

'Real'

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Philosophers have often sought criteria for a general distinction between appearance and reality. In chapter 7 of his *Sense and Sensibilia*, J. L. Austin claims to show that this enterprise is radically misconceived; and, characteristically, he bases his argument on the niceties of the use of 'real' in English. I shall try to show **(1)** that Austin's account of how 'real' is used is muddled and inaccurate; and **(2)** that the uses of 'real' which Austin explores are irrelevant to the traditional enquiry into the distinction between appearance and reality.

Of these, **(2)** matters more, but most of my paper will treat of **(1)**. The uses of 'real' which interested Austin may have some philosophical importance, so we might as well get them right. Also, although there are general grounds for denying that those uses are relevant to traditional epistemology, a tighter and more Austinian argument for the same conclusion can be based upon a correct account of the uses of 'real' in question. I should concede that I may have stated my thesis a little too strongly: for all I know, some philosophers may have pursued the traditional enquiry in such a miserably inadequate way that Austin's points about the use of 'real' are, when suitably emended, effective against them.

The fact that Austin did not publish *Sense and Sensibilia* suggests that he was not satisfied with its contents. Nevertheless, his views about the use of 'real' have been published and may be believed: personal considerations cannot be allowed to disarm criticism.

I shall describe four ways of using 'real' in expressions of the form 'a real F' where 'F' stands for a general noun. Note the indefinite article: Austin writes as though nothing turns on the choice between 'a real. . .' and 'the real. . .', but this is not so. I shall argue that these four ways of using 'real' are distinct, though a single use of 'real' may partake of more than one of them. I believe but cannot prove that my four headings cover practically all idiomatic uses of the form 'a real F' other than the metaphorical, slipshod or pretentious. I hope to show through my criticisms of Austin that mine is a good way—I do not say the right way—of classifying uses of 'a real F'.

1. The approving use

Where Fs are items to which we look for utility or enjoyment, we speak of an F which is insufficiently useful or enjoyable in the relevant way as 'a bad F'. In general, those features of an F which make it a bad F will also serve, if present in high

enough degree or great enough quantity, to disqualify a thing from being an F at all. This fact is exploited when, in order to spice our denigration of something which we classify as literally 'an F', we say that it is 'not a real F', 'not really an F', 'not what I call an F', 'not my idea of an F' and the like, often with the words '. . . at all' added. Dramatized denigrations may take the form not of joking denials but rather of joking counter-descriptions, as in 'You call that steak? I call it leather!' which may well be said of something which the speaker would soberly classify as steak. The approving use of 'real' works against the background of this sort of denigration. 'Now this is real coffee!' said as praise, involves an unspoken rider like 'Not that hogwash that passes for coffee in the canteen'. If someone, surveying my study, said admiringly 'That's a *real* desk!', one would naturally assume that he had encountered many desks which he had thought to merit abuse in such terms as 'That's not what I call a desk' or 'That's not a desk, it's a see-saw'. It would be surprising if he said of my telephone 'Now that's a *real* telephone!' for few telephones are so bad as to merit, in the average person's judgment, the kind of denigration in question. Of course the speaker might for special reasons find it difficult to use any telephone whose dial is not of a certain rare sort; and in that case, seeing that my telephone has a dial of that sort, he might well say 'Now that's a *real* telephone!'. With the praise, as with the denigration, 'real' and 'really' may occur but they need not. Similar work is done by such expressions as 'Now *that's* what I call a *desk*!' To summarize: in type **(1)** uses of 'real' good Fs are called real Fs because, in the speaker's opinion, many Fs are such bad Fs as to deserve to be characterized in terms which, taken literally, imply that they are not Fs at all.

