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Surveying the Facts

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1. Introduction.

It seems obvious that seeing can be a way of knowing. It seems obvious, for instance, that one's seeing the cat there on the mat enables one to know that the cat is there. More generally, it seems obvious that one's sensory experience can put one in a position to know things. For instance, one's feeling the cat brush against one's leg can put one in a position to know that the cat is there. However, what seems obvious is not always so. And the claim that sensory experience can put one in a position to know things is in apparent conflict with the conjunction of some claims that philosophers have found individually plausible. It is possible to find supporters for each of the following claims:

I. One's sensory experience can put one in a position to know things about one's perceptible environment.

II. When one knows things, one knows truths.

III. If one's sensory experience can put one in a position to know things about one's perceptible environment, then one's sensory experience must be capable of determining truths about one's perceptible environment.

IV. If one's sensory experience is capable of determining truths about one's perceptible environment, then what one can experience sensorily must be, or must determine, truths about one's perceptible environment.

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V. One cannot sensorily experience anything other than concreta—for instance, concrete particulars; in particular, one cannot experience truths.

VI. Concreta do not determine truths.

And yet those claims cannot all be true. If we were to accept all of II–VI, then we would be forced to reject the seemingly obvious claim in I. Alternatively, if we are to continue to accept the seemingly obvious claim in I, then we must reject at least one of claims II–VI.

Much recent work about the nature of sensory experience and its role in the acquisition of knowledge has in effect been aimed at avoiding the conflict between I–VI, by arguing that one or more of claims II–VI should be rejected. A version of the conflict figures, in particular, in a recent dispute between John McDowell and Charles Travis. McDowell had argued that if sensory experience is to put one in a position to know, then one's experiences must determine that which one comes to know in the following specific way: it must furnish one with decisive reasons for accepting that which one comes to know. And he proposed that sensory experience meets the condition, in part, through its directly determining truths or facts, through having those facts as components of its content. Thus, McDowell sought to preserve claims I–III by rejecting IV or V. (McDowell 1994.) In response, Travis defended claim IV and V, and rejected claim VI. (Travis 2004, 2007; Kalderon 2011.)

Travis's defence of claim V draws on a discussion of Frege's:

But do we not see that the sun has risen? and do we not then also see that this is true? That the sun has risen is not an object emitting rays that reach my eyes; it is not a visible thing like the sun itself. That the sun has risen is recognized to be true on the basis of sense-impressions. (Frege 1918–19: 354.)

Travis develops Frege's discussion in the following way:

That the sun has risen is a circumstance which now obtains. It does not represent anything as so. A fortiori it requires neither an intention nor anything else to fix a *way* it represents things. But that the sun has risen bears on representing: if it has, then there is a particular way to represent things which will be representing truly. Such is the fact one captures in saying that it is true that the sun has risen. Frege insists that, in a sense in which the sun itself (or its afterglow) is visible, that it has risen is not. (Travis 2011a: 232, amended with permission.)

Part of Travis's thought here is that the obtaining circumstances, or states of affairs, that are denoted by expressions of the form "that S" are objects of *cognition*—of what we represent as so—rather than of sensory experience. Where one sees that the sun has risen, what one experiences is only the sun and its doings. One's seeing that the sun has risen is not a matter of one's experiencing something in addition to the sun and its doings. It is a matter of one's *recognising* that the sun has set, albeit on the basis of what one then experiences.

Suppose that Travis and Frege are right about that. Nonetheless, Travis's defence of V leaves open whether one should follow him in rejecting VI, or whether one should instead take one of the options remaining open to McDowell by rejecting IV. For, as McDowell points out, accepting V is consistent with holding that experience determines truths or facts even though *that which one experiences* does not. For holding that experiential states have propositional contents does not commit one to holding that propositional contents are the experienced objects of those, or any other, experiential states. (McDowell 2008: 265.) And if states of experience have contents in addition to their experienced objects, then those states of experience (or the fact that one occupies them) might determine truths or facts partly on the basis of their contents, rather than solely on the basis of the objects (i.e. *concreta*) that are experienced through occupancy of states with those contents.

It's therefore crucial to Travis's overall case against McDowell that it demonstrate, not only V—that we cannot experience anything other than *concreta*—but in addition IV—that experiences do not possess, in addition to their objects, any features that figure essentially in determining environmental truths. In particular, part of Travis's case must be to show that experience lacks any analogue of propositional content that can figure in determining truth. (The task is attempted in Travis 2004.) However, demonstrating that wouldn't be enough to decide the issue in favour of Travis. The issue would then turn on the standing of VI. For if McDowell were right to think that *concreta* do not determine truths, then Travis's defence of IV and V would serve, at best, to force rejection of at least one of claims I–III, each of which is accepted by both McDowell and Travis. Alternatively, if Travis were forced to accept VI, then in order to preserve claims I–III, he would be forced to revisit his case for IV. Conversely, if Travis's case in favour of IV and V were successful, that would force McDowell either to reject VI—thereby allowing that experienced objects can determine truths—or to give up his apparently more basic commitment to claims I–III. Clearly, then, VI potentially plays a pivotal role in the dispute between McDowell and Travis. Furthermore, if Travis is right to endorse IV and V, then the standing of I–III is dependent upon the permissibility of rejecting VI.

In summary, McDowell has defended the view that in order for perceptual experience to underwrite our acquisition of propositional knowledge, it would have to make available to us some of the propositional facts we thereby come to know. Travis demurs. He argues that we can acquire knowledge on the basis of perceptual experience even though, as he also argues, that experience makes available to us only what is concrete and so does not make available to us propositional facts. Since knowledge is factive, so that if one knows that p , the proposition that p must be true, Travis' argument appears to depend upon the claim that concreta can determine the truth and falsity of propositions.

The dispute between Travis and McDowell therefore tracks—at least approximately—an earlier dispute between J. L. Austin and P. F. Strawson. (Austin 1950, 1954ms; Strawson 1950, 1964, 1965.) The earlier dispute was ostensibly concerned with the nature of truth. To a first approximation, Austin sought to develop and defend an account on which at least some truths are determined as such by relations between statements and facts, while Strawson argued that facts are not suitable to figure in such an account. However, it's plausible that Austin's aim was not to provide an account of truth *per se*. Rather, his aim was to consider whether, and if so how, statements made on the basis of perceptual experience can be determined to be true or false on the basis of what is experienced. Specifically, Austin sought to defend claims I–V, by providing an account of such truths that permitted the rejection of VI. Although Austin's account of truth did make appeal to relations between statements and facts, he was quite explicit that, for him, the category of facts included perceptible concreta and not—or, at least, not only—truths. In response, Strawson argued that facts are propositional elements, too close to statements to figure as truth correspondents. Furthermore, Strawson argued that facts are not “in the world” in the way they are required to be on Austin's account (1950: 194). That is, Strawson argued that facts are not perceptible concreta.

