

## Class Five: *How to Do Things with Words*, Lectures 7-9

Doing Things with Words - Ryan Simonelli

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### 1 Quick Recap

- **Our Original Distinction:** We started out by making a distinction between two kinds of utterances:
  - *constative* utterances, wherein one simply says something
  - *performative* utterances, wherein, in saying something, one *does* something (beyond simply saying).
- **The Breaking Down of Our Distinction:** The attempt to maintain a genuine distinction between these two distinct kinds of utterances
  - The categories that we were regarding as distinctive of one type or the other (such as truth/falsity, happiness/unhappiness) seemed to apply—at least in some way—to the other type as well.
  - We attempted to try to relate all performatives to a kind of “standard form,” sentences of the form “I [performative verb]...” which make explicit the performative force implicit in that performative, but we noted that the force of some performatives couldn’t be made explicit in this way, such as “I insult ...,” “I compliment...” and perhaps also “I insinuate...”
  - Even if we achieved a characterization of performatives in terms of sentences of the form “I [performative verb] ...” it seems that it would inevitably include sentences of the form “I state . . .” which would be such that, in uttering them, one would simply say something, thus contradicting our basic distinction between constatives and performatives.
- **The Upshot:** We can’t isolate the performative aspect of language by distinguishing a set of “performative utterances,” as contrasted with the normal, non-performative ones. Rather, we should see *all* utterances as involving a performative dimension. In Lecture 8, Austin provides a framework for seeing things in this way.

### 2 Locution, Illocution, Perlocution

- **Austin’s Threefold Distinction of Dimensions of “What is Done” in Saying Something:** Austin proposes a characterization of speech acts (a class which is now conceived of as including *all* sorts of utterances) along three dimensions:
  - **Locutionary Act:** The normal sense of simply “saying something,” uttering a sentence that has a certain meaning. Austin breaks down the locutionary act into three dimensions itself:
    - \* **Phonetic Act:** The act of making certain noises with one’s mouth.
    - \* **The Phatic Act:** The act of uttering certain syllabus and words belonging to a language.
    - \* **The Rhetic Act:** The act of using certain syllabus and words with certain meanings to say something.

The idea is that *in* making the noises that one does, one is uttering certain syllabus or and words, belonging to the vocabulary of a language, and in uttering the words that one does, one is saying something with a certain meaning.

- ▶ **Illocutionary Act:** The sorts of acts we've been mainly focusins on, ordering, advising, protesting, declaring, concluding, naming, and so on. Once again, there are certain conventional procedures such that, in the context of those procedures, performing a *locutionary* act of a certain sort constitutes the performance of an *illocutionary* act of a certain sort.
- ▶ **Perlocutionary Act:** The accomplishing of the effects that one typically aims to acheive by (note, not "in") performing an illucutionary act. For instance, getting someone do to something by ordering them to do it.
- **A (Nicer) Example:** Austin's example is a bit dark, so here's a cuter example of the same form. You come to my house and my dog Sparky is a bit excited, and so I say to you "Pet him!"
  - ▶ **Locution:** I said to you "Pet him!" meaning *pet* by "pet" and referring to Sparky (the contextually salient *him*) by "him."
    - \* **Phonetic Act:** I made certain noises, for instance, that could be depicted as a sound wave with a certain shpe.
    - \* **Phatic Act:** I uttered the word "Pet" and then the word "him."
    - \* **Rhetic Act:** I said *pet him*.
  - ▶ **Illocution:** I urged (or advised, ordered, etc.) you to pet Sparky.
  - ▶ **Perlocution:** We can actually distinguish between two sorts of perlocutionary acts here:
    - \* **Perlocution A:** I persuaded (convinced, etc.) you to pet Sparky.
    - \* **Perlocution B:** I got you to pet Sparky.
- **Some More Examples:** Let's work through Austin's threefold distinction for (at least some of) the following examples:
  - ▶ Saying "You can't do that," for instance, when a kid is touching the artwork in a museum.
  - ▶ Saying "I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*," when smashing the bottle on the ship.
  - ▶ Saying "I'm in pain!" at the dentist's office.
    - \* **Question:** How do we think this account of Austin's relates to what Wittgenstein was saying?
  - ▶ Saying "It's raining" when asked what the weather's like.

