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AUSTIN ON LOCUTIONARY AND ILLOCUTIONARY ACTS¹

IN ATTEMPTING to explore Austin's notion of an *illocutionary act* I have found his corresponding notion of a *locutionary act* very unhelpful and have been forced to adopt a quite different distinction between illocutionary acts and propositional acts.² I think this difference is more than a matter of taxonomical preference and involves important philosophical issues—issues such as the nature of statements, the way truth and falsehood relate to statements, and the way what sentences mean relates to what speakers mean when they utter sentences. In this paper I want to explain my reasons for rejecting Austin's distinction and for introducing certain other distinctions, and in so doing to show how these questions bear on some of the larger philosophical issues.

I

The main theme of Austin's *How to Do Things with Words* is the replacement of the original distinction between performatives and constatives by a general theory of speech acts. The original distinction (the “special theory”) was supposed to be a distinction between utterances which are statements or descriptions, and utterances which are acts, such as, for example, promises, apologies, bets, or warnings. It is supposed to be a distinction between utterances which are sayings and utterances which are doings. Austin shows in detail how attempts to make the distinction precise along these lines only show that it collapses. One is tempted to say that whereas constatives can be true or false, performatives cannot be true or false, but felicitous or infelicitous,

¹ I am grateful to Steven Davis, Dagmar Searle, and the editors of the *Philosophical Review* for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

² J. R. Searle, “What is a Speech Act?,” in *Philosophy in America*, ed. by Max Black (London, 1965); and J. R. Searle, *Speech Acts, An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), ch. 2.

depending on whether they are performed correctly, completely, and sincerely in accord with some antecedent set of conventions. But as Austin's careful researches show, certain performatives can be assessed as true or false (for example, warnings), and constatives can be assessed in the felicitous-infelicitous dimension as well (for example, an utterance of the sentence "All John's children are asleep" is infelicitous if John has no children). Eventually the conclusion becomes obvious: making a statement or giving a description is just as much performing an act as making a promise or giving a warning. What was originally supposed to be a special case of utterances (performatives) swallows the general case (constatives), which now turn out to be only certain kinds of speech acts among others. Statements, descriptions, and so forth are only other classes of illocutionary acts on all fours, as illocutionary acts, with promises, commands, apologies, bets, and warnings.

So far so good. But now Austin introduces a second distinction which will replace in the general theory what was hoped to be achieved by the performative-constative distinction in the special theory, the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. As initially presented it is the distinction between uttering a sentence with a certain *meaning*, in one sense of "meaning" which Austin characterizes as "sense and reference" (the locutionary act) and uttering a sentence with a certain *force* (the illocutionary act). This can be illustrated by the following example. A serious literal utterance³ by a single speaker of the sentence "I am going to do it" can be (can have the force of) a promise, a prediction, a threat, a warning, a statement of intention, and so forth. Yet the sentence is not ambiguous; it has one and only one literal meaning. It has one sense, and different utterances of it can have the same reference. Thus different utterances of the sentence with that literal meaning, given sameness of reference, can be one and only one locutionary act. They can be different locutionary tokens of one locutionary type. But those same utterances with the same sense and reference could be any of a

³ I contrast "serious" utterances with play-acting, teaching a language, reciting poems, practicing pronunciation, etc., and I contrast "literal" with metaphorical, sarcastic, etc.

LOCUTIONS AND ILLOCUTIONS

number of different illocutionary acts; they could have different illocutionary forces, because, for example, one could be (could have the force of) a promise, while another was a prediction, yet another a threat, and so forth. Utterances which were different tokens of the same locutionary type could be tokens of different illocutionary types.

