USE OF THESES

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STUDIES IN J. L. AUSTIN'S PHILOSOPHY OF LANGUAGE

by

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A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Australian National University, June 1965
Of course comments on comments, criticisms of criticisms, are subject to the law of diminishing fleas.....

Unfair to facts
This thesis is my own work, written while I was a research scholar in the Research School of Social Sciences in the Australian National University.
## CONTENTS

Abbreviations used iii  
Preface iv  
Synopsis viii

### PART I

Meaning and Statement

#### CHAPTER 1

The Meaning of Language 1

#### CHAPTER 2

Statements and Associated Speech Acts 20

#### CHAPTER 3

Statements and Facts 58

### PART II

Speech Acts and the Uses of Language

#### CHAPTER 4

The Use of Language 96

#### CHAPTER 5

Locutionary, Illocutionary and Perlocutionary Acts 153
# PART III
Grammatical Investigations

## CHAPTER 6
'I Know' and Performative Utterances  
187

## CHAPTER 7
Performative Utterances, Illocutionary Forces  
and Parenthetical Verbs  
212

## CHAPTER 8
Ability and Choice  
249

**Publications Cited**  
279
### ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in citations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papers</td>
<td>Austin's <em>Philosophical Papers</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>HTDTWWW</td>
<td><em>How to do Things with Words</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td><em>Sense and Sensibilia</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td><em>Analysis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>AJP</td>
<td><em>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</em></td>
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<td>P</td>
<td><em>Philosophy</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td><em>Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PASS</td>
<td><em>do., Supplementary Volume</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PR</td>
<td><em>Philosophical Review</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>PQ</td>
<td><em>Philosophical Quarterly</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ECA</td>
<td><em>Essays in Conceptual Analysis</em></td>
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What follows is a series of loosely related studies of some aspects of J.L. Austin's philosophy of language and of what I have called his 'grammatical investigations' into the usage of such verbs as 'I know' and 'I can'. Perhaps I had better say: Some aspects of philosophy of language as they arise out of Austin's work. For, while the starting point is always Austin, and the subjects discussed—meaning, use, force, statements, facts, speech-acts and so on—figure prominently in Austin's work, I have, in discussing them, drawn, not only on Austin's work, but also on related contemporary writings; for example, work by P.F. Strawson on statements, by Gilbert Ryle on the use of language, by J.O. Urmson on non-descriptive, force-showing verbs.

I am hesitant to advance any large thesis about Austin, preferring rather that this work be thought of as constituting a small part of that 'patient accumulation of many small truths' with which Austin, according to G.J. Warnock, may have hoped to pave 'the road to large truths'. However, before turning to the minutiae, I should like to say two quite general things about Austin, one of them completely untendentious.

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1 John Langshaw Austin, Proceedings of the British Academy, XLIX (1963), p.354.
The concluding words of Austin's *Philosophical Papers* are as follows:

...life and truth and things do tend to be a bit complicated. It's not things, it's philosophers that are simple. You will have heard it said, I expect, that over-simplification is the occupational disease of philosopher, and in a way one might agree with that. But for a sneaking suspicion that it's their occupation.

I should claim that Austin's occupation was, at least very often, philosophy, that is, over-simplification, even though, elsewhere (HTDTW 38), he remarked that over-simplification must at all costs be avoided.

It is of some interest to compare the following two quotations, the first from *Philosophical Investigations* (1:23) the second from *Austin's Performative Utterances* (Papers 221)

But how many kinds of sentence are there? Say assertion, question, and command? There are countless kinds: countless different kinds of use of what we call 'symbols', 'words', 'sentences' (Wittgenstein's italics).

...I think we should not despair too easily and talk, as people are apt to do, about the infinite uses of language. Philosophers will do this when they have listed as many, let us say, as seventeen; but even if there were something like ten thousand uses of language, surely we could list them all in time. (Austin's italics).

Now if Wittgenstein is right any attempted schematization of ordinary language will be either incomplete or an 'over-simplification'. And Wittgenstein may well be right. Nevertheless I believe that we ought to follow Austin in attempting the schematization even if it means
engaging in a bit of over-simplification or philosophy. For, notice that Austin's ten thousand uses of language would be almost as dull as Wittgenstein's countless uses if it were impossible to categorize these uses, subsuming them under the simplest possible schema. And, in fact, when Austin does list a great variety of speech-acts (HTDTW chap.12) he classifies some as, for example, expositive uses of language, as opposed to verdictive, exercitive, commissive and behabitive uses of language. Furthermore, all verdictive, exercitive, commissive, behabitive and expositive uses of language are alike in being illocutionary uses of language as opposed to, for example, perlocutionary uses of language. The attempted schematization may be an over-simplification, but the fun is in the trying.