The topic of the remainder of this paper is the dispute between Austin, Strawson, and some others, over claim VI. The main aim is to revisit an aspect of the initial dispute between Austin and Strawson in order to isolate what I take to be a core point at issue in that dispute and then to pursue some prominent arguments that have been offered in broad support of Strawson's position with respect to that point, and so against Austin's position. The arguments that I'll consider are due to Jonathan Bennett 1988 and Wolfgang Kühne 2003. They derive immediately from Zeno Vendler 1967, and mediately from F. P. Ramsey 1927 and Gilbert Ryle 1932. What I'll show is that those arguments are, as they stand, entirely ineffective against Austin's position. A secondary aim will be to isolate some additional claims that might be used in support of those arguments against Austin, and that

may reasonably be taken to be crux issues in further pursuit of the core points at issue in dispute with Austin. The upshot will be that, as things stand, and pessimistic advertising to the contrary, it is an open question whether Austin's position, and therefore the analogous part of Travis's position, is defensible.

I'll proceed as follows. In §2, I'll provide a general overview of Austin's partial account of truth, and indicate the way that *concreta* figure in that account as amongst the facts to which true statements correspond. In §3, I'll consider in more detail Austin's category of facts and also consider briefly one of Strawson's objections. In §4, I'll consider Bennett's and Künne's arguments against Austin and indicate various ways in which they fail to decide the central issue.

2. *Austin and truth.*

Austin's views about truth are scattered throughout his work, but his most explicit discussion of the topic is in his 1950. Amongst the distinctive claims Austin makes about truth are the following:

(A) The predicate "is true" has a descriptive function: in particular, it serves to characterize the obtaining of a relation between *statements* and *facts*. (1950: 117–121.)

(B) The *facts* that figure in determining whether or not a statement is true are *concreta*, for example, things, features, events, and states of affairs. (1950: 121–124; 1954ms: *passim*.)

(C) The relation between statements and facts that underwrites the truth or falsity of statements is itself underwritten by relations between sentences and types of fact, and between episodes of stating and particular facts. (1950: 121–133.)

(D) Human judgment is involved in determining whether a particular fact makes true a statement. And judgment is involved in a way that is sensitive to the intents and purposes with which a statement is made. For that reason, truth is not a simple relation between types of sentences (given their meanings) and particular facts. A pair of statements made using the same sentence with respect to the same facts but on different occasions—given different intents and purposes—might differ in truth-value. (1950: 122 fn2; 1962a: 40–41, 62–77, 110–111; 1962b: 142–147.)

I'll say a little more about each of these claims. However, my main focus will be on (A) and (B)—that is, on Austin's appeal to, and conception of, facts. Here, the target questions will be the following.

(Q1) What are facts?

(Q2) What, if anything, are the things to which true statements correspond and by virtue of which those statements are true?

(Q3) Do the elements specified in answer to (Q1) overlap with the elements specified in answer to (Q2)? That is, are the things to which true statements correspond facts, or the facts?

(Q4) Are the elements specified in answer to (Q1) and (Q2) happily characterised—along, for example, with other perceptible concreta—as being “in the world”?

Austin presents his account of truth as an account of truth for *statements*. However, ‘statement’ is at least two ways ambiguous, covering both historical episodes in which something is stated—what I'll refer to as *statings*—and also the things or propositions that are stated therein—which I'll refer to as *what is stated*. Austin isn't especially careful about the distinction, but it's possible to reconstruct much of what he says in a way that respects it. (For discussion of the distinction see e.g. Cartwright 1962.)

Austin's primary interest appears to be the truth of *statings*. He writes of ‘statement’ that it has “the merit of clearly referring to the historic use of a sentence by an utterer” (1950: 121). However, statings are not ordinarily said to be true or false, except derivatively insofar as what is stated in them is true or false. Rather, statings are assessed as, for example, correct or incorrect, appropriate or inappropriate, and so forth. Nonetheless, it is plausible that stating correctly is closely associated with making a statement that is true. To a good first approximation, they are connected by the following principle:

(Correct) An act of stating is correct if and only if what is stated thereby is true.

Austin's account can therefore be understood, or reconstructed, as an account of the conditions in which statings are such that what is stated in them is true. (See Travis 2011a for a more detailed account of how Austin's account can be understood as seeking to connect statings with things stated. For purposes of that paper, Travis identifies things stated with Frege's Thoughts.)

Austin presents the core of his account of truth in the following way:

When is a statement true? The temptation is to answer (at least if we confine ourselves to ‘straightforward’ statements): ‘When it corresponds to the facts’. And as a piece of standard English this can hardly be wrong. Indeed, I must confess I do not really think it is wrong at all: the theory of truth is a series of truisms. Still, it can at least be misleading. (1950: 121)

The two obvious sources of potential misdirection in the formula that Austin endorses here are its appeal to *correspondence* and its appeal to *facts*. Austin attempts to prevent our being misled by explaining how those two appeals ought to be understood. Austin’s focus in his 1950 is mainly on the nature of correspondence. He deals more fully with facts in his 1954ms. A third, less obvious source of misdirection is Austin’s claim that a statement is true *when* it corresponds to the facts: it would be easy to misread this as a claim about a necessary condition (“only when”), or necessary and sufficient conditions (when, and only when”), for statement truth. But it is clear—at least in context—that Austin’s more modest aim is to present what he takes to be a sufficient condition for statement truth. And the type of case to which his condition is apt to appear most appropriate is that involving what Austin calls “straightforward” statements—to a good first approximation, statements about ordinary objects of sensory perception as made on the basis of sensory perception of those objects. (Compare Austin’s cursory treatment of cases that he takes not to fit his basic account in a straightforward way, including formulae in calculi and definitions. (1950: 130–132.) Also note that material from Austin 1954ms was included in the 1958 version of the lectures that became Austin 1962a. See 1962a: vi.)

In giving an account of correspondence, Austin makes appeal to two types of (what he calls) *conventions* (as per (C) above) (These are conventions only in the general sense that they are correlations that are both arbitrary and instituted on the basis of manifest human decision. Thus ‘conventional’ is employed to contrast with ‘natural’ in something like the way suggested in Plato’s *Cratylus*.)

Descriptive conventions. These correlate *sentences* with *types* of situation, thing, event, etc., in the world.

Demonstrative conventions. These correlate *statements* (*statings*) with *historic* (particular, concrete) situations, things, events, etc., in the world. (1950: 121–122)

The *descriptive* conventions associate sentences with (types of) ways for things to be: ways for situations, things, events, etc. to be. For instance, the sentence “The cat is on the mat” is associated with a type of way for things to be in which the cat is on the mat. A variety of different historic situations might be of that type. For instance, one historic situation of that type might involve Logos (Derrida’s cat), while a different historic situation of the same type might involve Nothing (Sartre’s cat). Similarly, cat-mat pairings that took place at different times would be different historic situations or events and yet might be of the same type.

The *demonstrative* conventions, by contrast, associate particular statings—themselves historic events—with some amongst the historic situations, things, events, etc. that are then perceptible. Consider, for example, the following simplified case. There are two perceptible situations, one of which is of the cat-on-mat type and one of which is of the dog-on-linoleum type. The descriptive conventions governing the English sentence “The cat is on the mat” do not, and cannot, determine which of the two perceptible situations a speaker aims to talk about on a particular occasion. That is, the descriptive conventions do not determine whether a speaker is using the sentence in order correctly to characterize the perceptible cat-on-mat situation or rather that the speaker is using the sentence in order to *mischaracterize* the perceptible dog-on-linoleum situation. In order to achieve one or another such outcome, the speaker must find a way of making manifest that their goal is to select, say, the dog-on-linoleum situation. They might achieve this, for example, by pointing towards the dog and away from the cat. (1950: 121–126.)