2. The stressed classification use

Someone may say 'This is a real chop suey', using the word 'real' not because he has been served with too many bad chop sueys but because he thinks that much of what passes for chop suey is, literally, not chop suey at all. There may be general ignorance about the stuff which is wrongly taken to be chop suey: if housewives knew what went into those tins, they would realize that it just is not chop suey. Or the trouble may be that many people do not know what a dish has to have in it to be counted as chop suey by the gourmets, or the experts, or the Chinese. This falls within a notable sub-class of type **(2)** cases, namely those in which someone uses the form 'a real F' because the word for which 'F' stands is, in his opinion, too often not used in its true or proper or best sense: 'Stevenson's second campaign was a real tragedy' may be said by one who uses 'real' because he knows that any mishap will be called a tragedy by many people, and who wishes to stress his preference for restricting 'tragedy' to calamities which have a certain kind of grandeur. Stressed classifications do not always use 'real': grammar may demand 'really'; and there are also more specialized expressions such as 'literally an F', 'an F, and I choose my words with care', 'an F in the good old sense', 'a genuine F', 'strictly an F', 'an authentic F', and the like. To summarize: in type **(2)** uses of 'real', Fs are called real Fs because, in the speaker's opinion, things which are not in fact Fs are often mistakenly classified as Fs because people do not know the facts about them or because they do not attach to the relevant word its best, or right, or strict, or old, or dictionary, or technical, sense.

(1) and **(2)** are distinct: I use 'a real F' in the manner of **(1)** because there are many Fs which I am prepared jokingly to characterize as non-Fs; I use it in the manner of **(2)** because

I think that non-Fs are often wrongly described as Fs. A restaurant which announces 'Waffles with Real Maple Syrup' is probably making a type **(2)** use of 'real' and implying that its competitors pass off as maple syrup something which is not maple syrup at all. On the other hand, the television advertisement in which someone sips coffee and says 'Man, oh man, that's *real* coffee!' is probably making a type **(1)** use of 'real' and implying that rival brands of coffee are, although undeniably coffee, very bad coffee indeed. The law takes note of this distinction.

A rare use of 'real' might hover between types **(1)** and **(2)**. Someone may be given to saying of certain things that they are 'not real Fs' or 'not Fs at all' or 'not my idea of Fs' and be unsure how far he intends this literally and how far as joking denigration: 'I suppose this slop is whisky, but there ought to be a law against calling stuff "Whisky" when it has so little kick.' For a clear intersection of **(1)** with **(2)** we should need a case where someone says, for example, 'This is a real chop suey!', using 'real' because of the prevalence of (a) fake chop sueys and (b) bad chop sueys.

3. The intensifying use

Where being an F is in some clear way a matter of degree, admitting of more and less, one may say 'a real F' meaning 'very much of an F'. Thus one may declare a state of affairs to be 'a real shame', a person to be 'a real swine' or a birthday party to be 'a real shambles'. In the same way 'really' can have the force of 'very', as in 'a really ugly waistcoat'. This type of use, unlike **(1)** and **(2)**, need not involve any background of beliefs about or attitudes to other things which are, or are often called, Fs.

Type **(3)** uses may, rather boringly, intersect with **(1)** or **(2)**: the latter depend upon what a thing has to be like to count as an F, or as a good F, and this is sometimes a

matter of degree. An action may be described as 'a real help' with the force of 'very much of a help' or 'a big help' **(3)**, with the added suggestion that would-be helpers all too often describe as 'a help' what is in fact no help at all **(2)**. Cases could also be contrived in which **(3)** intersects with **(1)**. Mostly, though, the intensifying use of 'real' occurs without any of the associations which define **(1)** and **(2)**.

On page 73 Austin presents the type **(1)** example 'Now this is a *real* carving-knife!' and observes that this may be a way of saying that it is a good carving-knife. In a footnote he calls attention to 'I gave him a real hiding', which would normally be a type **(3)** use, and notes that one might instead say 'I gave him a good hiding'. In type **(1)**, of course, 'good' is always a fair substitute for 'real'. In type **(3)** this is not so: 'a good hiding' is all right, but not 'a good shambles'; so it seems that there is something to be learned here, not about 'real' but about 'good'. One's understanding of the facts, however, is not enlarged by Austin's handling of the two cases. Presumably taking the carving-knife case as one in which 'real' has the force of 'good', and the hiding [= beating] case as one in which 'good' has the force of 'real'; he speaks of the latter as 'the converse' of the former!

4. The ellipsis-excluding use

This is the use of 'real' from which Austin draws most of his examples, and which mainly explains his description of 'real' as 'what we may call a *trouser-word*' (p. 70).

