ((1950):22) then claimed that

\[(AT) \text{ A statement is said to be true when the historical state of affairs to which it is correlated by the demonstrative conventions (the one to which it 'refers') is of a type with which the sentence used in making it is correlated by the descriptive conventions.}\]

At first glance, the primary concern of Austin, as it appears, is to characterize the awkward but unenviable correspondence relation in terms of social conventions. However, it is unclear what Austin means by "the types of situation, thing, event, etc., to be found in the world" and "the historic situations, etc., to be found in the world". Moreover, Austin did not give any further explanation about where these two types of conventions come from and how they are functioning. These open the door to a variety of misunderstanding and misinterpretation. For example, Strawson ((1950), (1964), (1965)) and Warnock (1964) claimed that the thesis that the relation between the statement that S and the world which the statement that S is true asserts to obtain is a purely conventional relation is not a consequence of Austin's account but actually inconsistent with it.

It is worth mentioning that, for Austin, there is no such a thing as the objective meaning of a sentence. All that we have is the types of situations (thing, event, etc.) which are part of the world, with which the words (= sentences) correlate. By the same token, there is no entities of the kind to sever as truth-values to be assigned to a sentence with which a certain fixed type of situation correlates; a sentence is said to be true or false only if it correlates with a certain historical situation by a certain demonstrative convention. Here, the notion of types of situation and that of historic situations need a further explanation.

Suppose that in the world there is a person named Socrates and it happens that the very person is a philosopher. Let us assume that an English sentence 'Socrates is a philosopher' (using the Greek letter \( \sigma \) to stand for this sentence, for short) is used to describe this. Presumably, in a great number of communication in ordinary discourse, a speaker may intend to talk about the very person Socrates with this property on different occasions. And of course, each time the speaker can only talk about this on a particular occasion, we may think of the situation on this occasion as a historic situation. However, on many occasions, a speaker may talk about the same person with the same property. We may then take the very person together with his (i.e., Socrates) being a philosopher as the type of situation wherein Socrates is a philosopher. Therefore by a set of descriptive conventions, we may say that the sentence \( \sigma \) is used to correlate with the very type of situation. For simplicity, let us use the notation \( (\sigma) \) to stand
for the type of situation with which the sentence σ used in making it is correlated. Of course, one can see that in a successful communication, a speaker is not speaking of sentences; rather he/she is uttering statements in that the linguistic expression (i.e. the sentence) that he is uttering is already correlated with certain type of situation. Let us use the notation S(σ) to stand for such a statement. Now, when a speaker is making a statement by uttering a sentence σ, he/she is no longer referring to the type of situation σ; rather he/she could only be referring to a particular (historic) situation which belongs to the type of situation that the given sentence is correlated with. Let us use the notation h(σ) to stand for a certain historic situation of the type σ. (If an utterance of a sentence on a particular occasion can be viewed as a token of that sentence, the particular historic situation to which that statement is correlated can be by the same reason viewed as a token of the type of situation to which the sentence is correlated.)

Now, Austin argues that a sentence, say σ, can be correlated to a certain type of situation, say σ, by the descriptive conventions; while in making a statement S(σ), one is intended to correlate S(σ) to h(σ) by the demonstrative conventions. But, what required descriptive conventions are? And what are required demonstrative conventions for a statement to be true?

Granted that we have a language in use containing a denumerable sentences σ₁,...,σₙ, also there is the world containing a collection of types of situations 1, . . . , m , . . . . We may think of a descriptive convention as a function, say f, which may correlate a given sentence σ with a certain type of situation σ. Moreover, for each i, there is a collection of historic situations of that type, say {tk | tk ∈ i}. Analogously, we may think of a demonstrative convention as a function, say f *, which may correlate a statement, say S(σ), with a certain historic situation, say tk, such that f *(S(σ)) = tk. Now, what (AT) suggests is nothing more than the assertion:

A statement S is true when σ = f(σ) and f *(S(σ)) = tk such that tk .

Perhaps, it is in this sense that Austin claims that we can talk about further possibilities, and also that truth is a matter of pure convention.

It seems likely that Austin intends to take the correlated type of situation as the meaning of a sentence. Now, since sentences have no objective meaning, f cannot be a constant function. Presumably, the functioning of f and the value of f are purely
conventional. Moreover, different sentences could never be used to express the same statement. Consider the following sentences and the related occasions wherein the corresponding sentences are uttered:

(i) "John is so smart", said Tom, a friend of John, who saw John at the party.

(ii) "My brother is so smart", said Peter, a brother of John, who saw John at the party.

(iii) "I am so smart", said John at the party.