With this machinery in place, Austin continues:

A statement [a *stating*] is said to be true [*correct*] when the historic state of affairs [or e.g. situation, thing, event] to which it is correlated by the demonstrative conventions (the one to which it ‘refers’) is of a type [footnote omitted] with which the sentence used in making it is correlated by the descriptive conventions. (1950: 122)

What does ‘is of a type with which’ mean? Austin expands on his account in the omitted footnote:

‘Is of a type with which’ means ‘is sufficiently like those standard states of affairs with which’. Thus, for a statement to be true one state of affairs must be *like* certain others, which is a natural relation, but also *sufficiently* like to merit the same ‘description’, which is no longer a purely natural relation. To say ‘This is red’ is not the same as to say ‘This is like those’, nor even as to say ‘This is like those which were called red’. That things are *similar*, or even

‘exactly’ similar, I may literally see, but that they are the *same* I cannot literally see—in calling them the same colour a convention is involved additional to the conventional choice of the name to be given to the colour which they are said to be. (1950: 122 fn.2)

The English sentence “This is red” is correlated by the descriptive conventions with a type of way for things to be: a type instanced by all and only those historic situations or states of affairs in which a selected thing is red. According to Austin, a stating by use of that sentence would be correct if the thing selected in the stating via the demonstrative conventions were sufficiently like standard situations or states of affairs in which a selected thing is red. So, we rely on the existence of a range of standard instances that are assumed to be of the required type. We can see that the thing selected in this stating, via the demonstrative conventions, is now in various ways similar and dissimilar from those standard instances. The question we need to answer is this: Is this thing of the *same* type as the standard instances with respect to its colour? That is, is it the same colour as they are? According to Austin, we cannot answer that question simply by looking. In an at least attenuated sense we must make a decision as to whether the present instance is, in relevant respects, *sufficiently* similar to the standard instances as to mandate treating it as of the very same type. (It is because decision or judgement is required in order to determine classification of the present case as e.g. red, rather than this being determined by purely natural relations of similarity, that Austin speaks here of a role for an additional convention.)

The things to which statings correspond appear, then, to be quite different from *facts* as the latter have commonly been understood by philosophers. For facts are often thought of as proposition-like—as exhaustively captured by instances of the form “The fact that *p*”. And it seems that, having selected such an element—for example, through use of the expression “the fact that *p*”, or through making a judgment to the effect that *p*—one has thereby determined that the statement or judgment that *p* will be correct with respect to that element. (The alternative would be that one had failed to select such an element at all. Compare here Steward’s ‘secret life requirement’. To a first approximation, an element meets Steward’s requirement if and only if it is intelligible to suppose that one might understand two expressions that canonically denote the element and yet be ignorant as to their sameness of denotation. (Steward, 1997: 32). On the assumptions that facts are proposition-like elements, and that proposition-like elements are individuated like Fregean senses, facts when so understood would not meet the requirement.)

Austin nonetheless categorizes the things to which statings correspond as facts. Austin’s views about facts are developed a bit more fully in his 1954ms. There,

Austin makes clear that he uses ‘facts’ (with etymological precedent) to speak of *concreta* including, specifically, objects, events, conditions, situations, and what Austin called ‘phenomena’—for instance, rainbows and shadows. Austin’s category of facts is not, therefore, to be identified with a category of proposition-like elements.

Because Austin’s facts are *concreta*, it is possible for us to select them as objects of perception without that deciding how it would be correct to describe, characterize, or classify them in one or another type of stating. (Furthermore, Austin’s facts seem to meet Steward’s (1997: 32) ‘secret life requirement’. For one example, involving an event, it’s possible to understand two expressions that canonically denote an event of Jill running, say “Jill’s run” and “Her morning exercise”, without recognizing that they denote one and the same event.) Moreover, on Austin’s view, having the facts in view can leave space for human judgment or decision in mediating their correct description, characterization, or classification. And the role for judgment or decision in turn leaves open that the correct classification of facts as to types might vary depending on specific features of the occasion for so classifying them (see (D) above). It may be, for example, that for certain purposes an historic state of affairs involving a rose is sufficiently like standard situations involving red things as to warrant sameness in classification while for different purposes its likeness is outweighed by its dissimilarities from the standard cases. Moreover, what are counted as standard cases may vary with the purposes operative in attempting to classify, and may shift as new cases come to be counted as of a specific type.

The precise ways in which our statings depend for their correctness or incorrectness on the facts can vary with variation in specific features of the occasion, in particular with variation in the intents and purposes of conversational participants. As Austin puts it,

It seems to be fairly generally realized nowadays that, if you just take a bunch of sentences...impeccably formulated in some language or other, there can be no question of sorting them out into those that are true and those that are false; for (leaving out of account so-called ‘analytic’ sentences) the question of truth and falsehood does not turn only on what a sentence *is*, nor yet on what it *means*, but on, speaking very broadly, the circumstances in which it is uttered. Sentences *as such* are not either true or false. (1962a: 110–111. See also 40–41, 65, 1962b: 142–147.)

And the circumstances can matter in a variety of ways, not simply by supplying, or failing to supply, an appropriate array of facts:

...in the case of stating truly or falsely, just as in the case of advising well or badly, the intents and purposes of the utterance and its context are important; what is judged true in a school book may not be so judged in a work of historical research. Consider ... 'Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma', remembering that Alma was a soldier's battle if ever there was one and that Lord Raglan's orders were never transmitted to some of his subordinates. Did Lord Raglan then win the battle of Alma or did he not? Of course in some contexts, perhaps in a school book, it is perfectly justifiable to say so—it is something of an exaggeration, maybe, and there would be no question of giving Raglan a medal for it... 'Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma' is exaggerated and suitable to some contexts and not to others; it would be pointless to insist on *its* [i.e. the *sentence's*] truth or falsehood. (1962b: 143–144, emphasis and interpolation added.)

It's important here to separate two questions. First, is the *sentence* 'Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma' true? Second, is *what is stated* in using that sentence on a particular occasion, true? In order for the first question to get an affirmative answer, *every* use of the sentence would have to be—or issue in a statement that is—true. But although the sentence can be used in a schoolbook to make a statement that is true, it might also be used in a work of historical research, or in support of Ragan's decoration, in making a false statement. Hence, the sentence doesn't take the same truth-value on *every* occasion: the sentence *per se* is neither true nor false. By contrast, there is no reason to deny that particular statements made on occasion in using the sentence are true: in particular, there is no reason to deny that the statement made by the schoolbook occurrence of the sentence is true. So, the second question can be given an affirmative answer, as long as we are willing to allow that a sentence can be used to make different statements on different occasions. (See also Austin's discussion of 'real' in 1962a: 62–77 for an array of relevant examples.)

