2 PERFORMATIVE-CONSTATIVE

by J. L. Austin

Translator's Note: "Performative-Constative" is a straightforward translation of Austin's paper "Performatif-Constatif," which he wrote in French and presented at a (predominantly) Anglo-French conference held at Royaumont in March 1958. The case of the discussion which follows it is somewhat more complex. The actual discussion at Royaumont was carried on in both French and English. What appears in the published volume after Austin's text (*Cahiers de Royaumont, Philosophie* No. IV, *La Philosophie Analytique:* Les Editions de Minuit, 1962, pp. 271-304) is a version of this, based on a transcript but substantially cut and edited, in which the contributions originally made in English were translated into French by M. Béra. It might have been possible, for the present publication, to procure copies at least of those portions of the original transcript that were in English. However, it seemed to me preferable simply to translate into English the entire French text, mainly for the reason that it is this edited version, and this only, that all those taking part are known to have seen and approved for publication.

G. J. WARNOCK

One can quite easily get the idea of the performative utterance — though the expression, as I am well aware, does not exist in the French language, or anywhere else. This idea was brought in to mark a contrast with that of the declarative utterance, or rather, as I am going to call it, the constative utterance. And there we have straight off what I want to call in question. Ought we to accept this Performative-Constative antithesis?

The constative utterance, under the name, so dear to philosophers, of *statement*,[1] has the property of being true or false. The performative utterance, by contrast, can never be either: it has its own special job, it is used to perform an action. To issue such an utterance[2] *is* to perform the action — an action, perhaps, which one scarcely could perform, at least with so much precision, in any other way. Here are some examples:

I name this ship 'Liberté'.
I apologise.
I welcome you.
I advise you to do it.

Utterances of this kind are common enough: we find them, for instance, everywhere in what are called in English the 'operative' clauses of a legal instrument.* Plainly, many of them are not without interest for philosophers: to say 'I promise to . . .' — to issue, as we say, this performative utterance — just *is* the act of making a promise; not, as we see, at all a mysterious act. And it may seem at once quite obvious that an utterance of this kind can't be true or false — notice that I say it can't *be* true or false, because it may very well *imply* that some *other* propositions are true or are false, but that, if I'm not mistaken, is a quite different matter.

However, the performative utterance is not exempt from all criticism: it may very well be criticized, but in a quite different dimension from that of truth and falsity. The performative must be issued in a situation appropriate in all respects for the act in question: if the speaker is not in the conditions required for its performance (and there are many such conditions), then his utterance will be, as we call it in general, 'unhappy'.[3]

First, our performative, like any other ritual or ceremony, may be, as the lawyers say, 'null and void'. If, for example, the speaker is not in a position to perform an act of that kind, or if the object with respect to which he purports to perform it is not suitable for the purpose, then he doesn't manage, simply by issuing his utterance, to carry out the purported act. Thus a bigamist doesn't get married a second time, he only 'goes through the form' of a second marriage; I can't name the ship if I am not the person properly authorized to name it; and I can't quite bring off the baptism of penguins, those creatures being scarcely susceptible of that exploit.

Second, a performative utterance may be, though not void, 'unhappy' in a different way — if, that is, it is issued *insincerely*. If I say 'I promise to . . .' without in the least intending to carry out the promised action, perhaps even not believing that it is in my power to carry it out, the promise is hollow. It is made, certainly; but still, there is an 'unhappiness': I have *abused* the formula.

Let us now suppose that our act has been performed: every-

* The clauses, that is to say, in which the legal act is actually performed, as opposed to those — the 'preamble' — which set out the circumstances of the transaction.

thing has gone off quite normally, and also, if you like, sincerely. In that case, the performative utterance will characteristically 'take effect'. We do not mean by that that such-and-such a future event is or will be brought about as an effect of this action functioning as a cause. We mean rather that, in consequence of the performance of this act, such-and-such a future event, *if* it happens, will be *in order,* and such-and-such other events, *if* they happen, will not be in order. If I have said 'I promise', I shall not be in order if I break my word; if I have said 'I welcome you', I shall not be in order if I proceed to treat you as an enemy or an intruder. Thus we say that, even when the performative has taken effect, there may always crop up a third kind of unhappiness, which we call 'breach of commitment'.[4] We may note also that commitments can be more or less vague, and can bind us in very different degrees.

There we have, then, three kinds of unhappiness associated with the performative utterance. It is possible to make a complete classification of these unhappinesses; but it must be admitted that, as practically goes without saying, the different kinds may not always be sharply distinguishable and may even coincide.[5] Then we must add that our performative is both an *action* and an *utterance*: so that, poor thing, it can't help being liable to be substandard in all the ways in which actions in general can be, as well as those in which utterances in general can be. For example, the performative may be issued under duress, or by accident; it may suffer from defective grammar, or from misunderstanding; it may figure in a context not wholly 'serious', in a play, perhaps, or in a poem. We leave all that on one side — let us simply bear in mind the more specific unhappinesses of the performative, that is, nullity, abuse (insincerity), and breach of commitment.

Well, now that we have before us this idea of the performative, it is very natural to hope that we could proceed to find some criterion, whether of grammar or of vocabulary, which would make it possible for us to answer in every case the question whether a particular utterance is performative or not. But this hope is, alas, exaggerated and, in large measure, vain.

It is true that there exist two 'normal forms', so to speak, in which the performative finds expression. At first sight both of them, curiously enough, have a thoroughly constative look. One

of these normal forms is that which I have already made use of in producing my examples: the utterance leads off with a verb in the first person singular of the present indicative active, as in 'I promise you that . . .'. The other form, which comes to exactly the same but is more common in utterances issued in writing, employs by contrast a verb in the *passive* voice and in the *second* or *third* person of the present indicative, as in 'Passengers are requested to cross the line by the footbridge only'. If we ask ourselves, as sometimes we may, whether a given utterance of this form is performative or constative, we may settle the question by asking whether it would be possible to insert in it the word 'hereby' or some equivalent — as, in French, the phrase 'par ces mots-ci'.

By way of putting to the test utterances which one might take to be performative, we make use of a well-known asymmetry, in the case of what we call an 'explicit performative' verb, between the first person singular of the present indicative, and other persons and tenses of the same verb. Thus, 'I promise' is a formula which is used to perform the act of promising; 'I promised', on the other hand, or 'he promises', are expressions which serve simply to describe or report an act of promising, not to perform one.

However, it is not in the least necessary that an utterance, if it is to be performative, should be expressed in one of these so-called normal forms. To say 'Shut the door', plainly enough, is every bit as performative, every bit as much the performance of an act, as to say 'I order you to shut the door'. Even the word 'Dog' by itself can sometimes (at any rate in England, a country more practical than ceremonious) stand in place of an explicit and formal performative; one performs, by this little word, the very same act as by the utterance 'I warn you that the dog is about to attack us', or by 'Strangers are warned that here there is a vicious dog'. To make our utterance performative, and quite unambiguously so, we can make use, in place of the explicit formula, of a whole lot of more primitive devices such as intonation, for instance, or gesture; further, and above all, the very context in which the words are uttered can make it entirely certain how they are to be taken — as a description, for example, or again as a warning. Does this word 'Dog' just give us a bit of detail about the local fauna? In the context — when confronted,

that is, with the notice on the gate — we just don't need to ask ourselves that question at all.