Now the first difficulty that one encounters with Austin's distinction is that it seems that it cannot be completely general, in the sense of marking off two mutually exclusive classes of acts, because for some sentences at least, meaning, in Austin's sense, determines (at least one) illocutionary force of the utterance of the sentence. Thus, though the sentence "I am going to do it" can be seriously uttered with its literal meaning in any number of illocutionary acts, what about the sentence "I hereby promise that I am going to do it"? Its serious and literal utterance must be a promise.⁴ It may on occasion be other illocutionary acts as well, but it must at least be a promise—that is, an illocutionary act of a certain type. The meaning of the sentence determines an illocutionary force of its utterances in such a way that serious utterances of it with that literal meaning will have that particular force. The description of the act as a happily performed locutionary act, since it involves the meaning of the sentence, is already a description of the illocutionary act, since a particular illocutionary act is determined by that meaning. They are one and the same act. Uttering the sentence with a certain meaning is, Austin tells us, performing a certain locutionary act; uttering a sentence with a certain force is performing a certain illocutionary act; but where a certain force is part of the meaning, where the meaning uniquely determines a particular force, there are not two different acts but two different labels for the same act. Austin says that each is an abstraction from the total speech act, but the difficulty is that for a large class of cases—certainly all those involving the performative use of illocutionary verbs—there is no way of abstracting the locutionary act which does not catch an illocutionary act with it. Abstracting the meaning of the utterance will

⁴ Assuming that the act is successful, that is, that the conditions of successful utterance are satisfied.

necessarily abstract an illocutionary force wherever that force is included in that meaning.

The *concept* of an utterance with a certain meaning (that is, the concept of a locutionary act) is indeed a different concept from the *concept* of an utterance with a certain force (that is, the concept of an illocutionary act).⁵ But there are many sentences whose meaning is such as to determine that the serious utterance of the sentence with its literal meaning has a particular force. Hence the *class* of illocutionary acts will contain members of the *class* of locutionary acts. The concepts are different but they denote overlapping classes. For cases such as the performative use of illocutionary verbs the attempt to *abstract* the locutionary meaning from illocutionary force would be like abstracting unmarried men from bachelors. So our first tentative conclusion—we shall have to revise it later—is that the locutionary-illocutionary distinction is not completely general, because some locutionary acts are illocutionary acts.⁶

As it stands there is an easy, but in the end unsatisfactory, way out of this difficulty. A locutionary act is defined by Austin as the uttering of certain vocables with a certain sense and reference. But if that is absolutely all there is to the definition, then, it could be argued, the objection just raised is not really valid; because even for such cases as an utterance of "I hereby order you to leave" there is still a distinction between uttering the sentence with (that is, as having) a certain sense and reference on the one hand (the locutionary act) and actually bringing off a *successfully*

⁵ Throughout this paper I use these as equivalent. But on one possible interpretation Austin meant to distinguish illocutionary acts of type *F* from utterances with illocutionary force *F* on the grounds that an utterance may have force *F* even though the purported act is not, as a whole, successful, and hence has not strictly speaking been performed. I grant that as a possible interpretation, but nothing in my arguments hinges on accepting my interpretation. The arguments are statable in essentially the same form on either interpretation.

⁶ Austin was familiar with this difficulty. I discussed it with him in Hilary term of 1956, and he mentioned it briefly in his lectures of that term. It has also been discussed by L. J. Cohen, "Do Illocutionary Forces Exist," *Philosophical Quarterly*, 14 (1964), 118-137; and briefly by J. O. Urmsom, "J. L. Austin," *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edwards, vol. I. Cohen unfortunately seems to conclude that there are no such things as illocutionary forces. This conclusion seems unwarranted.

LOCUTIONS AND ILLOCUTIONS

performed illocutionary act. For example, I might utter the sentence to someone who does not hear me, and so I would not succeed in performing the illocutionary act of ordering him, even though I did perform a locutionary act since I uttered the sentence with its usual meaning (in Austin's terminology in such cases I fail to secure "illocutionary uptake"). Or to take a different example, I might not be in a position to issue orders to him, if, say, he is a general and I am a private (and so the "order" would again be "infelicitous," in Austin's terminology). So, one might argue, Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts is still intact even for cases containing the performative use of illocutionary verbs. It is a distinction between the simple meaningful utterance and the successfully performed complete illocutionary act. The successfully performed illocutionary act requires all sorts of conditions not required by the locutionary act.

But this answer to my original objection is unsatisfactory for at least two reasons. First, it reduces the locutionary-illocutionary distinction to a distinction between trying and succeeding in performing an illocutionary act. Since the conditions of success for the performance of the act are—except for the general conditions on any kind of linguistic communication⁷—a function of the meaning of the sentence, then uttering that sentence seriously with its literal meaning will be at least purporting to perform an illocutionary act of giving an order. And the only distinction left for such sentences will be the distinction between that part of trying to perform an illocutionary act which consists in uttering the sentence seriously with its literal meaning, and actually succeeding in performing an illocutionary act, a much less interesting distinction than the original distinction between the locutionary act and the illocutionary act.⁸

But secondly, even if we adopt this way out it now leaves us with two quite different distinctions, for the distinction between

⁷ In part these conditions involve what I elsewhere call input-output conditions (Searle, *op. cit.*, ch. 3) and Austin calls conditions of illocutionary uptake (Austin, *op. cit.*, Lecture 9).

