ASSERTION[1]

A THOUGHT may have just the same content whether you assent to its truth or not; a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted, and yet be recognizably the same proposition. This may appear so obviously true as to be hardly worth saying; but we shall see it *is* worth saying, by contrast with erroneous theories of assertion, and also because a right view of assertion is fatal to well-known philosophical views on certain other topics.

I shall call this point about assertion *the Frege point*, after the logician who was the first (so far as I know) to make the point clearly and emphatically. In some of Frege's writings the point is made in the course of his expounding some highly disputable theories, about sense and reference and about propositions' being complex names of logical objects called "truth-values." But the dubiousness of these theories does not carry over to the Frege point itself. Admitting the Frege point does not logically commit us to these theories; as a matter of history, Frege already made the point in his youthful work, *Begriffsschrift*, many years before he had developed his theories of sense and reference. Those theories are more defensible than some philosophers allow; but to discuss them here would only obscure the main issue.

When I use the term "proposition," as I did just now, I mean a form of words in which something is propounded, put forward for consideration; it is surely clear that what is then put forward neither is *ipso facto* asserted nor gets altered in content by being asserted. Unfortunately, this use of "proposition," formerly a well-established one, has become liable to be misconstrued, for the word has been appropriated by certain theorists for a supposed realm of timeless abstract "intentional" objects, whose principle of individuation has thus far eluded capture in any clearly formulable criterion. Philosophers have weakly surrendered

[1] Delivered as a Howison Lecture at the University of California in Berkeley in 1963 and to the Philosophical Society of the University of Warsaw in the same year. I thank my kind hosts in both places.

the term "proposition" to these theorists and cast around for some substitute; the ones they have come up with—"sentence" and "statement"—have been rather unhappy. It would be preferable to stick to the old use of "proposition," which has never quite gone out; if we need a substitute for "proposition" in the newfangled use, it will not be difficult to find one—let us say, "propositional content."

The use of "sentence" in the sense that "proposition" used to have often calls forth rather nagging objections. What is wrong with thus using "sentence" is quite a simple matter, and one is not likely to be misled once it has been pointed out: namely, that different occurrences of what is the same sentence by grammatical criteria may be different propositions by logical criteria. Moreover, the fact that "sentence" is a grammatical term makes it sound awkward as applied to logical or mathematical formulas, which could of course be naturally called "propositions." But nobody ought to plume himself on replacing "sentence" in this use by "statement"; for "statement" is a far more dangerously misleading term. It is obvious that our discourse may and does contain unasserted propositions; the notion of an unasserted statement may appear a contradiction in terms. If we want to allow for the possibility of a *statement's* being made nonassertorically, we have to strive against the natural use of the expressions "statement" and "making a statement," and the natural use may be too strong—*tamen usque recurret.*

This is no imaginary danger. In his essay *If, So, and Because* Professor Ryle actually uses the paradoxical sound of "unasserted statement" as a reason for censuring as deceptive the "code style" of the *modus ponens*: "if p, then q; but p, therefore q." The recurrences of the letters "p" and "q" suggest that a logician can recognize something identifiable which occurs now asserted, now unasserted; a statement, Ryle argues, cannot thus have two ways of occurring. Ryle even finds it a misleading feature of ordinary modern English that the same form of words may be used now to make a statement, now in an "if" or "then" clause; surely things would be clearer if we had to alter the mood or word order of clauses in framing a hypothetical.

A hypothetical statement, Ryle argues, cannot state a relation

between two statements, because the antecedent and consequent clauses are not assertoric and thus not statements; statements are neither used nor mentioned in the hypothetical. Ryle toys with an idea of Cook Wilson, who had similar worries, that a hypothetical asserts a relation between two questions; he decides against this, on the score that one who makes a hypothetical statement does not actually either pose or mention any questions. Ryle's final solution is that in a hypothetical the antecedent and consequent are indents or specifications for possible statements; they are no more themselves statements than a license to export bicycles is itself a bicycle—only confusion is easier because these clauses, like the statements for which they are indents, consist of words.

