

EXPLICATION AND ORDINARY LANGUAGE ANALYSIS *

The business of philosophical analysis is clarification, but explicators and ordinary language analysts disagree on how to achieve it. Their disagreement is made the more prominent by various attempts to clarify similar concepts, such as truth and meaning, and by the attempt to resolve common problems. However, their mutual criticisms or attempts at arbitration are made at such a level of generality as to leave the basis for dispute or settlement obscure. I propose to examine what is at issue by focusing on supposedly competing analyses — the semantical and performatory notions of truth. Although I shall adopt the labels some commentators use to designate schools of analysis, I shall focus on individual writers and make clarification itself the subject of clarification.

The disagreement between explicators and ordinary language analysts could be resolved if one procedure for achieving clarification could be shown to be more successful than the other. But obviously no question of relative success could be raised unless the goals of analysis were similar.

Consider the apparently competing approaches to the analysis of the use of 'true'. Both Tarski ¹ (or Carnap ²) and Strawson ³ appear to be clarifying the same pre-analytic usage: 'is true' as it is used in connection with empirical assertions. There are other striking similarities: both consider the problem of separating the task of defining 'true' from the task of determining the criteria that would warrant the use of 'true'; both seek to resolve a version of the liar paradox; both proclaim the epistemological relevance of their work. But here the similarity ends. Tarski (or Carnap) opts for 'true' as a metalinguistic predicate of sentences; Strawson opposes to this an analysis of 'true' as a non-assertive performance.

Although there are more attitudes toward the task of clarification than are represented here and more variations within the two approaches than

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¹ "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics*, transl. J. H. Woodger (Oxford, 1956), pp. 152-278.

² *Introduction to Semantics* (Chicago, 1942), pp. 89-90.

³ "Truth," *Analysis*, IX (1949) reprinted in *Philosophy and Analysis*, ed. M. MacDonald (Oxford, 1954), pp. 260-277. See also his contribution to a symposium on Truth: "Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Suppl., XXIV (1950), pp. 129-156.

I have space to discuss, I believe these two different analyses of the same usage are typical and we can expect that consideration of the methods that produced them will reveal points of convergence and divergence in the goals these analyses were intended to serve. I will consider the two methods in turn: first explication, then ordinary language analysis.

I. By explication (sometimes called rational reconstruction) I mean the special sense Carnap has given the term in his later work, in particular *The Logical Foundations of Probability*. Explication is a process of replacing an inexact notion in common usage or in science, called an *explicandum*, by a more exact notion, called an *explicatum*, that is constructed with the help of a formalized language.⁴

The idea behind explication is the scientist's conception of an ideal model. The explicator constructs, or gives directions for constructing, an artificial language which is simpler and better understood than natural language but which stands as an analogue to natural language. The *explicatum*, which is itself an analogue of some pre-analytic usage, is then connected in a determinate way with the concepts of the simpler language. The artificial language is itself a necessary condition for clarity, for a concept is clear (or completely clear) only if it is defined in a language that is highly specified and in which the concepts employed relate only to the form and arrangement of signs. But the languages of reconstruction vary in such a way that the concept being clarified must be said to be relativized to that language and in not every language can an adequate explication be carried out; e.g., Tarski's attempt to define 'true' fails for formalized languages in which the order of the variables is infinite. Since explication is based on two analogies, i.e., the *explicatum* is analogous to the *explicandum* and the language of reconstruction is analogous to natural language, there must be points of convergence with that of which these constructions are analogues. This is guaranteed by requiring that the language be interpreted and that the *explicatum* satisfy certain material adequacy conditions. Thus the Frege-Russell reconstruction of cardinal number and Tarski's semantical conception of truth are paradigms of explication, whereas Peano's postulate system for arithmetic is not.

In practice the process of explication consists of four interdependent parts: (1) a preliminary identification and clarification of the *explicandum*, (2) the selection of a convention that serves to test the material adequacy of the *explicatum*, (3) the construction of an *explicatum* in some suitable formalized language, and (4) an attempt to demonstrate that the *explicatum* is adequate. Besides material adequacy conditions

⁴ R. Carnap, *The Logical Foundations of Probability*, (Chicago, 1950-, pp. 3-18.

there are others such as formal correctness, simplicity, and degree of conceptual unification by which the finished *explicatum* is evaluated. The question of material adequacy cannot be considered in isolation from the more formal conditions since the *explicatum* is judged adequate as a whole. But because material adequacy conditions are relevant to our consideration of Strawson's analysis of truth I will emphasize that part and refer to the other parts as they bear on it.

