

J. L. Austin (1911–1960)

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John Langshaw Austin received his university education in classics at Balliol College Oxford. After completing his degree in 1933 he became a fellow of All Souls College and in 1935 a fellow of Magdalen College. During the Second World War, from 1939 to 1945, he served as an officer in British intelligence, rising to the rank of Lt. Colonel. He is said to be largely responsible for the extraordinary accuracy of the Allied intelligence at the time of the Normandy invasion, and he received citations from the British, French, and American governments for his war work. After the war he returned to Oxford and in 1952 he became White's Professor of Moral Philosophy, a post he held until his death in 1960.

When Austin was professor, there were about sixty practicing professional philosophers in Oxford, and only three held the rank of professor (the other two were Gilbert Ryle and H. H. Price). Austin was the most influential of a very distinguished group of Oxford philosophers of that period. During the fifties most people in Oxford thought it was the best university in the world for the study and practice of philosophy, and there was no question that philosophy was the dominant subject in the university at large. It is hard for people educated in other universities, even in Britain, to imagine the status, prestige, and intellectual centrality accorded to philosophy in Oxford at that time.

The period of Austin's ascendancy matched closely my own stay in Oxford, from my entry as a freshman in 1952 until, as a lecturer at Christ Church, I left in 1959. I got to know him quite well, and these remarks are based in part on my own personal recollections. Austin's influence was not primarily due to his writing. He published only seven articles in his lifetime, and of these only one, "Other Minds," can be said to have been tremendously influential at the time, though three others, "Truth," "A Plea for Excuses," and "Ifs and Cans" received a good deal of attention. There is a sense in which most of Austin's published works during his lifetime were popularizations. These were articles and lectures to meet some particular request or demand. Four of his articles were prepared as invited contributions to symposia of the Aristotelian Society and one was his public lecture to the British Academy. A sixth was his presidential address to the Aristotelian Society. Only one, "How to Talk – Some Simple Ways" was, so to speak, unprovoked. It was published as a separate article by the Aristotelian Society.

During his lifetime Austin's influence was due primarily to two factors: first, he had an original conception of how philosophy might be practiced; and second, he had a forceful intellect and personality that he exhibited in his teaching, and above all in philosophical discussions, both with students and colleagues. His lectures on speech acts were published after his death, and this work is his greatest legacy, though it was largely unknown in his lifetime, except to people who had been his students. Now that he has been dead for several decades, we can appraise his contributions from a longer perspective. It seems to me there are four different subjects that need to be discussed. First, his theory of speech acts. Second, his conception of ordinary language, and of ordinary language philosophy, and how it might be used constructively to give us greater philosophical insight. On this topic the classic work is his article "A Plea For Excuses." Third, Austin's conception of ordinary language philosophy and how it might be used critically in the examination of traditional philosophical issues. Austin's criticism of sense-data theories of perception, in his posthumously published book *Sense and Sensibilia*, is the purest expression of his critical technique. Fourth, much of Austin's influence both on his contemporaries, when he was alive, and on the subsequent work of his students and colleagues, was due to his qualities of character and intellect. I conclude the chapter by giving a brief assessment of his principal achievements.

The theory of speech acts

I believe Austin's most important contribution to the history of philosophy is in his overall philosophy of language as manifested in his theory of speech acts.

