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D. S. SHWAYDER

# STATEMENT AND REFERENT

An Inquiry into the Foundations  
of Our Conceptual Order

KLUWER ACADEMIC PUBLISHERS

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of Our Conceptual Order

Part I: Statements are Products of Assertion

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## PREFACE

There are in this volume sentences written as long ago/ as 1957. What was then projected as the third part of a modest discussion of then current issues has, through some fifteen revisions, now expanded into its own three parts. Of the project as originally conceived, the first part, itself grown too large, was published (prematurely, I now believe) in 1965 (*Stratification of Behaviour*). The second part, which was to be on language proper, was abandoned around 1967; such materials on language as I need for the present work are now mostly compressed into Chapter 1, with some scatterings retained in Chapters 2 and 14.

My scheme discovered problems with which I have been much preoccupied. I have been less enjoyably delayed by missteps. Additions were put on and the renovations have been incessant. Even in the course of my ultimate revisions, I ran into slippery stretches and soft spots I could only gesture at repairing. But now time is running out and my energy is ebbing, and I must allow the work to come to its conclusion, with reservations certainly and not without a sense of despair. If the reception of this volume warrants, the two following parts will be wound up in what I hope may be fairly short order.

A swing in the direction of my thinking about my materials and in the development of the text occurred along about 1967. I had accepted a commission to write a short treatise of metaphysics. It seemed to me that I could do a book more serviceable to students by backing up my own speculations with discussions of the metaphysical doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. I then came to see my own enterprise as continuous with the tradition of First Philosophy, and judged that comparisons appropriately emplaced into this work would assist my presentation. My appreciation of

"the tradition" deepened when, several years later, Arthur Melnick taught me something about the philosophy of Kant. These time-tested classics, in their contents, proved to be more instructive and more challenging to me for my endeavors and, I reckoned, for purposes of comparison and contrast, bound to be known to a wider and more enduring public than the contemporary literature I had been straining to keep abreast of. Some of my topics do indeed originate in the modern era, in the writings of Frege, Russell, Wittgenstein, Austin and their successors, and, for those topics, *those* writings are my classics. Other contemporary worthies are often noticed but little discussed, except where their writings have, for me, broken new ground, e.g. Dummett on *causation*, Grice on *meaning*, Kripke on *modality* and Urnson on *species*. I hope that these bits of autobiography which partially explain the postponements and the volume of this treatise may also work to spare me censure for inattention to still growing bodies of contemporary writing on the topics of this treatise.

My text, though full of commentary, is not a work of scholarship. I have not "researched the literature". My choice of authorities has been pretty much accidentally determined by what I already knew or through preparations for courses my departments have wanted me to teach. I use what I think I know of traditional doctrines both as sources of light and as reflecting surfaces, as points of reference and as parallels. Switching the figure once again, I hope to establish a line of credit from the texts themselves or from a bank of existing interpretations, but not to contribute to the fund of scholarship. I am of course liable for wrong readings.

This work is daunting in its size and complexity, and (I fear) heavy-handed and dull in its presentations; it's not "user friendly", as the publisher's referee found cause to remark. While I would like to believe that every part of the text will be of interest to someone other than myself, I do not think that there is anyone out there who could face the task of reading it straight through in order; the work has been composed with an apparatus attached and according to a plan calculated to dissuade anyone from so arduous an undertaking. I have also decided to present my treatise in three separate volumes, again with the hope that the reception of the first part will warrant the publication of the second and the third.

My three "parts" are explained by their titles. The first five chapters are groundwork for the rest. Subsequent chapters systematically depend upon their predecessors being brought to completion but draw little from the accomplishment and are pretty much self-contained. Summaries are set in the margins of the text, and I believe that any of the readership I envisage could get a pretty adequate idea of all the positions I hold by reading through these summaries, dipping into the main text only where they have a need for argument, illustration or amplification. Summaries of a like kind, extracted from an earlier version of Parts Two and Three, are assembled into a synopsis annexed to this volume, which may serve both to assist advance references and to give the interested reader an idea of where I'm headed.

In the text proper, resume's, comparisons with competing doctrines and traditional authorities, analyses of examples, responses to anticipated criticisms and off-track discussions of such large side issues as *perception* and *knowledge*--discussions I deem necessary to protect the integrity or to increase the plausibility of my systematic presentations--are either emplaced, in reduced font, as insets, or assembled into appendices. These passages are intended only for readers who may be particularly interested in the issues or comparisons brought under review. "Appendix D" is an inexact "formalization" of the materials of Chapter 3, and follow-ups will be included for Chapters 5 through 17. These "formalizations" have proven useful to me both for digesting and for checking my sundry proposals. Formula-haters are urged to skip them.

My presentation is jargon-ridden. The publisher's referee suggests a glossary, and I agree it could be helpful. I remain uncertain over how that glossary could most usefully and most economically be provided. My resolution is to include a few boldface glossary blurbs in the topical index under the appropriate headings, which happen to be mostly on *action* and its several varieties. I don't think this should be any more trouble to the reader than would be leafing forward in the main volume or sifting through a separate booklet.