⁸ Furthermore, Austin himself repeatedly insists that the distinction between "attempt and achievement" applies to all the kinds of acts. Cf., e.g., *op. cit.*, p. 104.

this part of trying and actually succeeding is different from the original distinction between an utterance with a particular meaning and an utterance with a particular illocutionary force.

So, at this preliminary stage of our discussion, we find two quite different distinctions hiding under the locutionary-illocutionary cloak. One is an interesting but not completely general (in the sense of marking off two mutually exclusive classes) distinction between the meaning of an utterance and the force of the utterance, the second is a not so interesting but general distinction between a certain part of trying and succeeding in performing an illocutionary act.

II

All this, it seems to me, is still very tentative; and it is now time to probe deeper in an effort both to push the objection to the bottom and at the same time to do full justice to the subtlety of Austin's thought.

Austin analyzes the locutionary act into three parts. The *phonetic act* is the act of uttering certain noises, the *phatic act* is the act of uttering certain vocables or words, and the *rhetic act* is the act of using those vocables with a more or less definite sense and reference. Taken together, these constitute the locutionary act. Each of these is an "abstraction," as are indeed the locutionary and illocutionary acts themselves. When he contrasts locutionary and illocutionary acts, Austin gives the following as examples of the contrast.

Locution: He said to me "Shoot her!" meaning by "shoot" shoot and referring by "her" to *her*.

Illocution: He urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) me to shoot her.

Locution: He said to me, "You can't do that."

Illocution: He protested against my doing it [pp. 101-102].

Notice that here he uses the *oratio recta* (direct quotation) form to identify locutionary acts and *oratio obliqua* (indirect quotation) to identify illocutionary acts. The sentence which identifies the locutionary act contains quotation marks, the sentence which identifies the illocutionary act does not. But on page 95, when

LOCUTIONS AND ILLOCUTIONS

discussing the internal structure of locutionary acts, he distinguishes within the locutionary act between the phatic act and the rhetic act, and here he identifies the phatic act by using the *oratio recta* form of quotation marks and identifies the rhetic act by using indirect quotation.

He said "I shall be there" (phatic). He said he would be there (rhetic).

He said "Get out" (phatic). He told me to get out (rhetic).

He said "Is it in Oxford or Cambridge?" (phatic). He asked whether it was in Oxford or Cambridge (rhetic).

Prima facie it seems inconsistent to identify the locutionary act on one page by the use of direct quotation, contrasting it with the illocutionary act which is identified by the use of indirect quotation, and then on another page to identify the rhetic part of the locutionary act by the use of indirect quotation, contrasting it with another part of the locutionary act, the phatic act, which is identified by the use of direct quotation. But as Austin sees, it is not *necessarily* inconsistent, because since the locutionary act is defined as uttering a sentence with a certain sense and reference (meaning) then that sense and reference will determine an appropriate indirect speech form for reporting the locutionary act. For example, if the sentence is in the imperative, the sense of the imperative mood determines that the appropriate *oratio obliqua* form will be "He told me to" or some such; if it is in the interrogative, it will be "He asked me whether." Both of these are precisely examples Austin gives. But now notice a crucial difficulty with the indirect forms: the verb phrases in the reports of *rhetic* acts invariably contain *illoctionary* verbs. They are indeed very general illocutionary verbs, but they are illocutionary nonetheless. Consider "He told me to *X*." Does not the form "He told me to" cover a very general class of illocutionary forces, which includes such specific illocutionary forces as "He ordered, commanded, requested, urged, advised, me to"? The verbs in Austin's examples of indirect speech reports of rhetic acts are all illocutionary verbs of a very general kind, which stand in relation to the verbs in his reports of illocutionary acts as genus to species. That is, there are different species of the genus telling someone

to do something—for example, ordering, requesting, commanding—but “tell . . . to . . .” is as much an illocutionary verb as any of these others, and a little reflection will show that it meets Austin’s criteria for illocutionary verbs. In short, on close examination we discover that in characterizing rhetic acts, Austin has inadvertently characterized them as illocutionary acts. Furthermore, there is no way to give an indirect speech report of a rhetic act (performed in the utterance of a complete sentence) which does not turn the report into the report of an illocutionary act. Why is that?