During his lifetime Austin's most important discovery was supposed to be that of "performative utterances," and correspondingly of performative verbs and performative sentences. In the period in which Austin worked, philosophers generally supposed that the main function of language was to make truth claims. There were various ways of describing these, and it was common to say, as the logical positivists did, that all of our cognitively meaningful utterances divided into the analytic and the synthetic, and it was common in ethical philosophy to insist that there was a distinction between those utterances which were "descriptive," and those which were "evaluative." Austin thought that all of these simple distinctions were much too crude. He was the first philosopher to notice that there is an important class of utterances made with indicative sentences that do not set out to be true or false, because in these utterances the speaker is not describing a situation, but rather performing an action, and performing an action where the utterance of the sentence constitutes the performance of the action named by the main verb of the sentence. So if I say "I promise to come and see you," in appropriate circumstances, I am not describing a promise, I am making a promise. According to Austin, the utterance of the sentence serves to perform an action, not to describe anything. This led him to make a distinction that he thought would enable us to see matters more correctly: the distinction between performative and constative utterances. There are three ways in which performatives differ from constatives. First, performatives such as "I promise to come and see you" typically have a special verb for performing the action in question, and there is even a special adverb, "hereby," which we can insert in performative sentences; for example, "I hereby promise to come and see you". Constatives, for example, "It is raining," or "Snow is white," do not have or

need a special verb. Second, constatives can be true or false, but performatives are not true or false, rather they are either felicitously or infelicitously performed. Corresponding to the true/false dimension for assessing constatives is the felicitous/infelicitous dimension for assessing performatives. And third, the performative utterance is an action, a doing, whereas the constative is a statement or a description.

However, Austin's patient research eventually showed that this way of making the distinction does not work. It turns out that all of the features that are supposed to be special to the performative are true of the constative as well, and thus what was originally supposed to be the special case, performatives, seems to swallow the general case, constatives, which now turn out to be performances of actions like any other utterance, and this led Austin to a general theory of speech acts.

Going through the three criteria in order: first, just as there are performative verbs for promising, ordering, and apologizing, so also there are performative verbs for stating, claiming, and other constatives. Thus, just as one can promise by saying "I promise," so one can state that it is raining by saying "I state that it is raining," and the criterion that Austin had hoped to use to identify performative verbs, namely the possible occurrence of the adverb "hereby," as in "I hereby promise to come," also characterizes constatives, as in "I hereby state that it is raining."

Second, the so-called constatives also have a felicitous/infelicitous dimension of assessment, and many so-called performatives can be appraised as true or false. For example, if I make a statement that I am no position to make, my utterance will be infelicitous in exactly the same sense that a promise can be infelicitous if, for example, I am unable to do the thing I promised to do. Suppose I say right now, "There are exactly thirty-five people in the next room," when I have no basis whatever for making that statement, then the statement is infelicitous in the same sense in which performatives can be infelicitous. Furthermore, there clearly are apparent performatives that can be judged as true or false. If I say, "I warn you that the bull is about to charge," when it is not the case that the bull is about to charge, then I have issued a false warning, even though a warning is a performative on Austin's original definition.

Third, making a statement is just as much performing an action as making a promise. At the end of Austin's discussion the conclusion is obvious: we should think of every utterance as the performance of a speech act. The notion of a performative should be restricted to those utterances containing the performative use of a performative expression.

The theory of speech acts begins with the rejection of the performative/constative distinction. Within the theory of speech acts Austin then made a distinction between three different levels of description of an utterance: (1) the level of the locutionary act, which is defined as uttering words with a certain meaning, where "meaning" is explained as sense and reference; (2) the level of the illocutionary act, which is defined as the utterance of words with a certain force, which Austin baptized as "illocutionary force"; and (3) the perlocutionary act, which is defined as the production of certain sorts of effects on the hearer. To take Austin's example, if I say "Shoot her," then if by "shoot" I mean shoot, and by "her" I refer to her, then I will have performed a certain locutionary act of saying "Shoot her." But if I uttered that sentence with the force of an *order*, or *advice*, or *request*, then those verbs will name the illocutionary force of my utterance and hence the illocutionary act that I was performing in making the utter-

ance. And if I *persuade* the hearer to shoot her, persuading is the production of an effect on a hearer of a sort that Austin called a perlocutionary act.

