J. L. Austin

HOW TO DO THINGS WITH WORDS

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Edited by J. O. Urmson
and Marina Sbisa

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LECTURE I

WHAT I shall have to say here is neither difficult nor contentious; the only merit I should like to claim for it is that of being true, at least in parts. The phenomenon to be discussed is very widespread and obvious, and it cannot fail to have been already noticed, at least here and there, by others. Yet I have not found attention paid to it specifically.

It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a 'statement' can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely. Grammarians, indeed, have regularly pointed out that not all 'sentences' are (used in making) statements: there are, traditionally, besides (grammarians') statements, also questions and exclamations, and sentences expressing commands or wishes or concessions. And doubtless philosophers have not intended to deny this, despite some loose use of 'sentence' for 'statement'. Doubtless, too, both grammarians and philosophers have been aware that it is by no means easy to distinguish even questions, commands, and so on from statements by means of the few and jejune grammatical marks available, such as word order, mood, and the like:

1 It is, of course, not really correct that a sentence ever is a statement: rather, it is used in making a statement, and the statement itself is a 'logical construction' out of the makings of statements.
though perhaps it has not been usual to dwell on the difficulties which this fact obviously raises. For how do we decide which is which? What are the limits and definitions of each?

But now in recent years, many things which would once have been accepted without question as 'statements' by both philosophers and grammarians have been scrutinized with new care. This scrutiny arose somewhat indirectly—at least in philosophy. First came the view, not always formulated without unfortunate dogmatism, that a statement (of fact) ought to be 'verifiable', and this led to the view that many 'statements' are only what may be called pseudo-statements. First and most obviously, many 'statements' were shown to be, as KANT perhaps first argued systematically, strictly nonsense, despite an unexceptionable grammatical form: and the continual discovery of fresh types of nonsense, unsystematic though their classification and mysterious though their explanation is too often allowed to remain, has done on the whole nothing but good. Yet we, that is, even philosophers, set some limits to the amount of nonsense that we are prepared to admit we talk: so that it was natural to go on to ask, as a second stage, whether many apparent pseudo-statements really set out to be 'statements' at all. It has come to be commonly held that many utterances which look like statements are either not intended at all, or only intended in part, to record or impart straightforward information about the facts: for example, 'ethical propositions' are perhaps intended, solely or partly, to evince emotion or to prescribe conduct or to influence it in special ways. Here too KANT was among the pioneers. We very often also use utterances in ways beyond the scope at least of traditional grammar. It has come to be seen that many specially perplexing words embedded in apparently descriptive statements do not serve to indicate some specially odd additional feature in the reality reported, but to indicate (not to report) the circumstances in which the statement is made or reservations to which it is subject or the way in which it is to be taken and the like. To overlook these possibilities in the way once common is called the 'descriptive' fallacy; but perhaps this is not a good name, as 'descriptive' itself is special. Not all true or false statements are descriptions, and for this reason I prefer to use the word 'constative'. Along these lines it has by now been shown piecemeal, or at least made to look likely, that many traditional philosophical perplexities have arisen through a mistake—the mistake of taking as straightforward statements of fact utterances which are either (in interesting non-grammatical ways) nonsensical or else intended as something quite different.

Whatever we may think of any particular one of these views and suggestions, and however much we may deplore the initial confusion into which philosophical doctrine and method have been plunged, it cannot be doubted that they are producing a revolution in philosophy. If anyone wishes to call it the greatest and most salutary in its history, this is not, if you come to think of it, a
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large claim. It is not surprising that beginnings have been piecemeal, with *parti pris*, and for extraneous aims; this is common with revolutions.

PRELIMINARY ISOLATION OF THE PERFORMATIVE¹

The type of utterance we are to consider here is not, of course, in general a type of nonsense; though misuse of it can, as we shall see, engender rather special varieties of 'nonsense'. Rather, it is one of our second class—the masqueraders. But it does not by any means necessarily masquerade as a statement of fact, descriptive or constative. Yet it does quite commonly do so, and that, oddly enough, when it assumes its most explicit form. Grammarians have not, I believe, seen through this 'disguise', and philosophers only at best incidentally.²

It will be convenient, therefore, to study it first in this misleading form, in order to bring out its characteristics by contrasting them with those of the statement of fact which it apes.

We shall take, then, for our first examples some utterances which can fall into no hitherto recognized *grammatical* category save that of 'statement', which are not nonsense, and which contain none of those verbal danger-signals which philosophers have by now detected or think

¹ Everything said in these sections is provisional, and subject to revision in the light of later sections.
² Of all people, jurists should be best aware of the true state of affairs. Perhaps some now are. Yet they will succumb to their own tenuous fiction, that a statement of 'the law' is a statement of fact.

they have detected (curious words like 'good' or 'all', suspect auxiliaries like 'ought' or 'can', and dubious constructions like the hypothetical): all will have, as it happens, humdrum verbs in the first person singular present indicative active.¹ Utterances can be found, satisfying these conditions, yet such that

A. they do not 'describe' or 'report' or constate anything at all, are not 'true or false'; and
B. the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as 'just', saying something.

This is far from being as paradoxical as it may sound or as I have meanly been trying to make it sound: indeed, the examples now to be given will be disappointing.

Examples:

(E. a) 'I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife)—as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony.²

(E. b) 'I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*’—as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stem.

(E. c) 'I give and bequeath my watch to my brother’—as occurring in a will.

(E. d) 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.’