We should avoid a possible misunderstanding of Austin here. His argument shows, at most, that whatever combines with the facts to determine a particular truth-value varies from occasion to occasion. That does nothing to dislodge the natural view that a sentence can carry its *meaning* with it from occasion to occasion, and thus can possess a literal meaning. However, if we wish to retain that idea, we must, it seems, give up on the idea that sentence meaning simply combines with the facts that are being spoken about to determine truth-value: we must reject the idea that sentence meanings determine truth-conditions. Plausibly, we should also give up the idea that meaning alone determines what is stated (at least insofar as the latter determines truth-conditions). In taking this line, we would reject views of meaning according to which they are given by appeal to truth-conditions. (For

sympathetic exposition of Austin on this topic, together with further development of an Austin-inspired account, see Travis 2008, 2011a.)

Austin makes no claims to generality for the account of truth that he sketches. (As we saw, his account presents a sufficient and not a necessary condition for statement truth.) Austin applies his account only to cases involving statements made about perceptually presented concreta. A plausible hypothesis, then, is that one of Austin's major aims in presenting his account was to provide an account of how such statements are determined as true or false on the basis of that which is perceptually presented. Austin's account is designed to help explain how what is presented in perceptual experience can figure in sustaining the truth or falsehood of statements made on that basis. On the assumption that what is perceptually presented is exhaustively concrete, any such account must help explain how perceived concreta can figure in the making of statements (and judgments) and in the evaluation of statements (and judgments) as true or false. One of Austin's major aims is to provide the bases for such an account. That aim explains the explicit lack of generality of Austin's account. It also explains what might otherwise have seemed to be a merely stubborn refusal to consider as candidates for truth correspondents anything other than perceptible concreta.

3. Austin and the facts.

Our opening questions about facts and truth correspondents were the following.

(Q1) What are facts?

(Q2) What, if anything, are the things to which true statements correspond and by virtue of which those statements are true? (For short: what, if anything, are the *truth-correspondents* of a true statement?)

(Q3) Do the elements specified in answer to (Q1) overlap with the elements specified in answer to (Q2)? That is, are the things to which true statements correspond facts, or the facts?

(Q4) Are the elements specified in answer to (Q1) and (Q2) happily characterised—along, for example, with other perceptible concreta—as being “in the world”?

Austin's account is based upon an affirmative answer to (Q3): the core of his account of truth is the claim that (the) facts are amongst the elements to which statements correspond when true. However, Austin appears not to commit to the

congruence of facts and truth-correspondents. Since Austin's core account of truth provides only a *sufficient* condition for statement truth, and not a necessary condition, it leaves open that there might be statements that are made true by correspondence with elements other than facts. (That fits the present reading of Austin, on which his fundamental end isn't to provide a general account of truth, but rather to provide an account for the truth of judgements (or statements) based on perceptual experience.) And furthermore it seems to be consistent with Austin's account that, amongst the facts, there are some that are unsuited to figuring as truth-correspondents in his account.

What, then, are the facts or truth-correspondents, on Austin's account? Here are some of the things that he says about them (some of which have already been quoted above):

[A1] Suppose that we confront 'France is hexagonal' with the facts, in this case, I suppose, with France, is it true or false? (1962b: 143)

Here we have that France is amongst the facts. More generally, we might predict that the facts include elements that we can think of as particular things or objects—in this case, particular regions.

[A2] A statement is said to be true when the historic state of affairs to which it is correlated by the demonstrative conventions...is of a type with which the sentence used in making it is correlated by the descriptive conventions. (1950: 122)

Here we have that truth-correspondents include historic states of affairs, or perhaps those states of affairs being of the types they are.

[A3] Troubles arise from the use of the word 'facts' for the historic situations, events, &c., and in general for the world. (1950: 122)

Here we have that the facts that can serve as truth-correspondents include historic situations, events, and (in general) the world.

[A4] I can only describe the situation in which it is true to say that I feel sick by saying that it is one in which I am feeling sick (or experiencing sensations of nausea): yet between stating, however truly, that I am feeling sick and feeling sick there is a great gulf fixed. (1950: 123–4.)

Here we have that the facts include the situation of Austin (or me, &c.) feeling sick, perhaps a state of Austin's (or mine, &c.) or a state of affairs involving Austin.

[A5] ...[A]lthough we perhaps rarely, and perhaps only in strained senses, say that a 'thing' (e.g. the German Navy) is a fact, and perhaps never say that a person is a fact, still, things and persons are far from being all that the ordinary man, and even Strawson, would admit to be genuinely things-in-the-world whatever exactly that may mean. Phenomena, events, situations, states of affairs are commonly supposed to be genuinely-in-the-world, and even Strawson admits events are so. Yet surely of all of these we can say that they *are facts*. The collapse of the Germans is an event and is a fact—was an event and was a fact. (1954ms: 156.)

Here we have a concession, albeit somewhat half-hearted, to an objection made by Strawson. Strawson presents the following argument (1950: 134–5):

(P1) Austin's account requires that there is something that is selected by the demonstrative conventions through which a statement is made and that serves as both (i) what the statement is *about* and (ii) the truth-correspondent of the statement.

(P2) What a statement expressed by the use of a simple subject–predicate sentence is *about* is the thing, person, etc., to which the sentence's subject expression refers (as so used and in accordance with the demonstrative conventions).

(P3) From (P1) and (P2), the truth-correspondent for the statement so expressed is the thing, person, etc., to which the sentence's subject expression refers.

However, (P4):

...while we certainly say that a statement corresponds to (fits, is borne out by, agrees with) the facts, as a variant on saying that it is true, we never say that a statement corresponds to the thing, person, etc., it is about. What "makes the statement" that the cat has mange "true," is not the cat, but the condition of the cat, i.e., the fact that the cat has mange. The only plausible candidate for the position of what (in the world) makes the statement true is the fact it states; but the fact it states is not something in the world. (Strawson, 1950: 135)

Ergo,

(C5) No thing, person, etc., is the truth-correspondent for a statement, or amongst the facts to which a true statement corresponds.

And thus, Austin's account, as characterised in (P1), is incorrect.

Austin's concession amounts, in effect, to allowing that (C5) is (or is "perhaps") correct. His sanguinity in the face of that concession is, of course, evidence that Austin would reject (P2). As we've seen, Austin's demonstrative conventions fix the targets of statings as wholes, rather than fixing merely the references of parts of the sentences that are used in those statings, as on Strawson's construal. And, as we've also seen, the targets so-fixed can include—in addition to things and persons—events, conditions, situations, and states of affairs.

The question remains, whether Austin was right to concede so much. There are at least two reasons for thinking that he conceded too easily.

The first reason is that the fact that "we never say something" doesn't appear immediately to entail that the thing we never say is false or nonsensical. Whether it does so would seem to depend at least on the specific reasons for our never saying that thing. However, it seems that Strawson's specific conclusion is derivable in a way that makes no explicit appeal to what we would say, as follows.

(P6) If e is a truth correspondent for the statement p , then, necessarily, if e exists, then the statement p is true. (Plausible principle. See e.g. Armstrong 2004: 5)

(P7) The cat is a truth correspondent for the statement that the cat has mange. (Assumption for purposes of *reductio*.)

(P8) Necessarily, if the cat exists, then the statement that the cat has mange is true. (From (P6) and (P7).)

(P9) Possibly, the cat exists and doesn't have mange. (Obvious.)

(P10) Necessarily, if the cat exists and doesn't have mange, the statement that the cat has mange is not true. (Obvious.)

(P11) Possibly, the cat exists and the statement that the cat has mange is not true. (From (P9) and (P10).)

