

How to Argue with Speech Acts*

Elijah Millgram

Department of Philosophy
University of Utah
Salt Lake City UT 84112
elijah.millgram@gmail.com

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A puzzling inversion has taken place in the reception of the work of John Austin. In his own day, he was understood to be Oxford's counterpart to Ludwig Wittgenstein, and, like Wittgenstein, he was described as an 'ordinary language philosopher.' That term itself reflected a confused outsiders' take on the enterprise that it was meant to label; nevertheless, at the time it would have been no trouble at all to elicit from the philosopher-on-the-street various on-target characterizations of that enterprise: for instance, that it was deeply antitheoretical; that its objective was to bring philosophy to an end by exposing philosophical tenets as grammatical confusions; that if one wanted to find out what came under that heading, one could look to Austin, who had provided a number of exemplary treatments.^{1,2}

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¹For one shorter but quite compelling model, in this case an attempt to defuse philosophers' interest in reality and the real, see Austin, 1962, pp. 70f. As I'll describe in an appendix, the book was meant to show that sense data, which at the time played an important role in foundationalist epistemology, were no more than a grammatical mistake: in the first place, that of moving from the thought that so-and-so appears such and such to the conviction that there must be something there distinct from the so-and-so, namely, an *appearance*. Sense data are still around today, albeit with a name change, as the subject of today's consciousness studies—which as a subfield has evidently suppressed Austin's objections.

²The confused outsiders' take is still in play. Among the further claims that the philosopher-on-the-street would have attributed to what he took to be a movement were that only ordinary usage is legitimate, and that because philosophers develop technical

Today, however, Austin is remembered as being the originator of a philosophical doctrine, usually called ‘speech act theory.’ It has become part of the toolkit of philosophers of language, linguists, literary studies and the many relatives of literary studies.³ How could such a thing have happened?

vocabularies, they are thereby talking nonsense. (See, for instance, Gellner, 2005.) That is, ordinary language philosophers, it was thought, are mostly in the business of calling out other philosophers for their uses of words in nonstandard ways. That certainly has nothing to do with Wittgenstein, and we will shortly be in a position to assess whether it is a reasonable way to portray Austin.

Compare, just for instance, a recent volume that subtitles itself “A Defense of Ordinary Language Philosophy” (Baz, 2012, p. 2):

I refer [by this label] to a particular form of critique of the tradition of Western philosophy—one that seeks to alleviate philosophical entanglements and obscurities by means of consideration of the ordinary and normal uses of philosophers’ words, [but then he goes on, almost redeeming the *faux pas*] and the worldly conditions that make those uses possible and give them their specific significance.

Or again for instance, here is Paul Horwich (2012, p. 70), caricaturing the movement by presenting what he takes to be its motivating argument (and which he means to contrast with what, in his view, Wittgenstein is doing):

1. Meaning = use.
2. Therefore any deployment of a word outside its ordinary usage would be meaningless.
3. But philosophical theorizing does involve departures from ordinary usage.
4. Therefore philosophical theories are meaningless.
5. Therefore we must confine ourselves to removing the temptation to engage in philosophical theorizing.

As I’ve suggested, this take on ordinary-language philosophy is inherited from early-on and very similar understandings. As documentation, here is an in-period complaint that makes it pretty clear how ordinary-language philosophizing was perceived by outsiders:

those who take their cue from a simple inspection of ordinary language cannot make the distinction they want to make [in this case, having to do with metaethics]... Ordinary language has been influenced sufficiently by all of the traditional ontologies to have adopted modes of speech consistent with all of them. To [resolve the philosophical question at hand] we must go beyond a *simple-minded* observation of the language we use. (White, 1963, p. 242)

For this reason, it has become almost routine to gesture at Austin’s own introduction of technical terminology, as in Strawson, 1973, p. 63.

³For an early example of the first of these, see Holdcroft, 1978; under the second heading, Lassiter, 2014, p. 32, takes as his foil a view of perlocutions that comes already labelled “the Received Model”; in an instance of the third, de Man, 1979, p. 7, casually remarks on “Austin’s theory of speech acts” having “had... a strong influence on recent

Here I want to explain what Austin was doing when he delivered the lectures that became *How to Do Things with Words*.⁴ When a philosopher is deep enough, and subtle enough, his views will often have consequences for what an argument has to be. If he is not so absent-minded as to fail to notice that his own arguments must conform to those views, he will advance arguments that are very different in their workings and their form from those of other philosophers.⁵ Austin was such a philosopher, and *How to Do Things with Words*—in the standard view, the text that originated the theory of speech acts—was an extended argumentative exercise of just this kind. As our own exposition of the argument proceeds, it will become clear that the theoretical apparatus that has since been attributed to him was not anything like a theory he endorsed; on the contrary, the point was that the apparatus could not possibly work. Although Austin did take it to be an observation that what he called “speech acts” were part of our spoken and written repertoire, he never advanced a theory of speech acts that he did not repudiate the moment its work had been done—or rather, in the course of making it do the job for which it was intended.

I will not attempt to retrace the successive appropriations that turned Austin upside-down, and made him into an purveyor of the very sort of philosophy he had devoted his life to dismantling.⁶ But when I am finished, we will have an explanation at hand for the now-commonplace misunder-

American work in literary semiology.” I will briefly take up his school’s engagement with Austin below. One additional recent sample: Price, 2011, p. 54, announces that “speech act theory is one of the more lasting products of the linguistic movement in philosophy of the mid-twentieth century”; the ‘non-factualism’ of the early speech act theorists is put down to their taking Austin’s lead.

⁴Austin, 1975, with references in the running text tagged as “HT”; a more compressed version of his train of thought can be found in Austin, 1971.

⁵For a review of a couple of nineteenth-century examples of the phenomenon, see Millgram, 2014.

⁶That said, perhaps the uptake given by John Searle to the ideas that Austin floated would be an important part of the story. He has recently remarked that his “work on speech acts is an attempt to carry on what Austin had begun” (2014, p. 1); for the work he is mentioning, see, e.g., Searle, 1969.

Once we have completed our reconstruction of Austin’s argument, the reader who does retrace that history will be primed to notice two motifs: first, a repeated attempt to revive R. M. Hare’s phrastic/neustic model, and either to attribute it directly to Austin, or to treat it as part of an Austinian theory of speech acts; and second, repeated attempts to assimilate Austin to Grice (that is, to reconstruct concepts derived from Austin, such as illocutionary force, in terms of complex reflexive intentions). (See, e.g., Kissine, 2013, p. 3.) I put these themes down to the philosophical vice of conflating new and difficult ideas with familiar, thus easier, thoughts and moves. Come the end of this paper, I hope to have explained why these lapses were in this particular case so very hard to resist.

standing of his life's work. One could not make sense of Austin's views without following his arguments, and his readers (and promoters!) failed to recognize those arguments, almost certainly because they were arguments of a novel, therefore unfamiliar, kind.⁷ Once we appreciate Austin's very ambitious attempt at an argument composed of speech acts, we will finally be in a position to ask what we think about its conclusion. But more importantly, we will have made available something which we urgently need: a full-on demonstration of how philosophy of logic is to be given uptake in one's philosophical thinking. This sort of uptake is required for serious philosophy, and we all of us need more in the way of role models for it than we have been given.

1

Early on in *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin identifies the target of the argument he is about to launch:

It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. (HT 1)

Despite that past tense, and despite the respectability of pragmatics in contemporary philosophy of language, that's mostly still *our* de facto assumption.

It uncontroversially is *a* standard view, in analytical philosophy of language, that the primary (the only important) linguistic or logical item is the proposition or sentence, where what's meant by that is the assertoric sentence: a sentence that tells you *what's true*.⁸ Still, there does seem to be

⁷For instance, George Pitcher, who attended Austin's William James lectures as a student, remarks on the lack of "overwhelming philosophical arguments": "Indeed, I cannot recall anything I ever heard, or read, of Austin's that contained a straightforward, old-fashioned philosophical *argument*" (1973, p. 20).

⁸The view is found as early on—leaving to one side worries about ladder chucking—as Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1921/1963), and it naturally brings in its wake associated doctrines that one can find both in the *Tractatus* and in circulation today: e.g., since saying what's true is the job of an assertoric sentence (and its only job), its meaning (that by virtue of which it does its job) is given by its truth-conditions. Likewise, meanings of words within a sentence are ways of identifying the words' contributions to the sentence meanings.

Throughout, the reader will notice stretches of my narrative paralleling Crary, 2007, ch. 2, which is one of the most sensitive readings of *How to Do Things with Words* that

a great deal of work in circulation on other parts and aspects of language. So why insist that Austin's target is more than *a* standard view, that it is, in fact, the collective view of analytic philosophy?

Well, suppose you thought that all that mattered was the truth of sentences that state purported facts. Then you would conclude that logic has to do with the entailment relations between such sentences, and consequently that an argument is a series of propositions with the following feature: the truth of the initial propositions (the premises) entails the truth of the subsequent propositions in the list, all the way to the very last one, which gets designated its 'conclusion'.⁹ But that is indeed the conception of argument accepted almost across the board within our philosophical tradition. That it *is* so widely accepted is very persuasive evidence that we still share the view that Austin announced he was going to dislodge. For now, notice that since Austin is trying to convince his audience that truth isn't a sole actor, we have to take his warmup remarks as meant to be read ironically in retrospect: "What I shall have to say here is neither difficult nor contentious; the only merit I should like to claim for it is that of being true, at least in parts."¹⁰

Suppose instead that when it came to the primacy-of-truth view, you begged to differ: perhaps on the grounds that there are obviously a great many "speech acts," like naming a boat ("I hereby christen this vessel the Queen Mary III"), or marrying ("I do"), or betting ("I bet you a buck").¹¹

we have; I will mark points of contact and the main divergences in the notes.