In the type **(4)** or ellipsis-excluding use of 'real' a statement containing 'a real F' has the same truth-conditions if the word 'real' is dropped from it. The criteria for a thing's counting as 'a real dog' where 'real' has a type **(4)** use, are just those which it must satisfy in order to count as a dog. If something is a real dog then it is not a gasometer, a rose-bush, a stuffed dog, a model dog, a toy dog, a dream

dog, a picture of a dog, an ice-cream dog: its being a real dog excludes its being any kind of non-dog and excludes nothing else. It follows that in the type **(4)** use of 'real' real Fs are not Fs of a certain kind: in this respect type **(4)** is like **(2)**, and unlike **(1)** and **(3)**. I have, in effect, already answered the question 'If "real" in its type **(2)** use does not serve to mark off Fs of a certain kind from Fs of other kinds, what work does it do?' I shall now answer the analogous question for type **(4)**, and in answering it I shall explain what the type **(4)** use is.

For good reasons, we have phrases of the form 'a. . . dog', with an adjective in the blank, which are properly and literally applied to things which are not dogs; and similarly with many other general nouns besides 'dog'. This fact gives rise to a certain kind of ellipsis, in which 'It is a dog' is properly though elliptically said of an object which is not a dog: of a stuffed dog, when there is no question about its status as a taxidermal product but there is one about what sort of animal it is whose skin has been stuffed to produce the object in question; or of a piece of marble, when there is no question about its being a piece of marble but there is one about what it is supposed to represent. The exchange: 'Is that a dog or a wolf'—'It is a dog' can properly occur where 'it' refers to something which is known not to be a dog. For the exchange may be elliptic for: 'Is that a marble dog or a marble wolf?' 'It is a marble dog.'

Such ellipses do not require that the object be literally describable by a phrase of the form 'a. . . F' with an adjective in the blank. One may properly say 'That is a dog' of a picture of a dog, if it is known to be a picture and there is a question only about what it depicts. Similarly with a statue of a dog. We might insist upon the adjectival form and speak of 'a pictorial dog' and 'a marble (iron, etc.) dog'; but the former is forced, and the latter is not available if the statue

is made of a mixture of many materials. Again, my phrase 'a dream dog' is a stilted substitute for the non-adjectival 'a dog in a dream'; but dreams are nevertheless relevant to these ellipses, for one may in reporting a dream properly say 'It was an F' of what was not an F. Speaking to someone familiar with my recurring dream, I can properly say 'Last night it was a dog which chased me, not a wolf'.

I guess that such ellipses are always connected with something's being taken to be an F, made to represent an F, or the like; but I am not sure of this.

When one says something of the form 'It is an F', there may be uncertainty about whether one is (a) asserting of something that it is a non-F of a kind which can properly though elliptically be spoken of as 'an F' or (b) asserting of something that it is an F. It is the task of 'real', in its type **(4)** use, to prevent such uncertainties from arising. The following example is stylized for the sake of brevity and clarity, but it epitomizes the type **(4)** work of 'real'. Someone seeing my dog lying on the floor says 'Is that a . . . ?' and tails off with an interrogative gesture. He can see that it is either a dog or a stuffed dog, and is wondering which. If I say 'It is a dog', I may not answer the question he has in mind: for my words can properly be used (a) of a stuffed dog, when its taxidermal status is not in question, or (b) of a dog; and the questioner may not know in which way to take what I say. I may, for all he knows, think that he is wondering 'Is it a stuffed dog or a stuffed cat?', in which case my answer falls under (a); but I may think that he is wondering 'Is it a dog or a stuffed dog?', in which case my answer may fall under (b). Now, the question he does have in mind is '. . . a dog or a stuffed dog?', and if he takes my answer according to (a) his question is answered in one way, if according to (b) it is answered in the other. The words 'It is a dog' thus do not answer his question. But the answer 'It is a real dog' says

that it is a dog, and excludes not only its being a cat but also its being a stuffed dog.