(C12) It's not the case that the cat is a truth correspondent for the statement that the cat has mange. (From (P8) and (P11), via *reductio*.)

Now one might have doubts about this argument, and in particular about the principle in (P6). For one might wonder why the capacity to serve as a truth correspondent for a statement shouldn't sometimes be possessed only contingently. However, I don't propose to pursue the issue here. Instead, let's assume that an argument to the required conclusion is available and that Strawson is right to deny that the cat is a truth correspondent for the statement that the cat has mange.

The second reason for thinking that Austin conceded too easily is that arguments of the form just considered apply only in cases where analogues of (P9) hold. That is, the argument form applies only in cases in which it's possible for the putative truth correspondent for a statement to exist while failing to fit its characterisation in the statement. Thus, in cases in which the statement concerns only characteristics that the putative truth-correspondent cannot fail to have—i.e. essential properties of the correspondent—or concerns only the truth correspondent's existence, the argument form will be unavailable. For instance, on plausible assumptions, the argument leaves open that the cat is a truth correspondent both for statements to the effect that the cat is an animal and for statements to the effect that the cat exists. For all we've said, then, with respect to such pairs of statements and things, it would be open to Austin to claim that the things are truth correspondents for the statements. And as noted above, Austin only commits to presenting a sufficient condition for statement truth, so that would be enough to serve his explicit aims.

Nonetheless, Austin is willing to concede to Strawson that ordinary objects—e.g. things and persons—are not truth-correspondents. And Austin anyway appears to want his account to apply to statements in addition to those that concern the existence of objects and their possession of essential properties. Hence, even if Austin were willing to defend the claim that objects can be truth correspondents, he would in addition want to defend the claim that there are other concrete elements that can serve as truth correspondents for those other statements.

In [A5], Austin claims the following:

(A5.1) The following are truth correspondents: phenomena, events, situations, and states of affairs.

Focusing specifically on events, Austin makes, in addition, the following two claims:

(A5.2) Events are facts.

(A5.3) (a) Events, and so (b) some truth correspondents, and so (c) some facts, are genuinely-in-the-world.

Fairly obviously, Austin's core commitment here is A5.1. Given the hypothesis about Austin's major aim, A5.3 figures as making clear that truth correspondents are genuinely-in-the-world in the sense of being perceptible concreta. They can therefore figure in accounting for how what is presented in perceptual experience can serve to determine the truth or falsity of statements made on its basis. A5.2, and its analogues for the other elements listed in A5.1, figures only insofar as it connects Austin's developed account with what he takes to be its platitudinous source, the purportedly standard English claim that a statement is true when it corresponds to the facts. (1950: 121.) It's therefore remarkable that the main targets of critical discussion have been A5.2 and, thence, A5.3 b and c. (See especially Strawson 1950 and Zeno Vendler 1967. More recently, see Jonathan Bennett 1988: 1–12 and Wolfgang Kühne 2003: 141–45.) The only reasonable explanation is that the objectors are at least implicitly committed to the claim that *only* facts can be truth correspondents. For given that commitment, rejection of A5.2 would entail deletion of events from the list in A5.1. And if analogous objections were available to the claims that phenomena, situations, and states of affairs are facts, then that would induce further contractions to Austin's list. Assuming further that nothing genuinely-in-the-world—no perceptible concreta—survived the onslaught, A5.3 b and c would fall, and with them the possibility of providing the type of account that Austin aimed to provide for the truth of statements made on the basis of perceptual experience. Alternatively, in the absence of the assumption, it is not clear that rejection of the claim that concreta can be facts would entail anything beyond a terminological revision to Austin's account. That is, conceding that concreta cannot be facts would leave A5.1 standing. For the most part, I shall for present purposes follow the contours of the historical dispute and so partake in the assumption that only facts can be truth correspondents. However, it is important to bear in mind that the core question at issue—the question whether concreta can serve as truth correspondents—might be independent of the assumption. It might be that non-factual concreta can serve as truth correspondents; and it might be that not every fact is apt to serve as a truth correspondent.

4. Disputing Austin's facts.

In this section, the aim is to consider in some detail a prominent type of objection that has been offered to Austin's A5.2. The type of objection that I want to consider derives from Vendler 1967 and was prefigured in Ramsey 1927 and Ryle 1932. It has been presented more recently by Bennett 1988: 1–12 and Kühne 2003: 141–45, and it's on the two more recent presentations that I'll focus.

Austin doesn't simply assert (A5.2). Rather, he sketches an argument in its favour. (1954ms: 156.) One way of reconstructing his sketch is as follows.

(P13) The collapse of the Germans was an event.

(P14) The collapse of the Germans was a fact.

(C15) There was something that was an event and was a fact. (From (P13) and (P14), by existential generalisation.)

(C16) Some things that are, or were, events are, or were, facts. (From (C15) by plausible reformulation.)

We can begin developing the criticism of Austin's argument with two premises about a type of nominal expression that can be used in order to denote facts.

(P17) Every imperfect nominal denotes a fact (or state of affairs or proposition).

(P18) No imperfect nominal denotes an event.

Let's begin by distinguishing between perfect and imperfect nominals. (Here I follow closely Bennett's presentation which itself tracks Vendler's. See Bennett 1988: 1–12.) Consider the following examples involving, respectively, a derived and a gerundial nominal:

(1) Quisling's betrayal of Norway...

(2) Quisling's betraying Norway...

There are four major grammatical distinctions between these two nominals. First, in (1), and not in (2), we can replace "Quisling's" with an article:

The betrayal of Norway...

(3) The betrayal of Norway...

- (4) A betrayal of Norway...
- (5)* The betraying Norway...
- (6)* A betraying Norway...

Second, (1) accepts adjectives in attributive position, and rejects adverbs, while (2) rejects adjectives and accepts adverbs.

- (7) Quisling's treacherous betrayal of Norway...
- (8)* Quisling's treacherously betrayal of Norway...
- (9)* Quisling's treacherous betraying Norway...
- (10) Quisling's treacherously betraying Norway...

Third, in (2), and not in (1), the nominal accepts negation, tense, and modal auxiliaries:

- (11) Quisling's not betraying Norway...
- (12) Quisling's having betrayed Norway...
- (13) Quisling's having to betray Norway...
- (14)* Quisling's not betrayal of Norway...
- (15)* Quisling's having betrayal of Norway...
- (16)* Quisling's having to betrayal of Norway...

Fourth, "of" figures essentially in (1) but not (2).

The four grammatical characteristics just mentioned serve to mark out the perfect nominal, which pattern in accord with (1), and the imperfect nominals, which pattern in accord with (2).

Those four grammatical characteristics correspond with more semantical characteristics. First, the following examples involving perfect nominals are all perfectly acceptable:

- (17) Quisling's betrayal of Norway began in June.
- (18) Quisling's betrayal of Norway began in this room.
- (19) Pieter helplessly observed Quisling's betrayal of Norway.

By contrast, imperfect analogues of those examples are, at best, degraded:

- (20)? Quisling's betraying Norway began in June.
- (21)? Quisling's betraying Norway began in this room.
- (22)? Hansen helplessly observed Quisling's betraying Norway.

(These cases differ from the similar sounding non-genitives, e.g. "Pieter helplessly observed Quisling betraying Norway." The latter involve small-clauses—tenseless analogues of sentences—rather than nominals.)