All we can really say is that our explicit performative formula ('I promise . . .', 'I order you . . .', etc.) serves to make explicit, and at the same time more precise, what act it is that the speaker purports to perform in issuing his utterance. I say 'to make explicit', and that is not at all the same thing as to *state*.[6] Bending low before you, I remove my hat, or perhaps I say 'Salaam'; then, certainly, I am doing obeisance to you, not just engaging in gymnastics; but the word 'Salaam' does not, any more than does the act of removing my hat, in any way *state* that I am doing obeisance to you. It is in this way that our formula *makes* the issuing of the utterance that action which it is, but does not *state* that it is that action.

The other forms of expression, those that have no explicit performative formula, will be more primitive and less precise, one might almost say more vague. If I say simply 'I will be there', there will be no telling, just by considering the words, whether I am taking on a commitment, or declaring an intention, or making perhaps a fatalistic prediction. One may think of the precise formulae as a relatively recent phenomenon in the evolution of language, and as going together with the evolution of more complex forms of society and science.

We can't, then, expect any purely verbal criterion of the performative. We may hope, all the same, that any utterance which is in fact performative will be reducible (in some sense of that word) to an utterance in one or the other of our normal forms. Then, going on from there, we should be able, with the help of a dictionary, to make a list of all the verbs which can figure in one of our explicit formulae. Thus we will achieve a useful classification of all the varieties of acts that we perform in saying something (in one sense, at least, of that ambiguous phrase).

We have now brought in, then, the ideas of the performative utterance, of its unhappinesses, and of its explicit formulae. But we have been talking all along as if every utterance had to be *either* constative *or* performative, and as if the idea of the constative at any rate was as clear as it is familiar. But it is not.

Let us note in the first place that an utterance which is undoubtedly a statement of fact, therefore constative, can fail to get

by[7] in more than one way. It can be untrue, to be sure; but it can also be absurd, and that not necessarily in some gross fashion (by being, for instance, ungrammatical). I would like to take a closer look at three rather more subtle ways of being absurd, two of which have only recently come to light.

(1) Someone says 'All John's children are bald, but [or 'and'] John has no children'; or perhaps he says 'All John's children are bald', when, as a matter of fact, John has no children.

(2) Someone says 'The cat is on the mat, but [or 'and'] I don't believe it is'; or perhaps he says 'The cat is on the mat', when, as a matter of fact, he does not believe it is.

(3) Someone says 'All the guests are French, and some of them aren't'; or perhaps he says 'All the guests are French', and then afterwards says 'Some of the guests are not French'.

In each of these cases one experiences a feeling of outrage, and it's possible each time for us to try to express it in terms of the same word — 'implication', or perhaps that word that we always find so handy, 'contradiction'. But there are more ways of killing the cat than drowning it in butter;* and equally, to do violence to language one does not always need a contradiction.

Let us use the three terms 'presuppose', 'imply', and 'entail'[8] for our three cases respectively. Then:

1. Not only 'John's children are bald', but equally 'John's children are not bald', presupposes that John has children. To talk about those children, or to refer to them, presupposes that they exist. By contrast, 'The cat is not on the mat' does *not*, equally with 'The cat is on the mat', imply that I believe it is; and similarly, 'None of the guests is French' does *not*, equally with 'All the guests are French', entail that it is false that some of the guests are not French.

2. We can quite well say 'It could be the case both that the cat is on the mat and that I do not believe it is'. That is to say, those two propositions are not in the least incompatible: both can be true together. What is impossible is to state both at the same time: his *stating* that the cat is on the mat is what implies that the speaker believes it is. By contrast, we couldn't say 'It could be the case both that John has no children and that his

* English proverb. I am told that this rather refined way of disposing of cats is not found in France.

children are bald'; just as we couldn't say 'It could be the case both that all the guests are French and that some of them are not French'.

3. If 'All the guests are French' entails 'It is not the case that some of the guests are not French', then 'Some of the guests are not French' entails 'It is not the case that all the guests are French'. It's a question here of the compatibility and incompatibility of propositions. By contrast, it isn't like this with presupposition: if 'John's children are bald' presupposes that John has children, it isn't true at all that 'John has no children' presupposes that John's children are not bald. Similarly, if 'The cat is on the mat' implies that I believe it is, it isn't true at all that to say 'I don't believe that the cat is on the mat' implies that the cat is not on the mat (not, at any rate, in the same sense of 'implies'; besides, we have already seen that 'implication', for us, is not a matter of the incompatibility of propositions).

Here then are three ways in which a statement can fail to get by without being untrue, and without being a sheer rigmarole either. I would like to call attention to the fact that these three ways of failing to get by correspond to three of the ways in which a performative utterance may be unhappy. To bring out the comparison, let's first take two performative utterances:

4. 'I bequeath my watch to you, but [or 'and'] I haven't got a watch'; or perhaps someone says 'I bequeath my watch to you' when he hasn't got a watch.

5. 'I promise to be there, but [or 'and'] I have no intention of being there'; or perhaps someone says 'I promise to be there' when he doesn't intend to be there.

We compare case 4 with case 1, the case, that is, of presupposition. For to say either 'I bequeath my watch to you' or 'I don't bequeath my watch to you' presupposes equally that I have a watch; that the watch exists is presupposed by the fact that it is spoken of or referred to, in the performative utterance just as much as in the constative utterance. And just as we can make use here of the term 'presupposition' as employed in the doctrine of the constative, equally we can take over for that doctrine the term 'void' as employed in the doctrine of the unhappinesses of the performative. The statement on the subject of John's children is, we may say, 'void for lack of reference', which is exactly

what lawyers would say about the purported bequest of the watch. So here is a first instance in which a trouble that afflicts statements turns out to be identical with one of the unhappinesses typical of the performative utterance.

We compare case 5 with case 2, that is, the case where something is 'implied'. Just as my saying that the cat is on the mat implies that I believe it is, so my saying I promise to be there implies that I intend to be there. The procedure of stating is designed for those who honestly believe what they say, exactly as the procedure of promising is designed for those who have a certain intention, namely, the intention to do whatever it may be that they promise. If we don't hold the belief, or again don't have the intention, appropriate to the content of our utterance, then in each case there is lack of sincerity and abuse of the procedure. If, at the same time as we make the statement or the promise, we announce in the same breath that we don't believe it or we don't intend to, then the utterance is 'self-voiding', as we might call it; and hence our feeling of outrage on hearing it. Another instance, then, where a trouble which afflicts statements is identical with one of the unhappinesses which afflict performative utterances.

Let us look back, next, to case 3, the case of entailment among statements. Can we find, in the case of performatives, some analogue for this as well? When I make the statement, for instance, 'All the guests are French', do I not commit myself in a more or less rigorous fashion to behaving in future in such-and-such a way, in particular with respect to the statements I will make? If, in the sequel, I state things incompatible with my utterance (namely, that all the guests are French), there will be a breach of commitment that one might well compare with that of the case in which I say 'I welcome you', and then proceed to treat you as an enemy or an intruder — and perhaps even better, with that of which one is guilty when one says 'I define the word thus' (a performative utterance) and then proceeds to use the word with a different meaning.