Thus far Ryle. His argument fully illustrates the dangers of "statement" as a logical term. If we speak rather of propositions, Ryle's difficulties vanish. What Ryle calls "making a hypothetical statement" is what I call "asserting a hypothetical proposition"; in making such an assertion the speaker is certainly putting forward the antecedent and consequent for consideration, so that they are undoubtedly propositions too, but he is of course not thus far stating or asserting them to be true.[2] He may then go on to assert the antecedent, and from this go on further to assert the consequent. This does not alter the force of either proposition; if in some languages the propositions need rewording when asserted, this is just an idiotism of idiom. The only thing that is wrong with the "code style" of the *modus ponens*—"if p then q; but p; therefore q"—is that we might profitably follow Frege in having an explicit assertion sign "$\vdash$ if p, then q; $\vdash p$; *ergo* $\vdash q$." (Here "p" and "q" are schematic propositional letters; any concrete interpretation of them as propositions yields a valid argument.)

Ryle argues that in "if p, then q; but p therefore q" the hypothetical is not a premise co-ordinate with "p," as the "code style" suggests, but is rather a license to perform the inference "p, therefore q" when you have the premise "p." His argument

[2] A good instance of the tangles that the use of "statement" leads to is to be found on p. 88 of Strawson's *Introduction to Logical Theory* (London, 1952): "for each hypothetical statement," we are told, "there could be made just *one* statement which would be the antecedent"; but of course it *would not* be the antecedent if it were a statement.

against the more conventional two-premise account of *modus ponens* is that if we needed to supply "if *p*, then *q*" as a premise for the inference of "*q*" from "*p*," then by parity of reasoning we should need to supply "if both *p* and if *p* then *q*, then *q*" as a premise for the inference of "*q*" from "*p*" and "if *p* then *q*"—and then we should have started on a vicious regress, the one made notorious by Lewis Carroll in "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles."

I do not think there is anything in this. Particular readings of "*p*" and "*q*" may make "*p*, therefore *q*" into a logically valid argument; but it is not in general logically valid, and if not, then no power in heaven or earth can issue me a "license" that makes it logically valid. On the other hand, "if *p*, then *q*; but *p*; therefore *q*" *is* logically valid; and this means precisely that the two premises "if *p* then *q*" and "*p*" are sufficient to yield the conclusion "*q*," so that there is no place for introducing an extra premise, and a regress never gets started.

The Frege point is thus something we need to grasp in order to understand *modus ponens*; it is no less needed in the doctrine of truth-functional connectives. Thus "*p aut q*" is true if and only if just one of the propositions represented by "*p*" and "*q*" is true, and "*p vel q*" is true if and only if at least one of them is true. (I use Latin words as connectives to dodge the idiotic but seemingly perennial discussion as to the "proper" meaning of "or" in ordinary language.) Now even if the proposition represented by "*p vel q*" or by "*p aut q*" is itself taken to be an asserted proposition, "*p*" will not be asserted in this context, and neither will "*q*"; so if we say that the truth value of the whole proposition is determined by the truth values of the disjuncts, we are committed to recognizing that the disjuncts have truth values independently of being actually asserted.

Oxford-trained philosophers often say nowadays that a sentence can have a truth value assigned to it only in that it is "used to make a statement" in a given context. If this were literally true, then a truth-functional account of "*p vel q*" or of "*p aut q*" would be impossible: for the disjunct clauses represented by "*p*" and "*q*" would not be being "used to make statements" in a context in which only the disjunction was asserted, and would thus not

have any truth values for the truth value of the whole proposition to be a function of. This consequence is not often drawn: Strawson's *Logical Theory*, for example, does not raise this as a fundamental objection to the very idea of truth-functional logic, as on his own premises he might well do.

Nor can the idea of only statements' having truth values be reconciled with truth-functional logic by saying that the truth value of a disjunctive sentence used to make a statement in a given context is a function of the truth values that the disjuncts would have had if they had been separately used to make statements in the same context. For this is not even plausible unless we mean by "the truth values that the disjuncts would have had" those that they would have had if *without change of sense* they had been used to make statements in the given context. But if we can tell what truth values the disjuncts "would have had," given the force they actually have in the context of their occurrence, then a denial that they actually have truth values is quite empty; it just evinces a determination not to *call* unasserted propositions "true" or "false," and this is what Professor Antony Flew has aptly called a conventionalist sulk.

The truth-functional "and" occasions another error to those who miss the Frege point. Thinking in terms of statements, they see no need to recognize a conjunctive statement "*p* and *q*" as distinct from the pair of statements "*p*," "*q*"; if you recognize conjunctive propositions as a kind of proposition, you may as well say, Mill remarked, that a team of horses is a kind of horse or a street a kind of house. But it is clear that in contexts of the kind "*p* and *q*, or else *r*" or again "if *p* and *q*, then *r*," where we have a conjunction occurring unasserted, the conjunction is a single proposition, a logical unit, not a pair of separate propositions.