The distinction between the illocutionary and the perlocutionary seems to me essential for any theory of language, and it is especially important for those theories that take language as a matter of linguistic behavior; because, of course, the linguistic behavior which involves producing effects on people in the form of perlocutionary effects, needs to be distinguished from the linguistic behavior which involves performing speech acts, regardless of the subsequent effects on the hearers. Implicit in Austin's work is the conception that the illocutionary act, not the perlocutionary act, is the fundamental target of analysis in the philosophy of language. That has been the assumption on which I and a large number of other researchers have proceeded in attempting to carry on Austin's pioneering efforts (see SEARLE).

The distinction between the locutionary and the illocutionary, however, does not seem to me to work. The reason is that the meaning of the sentence, which is supposed to determine the locutionary act, is already sufficient to fix a certain range of illocutionary forces. You cannot distinguish between meaning and force, because force is already part of the meaning of the sentence. There is no way that I can utter the sentence "It is raining," or for that matter, "Shoot her," without performing some illocutionary act insofar as it is a locutionary act. There is no distinction between the locutionary and the illocutionary, because the locutionary is *eo ipso* illocutionary.

Austin also gave us a taxonomy of types of illocutionary acts. His taxonomy includes the following; first, verdictives. These are findings of fact or value on some matter. An example of a verdictive is giving a verdict. Second, exercitives. These are the exercising of powers, rights, and influence. Examples would be appointing and voting. Third, commissives. These are always cases of committing the speaker to a course of action. The favorite example, of course, is promising. Fourth, behabitives. These have to do with social behavior. Examples are apologizing and congratulating. Fifth, expositives. These make plain how our utterances fit into the discourse. Examples are replying, arguing, and conceding.

As with the locutionary/illocutionary distinction, it seemed to me this taxonomy needs revision and extension, because there is no clear criterion for distinguishing between the various categories. I and several other philosophers have attempted to criticize and improve on Austin's taxonomy; however it is important to emphasize that the criticisms and revisions of his views are made within a framework he invented and using tools he gave us. I see the many criticisms of Austin's specific doctrines by subsequent speech act theorists not as refutations but as further contributions to a discussion that he began, but did not live to complete.

It is important to emphasize that when we read Austin's most famous book, the work posthumously published, *How To Do Things With Words*, we are reading his lecture notes. Austin would never have published this material in this form. I know this for a fact because I wanted him to publish it so that I could publish my criticisms of it, even when I was a student. I once asked him "How soon can we hope that your William James lectures will be published?" thus giving him an opening I should never have done. He responded immediately, "You can *hope* it will be published any time you like." Further discussion revealed that he did not think the work ready for publication: "It is too half-baked," he said.

Ordinary language philosophy: the constructive function

Austin was most famous during his lifetime, not for his theory of speech acts, about which only the theory of performatives was generally known, but rather for his particular conception of philosophy, and his style of doing philosophy. He was always anxious to insist that he did not think that his was the only way of doing philosophy, but merely that it was one possible way of doing one part of philosophy. He thought that the first step to be taken in philosophy was to make a very careful analysis of the ordinary use of expressions. The ordinary expressions of a natural language like English, he thought, embodied all the distinctions about the world that people had found it necessary and useful to make in the course of millennia. He did not think that ordinary language was the last word, but he did think it was the first word. In a debate with Bertrand Russell, when Russell asked him if he thought the examination of ordinary language was the be-all and the end-all of philosophy, Austin is reported to have answered, "It may not be the be-all and the end-all, but it certainly is the begin-all." The analysis of the ordinary use of expressions served two philosophical purposes for Austin. One was a corrective purpose of showing that many of the claims that philosophers had made rested simply on mistakes about the ordinary use of expressions. His most famous discussion in this regard is probably his criticism of the arguments for the sense-data theory of perception, in his lectures *Sense and Sensibilia*. The second purpose of the analysis of language was more constructive: he thought we could learn a great deal about the world by analyzing the expressions we use to describe the world.

