

MR. O'CONNOR'S "PRAGMATIC PARADOXES"

IN MIND of July, 1948, Mr. D. J. O'Connor drew attention to four statements constituting what he called "pragmatic paradoxes". The peculiarity of these is that apparently, although they are not formally self-contradictory, they cannot conceivably be true in any circumstances: *e.g.*, "I remember nothing at all" (where I must at least remember the proper use of the English sentence "I remember nothing at all"). In connexion with these paradoxes it is worth comparing some other statements with those mentioned by Mr. O'Connor. For instance, if I say "I remember something", apparently this statement cannot conceivably be false (for I must at least remember the proper use of the English sentence "I remember something"). But it does seem that I can intend it as a factual statement about my contemporary state of mind. Thus apparently on the one hand we seem to have statements which are not self-contradictory but cannot conceivably be true, and, on the other, statements which are not analytic but cannot conceivably be false. I wish to suggest that these paradoxes arise out of an ambiguity (not infrequently recognised) in the word "statement".

In one of the two senses of "statement" which I propose to distinguish it is an event-expression, like "motion", "laughter", or "physical training". Of anything which is called a "statement" in this sense it is legitimate to ask "When and where did (does, will) it happen?". In another sense, however, "statement" is a logical expression, like "entailment", "non-contradiction", or "type fallacy". And of anything which is called a "statement" in this sense it is absurd to ask "When and where did (does, will) it happen?". We can avoid the ambiguity by using "utterance" in the former sense, instead of "statement", and "proposition" in the latter. Thus utterances will, by definition, be events in space and time. Some utterances occur in speech, for instance, others in writing or in silent thought. And propositions will, by definition, not be events in space and time. I do not mean that propositions are subsistent entities, for I do not know what these are. But "utterance" and "proposition" stand to each other in such a relationship that it makes sense to ask, *e.g.*, "When should I utter the proposition 'The cat is on the mat'?", or "What proposition was his utterance intended to communicate?".

Now there is nothing to debar propositions from describing utterances just as they describe other events. "The cat is on the mat", "All his utterances are in English", and "None of my utterances take place between 2 a.m. and 8 a.m.", can all be regarded as propositions. Accordingly there is nothing in principle to debar propositions from being such that they can be verified or falsified by their own utterance.

If I now utter the proposition "I remember nothing at all", I should indeed be uttering a false proposition. But if I have my utterance recorded for a gramophone and the record is played at my funeral, the proposition uttered might then be true. Thus the proposition "I remember nothing at all" can conceivably be true. And the proposition "I remember something" can conceivably be false, if uttered in similar circumstances. But this can only be recognised if we distinguish "proposition" from "utterance" in such a way that the same proposition may be uttered in different circumstances at different times.

Similarly, the proposition "I am not speaking now" would be false if I spoke it aloud. But it would be true if I thought it silently to myself. And Mr. O'Connor himself mentions circumstances in which the proposition "I believe there are tigers in Mexico but there aren't any there at all" would be true: it would be true if I am lying when I utter "but there aren't any there at all".

Mr. O'Connor notes that three of his four paradoxes resemble each other in being "statements in the first person which refer to the contemporary behaviour or state of mind of the speaker". But he also mentions another paradox which does not contain any such egocentric particulars. "The military commander of a certain camp announces on a Saturday evening that during the following week there will be a 'Class A blackout'. The date and time of the exercise are not prescribed because a 'Class A blackout' is defined in the announcement as an exercise which the participants cannot know is going to take place prior to 6 p.m. on the evening in which it occurs. It is easy to see that it follows from the announcement of this definition that the exercise cannot take place at all. . . . The conditions of the action are defined in such a way that their publication entails that the action can never be carried out." I suggest that, although this paradox differs from his others in not involving egocentric particulars, it resembles them in arising from a proposition that can be falsified by its own utterance. The proposition in this case is "A 'Class A blackout' will take place during the following week". This proposition is rendered false by its public announcement: it might be true if the camp commander told nobody of his intention to hold the exercise.¹

¹ If the camp commander intended to stage a surprise exercise on one day during the week and yet wanted to warn his troops of his intention, he would have to make an announcement somewhat like one or other of the following: Either "One day next week there will be a surprise exercise. A surprise exercise is an exercise about which, unless it takes place on the last day of the period for which you are warned, you will be in doubt as to when it is to happen until 6 p.m. on the evening in which it occurs." Or "One day next week there will be an exercise. Unless it takes place on Saturday you will be in doubt as to when it is to happen until 6 p.m. on the evening in which it occurs." In the former case he utters a prediction and a definition, in the latter two predictions. Owing

It would be interesting to know if there are any pragmatic paradoxes—statements which are apparently not self-contradictory but not conceivably true, or factual but not conceivably false—that do not arise from failing to distinguish between the "utterance" and "proposition" senses of "statement" (or similar words) when the proposition in question can be verified or falsified by its own utterance.

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to the irreversibility of the time series, if it is known that an event will take place on either t_1 or t_2 or t_3 or . . . t_n , it will only occur as a surprise (in the ordinary sense of "surprise") if it happens on either t_1 or t_2 or t_3 or . . . $t_n - 1$. For this point I am indebted to a discussion with E. A. Gellner and K. Rankin.