So then, it seems to me that the constative utterance is every bit as liable to unhappinesses as the performative utterance, and indeed to pretty much the same unhappinesses. Furthermore, making use of the key provided by our list of unhappinesses noted for the case of performatives, we can ask ourselves whether there

are not still more unhappinesses in the case of statements, besides the three we have just mentioned. For example, it often happens that a performative is void because the utterer is not in a state, or not in a position, to perform the act which he purports to perform; thus, it's no good my saying 'I order you' if I have no authority over you: I can't order you, my utterance is void, my act is only purported. Now people have, I know, the impression that where a statement, a constative utterance, is in question, the case is quite different: anybody at all can state anything at all. What if he's ill-informed? Well then, one can be mistaken, that's all. It's a free country, isn't it? To state what isn't true is one of the Rights of Man. However, this impression can lead us into error. In reality nothing is more common than to find that one can state absolutely nothing on some subject, because one is simply not in a position to state whatever it may be — and this may come about, too, for more than one reason. I *cannot* state at this moment how many people there are in the next room: I haven't been to see, I haven't found out the facts. What if I say, nevertheless, 'At this moment there are fifty people in the next room'? You will allow, perhaps, that in saying that I have made a guess,[9] but you will not allow that I have made a statement, not at any rate without adding 'but he had no right whatever to do so'; and in this case my 'I state . . .' is exactly on a par with our 'I order . . .', said, we remember, without any right to give an order. Here's another example. You confide to me 'I'm bored', and I quite coolly reply 'You're not'. You say 'What do you mean, I'm not? What right have you to say how I feel?' I say 'But what do *you* mean, what right have I? I'm just stating what your feelings are, that's all. I may be mistaken, certainly, but what of that? I suppose one can always make a simple statement, can't one?' But no, one can't always: usually, I can't state what your feelings are, unless you have disclosed them to me.

So far I have called attention to two things: that there is no purely verbal criterion by which to distinguish the performative from the constative utterance, and that the constative is liable to the same unhappinesses as the performative. Now we must ask ourselves whether issuing a constative utterance is not, after all, the performance of an act, the act, namely, of stating. Is stating an act in the same sense as marrying, apologising, betting, etc.? I can't plumb this mystery any further at present. But it is already

pretty evident that the formula 'I state that . . .' is closely similar to the formula 'I warn you that . . .' — a formula which, as we put it, serves to make explicit what speech-act[10] it is that we are performing; and also, that one can't issue any utterance whatever without performing some speech-act of this kind.

What we need, perhaps, is a more general theory of these speech-acts, and in this theory our Constative-Performative antithesis will scarcely survive.

Here and now it remains for us to examine, quite briefly, this craze for being either true or false, something which people think is peculiar to statements alone and ought to be set up on a pedestal of its own, above the battle. And this time let's begin with the performative utterance: is it the case that there is nothing here in the least analogous with truth?

To begin with, it is clear that if we establish that a performative utterance is not unhappy, that is, that its author has performed his act happily and in all sincerity, that still does not suffice to set it beyond the reach of all criticism. It may always be criticised in a different dimension.

Let us suppose that I say to you 'I advise you to do it'; and let us allow that all the circumstances are appropriate, the conditions for success are fulfilled. In saying that, I actually do advise you to do it — it is not that I *state,* truely or falsely, *that* I advise you. It is, then, a performative utterance. There does still arise, all the same, a little question: was the advice good or bad? Agreed, I spoke in all sincerity, I believed that to do it would be in your interest; but was I right? Was my belief, in these circumstances, justified? Or again — though perhaps this matters less — was it in fact, or as things turned out, in your interest? There is confrontation of my utterance with the situation in, and the situation with respect to which, it was issued. I was fully justified perhaps, but was I right?

Many other utterances which have an incontestably performative flavour are exposed to this second kind of criticism. Allowing that, in declaring the accused guilty, you have reached your verdict properly and in good faith, it still remains to ask whether the verdict was just, or fair. Allowing that you had the right to reprimand him as you did, and that you have acted without malice, one can still ask whether your reprimand was deserved.

Here again we have confrontation with the facts, including the circumstances of the occasion of utterance.

That not all performative utterances without exception are liable to this quasi-objective evaluation — which for that matter must here be left pretty vague and multifarious — may very well be true.

There is one thing that people will be particularly tempted to bring up as an objection against any comparison between this second kind of criticism and the kind appropriate to statements, and that is this: aren't these questions about something's being good, or just, or fair, or deserved entirely distinct from questions of truth and falsehood? That, surely, is a very simple black-and-white business: either the utterance corresponds to the facts or it doesn't, and that's that.

Well, I for my part don't think it is. Even if there exists a well-defined class of statements and we can restrict ourselves to that, this class will always be pretty wide. In this class we shall have the following statements:

> France is hexagonal.
> Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma.
> Oxford is 60 miles from London.

It's quite true that for each of these statements we can raise the question 'true or false'. But it is only in quite favourable cases that we ought to expect an answer yes or no, once and for all. When the question is raised one understands that the utterance is to be confronted in one way or another with the facts. Very well. So let's confront 'France is hexagonal' with France. What are we to say, is it true or not? The question, plainly, oversimplifies things. Oh well, up to a point if you like, I see what you mean, true perhaps for some purposes or in some contexts, that would do for the man in the street but not for geographers. And so on. It's a rough statement, no denying that, but one can't just say straight out that it's false. Then Alma, a soldier's battle if ever there was one; it's true that Lord Raglan was in command of the allied army, and that this army to some extent won a confused sort of victory; yes, that would be a fair enough judgment, even well deserved, for schoolchildren anyway, though really it's a bit of an exaggeration. And Oxford,

well, yes, it's true that that city is 60 miles from London, so long as you want only a certain degree of precision.

Under the heading 'truth' what we in fact have is, not a simple quality nor a relation, not indeed *one* anything, but rather a whole dimension of criticism. We can get some idea, perhaps not a very clear one, of this criticism; what *is* clear is that there is a whole lot of things to be considered and weighed up in this dimension alone — the facts, yes, but also the situation of the speaker, his purpose in speaking, his hearer, questions of precision, etc. If we are content to restrict ourselves to statements of an idiotic or ideal simplicity, we shall never succeed in disentangling the true from the just, fair, deserved, precise, exaggerated, etc., the summary and the detail, the full and the concise, and so on.

From this side also, then, from the side of truth and falsehood, we feel ourselves driven to think again about the Performative-Constative antithesis. What we need, it seems to me, is a new doctrine, both complete and general, of *what one is doing in saying something*, in all the senses of that ambiguous phrase, and of what I call the speech-act, not just in this or that aspect abstracting from all the rest, but taken in its totality.

DISCUSSION

President: W. V. Quine.

Weil: I would like to ask a question. It is genuinely a question, and the very opposite of an objection. It seemed to me, thinking over the later pages of your paper, that one might perhaps sketch out a solution, with regard to the difficulty you bring up, by turning the problem round, and asking oneself whether all, or nearly all, the utterances of ordinary life are not in fact performative. In saying 'of ordinary life' I am of course excluding the examples given by logicians. When a logician gives an example, that example is not performative, though the fact that he gives it *is* performative. What I mean is this: when I say to someone in conversation 'It's a nice day', I 'perform' an act: I make conversation. My remark has often no other force than to introduce myself, and to oblige the other party in his turn to answer me. It does not constitute a serious judgment, true or false, on the state of the weather. If one took the remark at the

foot of the letter, one could give some such answer as 'So I see', or 'Of what interest do you suppose that is to me?'; but such an answer would certainly arouse, by its rudeness or aggressiveness, some anxiety as to the state of mind of the person giving it. The same goes for a thousand and one commonplaces of this kind. And conversation is often nothing but a tissue of commonplaces.