Batches of the material now included in this volume and the two I hope will follow were, over many years, at several colleges and universities, presented to some two-dozen seminars and to at least

as many classes. These captive audiences have invariably been most usefully forthcoming. Credits for some particular points made in discussions are recorded in footnotes. I simply cannot recollect all the contributors, but have found the following names in various seminar notes: Roger Ariew, Georgia and Paul Bassen, Tim Erdel, Tom Eudaly, Tim Griffin, Philip Hugly, David Israel, Dale Jordan, David Kolodny, Tom Norton-Smith, Gilbert Plumer, John Pollock, Shekhar Pradhan, Donald Riggs and Tom Sorrell. During the period of my final revisions, my department generously allowed me to present the materials one last time to a seminar, and the participants, Tim Griffin, Nancy Kendrick, Tim Ketcher and Jesus Ilundain, all of them, made useful criticisms and suggestions. I thank all of these persons for their contributions and also those many others whom I cannot acknowledge particularly. I have also profited greatly in conversation and in correspondence with colleagues and friends. I give special thanks to William Alston, Charles Caton, Hugh Chandler, Tim McCarthy, Alfred MacKay, Robert Monk, Fred Schmitt, Michael Shapira, Manley Thompson, Robert Wengert and Fred Will. I came to my "formalization" of the theory of testing as a result of a brief but fruitful conversation with Dana Scott sometime around 1960, and latterly this part of my presentation has been greatly assisted by the criticisms and suggestions of Jose' Iovino. My thoughts about notions of space, brought together in Chapter 21 of the yet-to-be published third part of this work, largely owe to conversations with Ernest Adams on the materials for two seminars on space and time we jointly conducted at Berkeley; Adams has continued to be a generous correspondent, a valuable critic and an intimidating rival. My greatest debt is to Arthur Melnick for discussions that have invariably been challenging, brisk and freshening. Finally, I must tender thanks in abundance to the publisher's unnamed referee, who provided literally hundreds of criticisms and suggestions, no one of which went unregistered in my ultimate revisions. I thank the departments of philosophy at Berkeley, Urbana, Chapel Hill and Oberlin for the boon of classrooms, students and colleagues. I am grateful for grants of money and time to The Fulbright Commission, The Guggenheim Endowment, The National Endowment for the Humanities and to The Advanced Institute of the University of Illinois and, for clerical grants, to the Research Boards at Berkeley and Urbana. Finally, I gratefully and admiringly applaud Glenna Cilento for her patient decipherment

and typing of several manuscript versions of this work and latterly for her enviable expertise as a word-processor.

Urbana, Illinois  
Nov. 19, 1991



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## INTRODUCTION

### STATEMENTS ARE PRODUCTS OF ASSERTION

My central concern across the main body of this work will be with a range of *products* which, for want of a better name, I call "statements". Statements may be likened to and therefore also contrasted with such other items as promises and civil enactments. Promises are products of promising and civil enactments products of legislative activity, where promises may be brought under the general heading of undertakings and civil enactments under the general heading of laws. Statements are comprised among the products of acts of subjects' both saying and meaning what they think they know to be so, and may be described as flat formulations of putative fact. Promises, we know, may be kept or broken or sometimes neither, and civil enactments may be enforced or ignored or sometimes neither; statements, as I conceive them, may or may not be "true to the facts", and accordingly, in themselves, be true or false or perhaps sometimes neither. My interest in statements arises from their susceptibility to these "truth-value" determinations. While statements are not the most "primitive" bearers of "truth-value"--what philosophers curiously call "beliefs" may perhaps fill that role--they are, as I believe, for systematic purposes, the most "fundamental" vehicles of truth and falsity .

*My central concern  
in this work is with  
statements.*

Our interest is traditional and ancient, with connections to logic and metaphysics. Following leads that come from Plato and Aristotle, we shall move from a consideration of language into the territories of First Philosophy. The study of statements lies between the two.

*The interest is  
traditional and  
ancient.*

First Philosophy is concerned with our conception of what is so. Statements are among the immediate products of successful attempts by subjects to say and mean what they think they know to be so. For convenience, call any act of meaning by saying,

however conveyed--in script, sound, gesture, smoke or whatever--, an *utterance*. I believe that our conception of what is so is determined by our general conception of a statement in the qualified sense that anything we conceive could be so is also conceived to be resolvable without remainder into statement-formulable parts, where those statements are themselves producible in utterances.

