

Philosophy 188 Truth

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General Remarks on the Course

Philosophers have been worrying about truth for just about as long as there've been philosophers. They've worried about what truth is; about what kinds of things are true; about what it is for one of these things to be true; about how its being true is related to our knowing or thinking that it is true; and so on. But why should philosophers worry about these things? This is itself a philosophical question. Some philosophers, Deflationists, think that there is nothing of philosophical interest to be said about truth. According to these philosophers, the concept of truth is boring.

There are three kinds of reasons philosophers have thought the concept of truth was interesting. First, philosophers have often concerned themselves with norms of correct reasoning (that is, with logic), and the concept of truth seems to play an important role here. Thus, a valid inference is one that is truth-preserving, whose conclusion must be true if its premises are. The concept of validity, and so that of a 'norm of reasoning', thus seems to be tied up with the concept of truth. Second, philosophy has long concerned itself with representation, that is, with our capacity to think about, or to make claims about, the world. A fundamental feature of representations seems to be that they can be right or wrong, true or false. Moreover, it seems in some sense a primary goal of thought to acquire true rather than false beliefs. It is because thought aims at truth that valid inferences are good inferences: Being truth-preserving is a good thing for an inference to be because we infer new beliefs from old ones, and we want our beliefs to be true. Questions about truth thus appear to bear on questions about representation (or meaning). Finally, there seems to be an intimate connection between truth and metaphysics. The nature of the connection is controversial, but consider, for example, the view that, for something to be true, we must be able to come to know that it is true: On this view, how things are depends upon what we are capable of knowing. That amounts to a form of Idealism, a form of the view that how the world is is in some sense or other determined, or constrained, by the mind.

We shall not discuss any of these issues directly: The course is less ambitious, the goal being that students should acquire the necessary background to appreciate contemporary discussions of truth. But we shall touch on each of them at one time or another. Indeed, a concern with these issues will shape the course in ways on which I shall comment when that seems appropriate.

The course will be structured as follows. We shall begin by looking at some famous papers on truth written in the 1950s, attempting to extract from these papers a sense of the importance of Convention T, which, so to speak, generalizes sentences of the following form:

The sentence "Snow is white" is true if, and only if, snow is white.
The sentence "Grass is green" is true if, and only if, grass is green.

I hope these sentences seem true. Convention T states that they are true, and that all sentences of the same form are true.

This principle has guided philosophical thinking about truth for over sixty years (and, indeed, for a long time before that, although less explicitly). It may seem to embody the idea that whether a sentence is true is determined by relevant features of the world: Whether the sentence "Snow is white" is true depends upon whether snow is white; whether "Grass is green" is true depends upon whether grass is green; and so forth. Indeed, some philosophers are so impressed by Convention T that they think that all that needs to be, or can be, said about truth is said by Convention T. This is one form of Deflationism, and we shall spend some time explaining and evaluating this position at the end of the course.

There is a big problem with Convention T, though: Obvious as it may seem, it is paradoxical. Among other things, Convention T tells us that:

The sentence "The sentence written in tiny type on the syllabus for PL 188 is not true" is true if, and only if, the sentence written in tiny type on the syllabus for PL 188 is not true.

But it happens that, as a matter of empirical fact, the sentence written in tiny type on the syllabus for PL 188 *is* the sentence "The sentence written in tiny type on the syllabus for PL 188 is not true". So, by the laws of identity, we have:

The sentence "The sentence written in tiny type on the syllabus for PL 188 is not true" is true if, and only if, the sentence "The sentence written in tiny type on the syllabus for PL 188 is not true" is not true.

That's a contradiction of the form ' $p \equiv \neg p$ '. This is the *Liar Paradox*, in one of its many versions.

One might think this is just foolish, that there is an easy solution: Isn't a sentence's referring to itself fishy? But that sentences should be able to refer to themselves in this way is essential to the proof of one of the most important mathematical theorems of this century, Gödel's incompleteness theorem. More generally, it is, roughly, a theorem of arithmetic that sentences can refer to themselves in this way. So what the Liar Paradox shows is no less than this: That one can not, on pain of contradiction, both accept all instances of Convention T and accept all the truths of arithmetic. Something has to give.

Just what has to give is the interesting question.

Prerequisites

We shall be reading and discussing a good deal of formal (mathematical) work on truth. Students should therefore have taken and understood some sort of basic logic course, e.g., PL 54 or an equivalent course, and should be comfortable with mathematical argumentation (that is, with proofs). If you have doubts about your preparation in this respect, please speak to the instructor before registering to take the course for credit.