I wonder, then, whether it is not necessary to distinguish between 'expressly' performative expressions or formulae, and those which are performative only implicitly, by implication. And there would perhaps be room for analysis of linguistic situations, if I may use that term, and of the performative implications which those situations either produce, or contain.

Austin: I agree entirely on both points. I myself regularly make a distinction between 'explicitly performative formulae' and 'primary' or 'primitive utterances'. That is, I think, the same distinction that you want to bring in.

As for whether we're in a position to say that all utterances of ordinary language are in fact performative, that's a different matter. We would be inclined to think so when we look at things from the point of view I've adopted here. The classic example of a constative utterance is the one where you say 'I state that . . .'. We take off from there, and at once we run into 'I warn you that . . .'. Is that still a statement, or is it perhaps a threat? And if it's still a constative utterance, how shall we distinguish these two acts? There would perhaps be no great harm in not distinguishing them, if by degrees we were brought to see, in every phrase of ordinary language, an implicit performative utterance — which would of course leave no sharp edge at all to the distinction we set out from. This is exactly the kind of difficulty I came up against all through my paper.

All that I would venture to say in answer to your question is that, setting out from a pretty vague distinction between the straightforward utterance (*stating*) and the act (*ordering*), we meet, as we go along, a number of difficulties which lead us appreciably to modify our original analysis, and not to go on seeing inside language just two types of 'speech-acts': and this leads us to reconsider in its entirety our conception of language, which may emerge from the test a good deal the worse for wear, without our yet being in a position to formulate a theory embracing every kind of 'speech-act'.

That said, I agree with you entirely.

Hare: I wonder whether the confusion does not arise, in part, from the fact that the two terms are commonly used to mark two sorts of distinctions. I don't say that Professor Austin confuses them; but I wonder whether certain passages in his paper do not invite this confusion in the minds of his audience.

1. There is, first, the distinction established by logicians between two ways of expressing, or of doing, the same thing: for example, between 'I order you to do so-and-so' and 'Do so-and-so'; or between 'I state that the cat is on the mat' and 'The cat is on the mat'.

2. But there is also the distinction between the different linguistic acts: between what we do when we state something about whatever it may be, and what we do when we promise something to somebody, or what we do when we order someone to do something, and so on.

The two distinctions are liable to be confused, because in certain cases both apply. It is in the name of both that we distinguish, for instance, 'I promise to do so-and-so' from 'The cat is on the mat'.

It seems to me that Austin, particularly towards the end of his paper, would allow some of his hearers to suppose that, *because* we can express a statement of fact, just as we can express an order, for example, or a promise, in the solemn and formal style 'I tell you that . . .', 'I order you to . . .', 'I promise you that . . .', instead of using the indicative, the imperative, or the future (distinction 1), we ought for this reason to conclude that they are not so different from one another as our distinction 2 would lead one to believe. I do not say that this confusion is in his mind, but I think that he would clarify the problem a great deal, for a great many people, by inventing another pair of terms, allowing a distinction to be made between these two distinctions.

Austin: Your question comes quite close to the one that Weil put to me, and I think my answer can only be much the same. The difficulty, if difficulty there is, proceeds from the fact that the distinction between performative utterances and the other class of utterances which one supposedly wants to contrast with them (but which one refrains, very often, from defining in any but very vague terms) was originally arrived at just by rushing

bald-headed at the first examples that came to hand — examples which in fact contain, when you look at them a bit more closely, what I call explicit performative formulae of the type of 'I promise you that . . .', 'I warn you that . . .', etc. But one soon sees that, to promise or to threaten, one does not have to use these roundabout methods, and that in a great many cases we don't beat about the bush in this way. This state of affairs leads one to distinguish what I call the explicit from the primary performative, exactly as from the other side we distinguish the explicit constative from the primary constative. As I said in my paper, that doesn't mean that the difference between the performative and the constative is always clear.

So I don't believe there is actual confusion (unless perhaps in the historical order in which these distinctions were brought into philosophy), but rather not enough detailed working out, perhaps, in our discussions of this matter.

But I'm not so sure I understand what kind of philosophical difficulty Mr. Hare thinks the confusion, if confusion there was, could lead us into. If I refer to his notes, that would perhaps refresh my memory, and help to clarify the point under discussion for you as well as for me. He says: 'It seems to me that Austin, towards the end of his paper, might mislead his hearers, by making them suppose that the distinction between, say, 'stating' and 'ordering' (distinction 2) can be whittled away[11] by showing that in both cases we can do what we do by making use of an explicit performative utterance, in the sense of distinction 1.' My comment is that, leaving open the question on what level the distinction is made (1 or 2), what I'm trying to do is not so much to whittle it away as to call it in question, by showing that it is not firmly based enough, and not clear enough. I don't see how the way I adopted of whittling it away (as he says) or of calling it in question (as I think I'm doing) is not a perfectly valid method. As I've already said in my answer to Professor Weil, and I can only say the same now, what bothers me about this distinction that we try to make at the start between performative utterances and constative utterances, what makes me think that this distinction isn't clear, is that the formula 'I state that . . .' appears to me to satisfy all the criteria, doubtless still much too vague, that we make use of to characterize performative utterances. I haven't the least intention of whittling

away the difference, if difference there is, between the act of stating and the act of commanding. I simply want to bring out that, insofar as one can apply the very vague notion that we have in mind in speaking of the performative, the distinction is not well founded, since the formula 'I state that . . .' shows all the characteristics by which we thought performative utterances were to be identified.

Hare: If I understand you correctly, you want to say that the criteria one usually employs don't allow us to distinguish 'I state that . . .' from 'I promise you that . . .' or 'I order you to . . .'. But you don't mean that there isn't a difference between these two types of acts in language?

Austin: Certainly not. I suggested, moreover, no doubt much too briefly at the end of my paper, in what direction one could look. It seems to me that we ought to draw up a list of all the formulae of this kind, a complete and general list of what one is doing in saying something, in every sense of that ambiguous phrase, as a preliminary to working out a general doctrine of what I call 'the speech-act' viewed in all its aspects and taken in its totality. Then we could decide, with clearer heads and some sort of plan before us, on the families or classes in which they could be arranged. And we shall not be tempted to accord to just one expression, 'I state that . . .' — which seems to me personally to have very little right to such promotion — the pre-eminent place that we do in practice accord to it. It could very well be that, in drawing up a classification of all speech-acts, we came to set a pretty wide gulf, in one place or another, between the acts of promising, warning, ordering, and a considerable number of other acts among which stating would come in again. One thing seems to me certain, and that is that 'I state that . . .' doesn't occupy the conspicuous position that we want to give it.

All that comes back to saying that the distinction we set out from, between performative and constative, is inadequate. We must get a much more general theory of the speech-act before we can set up a well-founded distinction.

Devaux: I am inclined to hold, with Professor Austin, that our utterances, our statements, are at the same time, or at any rate can be at the same time, what he calls 'performative' and 'indicative'. That does not seem to me incompatible, in fact.

But where I begin to run into difficulties is where commitments are in question, and in particular utterances which involve a moral commitment on the part of one who makes them, to respect his given word. And the question I would like to put to Professor Austin is the following: when I undertake, with regard to myself, and before my moral conscience, a commitment to myself, without witnesses, am I, in that case, confronted with a performative activity? And if I am confronted with a performative activity, can one allow that it is neither true nor false? The absence of truth and falsity seems to me difficult to allow when it is a question of a formal commitment before the tribunal of my conscience, or when it is my loyalty to myself that is at stake.