*Our conception of what is so is determined by our general conception of a statement.*

*Three objections answered: ineffability, generality and triviality.*

I anticipate three immediate objections to the above thesis. First, our conception of what is so allows that there may be ineffable facts perhaps known to but altogether unformulable by us. I wish to say three things in response to this objection. First, although our apparatus will be designed for the representation of humanly producible statements, our general conception of a statement is meant to cover all flat formulations of fact, including ones not producible by us. We can conceive that there are such formulations though we cannot conceive what they are. Leibniz constructed his system of metaphysics according to principles he supposed governed the conceptions of deity; our inquiry is more modest; but still, our conception of what is so may coincide with his. Second, we do indeed right now have all sorts of ineffable *practical* knowledge, felt perhaps as dark forebodings, rather as our ancestors had nothing but ineffable knowledge of depressions of atmospheric pressure expressed as forebodings of storm, and I must concede that there are indeed hard questions about the relationships between our merely practical and our expressible "theoretical" knowledge of fact--questions we shall all too briefly touch upon in Appendix C. But, third, I don't yet see that this distinction in knowledge gives reason to think that there is anything in particular of what we conceive to be so that is not also conceived to be resolvable into parts formulable in statements sometime producible by some subject. The illustration of the objection is a case in point.

The second objection alleges as such a reason that there may be facts, peircian "general facts" perhaps, "too large" for statement. I allowed for as much in my cautious way of speaking of the "resolution" of what we conceive to be so. Now statements must be distinguished from generalizations, and we shall touch on the matter of this distinction in Appendix B. Still I do not see that there is anything in the distinction between statement and generalization to require that there be any element of a "general

fact" not included within some statement-formulable part. I do concede that *that* condition, viz that the generalization should cover the whole general fact, is not itself formulable in a statement; the generalization does indeed express another *truth*, viz that nothing is excluded; but that condition of *nothing further*, I hold, is not a further fact.

I concede as a clarification prompted by both objections taken together that not all stateable facts are just anytime stateable by anyone, unless by God.

The third objection is that "flat formulations of putative fact" if true are trivial. Science and other worthwhile theoretical endeavors flourish on generalization, hypothesis, law, problem, proof and prediction with scarcely a side glance at statements. I agree, and my own investigation is no exception. I hold only that these other "interesting" and "progressive" productions couldn't stand without the continual support of statements and (as I shall argue) the analysis of concepts incorporated into all these various "illocutions" is best concentrated on statements. Statements are qualified formulations of fact and, within the mix, are (as I believe) also "most fundamental".

Statements may be true, false or neither. Those utterances of saying and meaning what one thinks one knows to be so that, when successful, produce statements, produce those statements "as true". Such utterances serve to convey a speaker's sense of what is so.

It should now be evident that a statement in the usage I shall follow is not a kind of utterance or "use of language", but rather a product of utterance. My usage of "statement" is adapted from that vernacular idiom in which statements are "made", and it differs from that other vernacular usage in which statements are "makings". Statement-makings are called "assertions" in my lexicon.

Now my usage of "statement" is only adapted from the vernacular. Lacking talent for coinage, I use old metal in a contrived but not I hope illicit way to gain a measure of intellectual control over an engaging field of problems. I respect anyone's preconceptions about what statements might be, but am not beholden to them. Please do not plead your specimens as

*Statements may be true, false or neither. "Assertions" that, when successful, produce statements, produce those statements "as true". My usage of "statement" and "assertion" is technical and needs explanation.*

arguments against mine (see pp. 68f). My usage is technical and consequentially narrow. It must and will be explained. For now, it will perhaps be enough to observe that my usage notably does not cover statements "made to the press", which are submitted in proprietary capacity and may comprise announcements, declarations of policy, acceptances, registrations of opinion and much else not statements in my usage. Statements for me are only the flattest formulations of putative fact. I do not wish to put down other usages of "statement", and certainly not those which occur in everyday speech. Nor will I question the credentials of other products of language, such as generalizations, conjectures and hypotheses, which, though true or false, are not produced in assertions and are not statements in my narrow sense. Indeed, I hope to use my notion of statement as an instrument to advance our understanding of such other items as generalizations and conjectures.

*Statements will be explained as products of assertion by defining assertion within a theory of language.*

Statements, I repeat, are not assertions. They are, rather, products of assertion. However, statements, so taken, do depend upon assertion both in conception and in fact. I shall accomplish the task of saying what statements are by finding a place for them within an account of the products of language. I do that by finding a place for assertion within my theory of language.

*What's to come.*

Our understanding of the nature of language is heavily obstructed and I once thought it would be necessary to clear the way with a full theory of language before I could begin to elucidate *assertion*. I now believe that we shall need only a few select principles which I hope can be made plausible and comprehensible within the space of my Chapter 1. I shall then, in Chapter 2, use those principles in my explanation of *assertion*.

The main task of Chapter 3 will be to secure a general representation of statements in separation from the successful assertions that produce them. This concluding chapter of Part I is, both ideologically and systematically, "most central" to my enterprise. The second part of this treatise, comprising Chapters 4 through 14, will be devoted to the working out of a theory and of an apparatus for the representation and characterization of all humanly producible statements, and will involve consideration of



what the Scholastics called *syncategoremata*<sup>1</sup>. That stretch of my exploration will make a very hard climb indeed. It will I hope finally bring us into position whence the main contours of First Philosophy and of Ontology can be surveyed and recorded in the several chapters of metaphysics that make up the third part of this work.

#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup>Approximately: "Greater Forms" (Plato), "*pros en* equivocals" (Aristotle), "Intellectual Ideas" (Leibniz), "Categories" (Kant).