What gives point to a type **(4)** indicative use of 'real' is the likelihood that one's hearers might otherwise take one to be using 'an F' as a proper but elliptic way of referring to a non-F. Speaking to a friend who knows of my nightmares, I may report an encounter with a burglar in the words 'I was badly scared last night by a big ugly brute of a man—a *real* man'. But if in reporting a cocktail-party I say 'There was a big ugly brute of a man there', there will normally be no point in adding '—a *real* man', unless I am making a type **(1)** or conceivably a type **(3)** use of 'real'. If I am speaking of a real F I can of course show that this is so, that no ellipsis is involved, without using the word 'real'; for I can say things about it which it would be absurd to say about the relevant kind of non-F. It occurs to you that when I speak of 'the break-up of their marriage' I may be referring not to a marriage but to a marriage in a book; you are about to ask 'A real marriage or a fictional one?' when I say '. . . and they gave me custody of the children'.

Type **(4)** is obviously distinct from **(3)** and, less obviously but just as thoroughly, distinct from **(1)** and **(2)**. In type **(4)** uses there is usually no background of jokingly exaggerated denials or counter-descriptions, or of frequent misapplications of an expression. (Austin blurs the distinction between **(4)** and **(2)** by bracketing 'decoy ducks' with 'paste diamonds' (p. 67). One might indeed use 'a real diamond' because the simple 'a diamond' could be taken as an elliptic reference to a paste diamond; but 'a real diamond' may also be used because of the frequency not of elliptic but of mistaken references to paste diamonds as 'diamonds'.) Here again, however, an individual case may belong at once to type **(4)** and to either **(1)** or **(2)**. For example, I announce that I have visited some people who own 'a real Corot', using the word

'real' for two reasons: (a) I think that the simple 'a Corot' may be taken by my hearers as an ellipsis for 'a reproduction of a Corot' and (b) I wish to stress that my classification of the picture as a Corot is made in the full realization that many pictures which pass for Corots are fakes. The former reason puts my use of 'real' in type **(4)**, the latter puts it in type **(2)**. A combination of types **(4)** and **(1)** in a single use of 'a real F' would involve my calling something 'a real Corot' in order to convey (a) that it is not a reproduction, and (b) that it is a very good Corot, unlike those daubs, those 'so-called Corots', as I like to call them, of which Corot unfortunately painted so many. A single use of 'real' is unlikely to get this double message across; though this might be achieved, archly, by 'That's a real Corot; and, my word! isn't it a real Corot!'

Defects in Austin's account

I have made some minor complaints against Austin's treatment of 'real', and could make more; but I shall here pick out six of the larger mistakes in what he says.

(a) On page 67 Austin says: 'That may not be a real duck because it is a decoy, or a toy duck, or a species of goose closely resembling a duck, or because I am having a hallucination.' It is true that a goose, like a sparrow or a lamp-stand, is not a real duck; but Austin is talking about ordinary uses of 'a real duck', and something false about these uses is implied by his inclusion of 'a species of goose. . . ' in his list. The other items in the list suggest type **(4)** uses of 'real', but I know of no kind of goose of which one can properly though elliptically say 'It is a duck'. Nor can I connect geese with 'not a real duck' in any of the other three uses of 'real'. Perhaps my classification omits something which Austin noticed, but I doubt this. I have not yet found anyone who thinks it natural to report the discovery that something which looked like a

duck was after all a goose in the words 'It is not a real duck'. Many think they might say 'It is not really a duck'. Perhaps Austin assumed that there are no noteworthy differences between 'real' and 'really'. If so, he erred.

We have here a hint that Austin thought that 'real' may come into play wherever a distinction is to be made between an F and a non-F which is very like an F. This assumption is false, but one can see how it might be thought true for type **(2)**: non-Fs which people wrongly call Fs, through factual ignorance or linguistic malpractice, may be expected to be rather like Fs. Similarly with type **(4)**: non-Fs which can properly though elliptically be referred to as Fs do in general resemble Fs, perhaps because these ellipses always concern non-Fs which in some way represent Fs. Thus, similarities do have something to do with type **(2)** and **(4)** uses of 'real'; but to suggest that similarity as such is what brings 'real' into play in these cases is just to show that one has not been paying attention.

(b) On page 69 Austin says: 'The question "Real or not?" does not always come up, can't always be raised. We *do* raise this question only when, to speak rather roughly, suspicion assails us—in some way or other things may not be what they seem. . .'. The qualification 'to speak rather roughly' must not disarm criticism here.