In another sort of case, however, we do get a pair of assertions rather than the assertion of a conjunctive proposition. Any statement containing a phrase of the form "the fact that *p*" is exponible as a pair of assertions, one of which asserts the content of the "that" clause. For example, an assertion "Jim is aware of the fact that his wife is unfaithful" is equivalent to the pair of assertions "Jim is convinced that his wife is unfaithful" and "Jim's wife is unfaithful."

We cannot analyze such an assertion as the assertion of a single conjunctive proposition—in our case, of "Jim is convinced that his wife is unfaithful, and Jim's wife is unfaithful." For this proposition conforms, as we might expect, to the law of excluded middle; it can be substituted for "*p*" in "either *p* or it is not the case that *p*" so as to get a logical truth. But we cannot so substitute "Jim is aware of the fact that his wife is unfaithful"; since "either Jim is aware of the fact (and so forth) or it is not the case that Jim is aware of the fact (and so forth)" is not a mere instance of excluded middle, but is something that can be admitted only by one who takes it to be a fact that Jim's wife is unfaithful. Like the original assertion about Jim, this is a double-barreled assertion; an assertion about Jim's wife gets smuggled in along with, and under cover of, an instance of the excluded middle.

This assertoric force of "the fact that" comes out even in requests, commands, questions, and so forth. If I ask, "Is Jim aware of the fact that his wife is deceiving him?" I am not just asking a question; I am asserting that Jim's wife is deceiving him. The question as I pose it cannot be properly answered "Yes" or "No" by someone who does not accept this assertion; a corresponding but unloaded question would be "Is Jim convinced that his wife is deceiving him?" In such cases, we do get a separate asserted proposition, which for clarity's sake ought to be separately enunciated; this points up the contrast with the genuine unity of a conjunctive proposition.

Negation often gets paired off with assertion as its polar opposite; this is another mistake over the Frege point—one exposed by Frege himself in his paper, *Negation*. Just as I can put forward a proposition "*s*" without asserting "*s*" as true, so I can put forward the negation of "*s*" without rejecting "*s*" as false—for example, when this negation occurs as part of a longer proposition, in a context, say, of the form "*p* and *q*, or else *r* and not *s*." Thus logic in any case demands the use of a negation sign which is not polarly opposed to the assertion sign and does not express rejection of what is negated; and when a proposition is rejected, we may equally well conceive this as asserting the negation of a proposition.

Indeed, there are serious objections to any other way of con-

ceiving the matter. It is clear that "if not q, then r; but not q; therefore r" is a mere special case of the *modus ponens* "if p, then r; but p; therefore r." But if we regarded rejecting a proposition as different from asserting the negation of a proposition, we should have here two quite different logical forms; we might write these as follows, using Łukasiewicz' sign $\dashv$ for a rejection opposed to Frege's assertion $\vdash$:

$$\vdash \text{If not } q, \text{ then } r; \dashv q; \text{ ergo } \vdash r.$$
$$\vdash \text{If } p, \text{ then } r; \vdash p; \text{ ergo } \vdash r.$$

Plainly this is a futile complication. All we need in logic for assertion and negation is two signs—the assertion sign, and a negation which does *not* convey rejection (as in "if not q . . ."); whatever is more than these, as Frege says, cometh of evil.

Frege's logical doctrine suggests a parallel doctrine in the psychology of belief. Christians and Muslims have called each other unbelievers; but this does not mean that there are two polarly opposed activities or attitudes, believing and unbelieving, and that the point at issue is which side goes in for which; it is just that what Christians believe is opposed to what Muslims believe. Believing, like seeing, has no polar opposite, though contrary dogmas may be believed, as contrary colors may be seen. An incredulous man is not a man who goes in for unbelieving, but a man who believes the contrary of what people tell him.

On this view of beliefs, there will be a sharp difference between belief and appetitive or emotional attitudes; for love and hate, desire and aversion, pleasure and pain, are opposite as attitudes, not by being attitudes toward opposite objects. The distinction of "pro" and "contra," of favorable and unfavorable attitudes, has its place only in the realm of appetite, will, and passion, not in that of belief; this shows the error in treating religious beliefs as some sort of favorable attitude toward something.

