Has anyone seen a fact?

You can't see facts.

I can see a dog and that is a fact.

If you mean you can see a dog is a fact, that may be correct, but I cannot see that fact. If you mean the dog is a fact, that is incorrect.

There is a dog in front of me, and that is a fact.

Fine, but I cannot see it.

You can't see the dog?

I can't see the fact that there is a dog there.

Alright, look at the following: There is a dog right there.

I see it.

Aha! You see a fact.

Hm?

I put down "There is a dog right there," and that is a fact, and you said you saw it.

The statement is not a fact although what it says is a fact.

And you can't see what it says?

No

Look at it again. It says, "There is a dog right there."

I see that in the sense that I see the statement and I see it in the sense that I understand what it says, but I do not see what it says in the sense of visual perception. I cannot see, or touch, or do anything to what it says — or to a fact.

You can't do anything to a fact? You can hide them, reveal them, find them . . .

H-m-m. Let's see. Seems to me you do that sort of thing with
facts, not a fact. I have heard of juries finding facts, but never a
fact. Sure, we speak of a finding of fact or a fact finding, but that's
a different idea. We could say, “one of the facts that was found,”
but that does not mean the one fact was found; it is a fact among
others which were found.

Well look here. Suppose I'm a law teacher. I say, consider the follow-
ing facts: “Smith threw a rock at Jones, but Jones ducked and the
rock hit Brown.” Then I say, “Under those facts, Smith is liable for
battery to Brown.” Then I say, “Now let's change a fact. Let's say that
Smith hit Green instead of Brown.” I just did something to a fact. I
changed it.

Seems to me you changed the facts, not a fact. But I don't see how
you can change a fact. If something is a fact, it is unchangeable.
You can change what you say about it, but you cannot change it.

I think I have you!

Oh?

You changed the referent on me. The statements I made concerning
Smith, Jones, Brown, and Green were facts. You shifted to talking
about things which are facts. There are statements which are facts
and things which are facts.

There are no things which are facts. It is not the thing which is a
fact. A tree, or a dog, or a riot is not a fact.

Wait a minute. I say, “The students are uneasy and about to burn
down the building. That's a fact we have to face.”

Well, now that is an interesting...

And another thing. You said I cannot change a fact, but you played
with the word “it.” You said, “If something is a fact, it is unchangeable.
But “it” refers to “something” and not to “fact.” I can change a fact
but not something.

Nice try, but perhaps “it” refers to both “something” and to “fact.”
Of course you can change something. You can cut a dog's hair, cut
down a tree, and so on. But if something is a fact, then you cannot
change it.

Perhaps, but how about that fact you have to face, the student unrest.
That's a little trickier. I am not facing the student unrest, but the
fact of student unrest or that there is student unrest
“Fact” is referring to a state of affairs, or better yet, it’s being used in a statement that is just a way of talking.

Well, one last try. Back to my statement about Smith, Jones, Brown, and Green. Is that a fact?

You can say, “Here are the facts,” or “Take these facts,” or “These are the facts.”

Well, can’t you see them? Maybe you cannot see a fact, but you can see those facts.

I’ve never heard anyone talk that way. It just doesn’t make sense to talk that way.

But if I were to hand you the statement of facts, I could say, “Look at these facts.”

In that sort of case, you could even say “I saw the facts,” but not, “I see or saw a fact.”

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TALK

I talk a lot.
If I didn’t,
I’d have to listen
And that would make me
Very nervous
Because then I might hear
Something I didn’t like
Or didn’t understand
Or didn’t believe,
Etc.

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