Austin thought that his method of doing philosophy allowed for two features which philosophy is thought not to possess. First, philosophy on his conception is a cooperative enterprise. It is not something you do alone in your study, but rather you get a group of people and try to discuss examples to see how words are used in describing those examples. And second, philosophy so construed allows for progress. It is typical that people who carry on philosophical discussion of this type, at the end of the day, feel they have made definite progress in analyzing the application of words to concrete examples.

It is characteristic of Austin's approach that he can often show that what seem like two synonyms or near synonyms are really quite different. In a famous case he took the two expressions "by accident" and "by mistake" and showed that they really had quite different meanings, even though at first sight most English speakers would probably say they mean pretty much the same thing. Here was his demonstration. Suppose I go out into the field to shoot my donkey. Suppose I see your donkey, which looks very much like my donkey, and I shoot your donkey. Did I shoot your donkey by accident, or by mistake? Suppose I go out into the field and shoot at my donkey, but just as I am pulling the trigger, the two beasts move, and my bullet strikes your donkey. Did I shoot your donkey by accident, or by mistake? I think the examples are absolutely clear in both cases.

The constructive side of Austin's method of doing philosophy is most powerfully exemplified by his article "A Plea For Excuses" (together with its posthumously published companion piece, "Three Ways of Spilling Ink"). "A Plea for Excuses" is, in fact, a summary of an entire series of seminars that Austin gave during the 1950s. I

attended the seminars, and there was easily enough material presented to fill an entire book, but it is perhaps typical of Austin that the material that a more average philosopher would use for a complete book he condensed into a single article. Austin's method is illustrated by the following: most philosophers, myself for example, if examining the problem of action, would begin by asking what fact about an event makes it into a human action. Austin thinks that this approach, as he frequently said in criticizing my views, is "much too fast." His own approach is, so to speak, to sneak up on the problem indirectly by asking what sorts of excuses, justifications, extenuations, and explanations we offer for our actions. "Excuses," he insists, is just a title, not a description of the whole subject matter. The results of the analysis are a series of theses that he advances about the character of our conceptual apparatus for discussing actions. Many of these are quite surprising. So, for example, I think most philosophers intuitively would suppose that any action is done either voluntarily or involuntarily. But Austin points out that the whole question of negations and opposites is much more complex than that. The opposites of the word "voluntarily," he says, might be "under constraint" or "duress" or "obligation." The opposite of "involuntarily" might be "deliberately" or "on purpose" or the like. Austin urges us not to take anything for granted about negations and opposites. Again, I think many philosophers suppose that there is not much difference between doing something intentionally, deliberately, and on purpose. Austin makes it abundantly clear that these are not at all the same. He also urges us to pay close attention to legal cases and psychological studies; he examines one case, *Regina v. Finney*, in some detail, showing that the lawyers and the judge make serious mistakes, treating several terms of excuse as equivalent when they are not, and being unclear about what action exactly of the defendant is being qualified by what expression. It is impossible to summarize this article because the article is itself a summary of a quite extended project of research, and the interest of the results is in the specific details. But the article reveals both the strengths and some of the limitations of Austin's method.

Ordinary language philosophy: the critical function

I believe the purest case where one can observe Austin, so to speak "in action," is in his book *Sense and Sensibilia*. The actual text that we have before us now was prepared from notes of numerous students by Geoffrey Warnock, but Warnock does an excellent job of conveying the flavor of the actual lectures, as I can say from having attended them. If Austin had lived, I doubt that he would ever have published these lectures as they stand. Their results are almost uniformly negative, and the tone is often more harsh than Austin would normally have allowed in publication. Nonetheless, they are a beautiful exemplification of his method of philosophical analysis. He simply does a careful word-by-word examination of a series of traditional philosophical arguments designed to show that we never perceive "material objects," but only perceive "sense-data." Austin takes Ayer's book *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* as his "stalking horse," and he also discusses arguments from Price and Warnock (see AYER). Austin goes patiently through the arguments that are traditionally called "the argument from illusion," which attempt to prove that all we ever perceive are sense-data, and he shows that without exception the arguments, as presented by Ayer, are hopelessly muddled

and confused. Ayer assumes that such words as “look,” “appear,” and “seems” can be used indifferently as if they meant the same thing, but Austin’s patient analysis shows that they are really quite different. In the standard arguments for sense-data Austin finds only carelessness, muddle, and confusion.