Austin: The question you raise has many sides to it. And I don't know how I ought to take it. Do you mean to ask me what in fact goes on, when I promise something to myself, without witnesses? Are you asking me whether the act that I perform is, according to me, performative? Are you asking me why, in this case, I don't think any question of truth or falsity comes up? There are three distinct questions there, if not more.

Let's take the first. When you say 'I promise myself to be faithful to my promise', I don't think you mean to refer to all the cases without distinction in which one may say to oneself, without always wanting to say it out loud, 'I promise myself to do such-and-such, or not to do it' — as one can make a promise to oneself to give up smoking. I suppose you mean to refer to that species of mental act which accompanies in general every promise made in good faith to another, and which makes us say *sotto voce* 'I promise myself to keep this promise I've just made' — or conversely, if we are in bad faith, 'I promise myself to do nothing of the kind'.

Devaux: No, I was thinking simply of the case where we commit ourselves, or bind ourselves by a promise to ourselves, with regard to any act that we desire to perform or avoid.

Austin: You don't accept my distinction between 'promising yourself', as one would promise something or other to somebody else, and 'promising yourself to keep the promise you've just made to somebody else'?

Devaux: If you prefer — the case where I promise myself to

do something, and where I promise myself to keep this promise I have made to myself.

Austin: It's always a tricky business to talk about the cases in which, as we say, one 'tells oneself', 'promises oneself', 'asks oneself' something. On the other hand, the case of 'I promise myself to keep my promise' looks like a kind of parasitic case in a general series of promises to others. There we already have two aspects which would have to be considered separately. I don't say that we haven't an instance here of a difficulty of a very general sort, that one finds to be involved in all kinds of problems. And you're right to call attention to it.

But I don't know whether that requires me to work out an answer to the question whether 'I promise myself' is different from 'I promise someone else'; or whether 'saying to oneself' can be compared with expressing oneself out loud in someone else's presence. What you're really asking me, if I understand you correctly, is whether 'what I do when I promise myself to keep my promise', whatever we take that to mean, is in my sense performative or not performative. Well, I'm inclined to answer that it can't be anything else. Whatever is meant by saying one promises oneself, and whatever we understand by saying one tells oneself something, I don't see — going by the very rough criteria we've used to characterize performative utterances, and at present, however rough, we haven't got any others — how it could be anything else, because the only alternative would be for them to be statements that one could call true or false. And where would the criterion of truth or falsity have any application?

As for why utterances of this sort aren't true or false, I think it's true by definition, of all acts, that they occur or they don't, but can't be true or false. When we get married, we perform an act. What can be said *about* this act can be true or false: are they married, or aren't they? But about the marriage itself that question just can't come up. I don't see what alternative you have in mind in asking your last question.

Devaux: It is precisely with reference to that last point that I ask it.

Austin: A performative utterance can't be true or false. When I say 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow', a perfectly natural and ordinary thing to say, the bet that I make can't be said

to be true or false. What can be true or false is that I made the bet. I could very well have betted you the opposite, or not betted at all.

Devaux: It can be true or false in two senses: true or false in what concerns the speaker, true or false in the sense of the bet.

Austin: But the fact of saying 'I bet you . . .' constitutes betting; it really can't be questioned or be said to be true or false. I don't see how anyone can imagine it could be.

Devaux: We've come to a dead end.

Austin: Well, to get out of it again, let's go back to the marriage ceremony. If, at the moment when the affianced parties, in answer to the official conducting the ceremony, pronounce the sacramental 'Yes' which binds them, someone came along and asked whether this 'Yes' was really *true,* we'd take him for a lunatic. He can ask whether it's a good marriage, whether they're made for one another, whether they're sincere in saying this 'Yes', whether the marriage is valid for one reason or another; but we can't ask whether this 'Yes' is true or false. To take a still more familiar example: when I say 'Shut the door', you can't ask me whether 'Shut the door' is true or false. At best you could raise the question whether I was right to say it, for example in the case where the door is already shut. But the order I give is not, in itself, either true or false. You accept that?

Devaux: I don't agree, but I see the point you want to make.

Austin: 'Shut the door' —

Devaux: No, I was thinking of marriage or any kind of undertaking.

Austin: But let's begin at the beginning: can 'Shut the door' be true or false?

Devaux: Yes, as an act mentioned in an utterance.

Austin: One can say of an act that it's useful, that it's appropriate, that it's reasonable even. One can't say that it's true or false. Anyway, all I meant to say is that utterances of this type are much more numerous and various than people think, and that many of them have, at first sight, the air of statements. 'Shut the door' doesn't have the air of a statement, because it uses the imperative; but when I switch to 'I tell you to shut the door', one can easily go wrong. And if one relied on the grammar

books, it would be counted as an 'indicative sentence' under the same heading as an utterance like 'I tell you it's raining'. All I meant, if you like, is that 'I tell you to shut the door' belongs in the same category as 'Shut the door', and in a different category from 'I tell you the door is shut'. We think we know quite a bit about this latter kind of utterance (though perhaps I may not be quite sure what we mean when we state that the door is shut), and in particular we think we can say that they're capable of being true or false. Which doesn't apply to utterances of the other type.

Wahl: I am going to put my question in a somewhat unsatisfactory form: is philosophy an island, or a promontory? I mean simply that I often have the impression that one shuts oneself up on a narrow strip of linguistic territory, debars oneself from going outside it, but that one knows all the same that there are things outside it. So that, if pressed, I should be obliged to wonder how one could explain this state of affairs; and then I should be offered psychoanalytic explanations, Marxist explanations . . . I do not find the explanations particularly convincing. However, it seems to me all the same that here is a situation where an explanation would be welcome.

I have before me a statement like 'I have a watch'. There are two things here. There is, first, the idea of a watch, and leading on from that idea, there is the idea of measurement of time, there is time, and then there are the categories. On the other side, there is the word 'have'. And I believe that, in each of these directions, one encounters the categories. I believe that even in Oxford people study categories. But for the moment, we wish to restrict ourselves to the study of statements. I would rather, however, that our attention was directed to the idea of 'having', or the idea of 'time'.

And since we are discussing statements, I wonder, about two examples very different from that one, what their status is. Take 'To be or not to be, that is the question'; to what class does that belong? I have no idea. It is, in appearance, constative; but is it really? I have no idea. I am happy to have here, in the next room to mine, as neighbour and friend, and as colleague, Mr. Austin; so that, being his neighbour, I can ask him each morning 'Did you sleep well last night?' If unfortunately he should say, giving me a certain look, 'I slept very badly' — well, that would

mean 'Mind you make less noise tonight'. Here again, what is this statement? 'I slept very badly' can be a warning. It can also be a request. Or a complaint. In short, it can be all sorts of things. Just that is my point.

Austin: I shall not try to answer all the points which M. Wahl has brought up. But I shall take first his initial question: is philosophy an island or a promontory? If I were looking for an image of this kind, I think I should say that it's more like the surface of the sun — a pretty fair mess.[12] You disentangle yourself as best you can with the means you have at hand. Psychology, sociology, physiology, physics, grammar, can all be pressed into service.[13] Philosophy is always breaking out of its frontiers and into neighbouring territories. I believe the only clear way of defining the subject matter of philosophy is to say that it deals with what's left over, all the problems that remain still insoluble, after all the other recognized methods have been tried. It's the dumping ground for all the leftovers from other sciences, where everything turns up which we don't know quite how to take. As soon as someone discovers a respectable and reliable method of handling some portion of these residual problems, a new science is set up, which tends to break away from philosophy just as and when its subject matter becomes better defined and its authority made good. So then we give it a name: mathematics (a divorce of long standing), or physics (a more recent separation), or psychology, or mathematical logic, where the breakaway is still quite new; or even, who knows, tomorrow perhaps grammar or linguistics. I think that in this way philosophy will overflow more and more widely from its original channel. Then grammar, linguistics, logic, and psychology will form perhaps a new combination, which will break away from the still considerable mass of problems which philosophy bundles along with it in uneasy suspension.