We saw above that the original locutionary-illocutionary distinction is best designed to account for those cases where the meaning of the sentence is, so to speak, force-neutral—that is, where its literal utterance did not serve to distinguish a particular illocutionary force. But now further consideration will force us to the following conclusion: no sentence is completely force-neutral. Every sentence has some illocutionary force potential, if only of a very broad kind, built into its meaning. For example, even the most primitive of the old-fashioned grammatical categories of indicative, interrogative, and imperative sentences already contain determinants of illocutionary force. For this reason there is no specification of a locutionary act performed in the utterance of a complete sentence which will not determine the specification of an illocutionary act. Or, to put it more bluntly, on the characterization that Austin has so far given us of locutionary as opposed to illocutionary acts, there are (in the utterance of complete sentences) no rhetic acts as opposed to illocutionary acts at all. There are indeed phonetic acts of uttering certain noises, phatic acts of uttering certain vocables or words (and sentences), and illocutionary acts, such as making statements, asking questions, giving commands, but it does not seem that there are or can be acts of using those vocables in sentences with sense and reference which are not already (at least purported) illocutionary acts.

Austin might seem to be granting this when he says that to perform a locutionary act is in general and *eo ipso* to perform an illocutionary act (p. 98). But his point here is that each is only a separate *abstraction* from the total speech act. He still thinks that locutionary and illocutionary acts are separate and mutually

LOCUTIONS AND ILLOCUTIONS

exclusive abstractions. The point I am making now is that there is no way to abstract a rhetic act in the utterance of a complete sentence which does not abstract an illocutionary act as well, for a rhetic⁹ act is always an illocutionary act of one kind or another.

In Section I we tentatively concluded that *some* members of the class of locutionary acts were members of the class of illocutionary acts. It now emerges that *all* the members of the class of locutionary acts (performed in the utterance of complete sentences) are members of the class of illocutionary acts, because every rhetic act, and hence every locutionary act, is an illocutionary act. The concepts *locutionary act* and *illocutionary act* are indeed different, just as the concepts *terrier* and *dog* are different. But the conceptual difference is not sufficient to establish a distinction between separate classes of acts, because just as every terrier is a dog, so every locutionary act is an illocutionary act. Since a rhetic act involves the utterance of a sentence with a certain meaning and the sentence invariably as part of its meaning contains some indicator of illocutionary force, no utterance of a sentence with its meaning is completely force-neutral. Every serious literal utterance contains some indicators of force as part of meaning, which is to say that every rhetic act is an illocutionary act.

So if the distinction is construed, as I think it must be, as between mutually exclusive classes of acts, however abstract they may be, it collapses. There is still left a distinction between the literal meaning of a sentence and the intended force of its utterance (as illustrated by the example "I am going to do it") but that is only a special case of the distinction between literal meaning and intended meaning, between what the sentence means and what the speaker means in its utterance, and it has no special relevance to the general theory of illocutionary forces, because intended illocutionary force is only one of the aspects (sense and reference are others) in which intended speaker meaning may go beyond literal sentence meaning.

Austin sometimes talks as if in addition to the meaning of

⁹ It has to be emphasized that we are considering here (and throughout) utterances of whole sentences. If we confine ourselves to certain parts of sentences we shall be able to make a distinction. More of this in Sec. IV, pp. 420-422.

sentences there were a further set of conventions of illocutionary force; but in precisely those cases where there is a distinction between force and meaning, the force is not carried by a convention but by other features of the context, including the intentions of the speaker; and as soon as force is tied down by an explicit convention it becomes, or in general tends to become, part of meaning. For example, we have a convention that "How do you do?" is a greeting used when being introduced and not a question, but then that is part of the meaning of this idiom. Someone who thinks that this sentence is paraphrasable as "In what manner or condition do you perform?" or who takes it as permutable into such questions as "How does he do?" or "How do I do?" has not understood the meaning of this (contemporary English) idiom.