Course Structure and Requirements

The course will meet Monday, Wednesday, and Friday at 10am. Typically, there will be lectures each day, but some Fridays will be devoted to discussion. On such Fridays, students should arrive appropriately prepared with questions, comments, or criticisms. Otherwise, it will be very quiet.

There will be two short papers for the course, a problem set, and a longer paper. The short papers are to be about 3-5 pages, with a *maximum* length of 1500 words. Lists of 'topics' will be distributed on 10 February and 10 March; the papers will be due on 24 February and 24 March, respectively. The 'topics' will be short quotations from various of the papers we read, and the object of

the exercise will be expository: You will be asked to explain the passage and its significance in the context of the article.

The problem set will cover the formal material we study. It will be distributed on about 24 March and will be due on 21 April.

The longer paper is to be on a topic of the student's own choosing. The paper should be about 12-15 pages and is to be due on 9 May, which is the last day of reading period.

Warning: I do not accept late work, under any circumstances. On the other hand, I am extremely flexible about due dates. That is to say: If someone should need an extra day or two, she need only ask; no reason even need be given. If someone should need more time than that, then some reason does need to be given, but the request will usually be granted. Since I am so flexible, there can be no excuse for one's not asking for an extension. It's really just a matter of respect.

Readings

Unfortunately, there is no collection of articles on truth suitable for our purposes. I would like to have been able to produce a "sourcebook", containing xeroxes of the various articles, and then have these distributed, for the cost of the photocopying, in the department office. Unfortunately, copyright law currently prohibits this, making no distinction between uses of copyrighted material for educational purposes and uses for commercial purposes; nor does current law register whether what is charged merely covers the costs of photocopying or exceeds it. Sourcebooks that would have been produced by Brown would therefore have been *very* expensive, due to the outrageous fees charged for such reproduction by journals and publishers.

Each of you, however, is free to make a copy of the relevant reading materials, for your own personal use, in accord with the "fair use" provisions of the law. A fair number of the papers are available online, and I've noted below which ones are. (There are links to the papers on the course website where appropriate.) I'll put individual copies of the various papers we will be reading in the department office. It will be up to each of you to make copies of the articles along the way or to make a copy of the complete packet. Please make your copies *from these photocopies*, not from the original journals or the books, to protect them.

If any of this bothers you, write your senator or representative and request that copyright law be made at least somewhat rational.

Syllabus

For each meeting, there are both required and optional readings: The former are in standard type; the latter, in smaller type. The optional readings are listed for the benefit of those who find a given topic of special interest: No student should feel compelled to read all of the optional materials. What we shall be reading is, in general, sufficiently difficult that one should expect to have to read each article at least three times before really having a deep understanding of it. (Indeed, one could make this same comment about most philosophical writing.) Those who decide to write a paper on a particular topic should, however, have a look at the optional readings connected with it.

The questions which follow each reading are intended to help students focus their attention. Each of the articles raises a large number of different issues and concerns, not all of which will be discussed in class. In one sense, the questions are intended simply to give students some idea what I consider important for present purposes. There are thus no formal assignments connected with the questions: But it would not be a bad idea to write a page or so on each reading, sketching some kind of answer to them. For one thing, this will encourage critical thinking about the readings; for

another, it is a good way to make oneself write. Writing is not just a way of presenting one's ideas to others: It is a means for making them clearer to oneself.

25 January

Introductory Meeting

A Classic Debate, and the Role of the Concept of Truth

27 & 30 January

J.L. Austin, "Truth", and P.F. Strawson, "Truth", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1950), pp. 111-56.

J.L. Austin, "Unfair to Facts", in his *Philosophical Papers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979); P.F. Strawson, "Truth: A Re-consideration of Austin's Views", in his *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (London: Methuen, 1971).

Austin wants to claim that a sentence like "It is true that snow is white" makes reference to a statement and asserts that a certain correspondence obtains between this statement and a fact. What does Austin mean by "statement" and "fact"? What sort of correspondence does he think is asserted? What sorts of views does he take himself to be opposing?

Strawson insists that to say "It is true that snow is white" is just to say, as it were, in other words, "Snow is white". Why does he want to make this claim? How and why does he think it alone serves to undermine Austin's view? What additional problems does he have with the details of Austin's position?

1 February

A.J. Ayer, "Truth", *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 25 (1953), pp. 183-200.

A.J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), Ch. 5; F.P. Ramsey, "The Foundations of Mathematics", in his *Foundations of Mathematics and Other Logical Essays* (London: Routledge, 1954).