The preliminary identification of the *explicandum* amounts to little more than a marginal note. As a case in point I cite Carnap: "I am looking" for an *explicatum* of the term 'true,' not as used in phrases like 'a true democracy,' 'a true friend,' etc., but as used in everyday life . . . and in science in about the sense of 'correct,' 'accurate' . . ." ⁵

Step 2 involves the choice of a convention that will represent that usage and serve as a test of material adequacy. In the case of 'true' the convention selected is the biconditional 'x is true if and only if p' where p is a sentence and x the quotation-mark name of that sentence in a particular language. This scheme is not an explication of 'true'; it merely serves as a proxy for the inexact concept and is the only link between the finished *explicatum* and the pre-analytic usage. In practice it serves two purposes. One is to specify the pre-analytic usage more exactly; the other is to serve as a test of the *explicatum*. The explication of truth will be adequate materially if all the biconditionals formed by replacing p with a sentence and x with the name of that sentence follow from the completed *explicatum*.

The question whether a given *explicatum* corresponds to common usage may be interpreted in two ways: (1) Do the biconditionals follow on the basis of the definition? or (2) Is the *explicatum* similar to common usage; i.e., does the *explicatum* sustain the logical relations or other characteristics associated with common usage? That these two questions are quite distinct may be seen in the fact that one may give an affirmative answer to the first and a negative answer to the second; i.e., the biconditionals may follow from the *explicatum* but the biconditionals themselves may not be instances of or similar to the way 'true' is commonly used. The answer to the second question, the question whether the *explicatum* is an adequate paraphrase of common usage, is complex and depends on many factors.

It is possible that two or more *explicata* satisfying two or more different material adequacy conditions may be claimed to clarify the same inexact usage. And if usage is vague, then the explicator has considerable freedom in selecting the conventions his *explicata* must satisfy. At this

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

point the process of explication converges with a relatively autonomous discipline akin to pure mathematics that has little to do with the way expressions are commonly used, i.e., the conditions of material adequacy become the same as the conditions of formal adequacy.

Even in less 'extreme cases when usage is fairly clear, divergences between the *explicatum* and pre-analytic usage may be determined in part by the language in which the explication is carried out. For example, in the case of 'true' explicated with the help of the calculus of classes, it makes sense to let 'true' be a predicate of non-token reflexive sentences rather than some expression whose truth would vary an every occasion of its use. But another reason why wide divergences are tolerated is that they can be justified if the explication effects a conceptual unification; e.g., Tarski's explication of 'true' leads to a distinction between sentences that are true and sentences that are provable, with one consequence that it affords an alternative method of demonstrating the undecidability of certain sentences — a method that has results parallel to those obtained by Gödel in his researches in the incompleteness of certain languages.

This point anticipates the classic charge which the ordinary language analyst often levels against the explicator: in effect, the charge that the *explicatum* is not in accord with common usage. If this is the full measure of the charge, then it is a fundamental *ignoratio elenchi*. The explicator may always argue that departure from usage is perfectly compatible with his conception of analysis. But his continued claim that he is clarifying common usage is misleading and has undoubtedly kept the dispute going and is the reason why it lingers still. For unless the explicator's claim to be clarifying usage is qualified and unless the conditions that determine the choice of material adequacy conditions are made explicit then the charge that he is departing from usage will *appear* to have point. The charge that the explicator is departing from common usage would have point only if the explication were explicitly designed to record some usage or if attention to some as yet unacknowledged aspect of usage is presupposed in his program of clarification. The first alternative is unlikely as long as formalized languages are a necessary condition for achieving clarification; I shall postpone consideration of the second alternative until later. The criticism that the ordinary language philosopher makes is part of another conception of analysis to which I now turn.

II. Attention to the way ordinary expressions behave is not merely the occupation of those who are in revolt against heavy-handed formalism, but their concern with common usage presupposes a thesis about the relation of ordinary terms to philosophical perplexity that makes explication with the aid of formal language beside the point. For the ordinary language philosopher most of the key terms in traditional philosophy are

terms used frequently in everyday life. Philosophical perplexity often arises when these terms are made to perform unusual services or when certain grammatical analogies are ridden too hard. Thus it makes sense to study the way ordinary terms function as a condition for understanding the sources of philosophical perplexity. The freezing of certain aspects of usage into timeless logical relations misses the point of clarification for the ordinary language philosopher in two ways: first, by merely transporting the original problem from one language into another; and secondly, by fixing attention on the wrong place, since the formal model as such cannot be used to study how words actually work, though its use may reveal instructive points of contrast. Clarification according to this conception of analysis does not start with a vague usage that requires more precision, but with a term usually associated with some traditional philosophical perplexity.

