

PRAGMATIC PARADOXES

PHILOSOPHERS have spent a good deal of time and trouble in elucidating the so-called "logical paradoxes". And although their efforts have not yet been completely successful, these paradoxes are now a good deal less puzzling than they were when they were first propounded. But there is another class of paradoxes which has received less attention, partly no doubt because they do not appear at first sight to raise any interesting technical questions of logic or to point the way to new technical developments. Nevertheless, these "pragmatic paradoxes" as they have been called, are worth examination, although I shall not do any more here than draw attention to some of their characteristics and commend them to the attention of philosophers.

Consider the following case. 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 6.0 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. It cannot take place on Saturday because if it has not occurred on one of the first six days of the week it must occur on the last. And the fact that the participants can know this violates the condition which defines it. Similarly, because it cannot take place on Saturday, it cannot take place on Friday either, because when Saturday is eliminated Friday is the last available day and is, therefore, invalidated for the same reason as Saturday. And by similar arguments, Thursday, Wednesday, etc., back to Sunday are eliminated in turn, so that the exercise cannot take place at all.

Now though there is an obvious fault of definition in this case, the fault is not a fault of logic in the sense that the definition is formally self-contradictory. It is merely *pragmatically* self-refuting. The conditions of the action are defined in such a way that their publication entails that the action can never be carried out. Now why should philosophers be interested in this sort of situation? It seems to me that there are a number of examples of such paradoxes which can arise in philosophical discussions and which deserve the attention of philosophers even if the rather frivolous example I have just given does not interest them.

If I say "I do not exist", my statement is L-false as the word "I" in a given context functions as a proper name. But suppose I say "I remember nothing at all". This is not logically self-contradictory. And it is not merely a false factual statement like "X remembers nothing" where X is giving accurate answers to questions about his past life. But it is like an L-false statement in

that it could not conceivably be true in any circumstances, because I must at least remember the proper use of the English phrase "I remember nothing at all" in order to be able to use it significantly. Thus, *prima facie*, it is a peculiar sort of false statement which is neither logically false, nor yet merely factually untrue.

It is not difficult to multiply instances. For example, when I say, on a given occasion, "I am not speaking now" I am uttering a false statement of a totally different character from, say, "Churchill is not speaking now" when I am listening to his broadcast. Yet it is not a statement which is L-false or one which raises by self-reference logical puzzles of the same sort as "I am lying now".

Here is one further example of a slightly different type. Suppose I say "I believe there are tigers in Mexico but there aren't any there at all". This statement, being of the form " p and q ", can be true only if both its components are true. And a curious result follows from this. If I say "I believe there are tigers in Mexico" (p) "but there aren't any there" (q), it is possible for p and q both to be true, *only if I am lying* when I utter " q ". For even if there are no tigers in Mexico, the fact that I believe the opposite entails that when I utter " q " I *intend* the statement to be false, whether it is in fact false or not.

There is a feature common to the last three paradoxes I have mentioned. They are all statements in the first person which refer to the contemporary behaviour or state of mind of the speaker. In other words, they are all statements involving what Russell calls "egocentric particulars"¹ and Reichenbach calls "token-reflexive" words.² That their peculiarities are closely connected with this can be seen from the fact that the peculiarities disappear if we substitute "you" or "he" for "I" or allow the statement to refer to past or future conditions of the speaker. But not all pragmatic paradoxes are of this kind, and it seems to me that it would be worth while for philosophers to pay a little more attention to these puzzles than they have done up to now even if their scrutiny does no more than make a little clearer the ways in which ordinary language can limit and mislead us.

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¹ *An Enquiry into Meaning and Truth*, ch. vii.

² *Elements of Symbolic Logic*, ch. vii ("Analysis of Conversational Language", para. 50).