I was speaking just now about assertoric sentences containing a phrase "the fact that p," which are to be expounded as pairs of asserted propositions, not as single propositions. A similar complication occurs in some other cases: thus, an assertoric sentence

of the form "*A* has pointed out that *p*" is exponible as the double-barreled assertion of "*A* has maintained that *p*" and of "*p*" itself. Again (an example of Frege's), "*A* fancies that *p*" is exponible as the double-barreled assertion of "*A* thinks that *p*" and of "it is not the case that *p*." Assertions thus exponible will certainly retain part of their assertoric force when put, for example, into an "if" clause; thus, one who asserts, "If *A* is under the illusion that *p*, then *q*," does not mean "If *A* is under the impression that *p*, but it is not the case that *p*, then *q*"—rather, he both asserts, "It is not the case that *p*" and asserts, "If *A* is under the impression that *p*, then *q*." Notice that no such complication arises for the verb "know." Use of the expression ". . . knows that *p*" does not commit the speaker to asserting "*p*"; to adapt an example of Hintikka's, one who asserted in 1916, "If Russell knows that Wittgenstein is dead, then Wittgenstein is dead" would not himself be asserting, "Wittgenstein is dead."

In these special cases, we have an expression that endows a clause within a sentence (or the negation of such a clause) with an assertoric force that is, so to speak, inalienable, and is not canceled even by prefixing an "if" to the whole sentence in which the clause occurs. Apart from these special cases, which for simplicity's sake I shall henceforth ignore, there is no expression in ordinary language that regularly conveys assertoric force. The conjunction "if," which generally cancels all assertoric force in the "if" clause, can grammatically be prefixed to any sentence of assertoric form without altering its grammatical structure or even the way it sounds; somebody who fails to hear the first word of my "if" clause may actually mistake what I say for an assertion, so that like Alice I have to explain, "I only said 'if.'"

In written or printed language, however, there is something of a clue to what is meant assertorically. There is a certain presumption—though of course it can be upset in various ways—that an author of a nonfictional work intends a sentence to be read as an assertion if it stands by itself between full stops and grammatically can be read as an assertion. The assertoric force of a sentence is thus shown by its *not* being enclosed in the context of a longer sentence.

Possibly there is something corresponding to this in the realm

of thoughts; possibly a thought is assertoric in character unless it loses this character by occurring only as an element in a more complicated thought. In Spinoza's example, the boy whose mind is wholly occupied with the thought of a winged horse, and who lacks the adult background knowledge that rules out there being such a thing, cannot but assent to the thought of there being a winged horse. This would be a neat solution to the problem of how thought is related to judgment, but I do not insist on it; there may be fatal objections. Anyhow, if this theory is true, I need not recant anything I have so far said; it would still be true that a thought may occur now unasserted, now asserted, without change of content. But if I had to choose between this theory and the Frege point, this is what I would reject.

There have been a number of attempts to treat some expression of ordinary language as carrying with it the assertoric force. I think these attempts all miscarry; apart from the exceptional cases of double-barreled assertions, previously mentioned, there is no naturally used sign of assertion, but only the negative clue to assertoric force that I have just been discussing. That is why Frege had to devise a special sign.

Let us consider some attempts to read assertoric force into some ordinary expression. We want our assertions to be true, or to be taken for true; so it is natural to cast "it is true that . . ." for the role of assertion sign. But this will not do, for this expression may come in an unasserted clause without any change of meaning; nor is there any equivocation in an argument "it is true that p; and if it is true that p, then q; ergo q." Indeed, whether asserted or not, "it is true that p" is scarcely to be distinguished from the plain "p." This does not mean that "true" is a useless sign, for it is not always trivially eliminable—not, for example, from "what the policeman said is true" nor from "there is many a true word spoken in jest." But the identification of the assertoric force with the meaning of "it is true that . . ." is just a mistake.

Oddly enough, Frege himself committed a similar mistake in his *Begriffsschrift*. He regarded an unasserted proposition as a sign for the circumstance (*Umstand*) that so-and-so, and called his assertion sign a "common predicate" in all assertions—one predicating of the relevant "circumstance" that it actually obtains.