Here, Crary and I agree that Austin's target is the primacy of the proposition, but we understand what that comes to differently. She takes Austin to be trying to undercut

a picture of the sense of a sentence as fixed independently of its being used to say something to someone on a particular occasion. (p. 60)

[that is,]

of the idea that sentences have literal or conventional meanings that they carry with them into every context of their use. (p. 64)

[that is,]

the idea of literal sentence-meaning (p. 69, n. 29; Bauer, 2015, pp. 53, 98, 113, endorses Crary's complaint).

Once we have more of Austin's argument in place, I will explain why this seems to me to be a mischaracterization of his thesis.

⁹For present purposes, we don't need to distinguish between defeasible and deductive entailment; what is at issue is that the link has truth-values on both ends.

¹⁰HT 1; the irony is especially pointed, because it emerges, late on in the work (HT 142–145), that one of the ways in which his view differs from those of his targets is in the ways it is able to construe being 'true in parts'.

¹¹Under the heading of pointing out that some things that look like assertoric sentences

They're not true or false, and it's not their job to be. Suppose you also thought that, in the end, they're going figure into our intellectual lives every bit as centrally as assertions. And suppose you thought that it was a mistake to think that there even *was* a clear-cut category of assertoric statements, much less a type of abstract object, the 'proposition,' out of which arguments were constructed. Then you would decide that your own arguments should not take the form of a series of propositions, such that the first members of the series are known, or plausibly believed, to be true, and the latter members are true if the earlier members are.¹² Instead, you would find yourself forced to construct an argument out of speech acts. But how might such an argument proceed?

2

Consider an argument of the sort that we are used to (and that Austin's opponents were committed to): If assertoric (true-false) statements are the kind of thing philosophers have thought they are, we have to be able to *distinguish* them from other 'speech acts'. But (and at this stage this is only a promisory note) experimentation with different ways of classifying utterances shows that you can't distinguish statements from (other) speech acts. It will follow that statements aren't the kind of thing philosophers have thought. And since, unlike "statement" or "sentence," "proposition" is a philosophers' term of art, a name for the contents of sentences or statements as philosophers have understood them, we can also say that it follows that there *are* no propositions.¹³

aren't, Austin's first move was to gesture at emotivism, the then-popular doctrine that moral judgments are really just expressions of emotion. (For a standard exposition, see Ayer, 1951, ch. 6.) However, that was just warmup, and just as well; back then, emotivism was still a live position, but not anymore.

¹² *Would* you decide that? I'll entertain second thoughts in note 28.

¹³ It seems to be very difficult indeed for Austin's readers to keep his intended conclusion in mind. For instance, Kissine, 2013, pp. 18f, attempts to pick out 'rhetic' acts as transmitting a propositional content. This is not exactly false, but it is to use precisely the vocabulary that Austin was trying to dislodge. Or again, when Searle accuses Austin of equivocating on two senses of "statement" (in one of which it is an action, and in the other, a proposition), he is begging the question, presumably because he does not remember that Austin disallows propositions (1968, p. 423). (And *did* Austin not notice the slip Searle thinks he made? Take a look at the snippet of text that starts out note 15, below.)

A moment ago, I allowed in passing that the words "state" and "statement" weren't just philosophers' terms of art. If these are terms that competent speakers of English control, can't they serve as an entry point into the small circle of puzzling concepts that includes "proposition," "assertion," "belief" and so on? So let's take that back. Bear in

We should not expect Austin to follow in the footsteps of other familiar arguments against one or another distinction—say, Quine’s argument against the analytic-synthetic distinction.¹⁴ That latter argument involves what from Austin’s point of view is a confusion: that of treating a distinction as though it were tantamount to a proposition, which one confutes by showing it to be false. On Austin’s way of thinking, a distinction is *made*: to distinguish one thing from another is a speech act.¹⁵ So if we are right

mind that an ordinarily-so-called statement does not nearly always advance a true-or-false content: the young man was formerly asked to state his intentions; the negotiator states his position, i.e., a series of demands; when you state that under no circumstances will you be a party to such a coverup, you are announcing a determination of your own, not the way the world is. (Stating is very close to declaring, so relatedly, recall that you can declare your allegiance to the United States of America, which once upon a time declared its independence; you can declare your undying love, your hopes and fears and your red lines in the sand. . . none of which are facts.) When your fashion choices make a statement, they are not announcing some proposition to be factually true—and you can find two further examples at Searle, 1968, p. 423n15. Briefly, “statement,” in the requisite restricted sense, is *also* a philosophers’ technical term.

¹⁴See Quine, 1963, ch. 2, and for a vivid expression of his conclusion, Quine, 1966, p. 132; for complaints, Millgram, 2009, pp. 154–57. Here is one way to see how different the respective arguments are. Quine’s complaint is that rather than falling cleanly on one side or another of the contrast he is disputing, our claims fall somewhere on a spectrum between them. (That is, he is arguing against the proposition that every proposition is either flat-out analytic or flat-out synthetic.) As we will see when we get to Austin’s classification of infelicities (note 19, below), Austin does not take this sort of phenomenon to vitiate a taxonomy. His complaint is rather that one hasn’t taken the trouble to introduce the contrasting poles of the spectrum.

¹⁵In a footnote early on, we find Austin remarking:

It is, of course, not really correct that a sentence ever *is* a statement: rather it is *used* in *making a statement*, and the statement itself is a ‘logical construction’ out of the makings of statements. (HT 1)

By parity of reasoning, we should expect distinctions, understood as the abstract objects of interest to Quine and his ilk, to be logical constructions out of acts of distinguishing. (That said, we also need to register that the logical constructions that Austin has in mind will not be Carnapian or Quinean; we are in the middle of reconstructing Austin’s complaint about the logic which they took for granted.)

But now, perhaps I should parry, on Austin’s behalf, a response philosophers of the sort that he is attacking are likely to have: that distinctions are not actions we execute, but *out there in the world*. Suppose we say that; then the problem is that there are too *many* distinctions (in very much the way that there are too many properties), and an action is still necessary, now construed as that of picking one rather than others out of the plethora of them. Suppose the rejoinder is that some distinctions, out in the world, are in and of themselves *distinguished* distinctions (in rather the way that David Lewis thought that *some* of the too-many properties were, in and of themselves, *universals*—Lewis, 1983). But now, the distinctions I need to make are for the most part not anything like Lewisian universals, written as it were into the sinews of nature: when I tell my class that papers

in expecting Austin to argue against the distinction between assertoric sentences and other utterances, that argument will take the form of an attempt to show that the *act of distinguishing* fails.¹⁶

receiving a B+ or above will have an effective argument, be literately written, and include all the requisite information in their bibliographies, the distinction I am insisting on is not anything like a natural kind.

More generally, it is about as unhelpful, in my view, to insist that the real precondition for making a distinction is that there *is* a distinction (out there, in the offing) to *be* made as it is to insist that *p* is true when it's a *fact* that *p*: not so much wrong as a philosophical dead end.

¹⁶In case you were wondering whether Austin's readers could really have missed the argument I am in the course of setting up, here is Holdcroft, 1978, p. 23, 14f, observing that Austin's "remarks markedly underdetermine the distinctions he wishes to make" (thus assuming that the point was to *make* the distinctions); that "it is clear that Austin did not succeed in [developing a detailed theory of the nature of illocutionary acts]" (thus assuming that Austin was trying to do so); that "Austin introduces the notion of an illocutionary act as part of a comprehensive theory of speech acts"; and that the distinctions between the main categories of speech act in that theory are "far from clear" (thus assuming both that Austin wanted to advance such a theory, and that he thought he was making clear distinctions).

Again, Searle, 1968, pp. 405, 419, tells us that "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... though I do not think Austin was completely successful in characterizing a locutionary-illocutionary distinction" (thus implying that he meant to make that distinction, by way of putting in place that general theory).

Again, a recent book whose subtitle describes it as "An Austinian View of Knowledge and Knowledge Claims" (Lawlor, 2013, pp. 31f), announces that "by the end of *How to Do Things with Words*, the distinction [between constatives and performatives] is replaced, in favor of a tripartite analysis of speech acts in general... This is the heart of Austin's theory of *speech acts*. . . [the earlier] distinction. . . Austin himself came to see as less fruitful and robust than the general theory of speech acts." As before, the assumption is that Austin was discarding an inadequate distinction on his way to the theory, and its distinctions, which he adopted.

Again, Kissine, 2013, p. 1, begins his exposition by telling his reader that "anyone who has come into even the most superficial contact with pragmatics will have heard of speech acts. . . and the names of Austin and Searle, the founding fathers of contemporary Speech Act Theory, are often among the first ones we learn as naïve students in linguistics or philosophy of language."

Or again, here is Garvey, 2014, p. x: "Austin goes some way towards creating a systematic taxonomy of types of speech-acts."

However, Crary, 2007, p. 56, n. 10, 58, n. 14, correctly observes that "Austin's discussion of constatives and performatives [has] the structure of a *reductio*-proof. [His] aim in introducing the distinction is to collapse it... [by showing] that the task of making [that] distinction. . . is a hopeless one." And Bauer, 2015, p. 92, correctly observes that "it's best not to read *How to Do Things with Words* as a theory, of speech acts or of anything else."