Austin seems to have overlooked the difference between what makes 'Real or not?' appropriate and what makes 'real' appropriate. In fact, the interrogative does not sit happily with type **(1)** or **(3)** uses, and one presumes that in speaking of 'suspicion' Austin did not have these cases in mind.

What he says is more or less true of type **(2)** uses of 'real', for these concern prevalent mistakes. You tell me of the chop suey you had for supper, and I ask 'Was it real chop suey?', because I know that the contents of tins labelled 'Chop Suey'

are often *not what they seem*. Again, I say 'That jazz is awful', and then I wonder 'Is it real jazz?'; *suspicion has assailed me* because I recall being told that most people don't know what jazz is. In these cases, then, the notion of 'suspicion [that] things may not be what they seem' can be introduced without too much strain.

In type **(4)**, however, from which Austin draws so many of his examples, there is usually nothing remotely like a suspicion that things may not be what they seem. Someone comes in when I am in the middle of boasting about 'the dog I bought yesterday', and asks 'A real dog?'. He may not be voicing a suspicion but merely asking for detail. My words do not make it 'seem' to him that I have bought a real dog; he realizes that I may be using 'dog' in either of two ways; and until he knows which way I am using the word he knows only that I have made a satisfactory purchase of a dog, or of a statue of a dog or a painting of a dog or. . . something else for which 'a dog' is a proper ellipsis. His question 'Was it a real dog that you bought?' no more voices a 'suspicion [that] things may not be what they seem' than does any other request for specification, e.g. when I tell someone of my new car and he asks 'Is it a convertible?'

I have taken a case in which a thing is spoken of in its absence; and it may be thought that this is why I have been able to suppress the notion of things not being what they seem. We need the antithesis between real dogs and statues of dogs—it may be said—only because statues of dogs do very often seem like real dogs. Taken in the relevant way, this is false: statues of dogs hardly ever seem like real dogs in such a way as to engender 'suspicions'; and even if they did, and pictures of dogs did seem like real dogs, etc., such resemblances are not *the point* of type **(4)** uses of 'real'. Furthermore, if we must restrict ourselves to what is said about things with which both speaker and hearer are

confronted, we are in danger of having to say that all our simple descriptive talk reflects suspicions that things may not be what they seem. When I ask 'Is it red or not?' of something which is under my eyes, must I be voicing such a suspicion? There are as good grounds for answering 'Yes' to this as to the analogous question about the case where I ask, of something which is under my eyes 'Is it a real dog or not?'

Thus, Austin offers as true of all uses of '... real' a thesis which is false of, at a guess, about half of them. It is true of a somewhat higher proportion of uses of '... really...', but that is another matter.

(c) On pages 71–72 Austin says that 'real' belongs to, and 'has the same function as', a group of words including 'proper', 'genuine', 'live' and 'natural'. Because 'real' is supposed to be the most general and comprehensive member of this group of words, Austin calls it a 'dimension-word'; but I suggest that the facts about 'real' are seriously obscured by throwing it in with this rag-bag collection in the first place, and that Austin would have discovered this if he had tried to say what the function is which all these words are supposed to have. Austin's examples so far have all come from types (2) and (4); and 'a real F' in those uses does not mark off Fs of a kind from Fs of other kinds, but marks off Fs from things which are not literally Fs at all. Some of the other words which Austin lists as having the same function as 'real'—as belonging to the 'dimension' of 'real'—do not have this property at all. A makeshift theatre may be a theatre, and so a proper theatre may be a kind of theatre; a synthetic fibre is a fibre, and so a natural fibre is a kind of fibre. 'A real F' does in some of its uses mark off Fs of a kind from other Fs, notably in type (1); and it is true that Austin here calls attention to the type (1) example 'Now this is a *real* carving-knife!' But he gives the reader no help in finding his bearings, presents

none of the necessary contrasts and comparisons. On the contrary: having called 'real' a dimension-word and noted that 'good' is a dimension-word too because it is the most general and comprehensive term of commendation, Austin tells us: 'It is a curious point, of which Idealist philosophers used to make much at one time, that "real" itself, in certain uses, may belong to this family', i.e. to the group of words of which 'good' is the most general. Another aspect of this disastrous passage has been discussed on page 3 above.