But "the circumstance that *p* is one that actually obtains," like "it is true that *p*," hardly differs from plain "*p*," and any such proposition may unequivocally occur now asserted, now unasserted. In later works Frege saw his mistake, and gave up any attempt to explain the assertion sign by classifying it as a predicate, or as any other sort of sign; it is necessarily *sui generis*. For any other logical sign, if not superfluous, somehow modifies the content of a proposition; whereas this does not modify the content, but shows the proposition is being asserted.

Another concept often confused with assertoric force is the concept of existence. To be sure, people guilty of this confusion would say it is improper to speak of the concept of existence; for the assertion sign adds no concept, so their very confusion makes them deny that the verb "exists" or "there is" adds a concept either. What "there is an *A*" or "an *A* exists" adds over and above the bare term "an *A*" is not a concept, they say; rather, there is a transition from the bare concept of an *A* to a judgment, and it is the act of judgment that mirrors existence (or, they would perhaps prefer to say, being).

In recent philosophy the best-known advocate of this view is Gilson. Gilson fathers it on Aquinas; but I really do not see how it can be extracted from Aquinas' text. (Aquinas says a judgment is true when it says a thing is as it is; I suppose Gilson would read Aquinas as saying that a judgment is true when a thing IS as the judgment says the thing IS.) The actual provenance of Gilson's view seems to me to be different: he acknowledges an anticipation of it by Brentano, and there is an even clearer anticipation in Hume. "It is far from being true, that in every judgment which we form, we unite two different ideas; since in that proposition, *God is*, or indeed, any other, which regards existence, the idea of existence is no distinct idea, which we unite with that of the object . . . . The act of the mind exceeds not a single conception; and the only remarkable difference, which occurs on this occasion, is, when we join belief to the conception, and are persuaded of the truth of what we conceive" (*Treatise*, Book I, Section vii).

Be the doctrine whose it may, it is hopelessly erroneous. For one thing, an existential proposition, like any other proposition, may occur unasserted without change of content; we get this in

such propositions as "either there is a Loch Ness monster or many observers have been unreliable," or, again, "if there are canals on Mars then Mars is inhabited." An existential proposition need not express a *judgment* of existence. And let no one retort that in such cases, just because there is no judgment, there is no existential proposition; for even the unasserted proposition "there is an *A*" is quite different in content from the bare term "an *A*." As Frege pointed out, we cannot substitute "there is a house" for "a house," in "Priam lived in a house of timber"; we cannot even substitute "there being a house." Again, as Aristotle pointed out, "goat-stag" by itself gives us nothing true or false, but "there is a goat-stag" does give us something false; and, we may add, the falsity of this proposition in no way depends on anybody's asserting it, or else we could not assert with truth, "It is false that there is a goat-stag," if nobody ever asserted there is.

In Buridan's *Sophismata* the point I have been making is brought out in an elegant ontological disproof of God's existence. Buridan points out that if I just say "a God" or "a horse" I have not yet said anything true or false, but if I add the verb "exists," then I have said something true or false; therefore, "a God exists" must signify something more than the bare term "a God" signifies. But, on the orthodox view, only after the world was created was there something more than God for the proposition "a God exists" to signify; therefore before the creation it did not signify anything more; therefore it was not true; therefore God did not then exist!

Of course, Buridan did not mean us to take this very seriously; there is in fact a patent equivocation in the use of "something more." Before the world was created, there would not be "something more" than God that could be signified by a name; but the sense in which "exists" in "a God exists" or "a horse exists" signifies "something more" than the grammatical subject is clearly not that it names another object. All the same, it does signify something more, in the sense of introducing a new *ratio* or concept into the proposition, whether the proposition is asserted or not.

The Hume-Brentano-Gilson thesis cannot be intelligibly stated if it is true; it claims that existence is unconceptualizable and can be grasped only in existential judgments, but this very claim is not an existential judgment and treats existence as conceptualizable.

This suicide of a thesis might be called *Ludwig's self-mate*; but Wittgenstein at least ended his *Tractatus* by saying that now he must shut up, and he was fairly brief in coming to that conclusion.

Just as the "is" of existence has been supposed to carry assertoric force, so has the "is" of predication (which some people, two thousand years and more after Plato's *Sophist*, will wantonly confuse with the existential "is"). I can be brief about this; since the copulative verb "is" occurs in unasserted clauses, it cannot carry assertoric force. In fact, I should agree with Frege that the "is" of predication, *die blosse Copula*, has no force at all. There is no logical difference between the predicates "surpasses Frank at chess" and "better at chess than Frank"; the requirement of the latter for an "is" is mere idiom, and there is no such requirement in Russian nor in classical Greek (so that Aristotle can say casually that a predication is formed with or without the verb εἶναι "to be").