Somewhere in the middle is Williams, 2015, pp. 42f: "Sometimes, indeed, Austin seems

Distinctions are most naturally managed, anyway in this sort of context, by classifying the items you propose to distinguish under the several appropriate headings you have in mind for them. So Austin begins his argument by *introducing a classification*: having pointed to the acts of naming a ship, marrying by saying ‘I do,’ and so on, he says: “I propose to call [such an utterance] a *performative sentence*...or, for short, ‘a performative’.”¹⁷ That is, he’s executing an act on a par with the ones he (and we) have just mentioned: to ‘propose to call’ is not true or false; it *makes* ‘performative’ a term for these sorts of utterance. Austin has in passing similarly introduced a special term for the assertoric statements, “constative” (HT 3), and now that we have been alerted to his agenda, we can identify that as having been a speech act also.

Jumping the gun just a little bit, performatives are obviously meaningful utterances, but since they’re neither true nor false, we can’t analyze their meanings in terms of their truth-conditions. Austin suggests that we’ll have to look elsewhere, and he introduces a term for the analog of truth conditions, namely, their ‘happiness’ or ‘felicity’ conditions. These can be expected to vary from performative to performative; for instance, for a ‘guilty!’ to be legally effective, the person performing it has to be a judge, presiding over the court, at the conclusion of the proceedings, etc. And perhaps one way to make out the distinction we are considering will be precisely this: assertions (and propositions) have truth-conditions; performatives have happiness conditions.

If classifying is a speech act, and speech acts have happiness conditions, then classifying has happiness conditions. For instance, if you’re classifying utterances into As and Bs, As and Bs had better be *utterances*; if they aren’t, the attempted classification would presumably be what Austin calls a ‘misfire’. And so Austin in fact takes time out to explain that this happiness condition is satisfied.

How did that go? You might have been worried that, say, getting married isn’t really a speech act; to be sure, you utter the words ‘I do’, but

just to be making some distinctions which take his fancy...the linguistic observations seem often to be pursued for their own sake.”

¹⁷HT 6; we can confirm the suggestion that Austin thinks of classification as a speech act by noting that ‘to class’ appears in one of Austin’s (very meta) attempts at a classification of speech acts. Austin gives “class” as an example of an ‘expositive’ (it appears in a table at HT 162f, along with “define” and “analyze”), one which could easily be taken for a ‘verdictive’; but since he also tells us that “[c]alling, defining, analyzing and assuming form one group” of ‘commissives’, we may take it that one of his points is that classifying will straddle the categories with which he is experimenting. (HT 159–61)

it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and undivorced, and so on. . . (HT 8f).

That is, the putative speech act involves elements that are not themselves *speech*. For our purposes, what is of interest is the form of the subsidiary argument that Austin gives in reply: *classifying* the necessary surroundings for the utterance that are not themselves utterances as happiness conditions (thus, not part of the speech act itself) allows the utterance proper to be suitably classifiable as a performative, as opposed (tentatively) to a constative. That is, Austin has responded to a problem with his initial classification by extending his system of classification: that is, by performing further speech acts.

Austin then makes a start on classifying ‘infelicities’—ways performatives can be ‘unhappy’—into ‘misfires’ and ‘abuses’. Readers at this point start to have the feeling that they’re wading through laundry lists, composed by someone with an obsessive interest in taxonomizing his version of a stamp collection, and fail to notice that all this is part of Austin’s developing argument. The classification of infelicities is a response to the objection that, for example, when you say ‘I promise’, but don’t actually mean to keep your promise, something has gone wrong; that shows, the objection continues, that promising is a mental act (amounting to forming an intention), therefore not a speech act. The rebuttal allows that something has indeed gone wrong, but identifies an unwarranted assumption at the bottom of the objection: that the only thing that can go wrong with a performative is the act’s not actually coming off. Certainly that *is* one sort of thing that can go wrong, as when it turns out that I wasn’t really married, even though I said ‘I do,’ because the person performing the ceremony wasn’t empowered by the State of Utah to marry anyone. But there are *other* things to go wrong, too: a misfire is just one of those, and when you say it but don’t mean it, that’s a *different* kind of background condition that’s not satisfied. It doesn’t nullify the promise; when little children cross their fingers behind their backs while making promises, they’re misunderstanding this—or perhaps indulging a desire not to understand. Rather, it falls under a *different subheading*, which Austin labels ‘abuses’. Once again, we are seeing an argument by classification, that is to say, a stretch of an argument conducted as a series of speech acts.¹⁸

¹⁸Incidentally: another way to fail to be married by saying “I do” is to say so on stage, as part of a play; here Austin describes the utterance as ‘etiolated’ (HT 22, 92n, 104, 122). He says he’s putting *these* sorts of cases to one side, and Derrida, de Man, and their followers have criticized Austin on the grounds that the etiolated/nonetiolated distinction

3

Remember the rough argument sketch we're using to frame our discussion. The idea it expressed was that the standard and traditional view, which gives primacy to sentences that do the job of conveying true (or false) claims, presupposes that you can distinguish assertoric sentences from the other utterances. The counterclaim Austin is going to field is that you can't make the distinction fly, because you can't get such a classification to work. And we can already anticipate that the strategy will be to show that attempts at such classifications prove *unhappy*. Perhaps that's why Austin makes a point of telling us early on that "infelicity is an ill to which *all* acts are heir to which have the general character of ritual or ceremonial, all *conventional* acts" (HT 19, his emphasis). If *all*, then classifications, too.

We have already introduced Austin's first shot at a classification meant to support the distinction. Assertoric sentences (constatives) are true-or-false; they have truth conditions. Performatives, contrastingly, aren't true-or-false; they have happiness conditions. So when Austin tells us that he's "let[ting] some of [his] cats on the table" (HT 20), i.e., out of the bag, he's about to ask:

does the notion of infelicity apply to utterances *which are statements*? (HT 20, his emphasis)

And he is also about to argue that some performatives can be true-or-false. If he establishes both of these, then the classification turns out to be infelicitous, in roughly the way that this one would be: I hereby classify mammals into critters and varmints; *critters* have blood and skin (but no skeletons or hair), and *varmint*s have skeletons and hair (but no blood or skin).¹⁹

can't be sustained *either* (Derrida, 1988, pp. 133f). (That is, in a way they're just making the move Austin is making, but back at him. Fair enough.) The problem is, their criticism sticks only if Austin *needs* the distinction: if it's not just a throwaway, too; or, if he needs it at least temporarily, before he throws it away. But it's not at all clear to me that he does: Austin's *point* is that the performative/constative classification *doesn't* work. If it turns out that it presupposes another classification which also isn't workable, that's additional support for Austin, not criticism of his view. (Another way to put it is that Derrida is confused about Austin in exactly the way that Searle is: like Searle, he thinks that "general theory" is a correct characterization of "Austin's concept and project".)

¹⁹You might be wondering where this fits in Austin's table of 'infelicities' (HT 18). But a better question would be how much it matters which *sort* of infelicity this is. Recall that

It appears to [Austin] that it does not matter in principle at all how we decide in particular cases. (HT 29)

Let me briefly describe a detour from the main line of argument, in which Austin considers an objection to the performative-constative distinction which he thinks is too fast. Constatives, goes the objection, are alleged to have truth-conditions, in contrast to performatives, which don't. But a performative has happiness conditions; varying the example, if you apologize for having smeared butter on the inside of Professor Butterfield's toupee, that's infelicitous if you *didn't* smear butter on the inside of the toupee. But surely the happiness condition is satisfied when the proposition "You smeared butter on the inside of Professor Butterfield's toupee" is *true*. Consequently (the objection wraps up) performatives have truth-conditions as well, and therefore aren't distinct from constatives (HT 45–46).

This is obviously badly confused, and Austin would not have spent lecture time on it if there had not been a payoff. (Why confused? The reason truth conditions are so-called is that they're what make the *sentence* true, not that the conditions are themselves true.) Austin makes a show of charitably taking the point of the objection to be this. The ways truth- and felicity conditions work are substantively similar enough for there to be no point in insisting on calling the result of truth-conditions being satisfied *truth*, and the result of happiness conditions being satisfied *happiness*. Why should we think of these as being different, really? And if we don't, the attempted classification fails in a different way: a classification should not produce a distinction without a difference.

Austin's response to the objection so construed is, once again, to introduce a classification: this time, a classification of ways in which an utterance can involve or require the truth of some further claim (HT 47ff). Doing so allows him to say that constatives require their truth conditions in a way that is *different* than performatives require their happiness conditions: constatives "entail" their truth conditions; performatives "presuppose" or "imply" them. And that in turn allows him to continue to distinguish performatives

[Or again:]

Needless to say, and as a matter of general principle, there can be no satisfactory choice between these alternatives, which are too unsubtle to fit subtle cases. There is no short cut to expounding simply the full complexity of the situation which does not exactly fit any common classification. (HT 38)

[Or again:]

The distinctions are so loose that the cases are not necessarily easily distinguishable: and anyway, of course, the cases can be combined and usually are combined. (HT 41)

I take it that these remarks tell us that we had better not interpret Austin's main argument as turning on such problems of classifying particular cases of infelicities.

from constatives.

What *was* the payoff for giving extended consideration to that badly misguided objection? Austin describes philosophers who think the requirement we were just disambiguating can only take one form as “obsessional logicians” (HT 54), and that is likely to distract readers from a rebuke that Austin is administering to Bertrand Russell, on account of the latter’s theory of descriptions. You will recall that Russell’s famous analysis of definite descriptions renders sentences that seem to refer to nonexistent objects so that they come out false rather than senseless, by building the presupposition of existence into the content of the sentence.²⁰ Austin has just put himself in a position to complain that the existential presupposition of a claim like “The present king of France is bald”—his own example is “the statement that ‘John’s children are all bald’ if made when John has no children”—is differently logically related to the claim than its properly so-called truth conditions.²¹ It’s ‘presupposed’, not ‘entailed,’ and Russell’s treatment conflates the two.