Unlike Carnap or Tarski, Strawson does not make explicit his recipe for clarification except to suggest that an examination of the actual use of words is the best procedure in philosophy. But his procedure is clear enough in practice. (1) He begins by identifying a pre-analytic usage, e.g., 'is true' as it is used as a grammatical predicate. This first step is comparable to the same step in explication except that it is the puzzle whether truth is a quality or a relation that is the source of his interest in the common usage.⁶ (2) His next step amounts to a second look at the way the expression actually functions. By a series of linguistic portrayals he displays analogies between certain features of the use of 'is true' and the use of other expressions in an attempt to shock us into seeing something we have not seen before that would bear on the original perplexity. This step ends with a generalization stating what the actual function of the term is, e.g., 'is true' is a performatory device reducible to expressions such as 'I confirm' or 'I concede.' (3) The last step is both diagnostic and curative. The puzzle about truth arose because 'is true' was always thought to be an assertive device. Once its actual use as a performance is revealed then (a) the paradox of the liar is neutralized and (b) the traditional problem about whether truth is a property or a relation is resolved.

Step 2, linguistic portrayal, is the heart of Strawson's method. There is seldom anything resembling it in the practice of explicators. I therefore want to examine this step closely as it bears on his criticism of the semantic conception of truth and on his own practice of analysis. His criticism of semantic truth is based on two arguments, that truth is not a predicate of sentences, and, more positively, that it is a non-predicative performative.

⁶ Strawson, "in *Philosophy and Analysis*, p. 226.

If truth were a predicate of sentences, then one would expect that it would be analogous to standard uses of expressions that *are* clearly predicates of sentences in a particular language, predicates such as 'ungrammatical,' 'means,' etc. One characteristic of the standard use of these expressions may be displayed in translating a sentence containing a quoted sentence into another natural language. In the case of standard predicates of sentences the expression or sentence in quotes remains untranslated, whereas in the case of 'is true' the quoted part would very likely be translated. Thus 'is true' is language-neutral. This, according to Strawson, indicates that the convention Tarski uses to test the material adequacy of truth does not accord with the actual use of 'true'.

But this criticism is irrelevant for reasons that are now obvious from our examination of the factors that bear on the explicator's choice of conventions. With this Strawson agrees, but his appeal to the standard case suggests that he is treating the semantical conception of truth as if its framer had been blinded temporarily by his obsession with grammar. This move is hardly applicable; language neutrality can *not* be a characteristic of the semantical conception of truth since a sentence that is true in one language need not be a true sentence in another. And, in general, an explication of truth need not be expected to retain all the properties associated with common usage. Strawson's criticism of the semantical conception of truth reveals how qualified the explicator's claim is that it clarifies the ordinary use of 'true'. His criticism also reveals the extent to which Strawson's conception of clarification is dependent on the view that light shed on the actual use of 'is true' is also light shed on the philosophical problem of truth.

Consider now Strawson's general claim that 'true' is a non-assertive performative. This time he draws on the analogy between the use of the expression 'That's true' and the use of words like 'ditto' or 'yes'. The common occasion for the use of these expressions requires that some statement be uttered or written; but in saying 'That's true,' as in saying 'yes,' we do not say anything *about* that statement but we do concede or endorse it. Even in cases in which a statement is described and not explicitly stated, 'is true' is performatory. For example, Strawson contends that a statement like 'What Nellie said is true' makes the implied metastatement 'Nellie made a statement' but makes no further statement involving 'is true.' 'What Nellie said is true' reduces to 'Nellie made a statement' and 'I concede it.'⁷

The central place Strawson accords to the actual use of terms in his conception of clarification makes his reference to the language of custom as crucial to his purpose as the language of fiat is to Tarski and Carnap.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

But attention to language has a comparable role in determining the range of problems that can be successfully dealt with and the nature and relevance of their solution. It follows that mathematical and logical perplexities couched in semi-technical or formal terms would not need to be, nor could they be, treated by the technique of linguistic portrayal; unless we are to understand that Strawson's recipe for clarification is a misleading way of suggesting that ordinary language is genetically the medium of ultimate clarification. But I take it that his claim for the importance, for philosophical purposes, of close scrutiny of the actual use of language amounts to more than that. How *much* more can be determined by challenging his performative analysis of truth.

Consider the following counter example which I owe to Austin. Suppose Jane says 'Nellie has blue eyes' and instead of saying 'that's true,' Jim looks at Nellie and sees that Jane's statement is true. Now I may say 'Jim sees that Jane's statement is true.' In the statement I have just made 'is true' is not used as a performatory expression.