Some of the antonyms of 'real' in its type (4) uses can also mark off Fs of a kind from other Fs: a stuffed elephant is not an elephant, but a stuffed leg of lamb is a leg of lamb; a plastic rose is not a rose, but a plastic plate is a plate. But this does not restore the analogy between 'real' and 'stuffed' or 'real' and 'plastic' on the one hand and 'natural'/'synthetic' or 'proper'/'makeshift' on the other. The phrase 'synthetic fibre' *both* marks off fibre of a kind from other fibre *and* is antithetical to 'natural fibre'; whereas there is no adjective G such that 'a G F' *both* marks off an F of a kind from other Fs *and* is antithetical to 'a real F' in its type (4) use. We do not deny that a plate is plastic, or a leg of lamb stuffed, by calling them real. This points to further complexities which are masked by Austin's primitive account. For example, consider whether 'real teeth' is antithetical to 'false teeth' from the point of view of (a) ordinary people, (b) a dental anatomist in his professional capacity.

(d) On page 70 Austin says: 'I don't know *just* how to take the assertion that it's a real duck unless I know *just* what, on that particular occasion, the speaker has it in mind to exclude.' Certainly, unless I know something of what the speaker has it in mind to exclude I do not know whether to take his use of 'a real duck' as type (1), (2), (3) or (4); but this cannot be the sort of point Austin wanted to make, for

in that same sentence he says: “A real duck” differs from the simple “a duck” only in that it is used to exclude various ways of not being a real duck—but a dummy, a toy, a picture, a decoy, etc.’ This is circular, but its general effect is to put types **(1)** and **(3)** out of consideration.

Let us see, then, what happens when Austin’s ‘I don’t know just how to take. . . etc.’ is applied to **(2)** and **(4)**. If someone says ‘It is a real duck’, I take him to be saying that the thing is a duck, i.e. merits the label ‘duck’ used non-elliptically and used in its proper or strict sense. Also, because he has used the word ‘real’ I take it that he has it in mind to exclude one or more of the special ways in which a thing can be a non-duck and yet commonly though wrongly **(2)**, or properly though elliptically **(4)**, be referred to as ‘a duck’. If I do not know just how to take his assertion unless I know just which of these special ways of being a non-duck he ‘has it in mind to exclude’ then no one knows ‘just how to take’ anything said by someone else. Perhaps no one does; but Austin implies that he has here a contrast between what is said with ‘real’ and some things which are said without it.

(e) Echoing the remark last discussed, Austin says on page 76 : ‘It should be quite clear. . . that there are no criteria to be laid down in general for distinguishing the real from the not real. How this is to be done must depend on *what* it is with respect to which the problem arises in particular cases.’ The words ‘criteria. . . for distinguishing’ show that types **(1)** and **(3)** are not in question here; and in respect of types **(2)** and **(4)** the quoted statement is false. The criteria for whether something is a real F, with a type **(2)** or **(4)** use of ‘real’, are identical with the criteria for whether something is an F. The variousness of the circumstances in which type **(2)** and **(4)** uses of ‘real’ *have a point* need not be matched by a variousness in the criteria which determine whether a

statement using ‘real’ is *true*. The distinction between the pointfulness of using a word and the truth of what is said with it may sometimes be a delicate one; but here, where it is straightforward enough, Austin writes as though it did not exist.

Austin rightly says that no general criteria can be laid down for distinguishing the real from the not real because there are as many sets of criteria for ‘a real F’ as there are values of F, i.e. because ‘real’ is ‘substantive-hungry’. But he insists that this is not his whole point, and that the criteria proliferate even for a single value of F.

(f) On pages 73–75 Austin deploys his claim that ‘real’ is an adjuster-word, i.e. one which helps us to cope with borderline cases.

Consider the following sentences:

(i) ‘It is not a real pig, but is like a pig.’

(ii) ‘It is not a pig, but is like a pig.’