A more important and pervasive error has been the idea that the predicate itself carries the assertoric force: a predicate is often explained as what is *asserted* of something in a proposition. To be sure, someone who talks this way need not be ascribing assertoric force to the predicate; his "asserted" may be the German "*ausgesagt*" rather than "*behauptet*"; but his way of talking is ill advised and will certainly confuse people (as I found before I mended my own ways in the matter). And in many writers there is actual error on the point; here, indeed, one might well fear lest "mountainous error be too highly heapt for truth to overpeer." I shall not here try to state a correct view of predication; it is enough to point out that since one and the same unambiguous predicate may occur now in an asserted proposition, now in an unasserted clause, the predicate cannot have any inherent assertoric force. Again, if predicates have assertoric force, how can they ever be used in questions?

A recent example of this error about predicates may be found in Strawson's work *Individuals*. Rightly supposing that there is something important underlying the old distinction of subject and predicate, Strawson tries to explain the predicate as the term whose insertion into a proposition conveys assertoric force (in his

own words: the term that is "introduced" in "the assertive or propositional style"). Strawson does indeed recognize that there are nonasserted occurrences of propositions; but he regards these as derivative, the asserted occurrences as primary, and is thus still able to think predicates can be characterized as the terms to which propositions in their primary occurrence owe their assertoric force.

Accepting the Frege point, we know that no term of any proposition gives the proposition assertoric force; for the same term might occur without any change of sense in an unasserted occurrence of the proposition. For predicates, the matter is especially clear: any predicate may be negatively predicated, and then, even if the proposition is asserted, the predicate is not being asserted of anything. Nor can negative predication be called a secondary use or occurrence of a predicate; "*P*" and "not *P*" are grasped together, and one is no more prior to the other than one side of a boundary line you draw is logically prior to the other side; as medievals said, *eadem est scientia oppositorum.*

What distinguishes predicates from subjects, I suggest, is not that they are assertoric in force, but that by negating a predicate we can get the negation of the proposition in which it was originally predicated (plainly, there is nothing analogous for subject terms). This feature of predicates was already brought out very clearly by Aristotle, but is wholly ignored by Strawson. All the same, it may be just because predicates are negatable that Strawson (with many others) came to think of them as bearing the assertoric force; if, as is often fancied, assertion and negation are Siamese twins, then they must share a home.

Predicates of a philosophically exciting sort have been badly misconstrued because assertoric force has been supposed to inhere in them. Theory after theory has been put forward to the effect that predicating some term "*P*"—which is always taken to mean: predicating "*P*" assertorically—is not describing an object as being *P* but some other "performance"; and the contrary view is labeled "the Descriptive Fallacy." All these theories are constructed on the same pattern and admit, as we shall see, of the same refutation.

The briefest statement of some of these theories ought to

suffice. To call a kind of act bad is not to characterize or describe that kind of act but to condemn it. To say a proposition is true is not to describe it but to confirm or concede it. To say "He hit her" is not to state what happened, but to ascribe the act to him as a matter of legal or moral responsibility; and such an ascription is a verdict, not a statement, about him. To say "That looks red" is not to describe how a thing looks but to assert tentatively that it is red. Or again, the difference between a set of statements of sensible appearance and a statement that there is now, for example, an orange on the mantelpiece is supposed to be illuminated by considering a difference between a jury's accepting that all the evidence points to guilt and their actually delivering a verdict. To say "I know that p" is no statement about my own mental capacities, but is an act of warranting my hearer that p. And so on and so on.

Each of these theories is devised for a certain class of assertoric sentences; very often we find the theory will not even fit all of the class it was meant for. Thus, whatever plausibility there may be in analyzing "I know that Smith is the murderer" as "Smith is the murderer—I warrant you that," no such analysis will fit "I know who is the murderer"; for here I do not even tell you, still less give you my warranty, who the murderer is. Again, "He hit her" is a very loaded example—what a swine to hit a woman!—but suppose "she" were a lioness that he shot? In that case, "He hit her" could be a mere bit of narrative and undoubtedly propositional in character; are we to suppose that the logical character of the utterance, its being or not being propositional at all, is radically affected if "she" is not a lioness but a woman?