The passing swipe at Russell is meant to put in place Austin’s own spin on the the upshot of the extended argument we are now examining. You might have thought that the conclusion of an argument against the standard propositionalist view would be that it was *false*. But recall that the point of the argument is that the standard view presupposes a distinction (between the assertoric, proposition-expressing sentences and other speech acts), and that that distinction cannot be made out. A view with such a failed underlying distinction is no more false than those failed definite descriptions; rather, it will turn out to be “null and void.”²²

²⁰That is, a sentence like “The present king of France is bald” is construed as saying that there is exactly one king of France, and he is bald; see Russell, 1905/1973.

²¹HT 50; he alludes to Russell’s example at HT 20, and again at HT 137.

²²HT 137, and Austin continues: “exactly as when I say that I sell you something but it is not mine or (having been burnt) is not any longer in existence.”

I can now explain one of the reasons I am uncomfortable with Crary’s rendering of Austin’s conclusion: if you allow that propositions are whatever it is that statements express (in that that is how the notion is purported to be introduced, and is its only anchor), and it then turns out that the notion of statement hasn’t been successfully made out, it eventuates that nobody has done the work necessary to make ‘proposition’ mean anything. As the New Wittgensteinians are wont to put it, it hasn’t been assigned a sense. That’s not quite the same thing as saying that propositions don’t exist, as though we already knew what they were—though it’s an allowable and vivid shorthand, and one which I allowed myself above. But if that is the point, then you ought to be pulled up short well before denying that propositions or statements come with, say, literal meanings.

Crary ends up describing the “argument against a familiar philosophical idea of literal sentence-meaning” as “Austinian-Wittgensteinian,” and while I wouldn’t want to conflate

4

In the course of defusing the confused objection we encounter a sudden swerve, into the decisive move against the manner of distinguishing statements that we have been considering. The contrast was that constatives have truth conditions (but not happiness conditions), whereas performatives have happiness conditions (but not truth conditions).²³ But when you assert that *p*, knowing that its truth-conditions aren't satisfied, you're *insincere*, and that's a *happiness* condition. It looks (or starts to look, because Austin will of course spend much more time and effort developing instances of this sort) like assertoric statements have happiness conditions *too*:

in order to explain what can go wrong with statements we cannot just concentrate on the proposition involved (whatever that is) [!] as has been done traditionally.²⁴

And if *that's* right, the constative-performative distinction can't be any good.

Come to think of it, it looks like we sometimes also assess performatives (*not* their happiness conditions, as in the earlier and confused version of the objection, but the performatives themselves) for truth and falsity. E.g., “I warn you that the bull is about to charge” is *mistaken* (or false) in pretty much the way a statement is.²⁵ Thus

considerations of the happiness or unhappiness type may infect statements (or some statements) and considerations of the type of truth and falsity may infect performatives (or some performatives).

In general we may say this: with both statements (and, for example, descriptions) *and* warnings, &c., the question can arise, granting that you had the right to warn and did warn, did state, or did advise, whether you were in the right to state or warn or

these two very different philosophers, I'm willing to accept the label as a reminder that reading Austin as committed to (what in the Wittgenstein literature gets tagged as) sensical nonsense is a bad idea.

²³Cf. “the old idea that the constative utterance is true or false and the performative is happy or unhappy” (HT 54).

²⁴HT 52; in the end, of course, Austin will insist “that statements *are* liable to every kind of infelicity to which performatives are liable” (HT 136).

²⁵HT 55; see also 85. Remarkably, given that Austin himself emphasizes this point, his followers have felt it necessary to argue that “explicit performatives can be true or false” (Holdcroft, 1978, 22f).

advise—not in the sense of whether it was opportune or expedient, but whether, on the facts and your knowledge of the facts and the purposes for which you were speaking, and so on, this was the proper thing to say.²⁶

Your warning may have been unjustified, and it may have been justified but *false*: the bull *wasn't* about to charge, after all. The constative-performative distinction is coming apart in his hands, and so Austin begins considering fallback versions; I'll only briefly remind you how that proceeds. He tries out other variations on the constative-performative distinction: First, he toys with grammatical contrasts (HT 47, 55–59, 73ff), and notices that these aren't decisive. Then he wonders if there is “a complex criterion... involving both grammar and vocabulary” (HT 59). This gets him to “an *asymmetry* of a systematic kind between [the first person singular present indicative active—e.g., “I pronounce you guilty”] and other persons and tenses of the *very same verb*,” which he allows is “precisely the mark of the performative verb (and the nearest thing to a *grammatical* criterion in connexion with performatives)” (HT 63). That is, if I say, “I bet,” I *have* made a bet, whereas if I say, “You bet,” no bet has actually been made; perhaps *this* will allow us to see the classification through.

But the ‘nearest thing’ isn't enough, because the grammatical form is also used to describe habitual activity (“I bet” can mean, I bet every morning), and has various other uses. Moreover, there isn't always a way of putting the performative into this shape; you don't, in English anyway, insult someone by saying, “I insult you.”²⁷

At this point, the attempted classification has been run into the ground. Austin has made a good faith effort to sustain it, and it's just gotten into more and more trouble. When you're this bogged down (the classification has turned out to be unhappy!), and you're the owner of the classification, then there's a speech act that's allowed you: you can take it back. So Austin does: “It is time then to make a fresh start on the problem” (HT 91). And from this point on, when Austin mentions constatives, it will be with increasing dubiousness: e.g., “a straightforward constative utterance (if there is such an animal).”²⁸

²⁶HT 55, 145; compare the former passage to 136–139, as well as 140–145 throughout.

²⁷Perhaps, Austin notes (HT 31n), in German one once did, in certain very special circumstances.

²⁸HT 110; I promised second thoughts about Austin's initial strategic decision to construct an argument out of speech acts, rather than relying on philosophically conventional truths-to-truths validity, and this is a good place to introduce them. Now that we have

5

His fresh start is to introduce *another* classification, meant, as before, to underwrite or spell out the distinction between assertoric sentences and other utterances; as we should by now expect, Austin is continuing his argument by performing yet another speech act.

Perhaps, he reasons, the problem with the earlier classification was that it tried to sort utterances into the saying ones, and the doing ones. But perhaps it needn't be this *or* (exclusively or) that: if you do things *by* saying them, you would expect to find truth-conditions and happiness conditions attached to the same utterance. The problem would then be to distinguish the layers, as it were, from each other. So Austin proposes that

- there's the mere production of a contentful, grammatical sentence: the *locution* layer;²⁹

come some distance in our reconstruction of Austin's argument, you will notice that although the large-scale architecture of it is assembled of speech acts (so far: advancing a distinction, defending it with subsidiary classifications, and then withdrawing it when those can't be sustained), several of the subsidiary moves lent themselves to being cast as what might as well have been natural deduction exercises. Now, we shouldn't take the form of my own redescription of his argument, which has turned out to be—largely—a series of assertions, as revealing the underlying logical form of that argument: when translating from the idiom of one philosophical tradition to another, the logical grammar of the translation can't be presumed to be the grammar of the source. Nonetheless, it doesn't seem to me that Austin purified even his own argument of truth-dependent inferences, and I don't think Austin ever committed himself to the position that you can't give traditionally valid arguments.

In that case, if it turns out that an utterance can both have a truth value *and* be felicitous or otherwise, what is to prevent someone from piecing together an argument that relies entirely on that conventional understanding of validity? When people are arguing, they normally help themselves to whatever lies ready to hand; so we should expect ordinary arguments to be a mix of truths-to-truths argumentation, strategically executed speech acts, and whatever else will assist them in making their points. And sometimes there are artificially constrained modes of argumentation; for instance, papers published in mathematics journals are supposed to rely on truths-to-truths arguments alone.

It seems that the nonstandard form of *this* argument is to be accounted for, anyway in part, as a matter of rhetorical effectiveness. If you were objecting to the idea that propositions, the bearers of truth and falsity, were solely responsible for the formal success of an argument, and then you constructed your own argument for that in a way that made the successive truth-values of your claims bear all the burden of its success, you would pretty much guarantee a response along the lines of, "Yeah, sure." If Austin's position was to be convincing, speech acts would be required to play a load-bearing role in the argument, and so they did.

²⁹And notice that Austin emphasizes the speech act he's engaging in. He says: "The

- there’s also the thing you do in producing the locution, and invoking a convention as you do so (e.g., making a promise, warning someone, etc.): the *illocution* layer;
- and finally, there are effects of saying what you said that aren’t in the same way convention-dependent (e.g., convincing someone, persuading someone, motivating someone to act, deterring someone, misleading someone, etc.): the *perlocution* layer.

For instance, “You may . . . deter me . . . from doing something [perlocutionary force] by informing me [illocutionary force] . . . what the consequences of doing it would in fact be,” and saying what the consequences would be is the straightforward production of a meaningful sentence [locutionary force].³⁰ Again, and to anticipate, the point of introducing this classification is to show that it *won’t* work out, and so to show that the distinction between assertoric sentences and other allegedly contrasting utterances can’t be sustained. This *isn’t* the foundation of some spiffy, shiny new theory. It’s a throwaway.

Austin finds a natural break between illocutions and perlocutions: the illocutions stop where the merely conventional consequences give out, and

act of ‘saying something’ in this full normal sense I call, i.e., dub, the performance of a locutionary act” (HT 95). Compare, at the very end of the lectures (HT 164), when he insists that he has “been doing [!] two things”.