Where does that leave us now? Austin's original taxonomy included the following kinds of acts:

Locutionary	phonetic
	phatic
	rhetic
Illocutionary	

What we really argued is that the rhetic act as originally characterized has to be eliminated and, with it, the locutionary act as originally characterized. So we are left with the following:

Phonetic
Phatic
Illocutionary

For any of these we can distinguish between trying and succeeding, so *that* distinction will not resurrect any special distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts; and furthermore there is an additional distinction between what a speaker means by the utterance of a sentence and what that sentence means literally, but *that* distinction will not preserve a *general* distinction between locutionary meaning and illocutionary force, since the locutionary meaning of sentences always contains some illocutionary force potential, and hence the locutionary meaning of utterances determines (at least some) illocutionary force of utterances.

III

Underlying the objections I have been making to Austin's account are certain linguistic principles, which it seems to me will enable us to offer a diagnosis of what I am claiming are the limitations in that account. I shall state them baldly and then try to explain what they mean and what relevance they have to the present discussion.

1. Whatever can be meant can be said. I call this the Principle of Expressibility.

2. The meaning of a sentence is determined by the meanings of all its meaningful components.

3. The illocutionary forces of utterances may be more or less specific; and there are several different principles of distinction for distinguishing different types of illocutionary acts.

1. Often we mean more than we actually *say*. You ask me, "Are you going to the party?" I say, "Yes." But what I mean is "Yes, I am going to the party," not "Yes, it is a fine day." Similarly, I might say, "I'll come," and mean it as a promise—that is, mean it as I would mean "I hereby promise I will come," if I were uttering that sentence seriously and meaning literally what I said. Often I am unable to say exactly what I mean, even if I want to, because I do not know the words (if I am speaking French, say) or, worse yet, because there are no words or other linguistic devices for saying what I mean. But even in cases where I am unable to say exactly what I mean it is in principle possible to come to be able to say what I mean. I can, in principle if not in fact, always enrich my knowledge of the language I am speaking; or, more radically, if the language is not rich enough, if it simply lacks the resources for saying what I mean, I can, in principle at least, enrich the language. The general point, however, is that whatever one can mean one can, in principle if not in fact, say or come to be able to say. The lexical and syntactical resources of languages are indeed finite. But there are no limits in principle to their enrichment. I think this is an important principle, but I am not going to develop all of its consequences here.

2. The principle that the meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meanings of its meaningful parts I take as obviously true; what is not so obviously true, however, is that these include more than words (or morphemes) and surface word order. The meaningful components of a sentence include also its deep syntactic structure and the stress and intonation contour of its utterance. Words and word order are not the only elements which determine meaning.

3. The illocutionary forces of utterances may be more or less indeterminate. Suppose I ask you to do something for me. My utterance may be, for example, a request or an entreaty or a plea. Yet the description "I asked you to do it" is, though less specific than any of these, nonetheless a correct description. Furthermore, I may not at all know myself which of the specific possibilities I meant it as. My own intentions may have been indeterminate within this range (which is not to say that they can be completely indeterminate—that I may not know if it was a statement, an order, or a question). There are really two separate points here. One is that *descriptions* of illocutionary acts may be more or less determinate. The second and more important, which I now wish to emphasize, is that the acts themselves may be more or less definite and precise as to their illocutionary force.

One might think of illocutionary acts (and hence illocutionary verbs) as on a continuum of determinateness or specificity, but even this would not do full justice to the complexity of the situation, for under the rubric "illocutionary forces" are all sorts of different principles of distinction. Here, by way of example, are four different principles of distinction: the point or purpose of the act (for example, the difference between a question and a statement), the relative status of the speaker and hearer (for example, the difference between a command and a request), the degree of commitment undertaken (for example, the difference between an expression of intent and a promise), the conversational placing and role of the act (for example, the difference between a reply to what someone has said and an objection to what he has said).