Secondly, I want to say that I have found in the close study of Austin's philosophical writing what Austin claimed to find in the study of excuses, namely, 'what philosophy is so often thought, and made, barren of - the fun of discovery, the pleasures of co-operation, and the satisfaction of reaching agreement' Disagreement too, of course, as I shall try to make clear. For I am acknowledging, gratefully, that it is always possible, even when Austin's argument is most complex and difficult, to be clear what the argument is. So that, agreeing or disagreeing, we can know what we are agreeing or disagreeing with. Who will say that it is always so in philosophy?
My thanks go to the Australian National University whose generous research scholarship made this work possible: And to Professor John Passmore and Dr Robert Brown for a great deal of patient, sympathetic criticism.

Canberra, June 1965.
Chapter 1

I examine Austin's paper How to Talk from the point of view of the theory of meaning (sense and reference) there adumbrated.

Chapter 2

I describe the operation of 'fitting' and 'matching' by means of which Austin, in How to Talk, claims to generate four distinct speech-acts from a given speech-situation. I then argue, against J.W. Roxbee Cox, that it is neither vacuous to speak of fitting an item to a given name while matching the 'item-type' to the 'sense' of the name, nor impossible to speak of fitting an item to a name while matching the 'sense' of the name to the 'item-type'. I go on, however, to claim that 'statements', 'descriptions', etc., the speech-acts schematized by Austin, are not distinguished in ordinary language in the way that Austin suggests they are.

Chapter 3

I consider the role played by statements in the controversy between Austin and Strawson about Truth; I argue that some of the confusion about facts which that debate engendered rests on a prior confusion about statements.
Chapter 4

Contemporary philosophers often speak of the use of (units of) language for (units of) speech. I examine some recent 'use-talk' as it is found in the writing of Austin, Ryle and Strawson, and try to show that it is neither particularly consistent nor particularly sensible. I except, with some reservations, the later use-talk of Austin; the use of language, not for the 'bare' locutionary act of saying something, but for further illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. I then argue in favour of Ryle's recommendation that use-talk be construed as talk about how language is used rather than as talk about what language is used for. However, I go on to claim, against Ryle, that use-talk, thus construed, becomes 'usage-talk'. Finally, I argue that Ryle, in his important papers on this topic, is led into error just because he writes in terms of the use of language rather than in terms of linguistic usage.

Chapter 5

I try to examine, in some detail, the distinctions drawn by Austin, in *How to do Things with Words*, between (1) the phonetic act, the phatic act and the rhetic act - the speech-acts which together comprise a complete locutionary act; (2) the locutionary act and the illocutionary act; (3) the illocutionary act and the perlocutionary act.
Chapter 6

I begin by claiming that J.C. Urmson's argument to the effect that Austin did not, in Other Minds, read 'I know' as performative, is unsuccessful. I go on to argue that Austin, while affecting to draw a parallel between knowing and promising, succeeds only in drawing a parallel between saying 'I know' and saying 'I promise'; and that the latter parallel does not support the former just because 'I promise' is a performative utterance while 'I know' is not. The breakdown of the parallelism suggests the sort of grammatical criterion for performative or practical utterances which has been proposed by W.H.F. Barnes. I proceed to test Barnes' criterion, first against some paradigmatically performative utterances, 'I promise', 'I guarantee' and so on, then against utterances which are less clearly performative, 'I hold', 'I agree' and so on. I find that while the criterion will do very well for the paradigms, verbs like 'I agree' may be read either as conforming or as not conforming to Barnes' rule. I then suggest that 'I agree' conforms or fails to conform to Barnes' rule (is performative or descriptive) according to whether we think of agreement as an action to be performed or a 'state of mind' to be described. I conclude by arguing that 'I know' is never performative just because knowing is not an action we perform.

Chapter 7

Austin's later doctrine of illocutionary forces will not, I argue, accommodate 'I know' and 'I believe' as illocutionary verbs, any more
than the performative thesis before it would accommodate 'I know' as
a performative utterance. For the later theory is, like the earlier,
a theory of speech-acts. Because knowing and believing are not things
that we do they are not things that we do with words. I go on to make
a critical examination of Urmson's related thesis that 'I know' and 'I
believe' are non-descriptive because force-showing or degree-
indicating or parenthetical. Finally, I compare Urmson's attempt to
'reduce' some important 'psychological-descriptives' to the class of
parenthetical or force-showing verbs with Austin's attempt to 'reduce'
the class of performative utterances to the class of illocutionary or
force-showing verbs, in order to bring out what I take to be a
weakness common to both enterprises.

Chapter 8

I examine Austin's more successful investigations into the
'grammar' of 'I can', in the light of later criticism by D.J. O'Connor
and P.H. Nowell-Smith.