According to Strawson (1950), they make the same statement. By contrast, for Austin, in communication, we do not only speak of a sentence \( \sigma \); rather we are speaking of \( S(\sigma) \). And the meaning of a sentence in a communication is to be understood as the value of \( f(S(\sigma)) \), rather than that of \( f(\sigma) \). Thus, the meaning of a sentence is relative to the making of an \( S(\sigma) \), which is in turn relative to the use of \( \sigma \) under certain descriptive conventions \( f \).

If the foregoing analysis is right, then the truth predicate 'is true', as it stands, is no longer used as a predicate to be predicated of statements or sentences, as Strawson so suggests. Rather, it is used to indicate in what situation the truth predicate is used, namely when the referred historical situation is one of the type of situation, to which the statement is thus correlated. And this line of treatment of the use of the truth predicate is similar to the pragmatic treatment of the use of the truth predicate involved in Quine's resort to semantic ascent.

It is to be noted that both Strawson and Warnock's (1964: 67) criticisms seem to miss the point, when they argue that on Austin's account, all that is 'purely conventional' is that to utter the sentence 'S' is to make the statement that S: whether or not the statement so made is true is of course a matter not of convention, but of fact. However, for Austin, the conventional account of the ascription of truth to statements does not imply that truth is a matter of purely convention. At any rate, as Austin maintains, both two kinds of conventions are used to correlate types of situations and historic situations respectively and both are to be found in the world. As a matter of fact, all that Austin has illustrated is that the correlation of a sentence to a certain type of situation and the correlation of a statement to a certain historical situation are obtained via some pure conventions. But Austin should never claim that the application of the truth predicate is a matter of purely convention. By contrast, for Austin, the truth predicate is used to stipulate that whenever the speaker claims that the statement he is
making by uttering a certain sentence is true what he claims is an assertion that the use of such a statement suffices to indicate that the historic situation to be referred (via the set of demonstrative conventions) is a token of the type of situation that the sentence is used to describe (via the set of descriptive conventions). In short, what Austin has in mind is to illustrate what is the role that the truth predicate plays in a communication.

Again, just like Quine's semantic ascent, in speaking of the truth of a statement, Austin has no intention whatsoever to explain what the nature of the correspondence relation, and a fortiori, that of truth in terms of social conventions. For Austin, one of the main concerns in philosophical investigation is to elucidate philosophical concepts by virtue of meticulous attention to the usage of words through which they are expressed. As he remarked, close attention to the concepts and distinctions that have become embodied in the language is the beginning, if not the end, of philosophy, whilst airy recommendations about how we should think about something frequently fall short of the skill and delicacy with which we do think about. There is no surprise to find that instead of inquiring after the nature of truth (more specifically, the natural of correspondence relation), Austin approaches the required correspondence relation by asking how we use the word 'true', which will be characterized in terms of the sets of descriptive conventions and demonstrative conventions. And the ascription of truth to statements is a consequence of these conventions which are guarded by the use of the truth predicate.

If our aforementioned analysis is correct, we may again conclude that Austin's conversational account of truth thus construed offers a pragmatic treatment of the use of the truth predicate. That is to say, the truth predicate is no longer used as a semantic term to show the relation between the language and the world; rather it is used to indicate in what circumstances a statement is used to correlate a certain historic situation. In short, what Austin has offered is to tell us how and when to make a true statement, rather than to show us what it is that makes a statement true.

Some (e.g. Johnson, (1992)) might argue that Austin goes badly wrong in taking the demonstrative correlates to be worldly entities of some sort. Instead, the demonstrative and descriptive correlates must be seen as overlapping and ties to statements as actually made by the language-user, in context. But I can see no reason to claim that in so doing Austin is forced to take the demonstratives to be worldly entities of some sort. This is a mistake. From a pragmatic point of view, for Austin, in speaking of a statement's correlating with a historic situation, we are talking about such and such a statement, a sentence with a fixed interpretation, that's all.
4. **Towards a pragmatic concept of truth**

So far, our discussion on Quine's semantic ascent and Austin's conventional account of truth suggests that the use of the truth predicate is a pragmatic matter, rather than a semantic one. If this approach is on the right track, perhaps, we should take truth as a pragmatic concept, rather than a semantic one. At any rate, truth is not a property of sentences. Perhaps, as Bergström (2000: 65) rightly remarks, 'our linguistic usage determines the truth of the sentence'.

Surprisingly, this pragmatic concept of truth has been echoed by Dummett ((1978): 2) when he remarks that 'it is part of the concept of truth that we aim at making true statements; and Frege's theory of truth and falsity as the references of sentences leaves this feature of the concept of truth quite out of account.' And more recently, Dummett's (1991:165) remarks that

The source of the concept of truth lies in our general conception of the linguistic practice of assertion.
References


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