Now how does all this relate to Austin's distinctions? Consider point 3 first. Austin was much impressed by the surface structure

of natural languages, particularly English. The fact that he could get a list of "the third power of ten" illocutionary verbs was important to his conception of illocutionary acts. But there is nothing mutually *exclusive* about all the members of the list nor is the total list necessarily *exhaustive*. The same utterance may be correctly described by any number of different illocutionary verbs on the list, or the act may have been so special and precise in its intent that none of the existing words can quite characterize it exactly. If we think of illocutionary forces as existing on a continuum or continua of specificity (point 3), then the fact that our existing English verbs stop at certain points and not others on some continuum is a more or less contingent fact about English. It so happens that we have the word "promise," but we might not have had it. We might have had ten different words for different kinds of promises, or indeed we might instead have had only one word to cover our present classes of promises, vows, and pledges.

A neglect of point 3, then, seems one possible explanation of why Austin did not see that the supposedly locutionary verb phrases "tell someone to do something," "say that," "ask whether" are as much illocutionary verb phrases as "state that," "order someone to," or "promise someone that." They are indeed more general, but that makes their relation to the more specific verbs that of genus term to species term or determinable term to determinate term. It does not, as Austin seems to suggest (on p. 95),¹⁰ make their denotation a different type of act altogether.

Now let us consider point 1. A commonplace of recent philosophizing about language has been the distinction between sentences and the speech acts performed in the utterances of those sentences. Valuable as this distinction is, there has also been a tendency to overemphasize it to the extent of neglecting the Principle of Expressibility. There is indeed a category distinction between the sentence and the illocutionary act performed in its utterance, but the illocutionary act or acts which can be performed in the utterance of a sentence are a function of the meaning of the sentence. And, more importantly, according to the Principle,

¹⁰ In fact, "ask" crops up on p. 161 as well, as an example of an "expositive" illocutionary verb.

for every illocutionary act one intends to perform, it is possible to utter a sentence the literal meaning of which is such as to determine that its serious literal utterance in an appropriate context will be a performance of that act. Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts is supposed to be a distinction between uttering a sentence with a certain meaning, in the sense of sense and reference, and uttering it with a certain force; but according to the Principle, whenever one wishes to make an utterance with force F , it is always possible to utter a sentence the meaning of which expresses exactly force F , since if it is possible to mean (intend) that force it is possible to say that force literally. Often, of course, as I have noted, and as Austin emphasizes, the said-meaning and the meant-force come apart, but this is, though quite common, a contingent fact about the way we speak and not a conceptual truth about the concept of illocutionary force.

A neglect of the Principle of Expressibility (point 1) seems to be one of the reasons why Austin overestimated the distinction between meaning and force. It is a consequence of the Principle, together with the point that every sentence contains some determiners of illocutionary force, that the study of the meanings of sentences and the study of the illocutionary acts which could be performed in the utterances of sentences are not two different studies, but one and the same study from two different points of view. This is so because, to repeat, for every possible illocutionary act a speaker may wish to perform there is a possible sentence (or sequence of sentences) the serious literal utterance of which under appropriate circumstances would be a performance of that illocutionary act, and for every sentence some illocutionary force potential is included in the meaning of the sentence. So there could not, according to my analysis, be a general and mutually exclusive distinction between the meaning and the force of literal utterances, both because the force which the speaker intends can in principle always be given an exact expression in a sentence with a particular meaning, and because the meaning of every sentence already contains some determiners of illocutionary force.

A neglect of point 2 is also involved in our diagnosis. Austin

characterized the rhetic act in terms of uttering a sentence with a certain sense and reference. The difficulty, however, with this characterization is that the *terminology* of sense and reference inclines us to focus on words, or at most phrases as the bearers of sense and reference. But of course deep syntactic structure, stress, and intonation contour are bearers of meaning as well, as we noted in point 2. One of the possible reasons why Austin neglected the extent to which force was part of meaning is that his use of the Fregean terminology of sense and reference shifted the focus of emphasis away from some of the most common elements in the meaning of a sentence which determine the illocutionary force potential of the sentence: deep syntactic structure, stress, intonation contour (and, in written speech, punctuation). If one thinks of sentential meaning as a matter of sense and reference, and tacitly takes sense and reference as properties of words and phrases, then one is likely to neglect those elements of meaning which are not matters of words and phrases, and it is often precisely those elements which in virtue of their meaning are such crucial determinants of illocutionary force.