But these particular objections are of minor interest. In all the kinds of case I have mentioned, the very same sentence can occur in an "if" clause; and to such occurrences the anti-descriptive theories will not apply. For example, in saying, "If what the policeman said is true, then . . . ," I am not confirming or agreeing with what the policeman said; in saying, "If he hit her, then . . . ," I am not ascribing the act to him, and still less giving some moral or legal verdict about him; in saying, "If that looks red, then . . . ," I am not even tentatively asserting that the thing is red.

Of course, the anti-descriptive theorist will reply that his theory was not meant to cover such cases—that the same form of words, after all, may have different uses on different occasions. This possibility of varying use, however, cannot be appealed to in cases where an ostensibly assertoric utterance "*p*" and "If *p*, then *q*" can be teamed up as premises for a *modus ponens*. Here, the two occurrences of "*p*," by itself and in the "if" clause, must have the same sense if the *modus ponens* is not to be vitiated by equivocation; and if any theorist alleges that at its ostensibly assertoric occurrence "*p*" is really no proposition at all, it is up to him to give an account of the role of "*p*" that will allow of its standing as a premise.

This task is pretty consistently shirked. For example, Austin would maintain that if I say assertorically, "I know Smith's Vermeer is a forgery," this is not an asserted proposition about me, but an act of warranting my hearers that the picture is a forgery. Austin never observed that this alleged nonproposition could function as a premise obeying ordinary logical rules, in inferences, like this:

> I know Smith's Vermeer is a forgery.
> I am no art expert.
> If I know Smith's Vermeer is a forgery, and I am no art expert, then Smith's Vermeer is a very clumsy forgery.
> *Ergo*, Smith's Vermeer is a very clumsy forgery.

Still less did Austin discuss *how* a nonproposition could be a premise. But failing such discussion, Austin's account of "I know" is valueless.

The theory that to call a kind of act "bad" is not to describe but to condemn it is open to similar objections. Let us consider this piece of moral reasoning:

> If doing a thing is bad, getting your little brother to do it is bad.
> Tormenting the cat is bad.
> *Ergo*, getting your little brother to torment the cat is bad.

The whole nerve of the reasoning is that "bad" should mean exactly the same at all four occurrences—should not, for example,

shift from an evaluative to a descriptive or conventional or inverted-commas use. But in the major premise the speaker (a father, let us suppose) is certainly not uttering acts of condemnation: one could hardly take him to be condemning just *doing a thing*.

Here it is only fair to mention one exception to the bad practice of anti-descriptive theorists that I have just censured; for Mr. Hare does offer some sort of account of how acts of condemnation, though they are not propositions, can serve as premises. Hare argues forcibly that there is a logic of imperatives, although imperatives are not propositions; and he holds that condemnations like "tormenting the cat is bad" and imperatives like "Do not torment the cat" are alike in being species of prescriptive or action-guiding language. But we need not go into details of this; for Hare has offered us no imperative-logic model that even looks likely to yield an account of such moral reasoning as occurs in my example; and the fourfold unequivocal occurrence of "bad" in that example is enough to refute the act-of-condemnation theory.

Of course an *asserted* proposition in which "bad" is predicated may be *called* an act of condemnation. But this is of no philosophical interest; for then being an act of condemnation is nothing that can be put forward as an *alternative* to being a proposition. Moreover, this holds good only of asserted propositions, whereas "bad" may be predicated without change of force in unasserted clauses. The assertoric force attaches no more to "bad" than to other predicates.

The magnitude and variety of philosophical errors that result from not seeing the Frege point justifies a missionary zeal in the matter. When philosophers fail to see the Frege point, the reason, all too often, is that they have in general little regard for formal logic as a philosophical instrument; and this comes out in other ways too—as in M. Gilson's assertion that formal logic cannot cope with existential judgments, or in some Oxford philosophers' assertion that formal logic cannot cope with ordinary language. For myself, I think logicians have an all-purpose utility, as accountants have for all kinds of business; and resentment at an accountant's inquiries is not a healthy sign in any business. When a philosopher manifests annoyance at someone's seeking counter-

examples to a theory that runs smoothly enough for the philosopher's own chosen examples, he acts like a delinquent clerk: "Why should the accountant meddle with *that* book, when these other books are all right?" But logicians, like accountants, are paid to look out for discrepancies.

P. T. GEACH

University of Birmingham