### 3 Clarifying the Distinction Between Illocution and Perlocution

- **The Basic Distinction, A Few Different Ways:** The distinction between the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act is drawn rather neatly by Austin along the following lines:
  - ▶ **"In" vs. "By":** The illucutionary act is something that we do *in* saying something, whereas the perlocutionary act is something that we do *by* saying something.
  - ▶ **Constitution vs Consequences:** Putting this same point a different way, uttering a certain sentence in a certain context will *constitute* the performance of the illucutionary act, whereas this act will have, as *consequences*, certain perlocutionary effects.
  - ▶ **An Example:** For instance, *in* saying "Pet him" I urged you to pet Sparky, and *by* doing that I got you to pet him. Alternately, my saying "Pet him" *constituted* an act urging you to pet Sparky, and it was a *consequence* of my urging you to pet him that you actually did pet him.
  - ▶ **An Analogy:** The relation between the locution and the illocution is directly analogous to the relation between, for instance, the phonetic and the phatic act. The phatic act of

uttering certain words is accomplished *in* making certain noises with one's mouth, not *by* making those noises. In other words, making those noises *constitutes* the uttering of the words; the uttering of the words is not a *consequence* of the making of the noises.

- **A Secondary way of Distinguishing:** Austin also suggests that we can distinguish illocution from perlocution by noting that perlocutionary acts may be achieved by *non-illocutionary means*, whereas that's not the case with illocutionary acts.

## 4 Some Questions

- **Question:** What's the point of making this distinction?
  - **A Proposed Answer:** Perlocutionary acts are completely amenable to the Fregean picture. For instance, suppose you say "It's cold in here," expressing the thought that it's cold in here. I recognize that this implies that you're cold, I realize that it would be a good idea to shut the window, given that you're cold, and so I shut it. The idea is that the saying itself doesn't constitute a doing over and above expressing the thought, though the expression of the thought can have consequences, leading to changes in mental states, which, in turn, lead to changes in the physical world.
- **Question:** It seems that, at least with some acts (especially those which don't seem to aim at physical effects, like stopping someone from doing something), it's not clear how to draw the line between illocutionary and perlocutionary force.
  - **Example:** Consider complimenting or insulting someone. Does the illocutionary act include actually making the person feel complimented or insulted? Or is that a perlocutionary effect of the complimenting or insulting?
    - \* **Trying to Apply the Criteria:** First, it seems more natural to say *in* saying "You look wonderful" Eric complimented Pattie, not *by* saying it. Alternately, it seems that Eric's saying "You look wonderful" *constitutes* his complimenting Pattie rather than has complimenting Pattie as a *consequence*. Contrast this with how he might make Patty feel good *by* saying "You look wonderful" (therein complimenting her), or how his complimenting makes her feel good *as a consequence*. We might think that making someone feel complimented is analogous to making someone feel good—something done *by* complimenting them rather than something done *in* complimenting them.
    - \* **A Counterpoint:** But Austin also suggests that a speech act's having illocutionary force involves its securing *uptake*, and so this suggest that part of successfully performing the illocutionary act of complimenting means that it must be *taken* as a compliment. So, perhaps "making someone feel complimented," in the sense of making someone recognize that they are being complimented, is not analogous to "making someone feel good." If so, perhaps we should think of the illocutionary act more like a *transaction*, involving a speaker and an audience, such that it is not actually done unless it is registered as having been done by the audience.
    - \* **A Counter-Counterpoint:** *But* it also seems like one can compliment or insult someone without that person taking the speech act to be a compliment or insult.
      - **Example:** Consider, for instance, a case in which someone insults me with the use of sarcasm, but I don't pick up on the sarcasm and so don't recognize that I'm being insulted. In such a case, it seems like the act of insulting is fully performed, and we can imagine my haters laughing over this saying, for instance, "Ryan is such a fool he didn't even register the brutal insult that was leveled against him." So perhaps it is enough that the speech act get taken up by *someone*, who may not be the direct target of the speech act?

These are good questions, and it's not clear that Austin provides an answer to them here.

- **An Overarching Question:** *What is it, exactly, to perform an illocutionary act? How do the use of words actually have illocutionary force, and what, exactly is this “force” of which we speak?*
  - **A Sub-Question:** What exactly is the role of *intentions* in securing illocutionary force?
    - \* One might think that what makes something have the illocutionary force of a compliment, say, is that the speaker *intends* the speech act as a compliment, and perhaps also that the audience recognizes this as the intent of the speech act.
    - \* But it also seems, for instance, that one can intend something as a compliment and the audience can recognize this intention, but it isn't a compliment. Consider again the case of catcalling. There's good reason to think catcalling is not complimenting (See, for instance: <https://info.umkc.edu/womenc/2019/05/02/catcalling-is-not-a-compliment-its-harassment/>), and that this is the case even if the catcaller *thinks* that what they're doing is complimenting (and even if the person being catcalled knows that this is what the catcaller thinks they are doing).
  - **A Preliminary Suggestion (to be developed as we go on):** To perform an illocutionary act is to use words to shift the norms by which speakers take themselves to be bound. Certain types of norm-shifts are constitutive of certain types of speech acts, and one can shift the norms in a certain way without knowing that this is what one's doing.