

## Internal States vs. Internal Actions

Temporarily setting aside the various other problems with an internalist theory of performatives, I wish to discuss the potentially interesting distinction between internal states and internal actions. First let's consider the case of something that is undoubtedly an internal *state* – for example, hunger. We can make a statement about this state such as “I am hungry.” In class it was suggested that someone could respond to this utterance with “No you're not! You just ate!” To my ears, however, this sounds extremely odd. It sounds like something you might say when dealing with a small child, because children are prone to misrepresenting their internal states (lying), or at least, we are more likely to call them out on it when they do. But to say something like that to another adult would, I think, be rather disrespectful. However, I think you *could* say something like “You can't be! We just ate!” Thus, rather than trying to assert a fact about someone else's internal state, you express your surprise and perhaps mild disbelief in a much softer fashion.

Let us contrast this with an internal *action*. I think the easiest way to is to take a look at the differing grammatical structures we use to describe states vs. actions. We use a copula when talking about a state (I *am* hungry, he *is* probably thirsty), but when talking about actions we use a verb (I *promise*, he *warned* her). The distinction between internal states and internal actions is, as far as I can tell, basically the same as the distinction between *external* states and actions. A state is, well, a state, and an action is doing something. Perhaps a more exact definition would be that an internal action is defined as a change in internal state. For example, when we promise (if we take promising to be an internal act) we alter our internal state by adding something resembling a new intention. The details of what actually changes are up for debate, but I don't think that this preliminary definition is unreasonable.

So what, if anything, does this mean for our internalist theory of performatives? Perhaps this distinction can be used to explain the difference between descriptions of internal states, which we treat like normal statements, and descriptions of internal *actions*, which we treat as performatives. One of the main challenges to the idea of performatives being statements of any kind is the proposition that while statements are true or false, performatives cannot be either. Surely if we wish to categorize performatives as descriptions, of internal actions or anything at all, we must account for their being or not being classifiable as true or false. Personally, I think a satisfactory solution was suggested in class: that while performatives may technically be statements, we do not talk about them as true or false because they are statements about someone else's internal world, which is something both deeply personal and something we cannot know anything about ourselves. The counter-argument that we do, in fact, talk about other people's internal states as true or false, as in "I'm hungry! – No you're not, you just ate!" I have already rejected above. This still leaves us with several other problems, such as how to deal with the case of promising – what if I meant it when I promised, but changed my mind later? My promise statement was still "true." But those can wait for another day.

One further point I want to touch on is the possibility of a new criteria for explicit performatives, somewhat related to the above considerations. Austin's definition hinges on unambiguity, which proves somewhat problematic for a variety of reasons. Perhaps a different definition of explicit performative would be that explicit performatives are those which are statements of internal actions, while non-explicit (secondary, primary, whatever you want to call them) performatives are those which are not statements as such. For example, "I promise to make you a cake" is a direct statement of an internal action (promising), while "I will make you a cake" is rather a description of a future external action which *may* be interpreted as a promise.