Ayer wants to insist, as against Strawson, that the concept of truth is not 'superfluous'. Still, he agrees with Strawson that Convention T amounts to a complete explanation of the meaning of the word 'true'. But then, he wants to deny that the philosophical problem of truth is thereby solved. How can Ayer hold all three of these views simultaneously? What sorts of problems does Ayer think Strawson's view leaves unaddressed? How does Ayer propose to solve these problems himself?

3 February

Discussion

6 February

Alfred Tarski, "The Semantic Conception of Truth and the Foundations of Semantics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 4 (1944), pp. 341-75, esp. pp. 341-55. (Available on JSTOR.)

Richard Kirkham, *Theories of Truth*, Ch. 5.

What does Tarski think the Liar Paradox shows about our intuitive notion of truth? How is Convention T supposed to be related to our intuitive notion of truth? What are an object-language and a meta-language? How does distinguishing between them help us solve the liar paradox?

- 8 February Michael Dummett, "Truth", in his *Truth and Other Enigmas* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 1-24. You need not pay close attention to the Postscript. In fact, you can skip it.
 Michael Dummett, "The Philosophical Basis of Intuitionistic Logic" and "The Reality of the Past", in *Truth and Other Enigmas*; "Language and Truth" and "The Source of the Concept of Truth", in *The Seas of Language*.
 Why does Dummett think that it is a fundamental problem with 'classical' theories of truth that they ignore the connection between truth and meaning? Why is the primary sense of 'true' and 'false' connected with the notion of assertion? How and why does this lead Dummett to want to deny that we have any grasp of a concept of truth according to which what is true can exceed what we can, in principle, know to be true? What is the real point of the example of character?
- 10 February Discussion
Topics for first short paper distributed

Tarski's Theory of Truth

- 13, 15 & 17 February Handout: Formal Background for Theories of Truth
 George Boolos and Richard Jeffrey, *Computability and Logic*, 3rd. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), esp. Ch. 15; George Boolos, *The Logic of Provability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), Ch. 2.
 Important things to understand: Basic logic with constants and function symbols; elementary arithmetic; computable, or recursive, functions and their representability in elementary arithmetic; Gödel numbering and the diagonal lemma; the use of the diagonal lemma in generating the liar paradox; Tarski's theorem on the indefinability of truth.
- 20 February *No Class: Presidents' Day Holiday*
- 22 & 24 February Tarski's Theory of Truth (handout).
 Handout: Truth-theories for Fragments of PA; Alfred Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages", in his *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983)
First short paper due 24 February

The Philosophical Significance of Tarski's Theory of Truth

- 27 February Hartry Field, "Tarski's Theory of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* (1972), pp. 347-75.
 For a very different sort of view, Donald Davidson, "True to the Facts", in his *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*.
 What does Field think Tarski was trying to do? Why is this an important thing to do? Plainly, Field does not think Tarski succeeded: What does he think needs to be done to complete Tarski's project? Does Field's distinction between 'T1' and 'T2' reflect something present in Tarski's work? If so, can we acknowledge this distinction and its import without accepting physicalism?

- 1 March John Etchemendy, "Tarski on Truth and Logical Consequence", *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 53 (1988), pp. 57-79. (Available on JSTOR.)
 John Etchemendy, *The Concept of Logical Consequence* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); Scott Soames, "What is a Theory of Truth?" *Journal of Philosophy* 81 (1984), pp. 411-29, and *Understanding Truth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
 Etchemendy is critical of philosophers who find Tarski's work to be of philosophical value. What value does he think Tarski ascribed to his work? What criticisms does Etchemendy make of the claim that Tarski's work on truth is of substantial philosophical importance? What does he think is needed instead of, or in addition to, Tarski's theory of truth?
- 3 March Discussion
- 6 March *No Class: Professor out of town*
- 8 March Richard G. Heck, Jr., "Tarski, Truth, and Semantics", *Philosophical Review* 106 (1997), pp. 533-54. (Available on JSTOR.)
 Heck makes a number of distinctions he accuses Etchemendy of neglecting, including the distinction between axiomatic theories of truth and definitions of truth. How, if at all, is this distinction related to Field's distinction between T1 and T2?
- 10 March Michael Glanzberg, "The Liar in Context", *Philosophical Studies* 103 (2001), pp. 217-51. (Available online.)
 Charles Parsons, "The Liar Paradox", in his *Mathematics in Philosophy*, pp. 221-67; Tyler Burge, "Semantical Paradox", *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979), pp. 169-98.
 What is the 'strengthened liar paradox' and what problem does Glanzberg think it raises? What is the Tarskian 'hierarchy' and what is Glanzberg's attitude towards it? What problem does Glanzberg think the liar paradox really raises?
Topics for second short paper distributed