The stages of the arguments that he finds are

- 1 The philosophers assume that there are two exclusive classes of sense experience, those of material objects, and those of sense-data.
- 2 They argue that there must be no discriminable differences in the character of the perceptions since we can confuse one thing for the other.
- 3 They conclude that, since one would expect a considerable difference from two such different sorts of entities, there must be only one class that we are actually perceiving, and that one must be sense-data.

By patiently working through the texts Austin challenges each of these claims.

- 1 There are all sorts of things we perceive that do not fit either category comfortably, such things as shadows, clouds, gases, flames, rainbows, images, etc. Austin thinks the dichotomy is a typical philosophers’ oversimplification. It would be just as confused to say that all we perceive are material objects as it is to say that all we perceive are sense-data.
- 2 In real life there are all sorts of differences in the character of our experiences. Dreams, for example, are different from waking experiences in all sorts of ways; and even the stock-in-trade waking-life examples of the epistemologist are misdescribed. For example, the stick in water which “looks bent” does not look like a bent stick out of water, and even in water it need not look *to be* bent.
- 3 It does not follow from the arguments as presented that all we ever see are sense-data, and indeed it is quite arbitrary for the philosophers to select “sense-data” or “material objects” as the objects of perception.

It is important to emphasize that in criticizing the sense-data theory, Austin is not defending the idea that all we see are material objects. He thinks that idea is just as crude as its opposite.

In the course of his discussion he introduces the idea of what he called a “trouser word,” and what some philosophers subsequently came to call “excluders.” Some words get their meaning in a context from the words that they are opposed to in that context. Thus *real* cream is opposed to *artificial* cream, but a *real* duck is opposed to a *toy* duck or a *decoy* duck, and *real* teeth are opposed to *false* teeth. The word “real” is an excluder that gets its meaning in context from what it is opposed to. There is no common property of reality which the word “real” invariably and literally serves to ascribe. A decoy duck for example, though not a real duck, may nonetheless be a real decoy, as opposed for example to a paper model of a decoy duck. When the epistemologist talks about reality and perceptions of reality, he fails to appreciate the nature of the concept.

In a reply to Austin, Ayer claimed that his main points could survive, even if he accepted all of Austin’s specific objections. His main point is that we could have all of the experiences we do have and still be mistaken in our claims about objects and states of affairs in the world. To this I think Austin would have replied, first that this does not

show that all we ever perceive are the experiences, the “sense-data.” And, second, it does not show that the relation between the experiences and the objects they are taken to be experiences of, is one of evidence. It does not show that the experiences are evidence for the presence of the objects.

Whatever the merits of the debate, I think Austin’s critique proved immensely influential historically. One used to hear a lot about the sense-data theory of perception; one does not hear much about it anymore.

Other works

Austin wrote a number other important works which limitations of space prevent me from exploring in any detail, but I must mention them in passing. “Other Minds” presents a criticism of traditional epistemology which is very much in the spirit of *Sense and Sensibilia*. “Truth” and “Unfair to Facts” present a version of the correspondence theory of truth and a response to Strawson’s criticisms of it. I think Austin is right that the fundamental notion of truth is correspondence, but the particular version that he presents does not survive Strawson’s objections. “Ifs and Cans” is a gem of philosophical analysis. As far as the history of philosophy is concerned, its main point is to respond to those versions of compatibilism about the free will problem which maintain that to say that I could have done otherwise just means that I would have done otherwise if I had so chosen, and to say that I can do something just means that I will do it if certain other conditions are met. But Austin makes a large number of other points about related conceptual issues.