What we have done is tantamount to turning the kind of charge Strawson makes against Tarski, against Strawson's own performative analysis of truth. In other words, we deny the result of Strawson's step 2: *viz.*, his general assertion that 'is true' is purely performative. Now let us ask whether he can still affirm the conclusion reached in step 3 to the effect that the paradox of the liar and the philosophical puzzle of truth is resolved if 'true' is construed as a performative. In other words we construe his claim that 'is true' is performative as a pure proposal. Strawson is now in a position analogous to that of Tarski or Carnap when their *explicatum* is shown to deviate from usage but the deviation can be justified on the basis of systematic fruitfulness. But Strawson cannot argue that way because his claim to have solved the problem of truth depends on his ability to say that the philosophical problem of truth is resolved *only if* 'true' actually functions as a performative in contexts in which someone says of an empirical assertion that it is true. If 'is true' is not purely performatory in these contexts, then the philosophical puzzle is not resolved and the liar paradox might still be constructed.

I shall not concern myself further with the weaknesses of Strawson's conception of truth. If it is wrong, it is wrong for reasons that are relevant to *his* aim of clarification, not the explicator's. The rehearsal of his and Tarski's procedures has revealed divergences of a rather extreme sort. The success or failure of the analysis of truth is relative to two different conceptions of clarification.

These different aims of clarification determine what language will be used as an aid in achieving it. A case in point is Tarski's attempt to

explicate truth in natural language. Once it is realized that he wishes to employ elementary logical rules, including the principle of substitution with respect to identity and equivalence, without reference to contextual restrictions, then his claim that natural language is inadequate for his purposes follows necessarily. And for reasons I have already displayed, the language of custom is essential to Strawson's conception of the clarification of philosophical perplexity.

Moreover, the language upon which the success of clarification depends also determines in part the problems that must be solved before clarification can be achieved and what constitutes a relevant solution to these problems. For example, in order that the explication of 'true' be formally adequate the possibility of constructing semantical paradoxes must be eradicated; whereas the resolution of paradox is not a condition for applying Strawson's method. But the resolution of the liar paradox which each proffers is also related to the language of clarification. Tarski eradicates the possibility of the liar paradox by distinguishing between the object language and metalanguage for languages of a finite order. But this technique need not be considered relevant to the eradication of paradox from natural language, first, because it is hardly feasible for natural language as a whole, and secondly, because paradox does not have the far-reaching consequences for the use of natural language that it does for formalized systems. On the other hand, if Strawson were right in asserting that 'true' is a performative expression, then the paradox of the liar would not even arise. But this way out is not open to the explicator for Strawson's neutralization of the paradox depends on reducing 'is true' to acts such as 'I concede' or 'I confirm' to which the rules of logic would not apply without serious contextual restrictions.

Although the goals of analysis have been found to be quite distinct, thus making pointless any question of the relative success of the two procedures, there may be an aspect of one approach that is presupposed in the achievement of clarification of the other. The question whether one conception of clarification presupposes the other may be interpreted in at least two ways. First, are the two goals of clarification both aspects of a general conception of philosophy that analysts share? The answer to this question is a trivial no or a trivial yes, depending on how the word 'philosophy' is applied. For some, theoretical semantics is not philosophy enough; for others it is. .

Secondly, the question may be, does the aim of clarification of one presuppose for its success an aspect of the other? If anything, the alleged mutual aid is in only one direction. An ordinary language philosopher would be impatient to be told that as a result of problems with quotation-mark names, 'true' can be defined by providing a syntactical property of

sentences whose extension is identical with the property of being a true sentence. But in the course of watching how words work, ordinary language analysts may find distinctions worth preserving that might interest the explicator, granting that usage may be overridden in favor of the explicator's interest in economy and fruitfulness compatible with his conception of clarification.

This last consideration suggests that there is some basis for cooperation (at least in one direction). It would appear that the results of linguistic portrayal are just what is needed by explicators in order to effect a pre-constructional clarification and to resolve disputes about which use of a term a given *explicatum* is intended to clarify. Though the general spirit of cooperation is strong, there is actually very little basis on which to cooperate. Explicators are often more interested in semi-technical terms to which our ordinary language habits apply only indirectly, leaving little to portray. And it makes sense to Tarski and other explicators to resolve disputes about whether an *explicatum* conforms to common usage or not by accepting statistical evidence based on the kind of empirical questionnaire compiled and applied by Arne Naess.⁸ But the kind of evidence Strawson provides by means of linguistic portrayal is not statistical and has been denigrated as intuitive by some explicators.

Even if his attempt at cooperation turns into a dispute about evidence, in the case of Tarski and Strawson on truth the dispute loses all point. Tarski argues that even if statistical evidence shows that his schema for truth does not conform to the way in which people actually conceive of truth, his semantical conception grasps the intuitive content of truth as correspondence.

Thus I find little basis for cooperation and no basis for dispute. In the absence of common goals and in the absence of any agreement on what constitutes a relevant pre-analytic use of a term, explicators and ordinary language philosophers have the right to be pedantic in whatever language they find compatible with their conceptions of clarification.

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⁸ A. Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, IV (1944), pp. 359-360.