Kripke's Theory of Truth

- 13 & 15 March Saul Kripke, "An Outline of a Theory of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* (1975), pp. 690-716, esp. pp. 690-702. (Do not worry yet about the more mathematical parts of Kripke's paper. We will discuss those separately.)
 Solomon Feferman, "Toward Useful Type-free Theories, I", *Journal of Symbolic Logic* 49 (1984), pp. 75-111, 1984; Melvin Fitting, "Note on the Mathematical Aspects of Kripke's Theory of Truth", *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic* 27 (1986), pp. 75-88; Michael Kremer, "Kripke and the Logic of Truth", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 17 (1988), pp. 225-78; Vann McGee, "Applying Kripke's Theory of Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989), pp. 530-9.
 What are Kripke's main objections to Tarski's treatment of truth? Why does this lead Kripke to search for a way of allowing a language 'to contain its own truth-predicate'? What does Kripke think our most central intuitions about truth are? How are these related to Convention T? How do these central intuitions motivate the notion of groundedness, and what is its role in Kripke's theory?
- 17 March Discussion

- 20 & 22 March Handout: Kripke's Theory of Truth
- 24 March Richard Heck, "Diagonalization and Self-Reference", *manuscript* (available on the web).
Second short paper due
Problem set distributed
- 27-31 March *Spring Break*
- 3, 5, & 7 April Handout: Truth and Inductive Definability
 Stephen Yablo, "Grounding Dependence and Paradox", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 11 (1982), pp. 117-38; Vann McGee, *Truth, Vagueness, and Paradox* (Indianapolis: Hackett 1991).

Deflationism

- 10 & 12 April Hartry Field, "Deflationist Views of Meaning and Content", *Mind* 103 (1994), pp. 249-85.
 Hartry Field, "The Deflationary Conception of Truth", in G. MacDonald and C. Wright, eds., *Fact, Science and Morality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 55-117; Hartry Field, *Truth and the Absence of Fact* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); Paul Horwich, *Truth* (Cambridge MA: Blackwell, 1990); Dorothy Grover, Joseph Camp, and Nuel Belnap, "A Prosentential Theory of Truth", *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975), pp. 73-125; Dorothy Grover, *A Prosentential Theory of Truth* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).
 Field has recently developed an interesting, but extremely complex, formal theory of truth. See "A Revenge-Immune Solution to the Semantic Paradoxes", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 32 (2003), pp. 139-77. Related material is available on his web site.
 What is the primary motivation for Field's view?
- 14 April Discussion
- 17 April Richard Heck, "Truth and Disquotation", *Synthese* 142 (2004), pp. 317-52. (Available online.)
 Hilary Putnam, "Does the Deflationary Theory of Truth Solve All Philosophical Problems?", "On Truth" and "A Comparison of Something with Something Else", in his *Words and Life* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 264-78.
 Questions here....
- 19 April Michael Glanzberg, "Minimalism, Deflationism, and Paradoxes", forthcoming in *Deflationism and Paradoxes*, ed. B. Armour-Garb and J. C. Beall, Oxford University Press). (Available from his website.)
 Vann McGee, "Maximal Consistent Sets of T-Sentences", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* 21 (1992), pp. 235-41; Anil Gupta, "A Critique of Deflationism," *Philosophical Topics* 21 (1993), pp. 57-81.
 Questions here.
- 21 April Discussion
Problem set due

- 24 April Donald Davidson, "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth", *Journal of Philosophy* 93 (1996), pp. 263-78.
 Donald Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", "True to the Facts", "In Defense of Convention T", "Radical Interpretation" and "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*.
 How does Davidson think the concepts of truth and meaning are related? In what way does he think Tarski's work can be applied in the study of meaning? Does Davidson think that this study of meaning will, at the same time, throw light on the concept of truth?
- 26 April David Wiggins, "What Would Be a Substantial Theory of Truth?", in Zaak vanStraaten, ed., *Philosophical Subjects* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 189-221.
 Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge", in E. LePore, ed., *Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986).
 Wiggins wants to suggest that a broadly Davidsonian approach to questions about meaning will, in the end, throw a great deal of light on the concept of truth. In particular, Wiggins wants to suggest: (1) that a proper account of meaning requires a theory which yields theorems of the form
 "Snow is white" is ϕ if, and only if, snow is white;
 (2) that truth should be identified with whatever is best suited to play the role of ϕ here; and (3) that such theories should be evaluated in terms of their capacity to help us 'make sense' of speakers. The first and third claims are essentially Davidson's. Why does Wiggins make the second claim? What does he think we can say about truth, simply on the basis of these three claims? What important claims about truth does he think do not follow just from these three claims?
- 28 April Discussion
- 9 May *Final Paper Due*