But this breaking away takes a long time, a very long time. Psychology, the youngest of the sciences sprung from the original matrix, has been being born for a very great many years already, and still isn't entirely out.[14] The same thing will happen with linguistics: a science of language will separate off in the end, and will embrace a great many things which philosophy deals with today. So your question is an entirely natural one. Where is the boundary? Is there one anywhere? You could ask the

same question about the four quarters of the horizon. There is no boundary. The field is wide open to anyone who chooses to enter it; first come, first served, and good luck to anyone who is the first to hit on something worthwhile.

Your last question was a more specific one. Can assertions which look so factual, so constative, as 'I slept badly last night', in reality be orders, requests, threats in disguise? My answer is: certainly they can. Besides what we understand by the 'meaning' of an expression — and I'm well aware just how obscure that term can be, even if we restrict it to its ordinary, everyday use — we always have what we may call, for the sake of a name, its 'force'. We shall always be able to assign a meaning — even if it's a question of a cluster of exceedingly complex meanings and significances — to an expression like 'I slept badly last night', without so much as approaching the question which arises on a quite different level: is it a constative utterance? Is it a complaint? Is it a warning? Is it a threat? And so on. We have here a second dimension, so to speak. We could still talk here about 'meaning'; but as we've already used this word at the other level, let's choose a different word, and set ourselves to work out a new doctrine to take account of what one can call the *force* of the expression. These 'forces' are just what we were meeting with as we went along just now, and what I described, or attempted to describe, under the name of 'speech-acts'. In trying to make clear the second kind of 'meaning', or the force, of an expression like 'I slept badly last night', we say: it's a threat, a warning, a complaint, and so on — that is to say, we try to characterize the kind of speech-act which it exemplifies.

So I entirely agree with you: there is a problem here quite distinct from that of meaning, which arises not on the level of the factual content of expressions, but on the level of the 'forces' which show themselves when we speak.

Perelman: I would like to begin with an example of a linguistic expression, which I will present in French — because, in English, I fear it is a different matter. And here perhaps is another reason, which I offer to Mr. Apostel, in favour of comparative analysis.[15]

Suppose that a sergeant gives a soldier an order. The soldier answers 'Je refuse d'obéir'. That is a performative utterance in Professor Austin's sense. The sergeant goes to the captain to

make his report. The captain sends for the soldier, and asks him 'Est-il vrai que vous refusez d'obéir?'. And he replies 'C'est vrai'. The question and the answer are certainly constative utterances: 'Il est vrai que je refuse d'obéir'. But in English, it would not go like that at all, for in place of the expression 'I refuse', the question would be 'Are you refusing?'. One would transform the present into the present participle active. It would not be necessary to bring in the expression 'It is true that . . .', for there is available a particular grammatical form — which in French is replaced by 'Est-il vrai que . . .' — for effectively distinguishing the two forms. I believe it is true in general that, in French, one can in this way transform performative into constative utterances, by prefixing 'Il est vrai que . . .', 'Il est faux que . . .', etc. There are all sorts of expressions of the same kind.

If we take it, then, simply on the level of the current use of language, if we keep the expression 'Il est vrai . . .' in front of what follows, we cannot completely eliminate constative utterances. I wonder, also, whether we have any interest in wanting to reduce all these utterances, and I believe that, on the contrary, Mr. Austin is trying to safeguard them, and to give them a status.

My second question concerns the use of the [French] word 'ridicule'. No doubt you noticed that, in Mr. Austin's paper, the word 'absurde' occurred several times. Now, there are cases in which one would not speak of the notion of absurdity, but would invoke rather that of the ridiculous. When a child tries to argue with his elders, the parents would not say 'Il est absurde'; they would prefer to say 'C'est ridicule'. It is 'ridicule' to give an order to someone when one has no authority to give orders and is sure they will not be carried out.

That, I believe, would hold for quite a number of examples in which Mr. Austin gave prominence to the term 'absurde', and where we would prefer to employ the term 'ridicule'. In fact there is a whole family of notions, not just one or two, a whole spectrum of shades of meaning, which permit us to express our appraisals of this or that speech-act, and which reveal our attitudes in this or that situation. For me, absurdity has something more logical about it, the ridiculous something more social. I wonder whether Mr. Austin accepts this distinction.

Austin: Yes, and many others. There is a whole lot of notions of this kind that we make use of, or could make use of if we spoke

our language more correctly. The trouble is that for these emotion-charged epithets — they're nearly always pejorative or insulting — we are inclined to use the first term that springs to mind, the one that's uppermost because it's fashionable, rather than trying to pin down exactly the precise nature of our disagreement. But I believe something could in fact be got out of a closer study of epithets of this kind, and so I gladly accept the distinction you make.

I agree on the first point as well. Even in the first stage, where we try to set up — vainly for the most part, as I think I succeeded in showing — a firm distinction between the performative and the constative, one could point out many more snares and pitfalls than I did in my paper. I think that even in English, notwithstanding the distinction you made with reference to your example, you'll find the expressions 'It is true that . . .' or 'It is false that . . .' used to introduce a purely constative utterance, exactly as in French. And to take an everyday case, you can use the expression 'I promise to . . .' as a simple historic present. You say, for instance: 'By Article 37, second sub-section, paragraph 3, I promise to do such-and-such'. Obviously in that case the utterance is constative, can be true or false, in spite of the fact that it contains the formula designed for promising. We're led to say: this is a historic present tense, not the kind of present tense we're interested in.

But I'm not so sure that I agree with you when you invoke an 'extralinguistic' criterion. The distinction we've just agreed on could quite well be found in a work on linguistics, or a properly done grammar. A linguist would be careful to mark the difference between the two uses. And how would he do it? Certainly not by recourse to a *purely* linguistic criterion — understanding by that, I suppose, attentive examination of the order of the words and their functions in the phrase. He would certainly have to appeal to something outside language, in that sense, to appreciate the distinction between two uses of one and the same group of three words, 'I promise to . . .', in the two cases. So I don't see how what he would do would be any more reputable than, or even any different from, what we are trying to do.

However that may be, I agree with you on your first point; and I even go further, because what you spotted in French can occur in the same way in English. But I don't think that we're

thereby thrown back on an 'extralinguistic' enquiry, to make a distinction which for one thing is a matter of common sense, and for another is already current among grammarians. I don't think that this will push us out of our little cabbage patch. Those distinctions, and the well-tried method we use for making them, have always existed inside our territory.

Poirier: I should like to say first of all how delighted I was to hear Professor Austin, and how much I feel myself to be, fundamentally, in agreement with him. The questions I would like to ask him relate to logical and philosophical extensions of the analysis of language; and they are surely quite proper questions, insofar as the Oxford school does not seek to restrict itself to a philological or psychological explication of texts. These questions relate to three points: the linguistic expression of performative thoughts, the relation of the performative to the logical, and the nature of a possible logic of performative utterances.