³⁰HT 110. At this point, we may seem to be on what is now the familiar ground of action theory: just as Anscombe’s murderer poisons the people in the house by pumping the water by moving his arm up and down, so Austin’s speakers perform a perlocutionary act by performing an illocutionary act, by producing a locution, by producing a rhetic act (“vocables with a certain more-or-less definite sense and reference”), by performing a phatic act (saying the words), by performing a phonetic act (HT 92–95). So note two ways in which Austin is deviating from Anscombe’s model. First, over and above its being optional to make clear what more narrowly described action was used to perform a more broadly described action (Sbisà, 2014, p. 17), there may be no particular action satisfying any description belonging to a given layer. (For instance, we know what I promised to do, but because my speech came out garbled, it isn’t clear what exactly I *said*; or—an example from Kissine, 2013, p. 14—you blush because your hairdresser was mentioned, even though you failed to register what illocution was being produced.) And second, where Anscombe seems to think that these action ‘accordions’ bottom out in a mere bodily action, such as the movement of an arm, Austin is visibly skeptical about the intelligibility of such a view: see, e.g., his mention of “our actual action in the *supposed* minimal physical sense” (HT 111, my emphasis).

(We can anticipate his reasons: The segmenting of an action into an Anscombe-like accordion is a matter of making distinctions. Why should you be sure, *before* you’ve shown that you’re making distinctions that you can sustain, that there will be a *final* such distinction, and that it will always fall in the same place, between the ‘physical’ and everything else?)

although there has been a great deal of subsequent discussion of the would-be distinction, perhaps because it does occupy a good deal of Austin's own text, it will turn out that following the flow of his argument requires focusing on the other contrast-in-the-making, that between locutions and illocutions. Here we need to remember that we are working with posthumously redacted lecture notes; as the editors remark (HT vii), each lecture becomes progressively more fragmentary as it proceeds, and the same can clearly be said of the series of lectures as a whole. Indeed, Austin begins his wrapup by confessing, "I have as usual failed to leave enough time in which to say why what I have said is interesting" (HT 163). We tend not to bear this in mind as much as we ought, because, as editors must, they cleaned up Austin's literary remains for publication. But it is precisely the punch line, which comes at, or towards, the very end, that we can expect to be in the most fragmentary state, which in turn means that precisely the most important stretch of argument will receive the shortest and least complete exposition. We must not be misled by the respective lengths of the treatments of the two distinctions.³¹

The point of Austin's larger argument is to show himself (but of course not himself only) unable to manage the distinction between assertoric sentences and all of the other speech acts. Where would that distinction appear within this new conceptual scheme? There is perhaps a certain amount of muddiness in the exposition: a locution is something that can be reported as indirect speech, as for instance when I report that James said it was going to be a nice day, and it's easy to think that the locutions must be the statements we are after, as contrasted with the illocutions, which are those other speech acts.³² At this point in the argument, however, it is clear that a statement is an illocutionary act on a par with promising, warning, bequeathing and so on. The distinction between statements and other speech acts must be found *within* the class of illocutionary acts, if it is to be found at all. Austin points out that on the one hand, we can be entirely clear as to what you *merely said*, while still being in the dark as to whether you stated

³¹The fragmentary state of, especially, the tail ends is probably due to Austin's being, as we now colloquially put it, a control freak. Here is Isaiah Berlin's impression: "I think he... did not, at any rate in public, move his pieces until the entire plan of campaign had been thoroughly thought out, and he felt secure against any possible refutation. One of the criticisms made of him—I think a just one—was that he refused to advance rather than face the smallest possible risk of successful counter-argument" (1973, p. 6).

³²There is a marginal note in Austin's manuscript which suggests that he himself entertained, or lapsed into, this way of thinking: in the course of explaining the component layers of a locution, he jotted to himself "said \equiv asserted stated" (HT 167, annotation to p. 95).

it, suggested it, warned the others and so on.³³ Similarly,

An ‘imperative’ may be an order, a permission, a demand, a request, an entreaty, a suggestion, a recommendation, a warning (‘go and you will see’), or may express a condition or concession or a definition (‘Let it...’), &c. To hand something over to someone may be, when we say ‘Take it’, the giving it or lending it or leasing it or entrusting it. To say ‘I shall’ may be to promise, or to express an intention, or to forecast the future. And so on.³⁴

Now, Austin went in for carefully setting up points he wanted to make well ahead of time. So let’s return for a moment to an earlier argument, made in passing, against the proposal that the performative-constative distinction is either explicitly marked (by tags such as “I hereby state that” or “I promise that”), or—when a sentence is not so marked—that it can be rewritten without loss in the explicit form (HT 79). Here the disjunction is being considered as a candidate for making the distinction on *almost*-lexical grounds.

Performatives take ‘primary’ forms, as when you make a promise just by saying “I’ll be there”; Austin thinks these are historically the primitive or original forms of speech acts (HT 71f). The primary forms of performatives lack vocabulary-based markers, which is why the lexical surface on its own isn’t enough to pick out the performatives. If the performatives are to be

³³HT 98; Searle objects to the locution/illocution distinction (1968, p. 407), taking himself to be correcting Austin; his first reason is that illocutionary force is built into sentence meaning, so that once you have settled what the locution is, you are in a position to settle what the illocution is, anyway “for a large class of cases,” the ones in which you are explicit about your illocutionary act. But this would not be a successful objection to Austin’s pending distinction: in a great many other Anscombian accordions, more restrictive descriptions of an action allow you to settle broader such descriptions. I will take up Searle’s second reason in note 38.

³⁴HT 76f; compare, at HT 158f: “To say ‘I favour *X*’ may, according to context, be to *vote* for *X*, to *espouse* *X*, or to *applaud* *X*.” Again, at HT 115n, he observes: “We may agree on the actual words that were uttered, and even also on the senses in which they were being used and on the realities to which they were being used to refer, and yet still disagree as to whether, in the circumstances, they amounted to an order or a threat or merely to advice or a warning.”

These remarks can serve to indicate a second reason that I am uncomfortable with Cray’s take on Austin’s conclusion. Whether or not she is correct in taking locution generally to depend on illocution, Austin’s willingness to allow that we can know what was meant without knowing what the illocution was is casual in a way that contrasts markedly with edgily qualified introduction of categories that he is introducing only in order to discard.

picked out using a vocabulary-grammar criterion, it will have to be deployed this way: any performative can be rewritten, without change in content or force, into a sentence that satisfies the criterion. (E.g., “I’ll be there” is a performative because you could rewrite it as “I promise I’ll be there.”)

Austin objects that many performatives (the ones he calls ‘behabitives’) are conventionalized expressions of emotion: think of “Welcome!” or “Thank you!” or “Congratulations!” And performatives that are conventionalized expressions of emotion typically have, as their primitive forms, utterances that require one to have the emotion. For example, the primitive form of “I apologize” is “I’m sorry”, and that either entails or implies or presupposes (it’s a delicate matter to say which) that you really *feel* sorry. Clearly the fully conventionalized expressions of emotion carry no such implication.³⁵ And so primitive forms of conventionalized expressions of emotion can’t be rewritten, without change of content or force, into the conventionalized forms that satisfy the grammatical-vocabulary criterion.

It follows that the distinction between performatives and constatives can’t be made out using a grammatical- and vocabulary-based criterion for identifying performatives—but the real point of the argument was to introduce, for subsequent use, the notion of the historically prior and still pervasive primary form of a speech act. Austin later advises us that “the old distinction... between *primary* and *explicit* will survive the sea-change from the performative/constative distinction to the [new, three-tier] theory of speech acts quite successfully” (HT 150). So, returning from our digression, we will now be considering the primary forms of *illocutions*.

But now, suppose I say that you’re going to be back later. Is that a prediction? An order? Or even a query? Imagine this exchange appearing in a novel: “‘You’re going to be back later,’ he said. It was a plea. ‘Don’t wait up,’ she replied.”

Certainly *sometimes* there is already a fact of the matter as to which it was, one that would permit rewriting the sentence with the appropriate illocutionary tag. But often there is not. Sometimes the vagueness results from laziness, as when the speaker hasn’t settled (that is, done anything to settle) how he means it; sometimes, as Austin suggests, it’s because a distinction hasn’t yet been firmed up over the history of the language; sometimes, perhaps especially interestingly, it’s because the social situation requires that a choice between illocutionary acts not have been made. “The egg drop

³⁵ Although Alston, 2000, pp. 112f, objects that to produce the conventionalized behabitive, followed by a disclaimer of the corresponding emotion, counts as a pragmatic contradiction.

soup and the braised tofu will be enough,” I say. Is this an observation? A proposal? My terminating the order and sending the server on her way? To politely negotiate this bit of dinner table business is to allow you to decide: perhaps you nod at the server (acknowledging that I have terminated the order); but perhaps you make a counterproposal (in which we case we allow, retroactively, that it was only a proposal).

We had better preempt a response that is likely to occur to adherents of the sort of view that Austin is trying to undercut: that the ambiguity is, as they would be prone to put it, epistemic rather than ontological: that is, that there is a fact of the matter, already, as to which illocution it is, even if it is hard—or impossible—to discern. However, speech acts are *acts*, and when you perform an action, whatever you do not do is left undone.³⁶ If you have not done the work, whatever it is, necessary to make your locution into an illocution of one kind or another, then it *isn't* one rather than the other.