In other cases, both patterns are acceptable, but permit a different range of interpretations. Consider, for example, the following:

- (23) Quisling's betrayal of Norway surprised Hansen.
- (24) Quisling's betraying Norway surprised Hansen.

(23) is consistent with an interpretation on which Hansen was unsurprised that Quisling betrayed Norway, but was surprised by something about the way in which Quisling did it. By contrast, (24) is not consistent with the latter interpretation, but only with the former.

With the distinction between perfect and imperfect nominals in hand, we are now in a position to present an argument in favour of (P17) ("Every imperfect nominal denotes a fact (or state of affairs or proposition)").

(P19) Every imperfect nominal of the form "The fact that [S]" denotes a fact. Every imperfect nominal of the form "That [S]" denotes a fact or denotes a state of affairs or denotes a proposition. (Obvious.)

(P20) Every sentence involving an imperfect gerundial nominal is obviously necessarily equivalent with a sentence in which the gerundial is replaced with an analogous nominal of the form "The fact that [S]" or "That [S]".

(Plausible by reflection on cases. Bennett (1988: 7) has “synonymous” where I have “obviously necessarily equivalent”.)

(P21) The best explanation of the fact related in (P20) is that in each case of obvious necessary equivalence, the imperfect gerundial nominal is co-denotative with the analogous nominal of the form “The fact that [S]” or “That [S]”. (Plausible explanatory claim.)

(C22=P17) Every imperfect nominal denotes a fact or state of affairs or proposition. (From (P19) and (P21), and assuming, as adequate for present purposes, that all imperfect nominals are either gerundial, of the form “The fact that [S]”, or of the form “That [S]”).

As presented, the argument is far from apodictic. However, I propose, for present purposes, to accept its conclusion. Our next task is to present an argument for (P18) (“No imperfect nominal denotes an event”). Here we can be brief, since we have already seen some of the evidence on which we’ll rely. For perfect nominals are paradigmatically used in order to denote events. More generally, unlike expressions that are used to denote events, imperfect nominals don’t take articles, and don’t combine acceptably with predications of timing, location, or observation. For present purposes, then, we should be willing to accept (P17) and (P18). (We’ll return briefly to the standing of (P18) below.)

Now, the minimal function of those premises, in conjunction with some subsidiary premises, is to undermine Austin’s argument that some events are facts.

The key subsidiary premise is this:

(P23) In any acceptable version of (P14), “The collapse of the Germans” is an imperfect nominal.

On the basis of (P23), we can reason as follows.

(P24) Since “The collapse of the Germans” in (P14) is an imperfect nominal, either (a) “The collapse of the Germans” in (P13) is also an imperfect nominal, or (b) Austin’s argument is vitiated by an equivocation.

(C25) If (a), then (P13) is false, since if “The collapse of the Germans” is an imperfect nominal, then it cannot denote an event. (From (P18).)

(C26) If (b), then (P13) and (P14) can both be true, but won’t conjointly determine the truth of (C16).

The weak point of this first step in the argument is (P23). We have from (P17) that if “The collapse of the Germans” is an imperfect nominal, then it will denote a fact (or state of affairs or proposition). It’s therefore true that that would be one way in which to try to run Austin’s argument. However, the alternative would be to insist that “The collapse of the Germans” is construed, in both premises of Austin’s argument, as a *perfect* nominal. At that point, the objector appears to be reduced simply to denying (P14) when “The collapse of the Germans” is construed as a perfect nominal and, so, as denoting an event. Furthermore, Austin’s presentation of the argument that we’ve reconstructed as (P13)–(C15) seems to provide some support for the construal. For Austin appeals not to our (P13) and (P14), but directly to the following conjunction:

(25) The collapse of the Germans is an event and is a fact—was an event and was a fact. (Austin 1954ms: 156.)

And we can use this claim as the basis for the following argument.

(P27) (25) seems to be correct.

(P28) (25) is correct. (Plausible transition from (P27).)

(P29) General constraints on the interpretation of conjunctive predications of the form “is an F and is a G” impose a uniform interpretation of subject expressions with which they combine.

(C30) If (25) is correct, then “The collapse of the Germans” can figure only as an imperfect nominal or only as a perfect nominal.

(C31) If (25) is correct, then “The collapse of the Germans” cannot figure only as an imperfect nominal. (From (P18), (C30), since (25) characterises what is denoted by “The collapse of the Germans” as an event.)

(C32) If (25) is correct, then “The collapse of the Germans” when construed as a perfect nominal can denote a fact (and, indeed, an event).

(C33) “The collapse of the Germans” when construed as a perfect nominal denotes a fact (and an event). (From (P28), (C32).)

So, there is some apparent evidence that (P23) is false: a statement made by use of “The collapse of the Germans is a fact” and in the making of which “The collapse of the Germans” figures as a perfect nominal, can be true.

At this point, Austin's opponent will want to reject the transition from (P27)—the claim that (25) seems true—to (P28)—the claim that it is true. In order to do that, they are required to do two things. First, they must provide a positive case for claiming that, if “The collapse of the Germans is a fact” is to be true, then the nominal must be construed as an imperfect nominal: in effect, they must make a case for the claim that only imperfect nominals, and not perfect nominals, denote facts. Second, they must explain away the appearance that (25) is true.

Wolfgang Kühne attempts to meet both obligations in the following passage (which I've renumbered for ease of reference).

Consider

(P34) The collapse of the Germans is a fact

(P35) The collapse of the Germans began in 1944.

If the identity of the derived nominals in (P34) and (P35) were to guarantee that the very same entity is introduced into discourse, then we would have to conclude from these premises:

(C36) Therefore (?), a fact began in 1944.

We can avoid this slide into nonsense by treating derived nominals as systematically ambiguous. Then we can say: only in (P35) does the subject-term designate an event, hence the displayed argument commits the fallacy of equivocation. So Austin's reply to Strawson fails: ‘*The collapse of the Germans* is both an event and a fact’ is a zeugma like ‘*Anna Karenina* is both a beautiful woman and a great novel’, forcing one expression into two conflicting services. (Kühne 2003: 143)

It's important to observe that Kühne's claim that Austin's reply *is* zeugmatic (or, perhaps, sylleptic) rests entirely on the positive case for holding that it *must* be. Unlike the sentence about *Anna Karenina*, Austin's reply doesn't *seem* straightforwardly to be zeugmatic. It may be, since zeugma need not be transparently so, but that must be demonstrated, and cannot be read off from ordinary engagement with the sentence. (For discussion of some issues surrounding the detection of zeugma, see Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 2007.)

For present purposes, we can allow that (C36) would follow from (P34) and (P35) if, in addition, “The collapse of the Germans” could be construed in both

premises as a perfect nominal. Künne takes it that (C36) is nonsense and so, presumably, that it is not true. If he were right, then in order to avoid the slide into “nonsense” (C36), we might seek to deny either the truth of (P34) and (P35), or the validity of the transition from those claims to (C36). Since (P34) and (P35) seem obviously to admit of true readings, the favoured strategy for avoiding the slide into “nonsense” is to argue that there is no uniform reading of the nominals that (P34) and (P35) embed. (P35) couldn’t be true if its nominal were construed as imperfect (since no imperfect denotes an event, by (P18)). So the nominal in (P35) must be construed as a perfect nominal. Hence, to enforce the charge of equivocation, the nominal in (P34), on its true reading, must be construed as imperfect. And that, in turn, supports the charge that Austin’s sentence is zeugmatic. However, in the absence of independent grounds for treating the nominal on the true reading of (P34) as an imperfect nominal and so, by (P18), as incapable of denoting an event, the weight of Künne’s case rests on his claim that (C36) is not true.