If we encounter a new kind of animal which we do not want to call a pig but which is very like a pig, the word ‘real’ is useful, says, Austin, because ‘if I can say “Not a real pig, but like a pig” I don’t have to tamper with the meaning of “pig” itself’ (p. 75). In this, however, ‘real’ is idle: Austin has picked on **(i)** where **(ii)** would do just as well. All the work of adjusting, in short, is done here by ‘like’. While conceding that ‘like’ is ‘*the* great adjuster-word’, Austin thinks that ‘real’ may do some of the adjustment even in the presence of ‘like’. He adduces no evidence for this, and of his one example it is clearly false.

Austin sees this difficulty, and on page 76 he asks: ‘Why then do we need “real” as an adjuster-word as well as “like”?’ and he follows this with another question which he wrongly takes to raise the same issues: ‘Why exactly do we want to say, sometimes “It is like a pig”, sometimes “It is not a

real pig”?’ Austin offers no solutions, but the answer to his second question is a straightforward one which has nothing to do with adjuster-words: the cases where it is proper to say ‘It is like a pig’ have only a tiny overlap with those where it is proper to say ‘It is not a real pig’, because it is not the task of ‘a real F’ to mark off Fs from other things which are like Fs. I remarked on page 6 above that many uses of ‘a real F’ have something to do with resemblances between Fs and certain other things; but resemblances as such are not what give point to these uses of ‘a real F’, and *close* resemblances—such as there must be in borderline cases requiring ‘adjustments’—hardly come into the story at all except in one sub-class of type **(2)**. Thus, it is only because of his earlier confusions about resemblances that Austin takes his second question to be difficult, and to be relevant to the alleged adjusting function of ‘real’. He has, indeed, unwittingly given a case in which we would in fact say ‘like a. . .’ but would not say ‘not a real. . .’, namely that of the goose which is very like a duck.

I am not convinced that ‘real’ ever works as an adjuster-word in the way Austin says it does, even in the absence of ‘like’. Whether or not we use ‘like’, our decision to describe the borderline case as ‘not a real pig’ is a decision about how the creature relates to the borderline, specifically, a decision that it is not a pig. Austin gives ‘real’ a semblance of utility by presenting a case in which our first reaction to the creature is that ‘we don’t want positively to say that it is a pig, or that it is *not*’ and then, a little later, ‘we may proceed with the remark “But it isn’t a real pig”.’ This shows only that it may take time for us to make up our minds. To present ‘real’ as an adjuster-word one needs a case in which we should deny that the animal is a real pig *while* refusing to deny that it is a pig. I doubt whether such a case could be found.

The question of relevance

What has all this to do with the old questions about appearance and reality? Almost nothing. The one result which may look relevant is that sets of criteria for ‘a real F’ are as numerous as the values of F. Even if I was right, in **(e)** on page 8, in disallowing Austin’s attempt to inflate it, this point might still be thought to show the absurdity of seeking a general distinction between appearance and reality. But do those who pursue this distinction hope for a handful of rules which will tell us how to distinguish Fs from non-Fs for any F?

The epistemological tradition which Austin opposed is concerned above all with the distinction between something’s seeming to one (going by what one can see, feel, hear, etc.) to be the case and its really being the case. Descartes’s *Meditations*, the great issue between Locke and Berkeley, Hume’s section ‘Of Scepticism with regard to the Senses’, Kant’s theory of objectivity concepts, phenomenalism, Wittgenstein’s arguments about private languages—this, with all its faults, is the great tradition of modern epistemology, and it has an identifiable and roughly storable theme. If we must tie that theme to an English word, then the word is ‘really’.

Now, ‘really’, unlike ‘real’, is not substantive-hungry. ‘Really’ may be satisfied by an article-plus-substantive, or by an adjective, adverb, verb, preposition, phrase or sentence. The great epistemologists have, in effect, been concerned with ‘really’ as a *sentence*-qualifier; but they have not sought detailed rules for determining, of anything which seems (going by what one can see, feel, etc.) to be the case, whether it really is the case. They have enquired into what sort of thing we do when we ask and answer questions about what really is the case: what kinds of procedure we use, how these relate to one another, what their logical status is, and what

light all this throws on situations where we do not ask, and perhaps should find it ludicrous to ask, whether what seems to be the case really is the case. In short, they have sought high-level generalizations to cover extremely complex data.