[P]rimitive or primary forms of utterance will preserve the ‘ambiguity’ or ‘equivocation’ or ‘vagueness’ of primitive language in this respect; they will not make explicit the precise force of the utterance. This may have its uses: but sophistication and development of social forms and procedures will necessitate clarification. But note that this clarification is as much a creative act as a discovery or description! It is as much a matter of making clear distinctions as of making already existent distinctions clear.³⁷

Just as an animal must be an animal of some definite species, an illocution must be an illocution of some definite type; since this is an important point, let me pause to make it vivid. Recall that illocutions were introduced as acts that constitutively invoked conventions; they produce status

³⁶Here it is natural for Austin’s opposition to suppose that it is a mental act—how you *intended* your utterance—which determines which type of illocution it was. (For discussion of a sophisticated version of this view, see Holdcroft, 1978, ch. 4.) So here we also need to remind ourselves of Austin’s earlier treatment of the notion that promising is a mental act. But in a way the simpler consideration is that just as you may not have signaled to others whether you meant your remark as an exploratory observation or as an order, you may not have decided that for yourself. Even if intentions are relevant here, why assume that they have always been conjured up?

³⁷HT 72—and we can now float a reason for Austin not insisting that the problems he has been raising are classifiable under one or another heading in his table of infelicities. Types of infelicities too will emerge, be articulated, and get invoked only over the course of time.

changes. (Once you smash the champagne bottle over the bow and pronounce the required words, the ship *has* a name.) But this means that if you are not invoking the conventions required for that status change, you have not executed any illocution at all. There is a ritual that names a ship; there is a different ritual that names a baby; that does not bring into existence a less-definite ritual that christens either a boat or a baby. A genus of illocutionary acts is not itself a type of illocution, and if you have not made your locution into a definite type of illocutionary act, then you haven't made it definitely an illocution at all.^{38, 39}

The question was whether we could make out the distinction Austin is resisting, between the propositionally-tasked sentences and the others, within the class of illocutions. Many illocutions and would-be illocutions appear in their primitive forms; often—not always!⁴⁰—the work of making them into one type of illocution rather than another, and thus of making

³⁸Searle, 1968, pp. 412, 416, thinks otherwise: “Every sentence has some illocutionary force potential, if only of a very broad kind, built into its meaning.” He does notice that illocutionary forces may be 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.” When a novelist presents dialogue, one way or another it will be tagged with something like “he said,” “she said”; Searle thinks this shows there to be always an illocutionary force.

But “says” is not an illocution: where are the status-changing conventions that constitute saying? Asking may be an illocution, but if it is, then pleading, requesting and so on are not *different* illocutions, because they do not invoke different constitutive conventions; they are just askings, modulated so as to convey various impressions of urgency.

Similarly, Cohen, 1964, p. 118, announces that, “according to Austin every act of speaking [with uninteresting exceptions] . . . is both a locutionary and an illocutionary act”; but the passage he cites, which observes only that “when we have an explicit performative we also have an illocutionary act” (HT 132), says no such thing. The misreading is sufficiently widespread to raise the question of what preconceptions are driving it.

³⁹Compare—and contrast—Kissine, 2013, p. 4: “It turns out that some utterances that are endowed with contextually determined, fully propositional meaning do not constitute direct illocutionary acts; at a literal level some are just locutionary acts.” This sounds at first blush like the view I am developing, but proves to turn on his Hare-like (thus, very un-Austinian) account of illocutionary forces, on which sarcastic and ironic remarks typically fail to qualify as illocutions (71ff, and compare the imperatival analog at pp. 123f).

⁴⁰Not always’: sometimes stage-setting and context allow us to treat an unmarked primitive expression of an illocution as the illocution it is:

If someone says ‘I state that he did not do it’, we investigate the truth of his statement in just the same way as if he had said ‘He did not do it’ *simpliciter*, when we took that to be, as we naturally often should, a statement. That is, to say ‘I state that he did not’ is to make the very same statement as to say ‘He did not’. . . (HT 135)

them into illocutions rather than mere locutions, has not been shouldered or completed. (And it has not been completed *even if* we can anticipate the illocutionary genus of the utterance.) That is, in the cases where the locution/illocution distinction goes wobbly, so do the distinctions between the various types of illocution. In this round of argument, statements were to be identified as one sort of illocution, contrasted with others. Thus attention to the primary/explicit distinction undercuts the application of the locution/illocution distinction, and so indirectly undercuts the availability of distinctions between different illocutionary acts, which pulls the rug out from under the supposition that we can generally—rather than in special cases—distinguish statements from other speech acts. And this is why Austin casually enough, toward the end of his lectures, adds the caveat to “the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary,” namely, “*if these notions are sound*” (HT 149, and that is Austin’s emphasis).

By way of wrapping up, Austin retreats to a perhaps still viable classification, that of *families* of illocutionary acts (HT 150); but even these are messy, overlapping, and more a matter of emphasis than the cut-and-dried contrast of features: “It could well be said that all aspects are present in all my classes” (HT 152). Constatives have survived only as a type of performative, so as we lose “the notion of the purity of the performatives” (HT 150), we dispose of the constatives once and for all—“unless perhaps as a marginal limiting case” (HT 150), “an abstraction, an ideal” (HT 148), whose “truth and falsity are... [also] an artificial abstraction” (HT 149). No doubt there are special cases in which steps are taken to ensure that a full-fledged illocution of a definite type is produced, and no doubt some of these involve statements explicitly marked as such (“I hereby state and affirm that...”). But the opposing view required the special cases to be the at-least-pervasive default; the distinction was supposed to be present pretty much across the board. We know what the distinction would look like if we made it (and this is how Austin can seem to affirm it at, say, HT 103). But since we do not enforce it all that consistently, it turns out to be a distinction that it is far too often not possible to draw.

6

As it turns out, there was never supposed to be a theory of speech acts—which is not to say that Austin didn’t think there *were* what he called “speech acts,” or that it wouldn’t be important to think about them. There was a conclusion, alright, and one that would have real bite even today,

if we thought that Austin had nailed it down; and it is certainly worth considering whether his argument establishes it—or for that matter whether an argument *like* the one he constructed *could* establish it. But anyone who charged off to work out the theory of speech acts, thinking that he was finishing up something Austin had started, just didn't follow the argument. And anyone who thought he could just go ahead and *apply* (in his reading of some literary text, for instance) a theory of speech acts that had been developed by Austin also simply wasn't paying attention.

In retrospect, we could have anticipated his stance. Back in the day, a theory was thought of as a set of propositions, closed under deductive entailment. If your objective was to dislodge propositions from their place in philosophy, you would not go about that by arguing for and trying to enshrine such a collection of propositions.

And there is a deeper reason, namely the motivations shared by the would-be founders of the abortive tradition of ordinary language philosophy with their early-analytic foils—I mean, Russell, Carnap, Ayer and so on. Those schools shared the view that philosophy of language was first philosophy, and that the metaphysics of their Hegelian predecessors and Continental contemporaries was linguistic illusion. Ordinary language philosophers such as Austin agreed to all that, but went farther, turning their sights on the technical apparatus of analytic philosophy. To Austin (and Wittgenstein, but that is not our present topic), Russell and Carnap deploying propositions and sense-data looked just the way that Hegel and Heidegger had respectively looked to Russell and Carnap: victims of linguistic illusion. A Young Turk of this sort will understandably be very cautious about repeating the errors of the immediately previous regime.⁴¹

Now that we have walked ourselves through Austin's argument we had better turn, albeit briefly, to diagnosing its historical uptake. That will put us in a position to ask what we have to gain from the investment of effort needed to construe Austin's argument correctly.

If his readers have by and large missed Austin's argument entirely, and taken him to be promoting a theory of speech acts, that is in part because they overlook his signaling. Austin notes at the outset that everything he says early on “is provisional, and subject to revision in the light of later sections” (HT 4n); and he works his way into his second lecture by answer-

⁴¹Accordingly, although I am quite sympathetic to the substantive views attributed to Austin by Bauer, 2015, pp. 54, 92, 97, 105—she holds roughly that he is calling out philosophers for failing to acknowledge their responsibility for what they do with their words, in something like the way that Stanley Cavell calls us out for not acknowledging our fellow human beings—I don't see this agenda in Austin's writing myself.

ing the question of how as philosophers we are to proceed by suggesting: “One thing we might go on to do, of course, is to take it all back: another would be to bog, by logical stages, down.”⁴² We can now see that Austin was announcing the program for his own argument. He is going to do *both*: the justification for his conclusion, which is taking it all back (namely, the distinction to which he is objecting), turns out to have been, precisely, bogging down, stage by logical stage. Lest his readers forget where he is going, he occasionally reminds them, in asides; for example, discussing the way we peel off consequences of one type or another to arrive at the series of ever more circumscribed act-types he has been putting in place, he tells us that “we can, *or may like to think we can*” do so (HT 111, my emphasis). But of course I do not think it is illuminating to suggest that Austin’s readers have had tin ears; presumably they overlook his signaling because they are not prepared for an argument of this novel form.

The argument as I have presented it criticizes the assumptions and practice of the formerly and still reigning philosophical tradition, and I have emphasized that it was not an attempt to put in place anything like a body of theory. (Which is not to say that Austin wasn’t trying to improve our understanding of speech acts and the workings of language more generally: not all understanding amounts to endorsing a *theory*.) Austin was often compared to Wittgenstein, and Wittgenstein’s self-conception, at any rate, had it that his methods of argumentation produced only dissolutions. *Could* an argument by speech act put in place constructive, substantive results?

The law is probably just such a body of results, established via argument conducted by speech act.⁴³ Juries find and judges pronounce; defendants plead; attorneys object and judges sustain: and the upshot is not only a series of trial-by-trial legal conclusions, but a relatively systematic body of common law that is drawn upon as precedent in subsequent proceedings. That body of law is not exactly a theory about matters of fact in the sense that we analytic philosophers have thought ourselves entitled to take for granted. But we should not have expected it to be.

