# Class Four: *How to Do Things with Worlds*, Lectures 1-3

Doing Things with Words - Ryan Simonelli

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1   Some Context

- **J.L. Austin:** Some facts:
  - Lived from 1911 - 1960.
  - Professor at Oxford from 1935 until his death.
    - * Was collegues with notable philosophers of a similiar stripe, Gilbert Ryle and H.P. Grice.
  - His philosophical work (along with that of Ryle) is often referred to as "Ordinary Langauge Philosophy," a movement seen as emerging from Wittgenstein's later work (also that of G.E. Moore to a lesser extent).
    - * Wittgenstein was at Cambridge in the 30s and 40s, and, though he didn't publish anything, was very influential in the British philosophical scene at the time.
    - * There is good reason to think that Wittgenstein (largely indirectly) was a substantial influence on Austin's work, though they actually had relatively little direct interaction, and Austin rarely mentions Wittgenstein explicitly.

- **How to Do Things with Words:**
  - Given as the William James Lectures at Harvard in 1955, based on earlier lectures given at Oxford from 1952-1954.
  - Despite Austin's cheeky opening remark that the content of the lectures is "neither difficult nor contentious," the lectures were philosophically revolutionary, constituting a radical re-thinking of the nature and function langauge in general.
  - Had a huge influence beyond just philosophy, which continues to be noticed even in pop culture today:
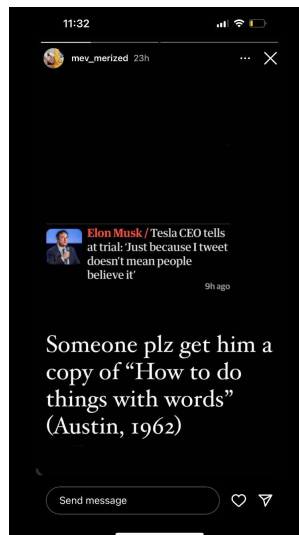
2   The Performative

- **Austin's Initial Characterization of the Perfomative:** Sentences that have the *gramatical form* of a declarative sentence, but, are unlike typical declarative sentences in the following two ways:
  - ‣ Though they might appear to, they don't actually "describe," "report" or function to make a statement, and, as such, aren't even true or false.
  - ‣ Uttering them constitutes the "doing of an action" which would not normally be described as merely "saying something."
- **Some Examples:**
  - ‣ 'I do' when said by the bride/groom at a marriage ceremony (or 'I now pronouce you man and wife' said by the officiant).
  - ‣ 'I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth' uttered when spashing the bottle against the stem.
  - ‣ 'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother' as occuring in a will.
  - ‣ 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow'
- **Question:** Can we think of other good examples that fit Austin's characterization?
- **Note on the Focus on Explicit Performatives:** We will eventually see that this intitial restriction to these specific types of sentences is just a useful way into an account of the non-assertoric functions of language more generally.
  - ‣ We'll come back to this, but, for now, note that many sentences used to perform speech acts that aren't explicit performatives can be turned into them, and this analysis will apply. For instance, the imperative "Shut the door" can be turned into the performative "I hereby command you to shut the door."

3   Happy and Unhappy Performatives

- **The Alternative to Truth and Falsity:** Performatives, Austin tells us, aren't true or false. Neverthless, there are analogous properties that they can have: *happiness* or *unhappiness.*
- **An Particularly Unhappy Case:** I'm at a naming of a ship ceremony, and just as the person designated to name the ship is about to smash the bottle, I run up, snatch the bottle, smash it on the ship and proclaim 'I name this ship the *Mr. Stalin.*'
  - ‣ Is the ship thereby named the *Mr. Stalin*? Clearly not. Why not? The conditions for a happy performative are not met. Buy what are these conditions?
- **Conditions A1 and A2:** The following two conditions have to be met in order for a performative to be happy:
  - ‣ **A1:** "There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and, further,
  - ‣ **A2:** "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked."
- **Conditions B1 and B2:** The following two conditions must also be met:
  - ‣ **B1:** "The procedure must be executed by all parties both correctly and
  - ‣ **B2:** "completely"

  If any these conditions aren't met, then the performative is unhappy in the sense that the act the utterance of it is meant to perform is not actually acheived.
- **The Stalin Example:** It seems that we have a failure of A2 (and perhaps B1 as well).
- **Our Examples from Class One:** Recall our examples from the first class:

- ‣ **Michael's Declaration of Brankrupcy:** This seems to be a failure of B1/B2. There is a conventional prodecure, and perhaps it can be appropriately invoked by Michael in case depicted in the episode, but Michael doesn't actually execute the procedure; he just utters the words associated with it.
- ‣ **Telling Random People What to Do:** When Andrew Hales (the youtuber) walked up to a random person and told him "Put your phone away," this seems to be a failure of A2.
  - ∗ *Note:* This analysis isn't really properly applicable here, since we're officially supposed to be dealing with explicitly conventionalized performatives. We'll return to this kind of case soon.

- **Question:** Can we think of any good cases where we have a failure of A1?

- **Conditions Γ1 and Γ2:** Even in cases when one performs the act, it can still be "unhappy" if the following two conditions aren't ment:
  - ‣ **Γ1:** "Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person perticipating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and futher
  - ‣ **Γ2:** "must actually so conduct themselves subsequently."

- **Another Example:** Consider a case in which I say "I promise to do the dishes" when I have no intention of actually doing the dishes. Here, in uttering the words that I did, I *did* promise (conditions A and B are met), but my utterance is still unhappy insofar as I don't have the intentions that someone who promises ought to have.

- **Mapping the Different Kinds of Infelicity:**