1. First of all, is it possible to characterize declarative and performative utterances linguistically, in such a way as to make possible the eventual construction of a theory, a logic of performative utterances (which would also be a logic of performative thoughts)?

What somewhat complicates the discussion, it seems, is that one naturally begins with utterances which, grammatically, are in the indicative (or the infinitive). And no doubt there are, among these utterances, some which are declarative and derive from material situations; but there are also some which express feelings, states of mind of very diverse kinds — promises, fears, instructions, wishes, desires, hope, confidence, etc. Can we distinguish these and give rules for doing so? The thing is difficult both in fact and in principle,* for usage is often uncertain, and it is not clear how it could be fixed even by stipulation. If it were a question only of ambiguities of language, the case would not be hopeless, but often the ambiguity extends to the thought itself. Thus when I say 'I order . . .', I may express a firm and seriously intended instruction, and that is equivalent to 'Do it, obey!'. But I may also express the knowledge or the certainty that I have of giving an order, making a demand, or, if you like, I describe myself giving an order. Again, I may quite well give

* E.g., the case of attempting to construct a logic of imperatives.

an order for the sake of giving it, and be quite unconcerned as to its execution.* Plainly there would be no point in setting out the rules for the expression 'I order' without having determined in what sense one is taking it.

What fixes the sense of utterances in current usage? It is not just vocabulary. The grammatical context, and the psychological or human context, must be taken into account. In the third person, 'He orders . . .' is purely descriptive; in the first, 'I order . . .' can be imperative. But if I add the remark 'Either do it or don't', the formula can scarcely convey a volition, a seriously meant instruction. Attention must also be paid to gesture and tone, as indicating the real intention. If I say 'It was a fine conference', the words may, by the merest shade of emphasis, shift from simple statement to admiration, or again to irony.

Tone and context are not the only devices we can normally make use of. What about putting in (even orally!) inverted commas, or using differently coloured inks to indicate different senses? Then we should have to make sure that *these* were unambiguous in thought!

There is, in fact, one thing we can always do, since we do not move on several different levels of thought at once, and that is to say, at the start of our discourse, on what level we are moving — whether we are taking personal indicatives in a sense fundamentally imperative, optative, etc., or rather in a reflexive and descriptive sense. Then there are quite simply the classical procedures for removing ambiguities, and which consist in, for instance, eliminating the indicative mood, at least in the first person, or again in the active voice. Normally an instruction is expressed by the use of the imperative (or even the active or passive subjunctive) — 'Do it', 'Let him do it', 'Let it be done'. Again one can use positive impersonal forms — 'It is prescribed . . .', 'It is ordered . . .' — which practically eliminate the ambiguities of subjectivity. Similarly, instead of saying 'I wish . . .', which is ambiguous, one may say 'May he come!', 'Let him come!', 'It is to be wished that . . .', etc.

What conclusion follows? That, on the one hand, subjective thoughts are infinitely diverse and subtly distinct, and we our-

* And sometimes, in speaking the words, I do not myself know just what my intention really is.

selves do not always know what we are thinking; and that, on the other hand, their linguistic expression is extremely various, extremely uncertain, and depends on a thousand grammatical and psychological circumstances. Any kind of expression whatever can, depending on the circumstances, convey any kind of thought whatever. This is the famous contention, not easy to disagree with, of Ferdinand Brunot, particularly in his *La Pensée et la Langue*. There are no genuine synonyms, nor any grammatical forms with one unique significance, and no thought has one and only one expression.

All that is not to deny that there are in practice thoughts as to which there is general agreement, which can be considered as definite, more or less rough mental categories, and that these thoughts are almost always capable, besides ambiguous expression, of unambiguous expression, at least in certain languages and for those who speak them correctly.* It is obviously appropriate, in discourse undertaken in good faith, to make use of these unambiguous expressions, after having taken the trouble of determining what one means.

As for what 'the language' means 'in itself', 'objectively', regardless of those who speak it, of circumstances, of the particular context, no doubt that does not mean anything much.

2. A second point, then, is this. Suppose† that by a linguistic and psychological analysis we have managed to classify objectively definite performative utterances, to distinguish those mental and grammatical categories that are genuinely performative — what is the relation of each of these to logic? Must we not say that that deals only with declarative or indicative expressions, and that the performative belongs to individual or group psychology? Is the answer really so simple as that? I do not think so; and I imagine Professor Austin would agree in the view that that would be too good to be true.

To be sure, if logic is by definition merely the study and formal representation of the most general laws of events or groups of events, of their presence and absence, co-presence and co-absence, then performative utterances come in only as the expression of

* It is precisely the case, I think, of performative notions that can lead to an appeal to the logician or the philosopher.

† The supposition may perhaps be objected to; but if so, there is no philosophical problem and nothing left to discuss.

particular material facts, with their own relations and laws. One can simply work out the theory of them, in the framework of general logic, as one does the theory of electrostatic attraction, of memory or instinct, or of movements of opinion. But if we take the word 'logic' in a wide sense, taking it to denote (as is also quite common) the study of the general methods and procedures by which we seek to define and to grasp the truth, in the fullest sense of that term, then the problem is much more complicated, the antithesis of logic and psychology vanishes, and performative utterances are perhaps entitled to a place in the realm of logic.

Thus the laws of certainty, of its modalities, of its implications, make up from this point of view a logic which is even, probably, the most fundamental of all and the most deserving of the name of logic (for truth, in the broadest sense, is that which it is necessary to believe, that which it is right to be certain of). Now these laws are those of a privileged experience, in nature fundamentally psychological, and lead on naturally to the hazier laws of belief, of probability, of desire, of hope, of volition — those, in a word, of performative thought.

Furthermore, the notions of truth and falsity themselves, which are the very type of logical notions, are limiting cases of notions that have numerous variants and aspects: one passes by insensible degrees from strictly logical absurdity or necessity to an absurdity and necessity which allow of, and reflect, all the pragmatic and affective *nuances* of performative thought, as Mr. Austin so rightly emphasizes. When I ask myself whether a belief is true, am I on the logical or the affective plane? Is the sincerity of the belief in question, its inner authenticity, its objective validity? The equivocation is not only in the words but at the heart of things. No doubt the logician will say that he considers only the objective validity of the belief and of the judgment which expresses it. But the distinction, so simple when definite physical facts are in question, disappears in many other cases. Not to mention Spinoza and the Adequate Idea which itself bears witness to its truth, we must surely agree that in many instances, and above all in morals, the objective truth of a judgment is defined by a kind of necessity, of inner evidence, which is akin to performative notions. One cannot then, in general, separate

the material truth of a judgment from the truth of authenticity of the belief or the corresponding feelings.

3. The third point is this. Under what form can we envisage a logic, and in particular a formal logic, of performative thoughts as such (of performative utterances, if you prefer that notation), and what is the relation of this logic to the logic of declarative utterances, the current logic of truth?