It may be that such a general enquiry cannot succeed: that there are no fairly watertight generalizations to be found at this level. No-one, however, has begun to show that this is so.

Again, it may be that the odds are against the success of a philosophical enquiry in which linguistic minutiae are neglected. I think that Austin had begun to show this of some of the general enquiries which philosophers undertake. On the other hand, it is mere dogmatism to say that unless the detailed work is done the results are bound to be wrong: a detailed dissection of a class of uses of a word may show only that the whole class is irrelevant to the general enquiry in whose statement the word occurs; and such irrelevance may sometimes be obvious from the outset. It is, for example, moderately obvious that the uses of 'a real F' differ from most uses of 'really' in such ways that someone interested in the latter can fairly safely ignore the niceties of the former. In taking something as obvious one risks being wrong; but the reduction of this risk may be bought at too high a price. Someone who cannily suspends judgment on all the larger issues until he has probed every possibly relevant detail may well fail to discover anything worth knowing. In philosophy, as in science, we need to carry into our investigations something in the nature of a hunch, a hypothesis, a general question, if we are to solve problems and not merely amass impeccably random data.

Also, relevance is a dyadic relation: a judgment of relevance requires a grasp of both the related terms. In order to show that philosophers are neglecting data relevant to their concerns, one needs to understand what their concerns

are; and such understanding requires some measure of intellectual sympathy with modes of thought whose largeness one may find distasteful.

In the light of this, consider the structure of Austin's discussion. On page 65 he embarks on 'a preliminary, no doubt haphazard, survey of some of the complexities in the use of "real"'. He proceeds to two pages on 'the real colour of' and 'the real taste of', in which he displays familiar difficulties which led earlier philosophers to draw the useful distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Austin then moves to a problem about 'the real shape of'. This is of an entirely different kind from the others, as indeed it had to be; but there is no hint from Austin that he has moved across an important distinction between two sorts of qualities. His problem about shape concerns the real shape of a cat: how do we name this shape? how snugly does it fit the cat's outline? does it change as the cat moves? Austin remarks that we can name some shapes which are not the real shape of the cat—e.g. it is not cylindrical—and comments on the desperateness of trying to specify the cat's real shape by elimination. Now, cats do have shapes; and one's readiness to say this is not weakened by Austin's awkward questions. Did he, then, think that when we speak of 'the real shape of the cat' we are committed to a precision and explicitness from which the omission of 'real' would excuse us? Austin does not say, and the bland casualness of his discussion precludes even a guess.

What comes next is more alarming still. Having displayed 'some of the complexities in the use of "real"' in connection with 'the real colour, taste, shape of', Austin says (p. 67): 'Contrast this with cases in which we *do* know how to proceed: "Are those real diamonds?", "Is that a real duck?."' He makes some brief debating points about these, offers to mention 'under four headings some of the salient features of

the word “real”, and launches into the material which I have criticized in my preceding section. He does not acknowledge that the shift has been not just from hard to easy cases but also from ‘the real colour of’ etc. to phrases of the form ‘a real F’. Yet each of his four ‘salient features’ depends upon this shift: what he says about ‘a real F’ is largely false, but as applied to ‘the real colour of’, etc. it is not even intelligible. In one whose main polemical weapon was the demand for rigour and precision, these facile transitions are astonishing.

Here, incomprehension of what the epistemological tradition is about goes with a massive neglect of required distinctions: no lines are drawn between ‘the real’ and ‘a real’, between ‘real’ and ‘really’, between ‘...real...’ and ‘...real...?’ This conjunction of slipshod analysis with

ignorance of what the opposition are up to is probably not a coincidence.

One hopes that Austin gave the death-blow to the sterile sub-tradition of handling epistemological problems in terms of bent sense-data, different senses of ‘see’, direct and indirect perception, and so on. The tragedy is that his keen eye for specific mistakes was not attended by an understanding of why, and in the attempted solution of what problems, the mistakes were made. Such an understanding might have saved him from his extraordinary unfairness to Ayer, Price and Warnock; and I think it would have been accompanied, whether as cause or as effect, by a more accurate account of the use of ‘real’.