Character and intellect

My own impressions of Austin are somewhat different from those of many people who thought of themselves as his close associates and followers. One trait that we would all agree on was his immense carefulness and precision. Not only when doing philosophy, but even in the most casual conversation, Austin spoke and thought with great precision, and he did not tolerate looseness in his students or colleagues. The worst condemnation that he could make of something he was reading would be to shake his head sadly and say in his thin, precise way, “It’s just loose.” Indeed, on several occasions he said to me in tones more of sadness than anger, “There is a lot loose thinking in this town.” For the most part, Austin’s colleagues regarded him with a kind of awe, and it seemed to me that to some extent they were even terrified in his presence. Certainly, his presence in seminars and meetings had a profound effect on the behavior of others participating. I noticed this when I went back to Oxford some years after his death and found that many of the professional philosophers were behaving like schoolboys during recess. They were much less cautious than they would have been in Austin’s presence.

At first I could not understand the source of Austin’s influence, because it seemed to me that I could I beat him in argument; and like a lot of undergraduates I thought the test of a philosopher was how good he was in the give and take of philosophical repartee. Austin’s technique in discussion was always to take everything dead literally, and then to insist on certain linguistic distinctions that he thought were being overlooked. So, for example, when Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* was published,

I and some other undergraduate philosophers insisted that we discuss Wittgenstein's private language argument in Austin's informal instruction for undergraduates. Austin's technique was to refuse to grant Wittgenstein any leeway at all. At one point when we were discussing Wittgenstein's famous example of the beetle in the box, Austin said sarcastically, "All right, for our next session everyone bring a box with a beetle in it." At one point in Wittgenstein's discussion, he says there might be nothing at all in the box. Austin thought Wittgenstein was simply contradicting himself. "First he says, there definitely is a beetle in the box, and then he says there might be nothing in the box, a plain contradiction."

Austin's habit of insisting on the highest level of precision, both in his professional activities and even in ordinary conversations, seems to me one of the main reasons for the terror that he inspired in his colleagues. At the time, much of the source of Austin's influence derived from his schoolmasterly style. Most Oxford philosophers of the time had been students at British boarding schools, and Austin was, so to speak, the ultimate schoolmaster. If he were reading a paper that I had written, a typical question he put to me would be, "Why exactly did you use the subjunctive?" Or, on another occasion, "In the verb 'suppose,' what does the 'sup' mean?" Austin was famous at the time for his attention to the minute details of ordinary language, but it seemed to me then, and it seems to me now, that his real contribution to philosophy was not so much in the details. Austin did indeed have a genius for spotting linguistic differences and distinctions where most people would have thought there were none, though in the details his views were sometimes mistaken. His most important contribution to philosophy, I believe, is in his overall vision of language.

Though he was regarded as terrifying by many of his colleagues, I can say that to undergraduates he was immensely kind, patient, helpful and, in his reserved way, even friendly. His contempt was reserved for people he thought of as pretentious, self-important, pompous, and above all obscurantist. When Austin, along with several other Oxford philosophers and students, went off to Royaumont in France for an English–French philosophy colloquium he considered the pretentiousness of Merleau-Ponty, then the most influential French philosopher, quite ridiculous. "That Merleau-Ponty, he is just a little tin god. He will never get anywhere." Austin would have hated the "deconstructionists" and "postmodernists" who currently pretend to admire his work.

He did not think his brand of philosophy was the only correct way to do the subject, but he did try to extend its influence with an almost missionary zeal. Again, when we were in Royaumont, and he saw me in discussion with an elderly distinguished French philosopher, he took me aside and said, "Don't waste your time on the aged. Talk to the young!" This remark annoyed me at the time because I did not think of myself there for any other reason than to practice philosophy. Austin, I believe, would have thought it a waste of time for us to go to France if we did not try to spread the truth.