Unlike Künne, I don’t find it obvious that (C36) is not true. For me, then, there are two puzzles here. First, why does Künne hold that (C36) is not true? And second, why does he find it obvious? Rather than speculate about that, let me consider a line of argument that might figure in explaining why someone would find it obvious that (C36) is not true.

(P37) In “The collapse of the Germans began in 1944”, “The collapse of the Germans” denotes a fact. (Assumption for purposes of *reductio*.)

(P38) If “The collapse of the Germans” denotes a fact, then it denotes the same fact as does “The fact that the Germans collapsed”. (?)

(P39) If “The collapse of the Germans” denotes a fact in “The collapse of the Germans began in 1944”, then it denotes the same fact as does “The fact that the Germans collapsed”. (From (P38).)

(P40) Inter-substitution of co-denoting expressions preserves truth-value. (?)

(P41) If “The collapse of the Germans began in 1944” is true, then “The fact that the Germans collapsed began in 1944” is true. (From (P39) and (P40).)

(P42) “The collapse of the Germans began in 1944” is true. (Obvious to the historically informed.)

(P43) “The fact that the Germans collapsed began in 1944” is not true.
(Obvious?)

(C44) It’s not the case that, in “The collapse of the Germans began in 1944”,
“The collapse of the Germans” denotes a fact. ((P37), (P42), (P43), by
reductio.)

I don’t myself find (P43) obvious in part because I do not find obvious any particular view about the proper treatment of constructions like “The fact that the Germans collapsed” that would make it obvious. If I were convinced that “The fact that the Germans collapsed” *always* denotes an abstract element (or a plurality of such elements), and in addition that *no* such elements begin, then I would be convinced that (P43) is correct. However, I am not convinced of either claim.

Austin himself suggests an alternative view, on which such expressions are used indirectly to denote truth correspondents, including events. (1950: 123–24, 1954ms: 165.) On the alternative view, “The fact that the Germans collapsed” is taken to denote the fact that makes true the statement that the Germans collapsed—that is, the event of the Germans’ collapse. More generally, expressions of the form “The fact that...” are taken to be definite descriptions the descriptive matrix of which makes appeal to the relation of making true between concreta and statements (or judgments, or propositions). It’s plausible that, if anything made true the statement that the Germans collapsed, it was the event of the Germans’ collapse. And it’s plausible that the event of the Germans’ collapse began in 1944. It’s therefore plausible that the element that made the statement that the German’s collapsed true began in 1944. So, on the alternative account of propositional fact talk, it’s plausible that “The fact that the Germans collapsed” denotes something that began in 1944. The alternative account therefore plausibly permits us to take “The fact that the Germans collapsed began in 1944” to be true. (For reasons I’ll turn to in a moment, the alternative account, when taken on its own, merely permits, and doesn’t without supplementation require, that we take the target sentence to be true.) Since expressions of the form “The fact that...” are imperfect nominals, adopting such a view would require us to revisit our earlier acceptance *pro tanto* of (P18), the claim that no imperfect nominal can be used to denote an event. And we would therefore need to find a way of explaining away what appeared to be evidence in favour of (P18). But there is no obvious reason to think that that task cannot be completed. For present purposes, however, I’m prepared to let the first concern pass and to accept that (P43) is true. However, the idea that expressions of the form “The fact that...” might be used to denote events figures as background to a second concern about the argument.

The second concern targets another potential weak point in the argument, (P40). The concern here is that substitutions of terms might fail to preserve truth-value for reasons other than differences in the denotations of those terms. To take one type of example, it seems to be possible for (26) and (27) to be used so that ‘she’ and ‘her’ both refer to the same individual, say Jill.

(26) Jack loves her.

(27) She is loved by Jack.

And yet, case restrictions mean that inter-substitution of ‘she’ and ‘her’ fails to preserve grammaticality, so truth:

(28)* Jacks loves she.

(29)* Her is loved by Jack.

Now it might be argued that ‘she’ and ‘her’ as they appear in (28) and (29) cannot be used to refer, and so cannot be used to refer to the same individuals as ‘she’ and ‘her’ in (26) and (27) can be used to refer. However, an analogous claim might be made about the nominal “The fact that the Germans collapsed” as it occurs in the string “The fact that the Germans collapsed began in 1944”. If the latter claim were defensible, then (P40) would not support (P41). And furthermore, even if the analogous claim about the nominal “The fact that the Germans collapsed” were not defensible, that wouldn’t preclude the availability of a broadly grammatical explanation for how the nominals “The collapse of the Germans” and “The fact that the Germans collapsed” can have the same denotations and yet make different contributions to the truth-values of otherwise similar sentences in which they appear. Such an explanation might be consistent both with the truth of “The collapse of the Germans began in 1944” and with the co-denotation of “The fact that the Germans collapsed” and “The collapse of the Germans”. For it would explain why (P43) is true in a way that leaves open that “The fact that the Germans collapsed” as it occurs in (P43) denotes something that is capable of beginning in 1944. (For further discussion of such broadly grammatical explanations, in application to the case of the objects of psychological verbs, see King 2002. Austin hints in this direction at various points in his 1954ms, e.g.: 156–59.) Again, however, I’m prepared for present purposes to let the concern pass and to accept (P40). For a more obviously weak point in the argument is (P39).

(P39) would be plausible if “The collapse of the Germans” occurred as an imperfect nominal in “The collapse of the Germans began in 1944.” For it is a plausible generalisation that imperfect nominals of that type have the same

denotations as analogous imperfect nominals of the form “The fact that...” (or more carefully, “That...”). However, we know by now that “The collapse of the Germans” occurs in the target context only as a perfect nominal. And we thus far lack any reason to hold that if perfect nominals denote facts, then they are co-denotative with imperfect nominals of the form “The fact that...” (The alternative account of imperfect nominals of the required form sketched above might provide a reason for expecting co-denotation, but only by rendering questionable other steps in the argument.) If the present argument to Künne’s conclusion is to be forced through, what is required is reason to think that all expressions that denote facts are co-denotative with one or another imperfect nominal of the form “The fact that...”.

Let’s try again to construct the missing argument. What is wanted is reason to extend plausible generalisations about the facts that are denoted by imperfect nominals in such a way as to undermine the claim that some facts are events. (More minimally, the aim might be to undermine the evidence that Austin presents in favour of the claim, by marshalling evidence that perfect nominals that denote events cannot also denote facts.)

To this point, we have sufficient materials to derive the following:

(C45) There are facts that are not events.

We could have derived (C45) from, for example, (P17) (“Every imperfect nominal denotes a fact (or state of affairs or proposition)”) and (P18) (“No imperfect nominal denotes an event”). For it would be possible to denote a fact without denoting an event only if there were facts that were not events. Similarly, we could have derived (C45) from the plausible claims (i) that constructions of the form “The fact that...” denote facts and (ii) that they do not also denote events. What is required, and what we have been struggling to find, is a way of progressing from (C45) to (C46):

(C46) There are no facts that are events.

