This paper is not self-contained but is a response to the remarks [1] of the Chairman, Sir Peter Strawson, at the *Mind*/Aristotelian Society symposium [2] entitled 'Truth-Conditions and Criteria'. Strawson seemed to me to misdescribe both what was essentially at issue between the symposiasts (Roger Scruton and myself) and, much more importantly, a broad range of features of the topography — motivation, points of vulnerability, and general implications — of anti-realism. And if that were not sufficient reason for a reply, the grateful reception of his remarks by an audience who seemed, by and large, to think that anti-realism could be nothing other than the Positivism of the Thirties, would provide one.

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Strawson (pp. 15–16) takes it that the main issue between Scruton and myself was whether a Davidson-style truth-theory, conceived as a theory of speakers' understanding, needed any kind of supplementation. Scruton is represented as holding that some such supplementation is required in the case of predicates treated as primitive by the theory; and that the supplement should take the form of supplying an analysis of the criteria — in something intended to be close to Wittgenstein's sense of that term — by reference to which correct application of such predicates would be assessed. Strawson represents me, on the other hand, first as complaining that, if such supplementary analysis is desirable at all, there seems no reason why it should be desirable only in the case of primitive predicates and not also e.g. in the case of quantifiers and singular terms; and, second, as doubting whether in fact such supplementation is required — whether, that is, a truth-theory, if both philosophically and empirically acceptable as far as it went, would not be in effect a complete account of speakers' understanding of the declarative part of the language.

Strawson rejects this doubt. Granted that understanding any declarative sentence is knowing its truth-conditions, it follows that a theory which correctly states the truth-conditions of every declarative sentence in the
object-language is a complete account of what anyone who understands the declarative part of the language knows. But it is not so far any sort of account of what, in the case of any particular sentence, possession of the relevant piece of knowledge consists in; of what, in practice, the distinctive manifestation of that piece of knowledge would be.

Strawson seems to me quite right to press this distinction. But my principal objection to Scruton’s proposals actually proceeded in terms of it. There are some declarative sentences which we should ordinarily take to be the possessors of truth-values but which are such that, even before we find out any facts which we should take to bear on what truth-value they have, we have to acknowledge that our investigations, while at best persuasive, will be in the nature of the case inconclusive. If our understanding even of such sentences is held to be a matter of knowledge of truth-conditions, then of course a truth-theory can aspire to state what, when we understand any particular such sentence, we thereby know. But my objection to Scruton was precisely that to endorse truth-theory that far precludes the belief that by a programme of analysis of criteria the question can then be answered whose legitimacy Strawson thought I had overlooked and which a truth-theory, unsupplemented, cannot answer.

The satisfaction of criteria for the justified assertion of a sentence is, both on Wittgenstein’s and — I took it — on Scruton’s conception of a criterion, a decidable matter: a situation which, if actual, can be recognised by speakers of the language to be so. Therefore to attribute to someone knowledge of criteria need involve no more than to credit him with a capacity to respond appropriately to the obtaining of certain detectable circumstances; and it would be with the detailed description of such capacities in particular cases that Scruton’s supplementary programme would turn out to be concerned. But how can possession of such a capacity, or range of capacities, constitute grasp of what it is for a possibly verification-transcendent truth-condition to obtain? How can a conception of a possibly transcendent state of affairs be exhausted by a sensitivity to recognisable circumstances? I took it that it could not (and so, implicitly, did Strawson, for he speaks of the rational speaker’s responses as being governed by the transcendent conception). But in that case the knowledge which Scruton’s supplementary work would be concerned with is not the same knowledge as the knowledge which the truth-theory, interpreted as realist, attributes to the object-language speakers.