Should we take Austin to have established the conclusion he was trying for? Notice first that the type of argument which Austin has deployed is nondeductive; there are many ways to resist the conclusion of most philosophical arguments, and this one is no exception. This particular argument

⁴²HT 13; Warnock complained that “Austin...did not subsequently consider in any great detail how much of the provisional account was to be conceived of as surviving” (1973, p. 80n10). That was merely an error; Austin *did* consider, very carefully, and the answer to the implicit question is, hardly any of it at all.

⁴³For orienting remarks, see Hart, 1968.

turned on being licensed to withdraw a classification when enough in the way of good-faith efforts to make it out have collapsed. But one might worry that Austin gave up too soon; or that his attempts to articulate the distinctions he was examining were inept: one could object to the argument by trying to do better.

Moreover, the argument seems to turn on the requirement that a distinction, to be made, has to be *articulated*, which in turn seems to suppose that if I can't articulate a distinction, I can't discriminate between the items on both sides of it. That's implausible: I know trashy literature when I see it, but it's not like I can spell out the distinction between bathtub reading and writing of literary merit. Isn't Austin just repeating the error of the early Platonic dialogues, whose hapless protagonists were given to understand that unless they could define some virtue, they couldn't *really* be morally knowledgeable—or fully virtuous themselves?

I don't know that the apparent misstep is fatal. It's one thing to rely on a capacity to discriminate, when I'm choosing my reading matter; it's another to rest the weight of a philosophical enterprise, involving the construction of layer after layer of elaborate theory, on a theoretical term I can't cleanly introduce. Compare: I can complain, informally, about a translation, by invoking meanings ("They don't mean the same thing"); but if I want to build a philosophical position that uses meaning as its most important building block, my grip on the concept had better not stop there. Given the uses to which the proposition is put in analytic philosophy, Austin is probably within his rights to demand the sort of act of distinguishing that he does.

The idea being expressed by the argument is perhaps something along these lines: We analytic philosophers never did the work of earning the entitlement to use what we take to be one of our very, very basic concepts. We go off talking about propositions as though we knew what we meant, and we have somehow not noticed that we never took the trouble to make the technical term mean anything. That seems to me like a claim that we should take very seriously—which is not the same thing as taking it to have been established by the argument we have been reconstructing.⁴⁴

⁴⁴Relatedly, Austin suggests that we might treat the constative statement as an idealization and, for my own part, I am quite sympathetic to the thought that propositions are best understood as idealizations of some kind (Millgram, 2009). Now, an idealization always has to be accompanied with an explanation of what uses it is suitable for, and why; in our tradition, that story is conspicuously absent. So while I have my doubts about the Austinian argument we have been reconstructing, I think there are independent reasons to treat its conclusion as plausible.

We can anticipate Austin's own likely response to expressions of confidence in our grip on propositions that appeal to their role in an ongoing research program, to the existence

Austin's mode of argumentation, I observed, was dialectically well motivated. If you want to argue against the assumptions that underlie the conception of argument common to most analytic philosophers, and if you do not want your argument to be a ladder you have to throw away, you will need to find a different way to argue. And if you are serious rather than sophisticated—I mean, if you do not want to discard the practice of argument entirely—you had better be prepared to offer a convincing alternative to the mode of argumentation you are attacking. So even if Austin's own argument does not work, philosophers who wish to contest the assumptions I have been gesturing at should have an interest in Austin, as a role model.

Moreover, what was perhaps most valuable about the now-defunct ordinary-language tradition were its innovations in the sphere of philosophical logic, by which I mean its experiments with novel forms of argument. When I teach Wittgenstein, I tell my students that while his views on this and that philosophical question are no doubt interesting, what I hope them to come away with is the ability to conduct Wittgensteinian arguments on topics that Wittgenstein himself never considered; and I could equally well say that about Austin. Argument is, to borrow an Aristotelian concept, the material cause of philosophy: it is the clay out of which we craft our philosophical ideas. To have a new kind of argument on hand is to have available a different medium into which to render our philosophical thinking. The first step toward integrating such a new kind of argument (in this case, not exactly new, but lost and found) into our philosophical repertoire is to have specimens of it clearly in view.

A Appendix: *Sense and Sensibilia*

If what I have outlined really *is* the argument of *How to Do Things with Words*—I am too regularly asked—then why doesn't anyone else read it that way? The response I gestured at above was that philosophers used to one conception of argument aren't generally prepared to recognize novel forms of argumentation when they encounter them. But to reinforce my claim that Austin did sometimes conduct his arguments as I say, I can provide an overview (don't worry, it will be comparatively terse) of the strategy of *Sense and Sensibilia*—that other course of lectures, subsequently turned

of a large literature discussing what propositions are and so on. His *Sense and Sensibilia*, an analogous challenge to the existence of sense data, was launched at a time when those theoretical entities likewise played a central role in an ongoing and flourishing research program (we still remember Carnap's *Aufbau*), when there was a large literature arguing about just what sense data *were*, etc. Austin was visibly unimpressed.

into a book. I will be first and foremost after the point that the common denominator of the two arguments is an attempt to convince you that a speech act went missing or failed, but doing so will allow us to say a little more about why we should renew our interest in Austin's work.

Where *How to Do Things with Words* contested the central dogmas of analytic philosophy of language, here Austin is taking on traditional epistemology: the idea that there is a world of sensory experience, which is what you immediately encounter and know, and whose elements have been variously called "sensations," "impressions" (by Hume), "sense data" (by early 20th-century positivists), and sometimes "mere appearances". These elements were assigned a foundational role in the architecture of knowledge: what you know *first* ('immediately' or 'directly', and thus with certainty) are your sensations; the rest of the world beyond them is apprehended inferentially—and maybe *not* known, if skeptical arguments show that inferences from the sensations to the outside world can't be made safe.⁴⁵ The sense data—the appearances—are how things look to you, and surely you can't be wrong about *that*. So the job of epistemology (and maybe of certain kinds of metaphysics, the variants which try to treat material bodies as constructions out of sense data) is to say what the relationship is between the appearances and the material objects we care about, and thus to determine what we're in a position to know about them. Just so we know where Austin is going, here's a concluding remark:

there *could* be no *general* answer to the questions what is evidence for what, what is certain, what is doubtful, what needs or does not need evidence, can or can't be verified. If the Theory of Knowledge consists in finding grounds for such an answer, there is no such thing. (SS 124)

⁴⁵Here is Austin saying just that:

In a nutshell, the doctrine about knowledge, 'empirical' knowledge, is that it has *foundations*. It is a structure the upper tiers of which are reached by inferences, and the foundations are the *data* on which these inferences are based. (So of course—as it appears—there just have to be sense-data.) Now the trouble with inferences is that they may be mistaken; whenever we take a step, we may put a foot wrong. Thus—so the doctrine runs—the way to identify the upper tiers of the structure of knowledge is to ask whether one might be mistaken, whether there is something one *can doubt*; if the answer is Yes, then one is not at the basement. And conversely, it will be characteristic of the *data* that in their case no doubt is possible, no mistake can be made. So to find the data, the foundations, look for *the incorrigible*. (1962, p. 105)

(From here on out, I'll cite the book by "SS" in the running text.)

A.1

Perhaps one reason that *Sense and Sensibilia* is no longer much read is the way that it seems to be closely engaging a small handful of figures who were perhaps prominent in the middle of the last century, but are not taken to be central figures today. A. J. Ayer, a flag-bearer for logical positivism, serves as the primary foil, but Austin also takes up G. J. Warnock in the last chapter, and in addition mentions H. H. Price on a regular basis.⁴⁶ However, we needn't be distracted by the particular targets, who are meant to be no more than samples and fair representatives of a very old tradition.

The organizing theme of the book is the so-called Argument from Illusion, which I'll rehearse in a moment, and here is David Hume's mid-eighteenth century gesture at it:

'Twill first be proper to observe a few of those experiments, which convince us, that our perceptions are not possest of any independent existence. When we press one eye with a finger, we immediately perceive all the objects to become double, and one half of them to be remov'd from their common and natural position. But as we do not attribute a continu'd existence to both these perceptions, and as they are both of the same nature, we clearly perceive, that all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits. This opinion is confirm'd by the seeming encrease and diminution of objects, according to their distance; by the apparent alterations in their figure; by the changes in their colour and other qualities from our sickness and distempers; and by an infinite number of other experiments of the same kind; from all which we learn, that our sensible perceptions are not possest of any distinct or independent existence.⁴⁷

⁴⁶The title is obviously a pun, on his own name and on Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*; Austin used to joke that perhaps he would write a sequel, which he would call *Price and Prejudice*.

N.b.: Warnock edited up this book out of lecture notes, so you can't take the wording in detail to be Austin's. And, flagging both sides of what is no doubt occurring to you as the question of his reliability, on the one hand, Warnock included Austin's criticisms of his own view; so at any rate, he's honest. On the other, however, Warnock wrote the Routledge "Arguments of the Philosophers" volume on Austin (1989), and—here I have to be blunt about it—he's often visibly unable to follow Austin's trains of thought. So we're relying on lecture notes as they were reconstructed into a book by someone who probably, a good deal of the time, didn't really understand them.

⁴⁷Hume, 1888/1978, Bk. I, pt. iv, sec. 2; at pp. 210f; this section of the book was

Returning to the Argument in the first *Enquiry*, Hume remarks

I need not insist upon the more trite topics, employed by the sceptics in all ages, against the evidence of *sense*; such as those which are derived from the imperfection and fallaciousness of our organs, on numberless occasions; the crooked appearance of an oar in water; the various aspects of objects, according to their different distances; the double images which arise from pressing one eye; with many other appearances of a like nature.⁴⁸

As we see, already in 1748, Hume can say, “I need not insist upon the more trite topics, employed by the sceptics in all ages”—meaning, these examples are already familiar to everyone, and everyone knows the argument. As we see, he gives the very same illustrations that Austin quotes from Ayer and so on: the oar in the water, pressing on your eye, moving closer and farther away and observing that the apparent size of a coin gets bigger or smaller. . . These are timeless *ur*-scenes, primordial mythology passed down from one generation of philosophers to the next, not views that arrived with Ayer and his contemporaries, or departed with them.