I never heard anyone other than his wife address him by his first name, and when one of his colleagues had the temerity to address him as "John," Austin is reported to have said evenly, "'Austin' is also a Christian name." He did have a habit of holding one's attention in discussion. So, for example, when making an involved point he would take his pipe in one hand and light a match with the other. Never taking his eyes off his interlocutor, he would allow the match to burn ever closer to his bare fingers until

at the last millisecond he would flick his wrist to extinguish the match, whereupon he would start the whole process over again while continuing his relentless discourse, eyes always on his listeners.

Austin's reluctance to publish was part of the culture of Oxford at the time, but also it was partly characteristic of his own attitudes. Oxford had a long tradition of not publishing during one's lifetime, indeed it was regarded as slightly vulgar to publish. People who did publish a lot, like A. J. Ayer, were regarded as remiss for having published too much too soon. As far as having a career and making a reputation were concerned, the attitude in Oxford was that the only opinions that really matter are the opinions of people in Oxford, and perhaps a few in Cambridge and London, and they will know about one's work anyway. One does not need to publish. What one does not want is a lot of graduate students somewhere, picking over one's half-baked published texts and – horror of horrors – finding mistakes. So I think Austin's reluctance to publish was partly due to his extreme carefulness, but it was partly due to his sheer vanity; he did not want any intellectual inferior pointing out errors.

At a time when anti-Americanism was very common in Britain, especially among the intellectual classes, Austin simply adored the United States, and especially its university system. He would not tolerate criticisms of the United States, and the only subject on which I have ever heard him show uncritical enthusiasm was America. Indeed, he once said to me, "The future lies with America," and on another occasion, "There are unplowed fields in that country." Once Herbert Hart was criticizing American cooking, and Austin said evenly, in his discussion-ending way, "It is not so bad."

I often read how much Austin was influenced by Wittgenstein. Nothing could be further from the truth. Austin had no sympathy whatever for Wittgenstein, and I think he was incapable of learning from someone whose style was so "loose." He typically referred to Wittgenstein in the style of English schoolboy slang of the time as, "Witters," pronounced "Vitters." He thought there were no original ideas in Wittgenstein. Indeed he once said to me about Wittgenstein's philosophy, "It's all in Moore," one of the least accurate things I have ever heard Austin say. If Austin had an inspirational model, it was Moore (see MOORE).

It will seem a paradoxical feature of Austin's career that he aroused such passionate controversy both pro and con. On the surface, at least, his presentations are invariably modest, cautious, and self-effacing. Though I did not regard myself as one of his followers, I found it easy to see why they regarded him with such enthusiasm. He offered them a new conception of philosophy, and with it, a new research program. But it is more puzzling to try to understand why he was hated so much. I think in order to understand the hostility that he aroused, we have to compare his career with that of Socrates. He was hated for much the same reason that Socrates was hated: he seemed to destroy everything without leaving anything substantive in its place. Like Socrates he challenged orthodoxy without presenting an alternative, and equally comforting, orthodoxy. All Austin offered, again like Socrates, was a new method for doing philosophy.

Austin's substantive achievement, especially in the theory of speech acts, has survived his death now for nearly a half century, and will, I believe, continue to be a focus of research. But his official doctrine as to how philosophy might be pursued has waned

considerably. It has very few followers and practitioners. Why? Well, part of the answer is that it is just too difficult. The sort of very careful analysis of minute linguistic distinctions that Austin urged us to undertake is simply too much work for most philosophers. Austin thought that we ought to be more patient and hardworking. If entomologists can classify a million different kinds of insects, surely philosophers ought to have the patience to classify the few dozens or few hundred or even a few thousand different sorts of uses of different sorts of words. But the problem is that the motivation that tends to make one a philosopher seems to be quite different from the motivation that makes one an entomologist. Philosophers want very general answers to very large questions, whereas Austin thought they had first better get clear about the distinctions among a number of adverbs, working themselves up to undertake an analysis of a few verbs.

There are certain limitations on Austin's methods, which, paradoxically but to his credit, we can use Austin's theory of speech acts to expose.