IV

Though I do not think Austin was completely successful in characterizing a locutionary-illlocutionary distinction, there are certain real distinctions which underlie his effort. The first I mentioned is a distinction between that part of trying which consists solely in making a serious literal utterance and actually succeeding in performing an illocutionary act. The second is the distinction between what a sentence means and what the speaker may mean in uttering it, with the special case of serious literal utterance where the meaning of the sentence uttered does not completely exhaust the illocutionary intentions of the speaker in making the utterance. Now I wish to consider a third distinction which I think Austin had in mind.

He says (pp. 144-145):

With the constative utterance, we abstract from the illocutionary (let alone the perlocutionary) aspects of the speech act, and we concentrate on the locutionary With the performative utterance, we attend

as much as possible to the illocutionary force of the utterance, and abstract from the dimension of correspondence with facts.

These and other remarks suggest to me that Austin may have had in mind the distinction between the content or, as some philosophers call it, the proposition, in an illocutionary act and the force or illocutionary type of the act.¹¹ Thus, for example, the proposition that I will leave may be a common content of different utterances with different illocutionary forces, for I can threaten, warn, state, predict, or promise that I will leave. We need to distinguish in the total illocutionary act the type of act from the content of the act. This distinction, in various forms, is by now common in philosophy and can be found in philosophers as diverse as Frege, Hare, Lewis, and Meinong. If we wish to present this distinction in speech act terms (within a general theory of speech acts) a taxonomically promising way of doing it might be the following. We need to distinguish the illocutionary act from the propositional act—that is, the act of *expressing the proposition* (a phrase which is neutral as to illocutionary force). And the point of the distinction is that the identity conditions of the propositional act are not the same as the identity conditions of the total illocutionary act, since the same propositional act can occur in all sorts of different illocutionary acts. When we are concerned with so-called constatives we do indeed tend to concentrate on the propositional aspect rather than the illocutionary force, for it is the proposition which involves “correspondence with the facts.” When we consider so-called performatives we attend as much as possible to the illocutionary force of the utterance (for example, “I know you *said* you’d come, but do you *promise*?”).

Symbolically, we might represent the sentence as containing an illocutionary force-indicating device and a propositional content indicator. Thus:

$$F(p)$$

where the range of possible values for F will determine the range

¹¹ Austin once told me he thought a distinction could be made along these lines—but it is not clear that he intended the locutionary-illocutionary distinction to capture it.

of illocutionary forces, and the *p* is a variable over the infinite range of possible propositions.¹² Notice that in this form the distinction is not subject to the objections we made to the original locutionary-illlocutionary distinction. The propositional act is not represented, either in the symbolism or in natural languages, by the entire sentence, but only by those portions of the sentence which do not include the indicators of illocutionary force. Thus the propositional act is a genuine abstraction from the total illocutionary act, and so construed no propositional act is by itself an illocutionary act.

I do not know that this is one of the things Austin had in mind with the locutionary-illlocutionary distinction, but the remarks quoted above suggest to me that it is (especially in connection with certain other remarks, such as his including "refer" among locutionary verbs; in my terminology referring is characteristically part of the propositional act, and referring expressions are portions of sentences, not whole sentences). But whether or not Austin ever intended this, it seems to me to be useful in its own right and to be one of the distinctions we need with which to supplant the original locutionary-illlocutionary distinction.¹³

So far I have said that there are at least three different distinctions¹⁴ which can be extracted from the locutionary-illlocutionary distinction:

- (1) The distinction between a certain aspect of trying and succeeding in performing an illocutionary act.
- (2) The distinction between the literal meaning of the sentence and what the speaker means (by way of illocutionary force) when he utters it.

¹² Not all illocutionary acts would fit this model. E.g., "Hurrah for Manchester United" or "Down with Caesar" would be of the form *F(n)*, where *n* is replaceable by referring expressions.

¹³ It is also a distinction I employ elsewhere (see references cited in n. 2).

¹⁴ There is a fourth distinction, which I do not discuss here, between the illocutionary act performed by the speaker and what he implies in performing it. Cf. H. P. Grice, "The Causal Theory of Perception" (secs. 2-4), *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, supp. vol. (1961); and J. R. Searle, "Assertions and Aberrations," *British Analytical Philosophy*, ed. by B. A. O. Williams and A. C. Montefiore (London, 1966), for some preliminary discussion of this distinction.

(3) The distinction between propositional acts and illocutionary acts.

I now want to use this last distinction in an examination of one of Austin's most important discoveries, the discovery that constatives are illocutionary acts as well as performatives, or, in short, the discovery that statements are speech acts.