First of all, will it be a matter of a logic of utterances, or a logic of the psychological reality which underlies those utterances — of performative thoughts and intentions? We find here, beside all the similarities and all the divergences of meaning which Mr. Austin analysed with such subtlety and depth, the equivalent of the problem which Professor Quine raised yesterday;[16] that is to say, how far, when we construct such a logic, do we attend to the properties of expressions (which in origin can only be conventional, imposed by the decisions of the axiomatizer, the legislator, or current usage), or rather of the reality, the meaning, which underlies the expressions and determines their use (or their different uses).*

Let us take an example. If I wish to construct a logic of promises, what promises, behind utterances of the type of 'I promise', are at issue here? The inner and sincere promise? Such a mental act, depending on the objects to which it is applied, the situation which produces it, the other promises with which it is combined, has in fact properties which could be studied experimentally. The formulation of a promise, a declaration, in speech or writing, in promissory form? Then the implications of that are settled externally by civil law or by public opinion, and it scarcely matters whether it expresses a deep and sincere intention. Or an ideal entity, a promise *in abstracto,* which moreover is in some peril of being no more than a word? And we must not suppose that the separation of these notions is an easy matter; for a civil promise, to be binding, must have been freely made, though it need not indeed have been sincere. In any case, an expression like 'One is bound by a promise' is quite ambiguous:

* There are evidently no natural laws of expressions. At the most there are formulae which must be accepted if one is to arrive ultimately, by verbal combinations, at certain other formulae and only those. It is thus that symbolic logic can be expected to allow the quasi-mechanical reconstruction of classical mathematics.

is it a question of the natural effects of inner promising, or of the civil consequences of a legal promise? Now how can the study of performative utterances give place to a formal logic within the ambit of ordinary logic — a formal logic in the strong sense, and not just a theory that, like any theory, can be axiomatized?

First — insofar as the notions and operations involved have some resemblance to those of logic in the ordinary sense — truth, falsehood, assertion, negation, entailment, conjunction, disjunction, applied to objects, to things, to utterances.

Next — insofar as one combines these operations directly by applying them either to themselves (iteration) or to others (product in general), and the thought progresses without other intermediaries. If beyond certain limits progress consists in applying, to the results of the immediate logic itself regarded as indicative utterances, the methods of ordinary logic, then we shall get a mixed system, a deductive theory.

Let us consider then, for example, what might be called the 'logic of imperatives'. Then there will be imperative procedures, which can be applied to various objects and combined among themselves. In what form should they be taken? The personal indicative form is fundamentally ambiguous, and besides is very ill adapted to meaningful iteration — what does 'I order that I order' mean? The personal imperative form, e.g., 'Do . . .', is not ambiguous, and one could work out a logic of 'do's'. But what meaning would attach to the iteration of 'Do . . .', or in general to the combination of two imperatives?* What could correspond to an entailment?

The only usable form seems to be the impersonal form† — 'It is prescribed that . . .'; or again, in French, the subjunctive forms. This eliminates the problems of subjective psychology; it lends itself in some degree to composition and iteration. 'It is prescribed that it is prescribed' has a sense (not, it is true, a very natural one) which in certain conditions could be taken as identical with 'It is prescribed'. 'It is prescribed that it is forbidden' can mean 'It is forbidden'. One can even establish a certain isomorphism between the categories of the imperative and those of what I have called elsewhere 'organic' logic — 'proved',

* The sentence 'Faites que vous veniez' does not combine two imperatives, either grammatically or semantically.

† A logic, like any science, naturally has an impersonal character.

'excluded', 'not proved', 'not excluded', 'allowed' (corresponding to 'nonexcluded' or 'possible'). But that does not go far, for expressions like 'A prescribes B' do not correspond at all to 'A proves B' — presumably because in the first case A and B cannot be of the same nature and so transitivity has no sense. A schema like 'A is prescribed, and A prescribes B, so B is prescribed' has sense only if 'prescribes' is taken in the sense of 'entails' and it is thus reduced to a schema of ordinary logic.

Can we, then, envisage an independent logic of performative utterances? That seems doubtful, and it would be as well, here again, to feel our way as we go along.

There then, among many others, are some points on which I should be glad to hear Professor Austin's views.

Austin: I can't reply point by point to your contribution — which, I am happy to observe, reveals agreement rather than disagreement with what I said. We agree in particular that, logically and psychologically, there are different levels, and different methods relating to each. So I will just take up your last point: can there be a formal logic of performative utterances?

I would be inclined to say yes. But at the same time with this reservation — that I think we should have to be quite sure we know what we mean by 'performative utterance'; and that calls, to begin with, for a much more minute and detailed inventory than the one I just briefly indicated in my paper. Then, and only then, armed with an inventory and a definition, we could if necessary consider formalizing the logic of performative utterances, at least for certain types or families of expressions of this kind. And then again, there would be a good deal needing to be knocked down, before we achieve anything useful on certain points.

But I would like above all to go back to what seems to me a central point all through your contribution — in the examples you chose, where expressions like 'I wish . . .', 'I know . . .', 'I believe . . .' come in, as well as in the implication which I think is carried by your choice of examples — namely, that these phrases express inner states, what could be called states of the soul, psychic phenomena or inner sentiments, which would be the business of psychologists or of ontology. I'm quite prepared to agree that by my own criteria a lot of examples of the sort you mentioned would be counted as performative utterances, and

I willingly admit too that such utterances, along with many others, express 'states of mind': for example, 'I intend to do so-and-so' certainly expresses my intention to do so-and-so. But shall I go so far as to say that all utterances of this sort are in the same position, or even that the essential job of any of them is to express something about our inner states? The promise is here the guarantee of the intention. But above all, and to my mind this is much the most important point, the words *bind* me by a contract, and *commit* me to doing something. I would not want to make the expressive function of an utterance of this kind, with respect to our mental life, the essential feature, or even a main one, of a performative expression.

And for the matter of that I'm not going to call on the psychologist to help me in interpreting these expressions. It seems to me that on this matter the liar would have a lot more things to teach me than the psychologist.

Translator's Notes

1. The French term is 'assertion'. I am sure that 'statement' is the English term Austin would have used here, and I have so translated 'assertion' throughout.

2. 'Formuler un tel énoncé'. The translation is supplied in a footnote by Austin himself.

3. 'Unhappy' is a term Austin regularly used in this connection, and he supplies it himself in brackets after the French 'malheureux'.

4. 'Rupture d'engagement'. Austin himself supplies the translation.

5. That is to say, a particular case of unhappiness might arguably, or even quite properly, be classifiable under more than one heading.

6. 'Affirmer'. I have translated this verb by 'state' throughout.

7. The French phrase is 'peut ne pas jouer'. Austin himself sometimes used in English the coined term 'non-play' (see, e.g., *How to Do Things with Words,* pp. 18n. and 31), but in a more restricted sense than would be appropriate here.

8. These three English terms are supplied in a footnote by Austin himself.

9. The French text has 'conjoncture' here, but this must surely be a misprint for 'conjecture'.

10. Austin supplies this English term himself. It is in any case the term he regularly used.

11. The French text here has 'peut s'établir'; but this gives exactly the opposite of the required sense, and must surely be an error.

12. This phrase is quoted verbatim in the text, a literal French version being tentatively offered in a footnote.

13. 'On fait flèche de tout bois'.

14. This sentence is quoted verbatim in a footnote to the French text.

15. In an earlier paper presented at the same conference, "Le Champ Sémantique de l'Incertitude", L. Apostel had compared French with German and English expressions and idioms, and advocated such comparative study of different languages. In discussion of that paper, Austin agreed that such comparative study was highly desirable, mentioned that, in discussions between philosophers in Oxford, references at least to Greek and Latin were pretty common, but suggested that an excessive attachment to traditional philosophical problems tended to inhibit his colleagues from extensive linguistic researches.

16. The reference is presumably to Quine's paper "Le Mythe de la Signification", presented earlier at the same conference.