

## XII AUSTIN ON PERFORMATIVES

### The Nature of a Performative Utterance

Utterance in which we do something rather than simply say something  
Not a report on the action but a performance of the action  
Not true or false

### Infelicities

Misfire (act not performed):

- The convention does not exist
- Circumstances are not right
- Act is not performed fully and correctly

Insincerity (act performed insincerely, etc):

- Agents lack the necessary mental states

Misunderstanding (act performed but not taken up)

Duress (act performed, but no responsibility)

Pretence (act not really performed)

### Marks of Performatives

Distinction between first person present use ('I apologize) and second or third person ('He apologizes'), and past or future tense use ('I will apologize')

Explicit performative markers. Can all performatives be reduced to these? According to Austin, such markers are not to be understood as providing statements that you are performing the actions, but as indicators that you are.

### Problems

I apologize; I'm sorry; I feel awful about it (cf. I am apologizing)  
The rulings of juries and umpires.

Are statements so different to performatives? Isn't the act of stating a kind of performative?  
Parallels to infelicities: 'The cat is on the mat but I don't believe that it is'; 'I promise that I shall be there, but I haven't the least intention of being there.'

### Austin's other work

*How to Do Things with Words*

Locutionary act: to utter a sentence with a given sense and reference

Illocutionary act: to perform an act *in* uttering a sentence (e.g. to threaten); this is not caused by the utterance but is rather part of what the utterance is.

Perlocutionary act: to achieve something *by* uttering a sentence (e.g. to persuade; to frighten); this is a causal effect of the utterance.

The performatives are a subset of the illocutionary acts; a proper subset, since asserting is an illocution. Illocutionary acts can be achieved non-verbally; but, Austin thinks, they must still be conventional.