The difficulty with this thesis as Austin presents it in *How to Do Things with Words* is that the word "statement" is structurally ambiguous. Like many nominalized verb forms it has what traditional grammarians call the act-object, or sometimes the process-product ambiguity. A modern transformational grammarian would say that it is structurally ambiguous as it has at least two different derivations from (phrase markers containing) the verb "state." "Statement" can mean either the *act of stating* or *what is stated*. (Possibly it has other meanings as well, but these are the most important for present purposes.) Here are two sentences in which these two meanings of "statement" are quite clearly distinct.

1. The statement of our position took all of the morning session.
2. The statement that all men are mortal is true.

Notice that you cannot say "The statement that all men are mortal took ten seconds." But you can say:

3. The statement of the statement that all men are mortal took ten seconds.

This just means that it took ten seconds to *make* the statement, or that the act of stating took ten seconds. Let us call these two senses the statement-act sense and the statement-object sense. Austin's discovery that statements are illocutionary acts holds for the act sense, but not for the object sense.

But that is not necessarily a weakness since the same distinction can be made for a great many other nominalized forms of the illocutionary verbs. The real significance of Austin's discovery is that "state" is an illocutionary verb like any other, and this leads us to the further observation that its nominalized forms share features with nominalized forms of illocutionary verbs; in particular in the "-ment" form "state" shares the act-object ambiguity.

LOCUTIONS AND ILLOCUTIONS

(As Austin might have said, it's the verb which wears the trousers.)¹⁵

The failure to take into account the structural ambiguity of "statement," however, had very important consequences for certain other parts of Austin's theory of language. For since statements are speech acts, and since statements can be true or false, it appears that that which is true or false is a speech act. But this inference is fallacious, as it involves a fallacy of ambiguity. Statement-acts are speech acts, and statement-objects (as well as propositions) are what can be true or false. And the view that it is the act of stating which is true or false is one of the most serious weaknesses of Austin's theory of truth.¹⁶

Confining ourselves to "constatives," the distinction between statement-acts and statement-objects can be explained in terms of our distinction between propositional content and illocutionary force as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| The statement-act | = the act of stating. |
| | = the act of stating a proposition. |
| | = the act of expressing a proposition with a constative (I would prefer to call it "statemental") illocutionary force. |
| | = the act of making a statement-object. |
| The statement-object | = what is stated (construed as stated). |
| | = the proposition (construed as stated). |

Propositions but not acts can be true or false; thus statement-objects but not statement-acts can be true or false. In the characterization of statement-object we have to add the phrase "construed as stated" because of course what is stated, the proposition, can

¹⁵ To complicate matters further, not all literal utterances of "state" are connected with what philosophers call "statements" at all. Consider "State the question again, please" or "He restated his promise." Neither of these is a "constative."

¹⁶ As Strawson pointed out in the "Truth" symposium, *Proc. Arist. Soc.*, supp. vol. (1950).

JOHN R. SEARLE

also be the content of a question, of a promise, the antecedent of a hypothetical, and so forth. It is neutral as to the illocutionary force with which it is expressed, but statements are not neutral as to illocutionary force, so "statement" in its object sense is not synonymous with "proposition," but only with "proposition construed as stated."

So, to conclude this point, the distinction between the propositional act and the illocutionary act and the corresponding distinction between propositions and illocutions enables us to account for certain traditional problems in the notion of a statement. Statement-acts are illocutionary acts of stating. Statement-objects are propositions (construed as stated). The latter but not the former can be true or false. And it is the confusion between these which prevented Austin from seeing both that statements can be speech acts and that statements can be true or false, though acts cannot have truth values.

What is the outcome of our discussion of locutionary and illocutionary speech acts? We are left with:

- Phonetic acts
- Phatic acts
- Propositional acts
- Illocutionary acts

Propositional acts are all that we can salvage from the original conception of a rhetic act, in so far as we wish to distinguish rhetic acts from illocutionary acts. But whether or not Austin had them in mind, they are independently motivated and not subject to the objections we made to Austin's account of locutionary acts.

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- Page 1 of 1 -

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[Footnotes]

⁶ Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?

L. Jonathan Cohen

The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 55. (Apr., 1964), pp. 118-137.

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