Cobbling together a generic version of the *ur*-argument that accompanies those scenes, you can seem to see things out in the world where it’s obvious either that there’s nothing there, or that how you see it isn’t the way it is. So sometimes there are *seemings* that aren’t real things out there. But you can’t tell the seemings that aren’t real things out there from the things that really are there; people are fooled by mirages, trompe l’oeil and Andy Warhol sculptures. Consequently, although I take myself to be, say, watching a bird, what I *really* see is the way the bird *looks*, and maybe there’s no bird there at all (or maybe it’s not the kind of bird I thought it was, or maybe it’s one of those synthetic birds, from *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep*). What you must always be really seeing are just the seemings, and you see the real things out there *indirectly*, by way of seeing the seemings.⁴⁹

A.2

Perhaps due to the talky, endlessly nitpicky Smoking Room *style*, Austin’s readers tend to get lost in the discussion—even though the book is not that

originally published in 1739.

⁴⁸Hume, 1777/1978, sec. 12, pt. i; at p. 151.

⁴⁹Still, it’s worth noting parenthetically that the uses of sense data—those mere appearances—can vary. In Hume, it’s not so much about foundational epistemology as (his antique version of) conceptual analysis: you find out what the contents of your thoughts are by tracing them back to ‘impressions of sensation’.

long—and to come away with the impression that his complaint is that Ayer *et al.* lack the refined ear for proper English usage that we upper-class Oxford academics are fortunate enough to possess—pass the sherry, will you? We don't want this to happen to us, and so let's get the book's overarching argument out in front of us (and just to give it a convenient label, we can call it the Overarching Argument).

The philosopher's contrast between 'material objects' and 'sense data' (again, variously: 'perceptions' [SS 47], 'sense impressions,' 'mere appearances,' 'external bodies,' and in the last chapter Austin mentions Berkeley's use of 'ideas' [SS 132f]) isn't part of our generally available intellectual repertoire. For instance, it's not just that nonphilosophers don't use phrases like "material thing" in the way that figures in the contrast at issue: that category of things that, we're told dismissively, the ordinary man thinks he perceives surely includes "people, people's voices, rivers, mountains, flames, rainbows, shadows, pictures on the screen at the cinema, pictures in books or hung on walls. . ." (SS 8); these aren't all material things in any ordinary sense, but we're never told what other sense is intended. The terms or concepts, 'material objects' and 'sense data' (or their variants) are introduced by way of the contrast: "the expression 'material thing' is functioning *already*, from the very beginning, simply as a foil for 'sense-datum'" (SS 8). So those terms or concepts have been successfully introduced only if the philosophers have given the contrast between them a definite and suitable sense. Now, the philosopher's contrast is itself introduced via a small family of *ur*-scenes, with accompanying description of those scenes, given using descriptors from our generally available repertoire. Surely we can insist that a new concept or distinction is given a sense, via descriptors deployed from our generally available repertoire, only if those descriptors are deployed *correctly*. But in the presentation of those *ur*-scenes, the descriptors from the generally available repertoire are systematically—one after the other!—deployed *incorrectly*. The support for this last claim makes up almost all of Austin's lengthy point-by-point discussion, but we can skip ahead to flag Austin's conclusion, to wit, that the philosopher's contrast between material objects and sense data hasn't been given a definite and suitable sense. Sure enough, almost at the very end of the book, Austin will refer to it as "this quite bogus dichotomy" (SS 142); this means that the terms or concepts ('material objects,' 'sense data,' 'sense impressions,' 'mere appearances,' 'external bodies,' etc.) haven't ever been successfully introduced.

Austin doesn't say so straight out, but he is supposing that the only ways our terms or concepts can be meaningful is if they are either part of our generally available repertoire or were introduced as technical terms.

So when philosophers—epistemologists, in the first place—talk about material objects or sense data, what they say is literally meaningless. So there couldn't have *been* any 'sense data' and so on. There *weren't* any such foundations of empirical knowledge to identify. And the largest part of traditional epistemology was accordingly a side effect of something on a par with a grammatical mistake.

A.3

There are several places at which one might reasonably want to get off the boat in this argument, and this is not the place to consider them; however, a remark or two on its point will be in order.⁵⁰ The New Wittgensteinian

⁵⁰Nonetheless, let me gesture at how it was resisted and then patched by the most prominent member of the next (and last) generation of ordinary-language philosophers. Stanley Cavell remembered his encounters with Austin as formative—and revelatory—experiences (2002), and those moves back and forth must have been experienced as fraught.

Cavell pointed out that *projection* is a very basic feature of our linguistic competence (1979, ch. 7). To *feed* obviously has to do, well, with food, but when I ask you to feed the meter for me, if you control the concept, you insert dimes, rather than trying to smush your french fries into the coin slot. Projection into novel contexts must be possible, and there's no sharp division between a morph of an already-available concept, and fielding a new concept. These invitations to extend the usage of a concept to somewhere where there was no use before seem to slide between the horns of Austin's dilemma: recall, either already-available terms, or terms formally introduced via the proper deployment of already-available terms. But in that case, why can't we see the Argument from Illusion is an occasion for projection, one that's every bit as legitimate as "can you go feed the meter for me?" Why isn't *that* how 'material body' and 'sense data' get to mean what they do?

Having fielded the seemingly devastating objection, Cavell then offered a replacement for Austin's argument, although one that shifted its terms. (He was engaging a once-popular form of skepticism about material bodies, on which what you were alleged to see was not their appearances—your sensations—but rather the surface of the object facing you; the following argument is extracted from pp. 194–203.)

Where the Skeptic insists that you don't see all of the object in question, but just that front surface, we first observe that this isn't the ordinary use of "you don't see all of it". So, per the above, the Skeptic owes us a projection of 'not seeing all if it' into the new context, analogous to that projection of "feed" into "feed the meter". This projection will have to give a sense to—pick out—the *parts* you see and don't see. But parts have to be coherently located in our world of practices and interests; they have to get uptake in our responses, and what will work is tightly constrained, in something like the way that changes to the rules of baseball would be. (Most of the improvements someone might think up for the rules of the game will leave you with a game it won't be any fun to play—or something which you won't be able to play at all, and might no longer even count as a game.)

Now, *these* parts (those surfaces of the object that face you) are always shifting and flowing; in one way, they're rather like the front side of the moon; but importantly, since

catechism has it that what you're supposed to realize, on perusing Wittgenstein's works, is that some word or turn of phrase hasn't been assigned a function or use, and here's a typical instance:

“A is an object” is no more than an innocently meaningless sentence like “Socrates is frabble”; it *merely* contains a word to which, in its use as predicate noun, no meaning has been given.⁵¹

For my own part, I am not at all sure that so construing Wittgenstein's intentions is in place nearly as uniformly as it's made out to be; his agenda seems to me to be much more interesting, because much more intelligently varied. Here we can remain agnostic about Wittgenstein, while observing that something like this characterization sticks to the conclusions of both *How to Do Things with Words* and *Sense and Sensibilia*: in each case, it was maintained that a putatively central concept (“proposition” and “sense datum,” respectively) had never actually been given a sense or a use, and that, somehow, no one had ever noticed. That is, the upshot of these arguments isn't in the first place that a theory is false, but rather that there couldn't have *been* a theory, and the reason for the key terms' meaninglessness was shared. To wit, in both cases, a speech act—that of introducing a term or concept—wasn't successfully performed.

If you allow that this *is* the point of *Sense and Sensibilia*, I hope you'll be less disinclined to resist the reading I've offered of *How to Do Things with Words*. But let's adjoin a couple of cautionary lessons, which I hope will stimulate further engagement with Austin's efforts.

First, we took time out to notice the antiquity of the concept pair that Austin is contesting, which perhaps evidences its remarkably persistent allure. And it is remarkable that, following a brief eclipse, sense-data, mere appearances and so on are, under new names, once more respectable in polite philosophical conversation. The *term* “sense data” is still out of fashion, but keywords to give your search engine might include “consciousness studies” and “cognitive penetration”.

The Wittgensteinian and Austinian arguments that briefly dislodged the sense datum approach were never directly rebutted, and if sense data are *back*, like the zombies in made-for-TV sequels, maybe that's because, as

we can change perspectives on them, or move them, they're unlike the moon, which always shows us the same side. Their reconfigurations are too arbitrary to work as parts located in our world of practices and interests, and to elicit workable responses. So the projection fails. And so the skepticism fails.

⁵¹Diamond, 1991, p. 197; for an overview of and complaints about the New Wittgensteinian mode of reading, see Ulatowski, 2020.

Wittgenstein might have thought, the philosophical illusions are just too tempting. But possibly the reason is that we analytic philosophers are not used to arguments that proceed via an elaborate display, one meant to make it clear that there were sins of omission. This time around, I did recast Austin's Overarching Argument as a series of propositions—that is, in the form *we* presume an argument has to take—but that was not how he went about it. So the more general and methodological takeaway is that we want to be attuned to arguments of this form.

And second, one of the object lessons of the paper to which this discussion is appended has been reinforced. When you make it your business to overthrow metaphysics (as the logical positivists did—and as our gesture at Hume reminds us, the British Empiricists before them did), it is all too easy to find yourself introducing a new metaphysics. And so it is all too easy to leave it subject to the very same sort of attacks—on the literal senselessness of the theory—that were wielded against one's predecessors.

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