(1) Sometimes Austin confuses the truth conditions of a term, that is, the conditions under which it is a fact that some object satisfies that term, with the conditions for appropriately *asserting* that the term applies. Thus, to take an Austin-style example, Austin points out that we wouldn't normally assert that a man walked across the room intentionally, if he just walked across the room in an ordinary, unexceptional way. "No modification without aberration," Austin tells us. Nonetheless it may be *true* that the man walked across the room intentionally, it is just not appropriate to assert it unless there is something unusual. It may just be too obvious that the act was done intentionally.

(2) Related to the first mistake is the mistake of confusing the meaning of a term with the illocutionary force that characteristically accompanies the assertion that the term applies to an object. Thus, to take another example from Austin, he points out that when we say that we know something, we are often giving our guarantee for what we claim to know, that the claim to know has certain features in common with a performative, such as "I promise." Austin is careful not to say that "know" is a performative, but he does think that the assertion that one knows has a performative-like guaranteeing force. But once again this does not tell us the meaning of the word "know," because it cannot account for the occurrence of this word in other cases such as conditionals or negations. So even if an utterance of the form "I know that *p*" means something like "I guarantee that *p*," still, an utterance of a conditional of the form "if I know that *p* then *q*," does not mean anything at all like "if I guarantee that *p*, then *q*."

(3) Even after you have done a careful linguistic analysis and shown that the standard philosophical positions rest on a misuse of words, still, you can often state the position again without using those words. The problem remains even after the misuse of words have been corrected. Thus, to take the problem of free will, Austin points out that when we say that an act was done freely, "freely" functions as an excluder, excluding all of the various ways in which an act may not have been done freely, such as, for example, done under duress or under compulsion. But even if Austin is right about this, and he probably is, you still have a free will problem left over. Here it is: Are all human acts such that the performance of the act has antecedent causal conditions which are causally sufficient to determine the act? If I walk across the room, and I walk across

the room in a way which is not under duress or compulsion, all the same there is still the question about free will. Were the antecedent conditions prior to the onset of my action of walking across the room sufficient to determine that I was going to walk across the room? That question remains even after we have become clear about all of the various uses of freely, voluntarily, etc.

(4) Austin says that ordinary language embodies all of the distinctions that humans have chosen to make over millennia. But there is a sense in which that is not quite right. We can indeed *state* in ordinary language all of the distinctions that humans have chosen to make, and indeed we can state a lot that they have not chosen to make. But it is not the case that every real distinction that humans have made is marked by a lexical distinction, by two different words, in ordinary usage. Thus to take one of Austin's examples, the word "pretend" does not mark a distinction between those cases of pretense which are genuinely intended to deceive, and those cases of pretense which are put on or are mock-performances, but not designed to deceive. So if I pretend to be the President of the United States in order to be admitted to the White House, I have pretended in the deceptive way. But if I pretend to be the President of the United States as part of a game of charades, there is no intention to deceive. This is an obvious and important distinction, as Anscombe pointed out in the symposium with Austin on pretending, but we do not have two verbs whose meanings are "pretend deceptively" and "pretend non-deceptively."

Conclusion

J. L. Austin was one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century. In examining his contribution we need to distinguish between the philosophy of language and linguistic philosophy. The philosophy of language is the attempt to give an account of certain very general features of the structure, use, and functioning of language. Linguistic philosophy is the attempt to solve philosophical problems by using linguistic methods. Austin made important contributions to both the philosophy of language and linguistic philosophy. During his lifetime he was famous as a linguistic philosopher, but not for his philosophy of language. Since his death it has emerged that his most important contribution to philosophy has been his philosophy of language as expounded in his theory of speech acts. At the conclusion of "Ifs and Cans," Austin expresses the hope that the next century may see the birth of a comprehensive *science of language*. I believe that he thought his theory of speech acts was a contribution toward that future science.

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