(We haven’t even managed to derive the far weaker: “There are events that are not facts.”)

A premise sufficient to do the required work would be the following.

(P47) The metaphysical category of facts is categorially uniform.

The notion of categorial uniformity embedded in (P47) is to be understood in such a way that if the predicate “is an event” is correctly applicable (/inapplicable) to any member of a uniform metaphysical category, then it is correctly applicable (/inapplicable) to every member of that category. On the basis of (P47), it would follow straightforwardly from the fact that some facts are not events that no facts are events.

The main problems with (P47), when so construed, are the following. First, as we’ve seen, Austin appears explicitly to reject it, at least on the assumption that expressions of the form “The fact that...” cannot denote events. Second, we have, as yet, been offered no reason not to agree with him in rejecting it. The arguments that we have considered to this point seem at best to assume, rather than to support, (P47). Furthermore, third, Austin appears not to be alone in rejecting the uniformity claim. Bertrand Russell, for example, appears, at least for a moment, to agree with Austin:

When I speak of a fact...I mean the kind of thing that makes a proposition true or false.... If I say ‘Socrates is dead,’ my statement will be true owing to a certain physiological occurrence which happened in Athens long ago. (Russell, 1918: 7.)

Here, it’s plausible to read Russell as allowing that whatever makes a proposition true or false is a fact and, furthermore, that some occurrences—i.e. some events—are included within that category. The evidence here isn’t quite decisive, since it may be possible to read the relational predicate “is true owing to” as expressing something other than the converse of “makes true”. Moreover, Russell goes on to muddy the water by denying that “any particular thing just by itself” makes a proposition true or false. (1918: 7) However, what Russell is most keen to rule out is that things like Socrates might be truth correspondents for propositions, and it may be that Russell would deny that particular things are truth correspondents only because he would deny that occurrences are particular things. Minimally, then, Russell appears to agree with Austin that events are, or can be, facts. Moreover, the putative characterisation of facts as whatever is able to make propositions true or false strongly suggests a willingness, in principle, to allow that things other than events might be facts—for example, that there might be (non-occurrent) arithmetical facts. (Russell appears to accept the existence of arithmetical facts in the same passage. (1918:7))

Let me summarise the discussion to this point. We have that Austin includes in his category of facts a range of elements: concrete particulars, stuffs, processes, events, and states. The principle organising the category seems to be analogous to that employed by Russell: the kind of thing that can make a proposition (for Austin, a

statement) true or false. We've considered a range of prominent arguments for the claim that Austin is wrong to include—in particular—events in his list of facts and found those arguments wholly unconvincing. The negative arguments that we've considered all seem ultimately to trade upon an assumption like (P46). Until a reasonable defence of that assumption is offered, no reason has been made available that precludes our endorsing Austin's system of classification. That is, we may provisionally accept Austin's (A5.2).

However, before concluding this section, we should consider briefly whether events really are apt to meet the Russellian condition—whether, that is, they furnish a special case of (A5.1) by possessing the capacity to make true propositions (or statements). Let's consider, then, a permutation of the argument that we considered earlier for the claim that ordinary objects can't make true propositions, with events figuring in place of objects.

(P48) If e is a truth correspondent for the statement p , then, necessarily, if e exists, then the statement p is true. (Plausible principle. See e.g. Armstrong 2004: 5)

(P49) The event of Germany's collapse is a truth correspondent for the statement that Germany collapsed. (Assumption for purposes of *reductio*.)

(P50) Necessarily, if the event of Germany's collapse occurred, then the statement that Germany collapsed is true. (From (P48) and (P49).)

(P51) Possibly, the event that was actually the event of Germany's collapse occurred and Germany didn't collapse. (?)

(P52) Necessarily, if the event of Germany's collapse occurred and Germany didn't collapse, the statement that Germany collapsed is not true. (Obvious.)

(P53) Possibly, the event of Germany's collapse occurred and the statement that Germany collapsed is not true. (From (P51) and (P52).)

(C54) It's not the case that the event of Germany's collapse is a truth correspondent for the statement that Germany collapsed. (From (P50) and (P53), via *reductio*.)

I take it that the claim (in (P51) that it is possible for the event that was actually Germany's collapse to have occurred without Germany collapsing—unlike the claim (in (P9)) that it is possible for the mangy cat to exist without having mange—is far from obviously correct. In order to defend it, one would need to

demonstrate that that very event—an event in which Germany collapsed—could have occurred and yet not have been an event in which Germany collapsed. It would be a larger task than can be attempted here to argue that no such demonstration can be carried out. For present purposes, we can rest content with the fact that nothing approaching such demonstration *has* been carried out. For present purposes, it is therefore reasonable to accept *pro tanto*, not only (A5.2), but also the special case of (A5.1): events are amongst the truth correspondents.

5. Conclusion.

I began with a recent dispute between McDowell and Travis over what is made available to us in perceptual experience and how what is made available in experience can figure in underwriting our acquisition of propositional knowledge. McDowell had defended the view that in order for perceptual experience to underwrite our acquisition of propositional knowledge, it would have to make available to us some the propositional facts we thereby come to know. Travis demurs. He argues that we can acquire knowledge on the basis of perceptual experience even though, as he also argues, that experience makes available to us only what is concrete and so does not make available to us propositional facts. Since knowledge is factive, so that if one knows that p , the proposition that p must be true, Travis' argument appears to depend upon the claim that concreta can determine the truth and falsity of propositions.

I sought to connect the dispute between McDowell and Travis with an earlier dispute between Austin, Strawson, and others, concerning truth and the natures of truth correspondents. We saw that Austin, like Travis, wished to defend the view that perceptible concreta can serve as truth correspondents, plausibly as part of an analogous project. I sketched Austin's account and then considered in some detail some prominent objections to Austin's inclusion of events—one species of concreta—in his list of facts and so truth correspondents. Finally, I argued that none of those objections is successful as it stands and indicated two points at which further firepower might usefully be directed: (i) critical assessment of (P46), the claim that the metaphysical category of facts is categorially uniform; and (ii) critical assessment of the claim that events are sufficiently modally robust that few, if any, of their properties are essential to them.

As things stand, we have seen that the claim that some concreta are facts—specifically, that some events are facts (Austin's A5.2)—has not yet been shown to be false. Moreover, we've briefly considered the standing of the more critical claim that some perceptible concreta are truth correspondents for truths about the perceptible environment (via considering Austin's A5.1), and found no reason to

reject that claim. It therefore remains open that the following claims might all be true:

I. One's sensory experience can put one in a position to know things about one's perceptible environment.

II. When one knows things, one knows truths.

III. If one's sensory experience can put one in a position to know things about one's perceptible environment, then one's sensory experience must be capable of determining truths about one's perceptible environment.

IV. If one's sensory experience is capable of determining truths about one's perceptible environment, then what one can experience sensorily must be, or must determine, truths about one's perceptible environment.

V. One cannot sensorily experience anything other than concreta—for instance, concrete objects and events; in particular, one cannot experience truths.

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