¹ Not without design: they are all 'explicit' performatives, and of that preportal class later called 'executives'.
² [Austin realized that the expression 'I do' is not used in the marriage ceremony too late to correct his mistake. We have let it remain in the text as it is philosophically unimportant that it is a mistake. J. O. U.]
In these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be done or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it. None of the utterances cited is either true or false: I assert this as obvious and do not argue it. It needs argument no more than that 'damn' is not true or false: it may be that the utterance 'serves to inform you'—but that is quite different. To name the ship is to say (in the appropriate circumstances) the words 'I name, &c.' When I say, before the registrar or altar, &c., 'I do', I am not reporting on a marriage: I am indulging in it.

What are we to call a sentence or an utterance of this type? I propose to call it a performative sentence or a performative utterance, or, for short, 'a performative'. The term 'performative' will be used in a variety of cогnate ways and constructions, much as the term 'imperative' is. The name is derived, of course, from 'perform', the usual verb with the noun 'action': it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action

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1 Still less anything that I have already done or have yet to do.

2 'Sentences' form a class of 'utterances', which class is to be defined, so far as I am concerned, grammatically, though I doubt if the definition has yet been given satisfactorily. With performative utterances are contrasted, for example and essentially, 'constative' utterances: to issue a constative utterance (i.e. to utter it with a historical reference) is to make a statement. To issue a performative utterance is, for example, to make a bet. See further below on 'illocutions'.

3 Formerly I used 'performatory': but 'performative' is to be preferred as shorter, less ugly, more tractable, and more traditional in formation.

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— it is not normally thought of as just saying something.

A number of other terms may suggest themselves, each of which would suitably cover this or that wider or narrower class of performatives: for example, many performatives are contractual ( 'I bet') or declaratory ( 'I declare war') utterances. But no term in current use that I know of is nearly wide enough to cover them all. One technical term that comes nearest to what we need is perhaps 'operative', as it is used strictly by lawyers in referring to that part, i.e. those clauses, of an instrument which serves to effect the transaction (conveyance or what not) which is its main object, whereas the rest of the document merely 'recites' the circumstances in which the transaction is to be effected. But 'operative' has other meanings, and indeed is often used nowadays to mean little more than 'important'. I have preferred a new word, to which, though its etymology is not irrelevant, we shall perhaps not be so ready to attach some preconceived meaning.

CAN SAYING MAKE IT SO?

Are we then to say things like this:

'To marry is to say a few words', or

'Betting is simply saying something'?

Such a doctrine sounds odd or even flippant at first, but with sufficient safeguards it may become not odd at all.

1 I owe this observation to Professor H. L. A. Hart.
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A sound initial objection to them may be this; and it is not without some importance. In very many cases it is possible to perform an act of exactly the same kind not by uttering words, whether written or spoken, but in some other way. For example, I may in some places eft marriage by cohabiting, or I may bet with a totalisator machine by putting a coin in a slot. We should then, perhaps, convert the propositions above, and put it that to say a few certain words is to marry or 'to marry is, in some cases, simply to say a few words' or 'simply to say a certain something is to bet.'

But probably the real reason why such remarks sound dangerous lies in another obvious fact, to which we shall have to revert in detail later, which is this. The uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act (of betting or what not), the performance of which is also the object of the utterance, but it is far from being usually, even if it is ever, the sole thing necessary if the act is to be deemed to have been performed. Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform certain other actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions or even acts of uttering further words. Thus, for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her, for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and undivorced, and so on: for a bet to have been made, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been accepted by a taker (who must have done something, such as to say 'Done'), and it is hardly a gift if I say 'I give it you' but never hand it over.

So far, well and good. The action may be performed in ways other than by a performative utterance, and in any case the circumstances, including other actions, must be appropriate. But we may, in objecting, have something totally different, and this time quite mistaken, in mind, especially when we think of some of the more awe-inspiring performatives such as 'I promise to ...'. Surely the words must be spoken 'seriously', and so as to be taken 'seriously'? This is, though vague, true enough in general—it is an important commonplace in discussing the purport of any utterance whatsoever. I must not be joking, for example, nor writing a poem. But we are apt to have a feeling that their being serious consists in their being uttered as (merely) the outward and visible sign, for convenience or other record or for information, of an inward and spiritual act: from which it is but a short step to go on to believe or to assume without realizing that for many purposes the outward utterance is a description, true or false, of the occurrence of the inward performance. The classic expression of this idea is to be found in the Hippolytus (I. 612), where Hippolytus says

ή γλώσσα εμάμου, ή δε φημη ἀνωμοσία,

i.e. 'my tongue swore to, but my heart (or mind or other
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backstage artiste) did not. Thus ‘I promise to...’ obliges me—puts on record my spiritual assumption of a spiritual shackle.

It is gratifying to observe in this very example how excess of profundity, or rather solemnity, at once paves the way for immodality. For one who says ‘promising is not merely a matter of uttering words! It is an inward and spiritual act!’ is apt to appear as a solid moralist standing out against a generation of superficial theorizers: we see him as he sees himself, surveying the invisible depths of ethical space, with all the distinction of a specialist in the sui generis. Yet he provides Hippolytus with a let-out, the bigamist with an excuse for his ‘I do’ and the welsher with a defence for his ‘I bet’. Accuracy and morality alike are on the side of the plain saying that our word is our bond.

If we exclude such fictitious inward acts as this, can we suppose that any of the other things which certainly are normally required to accompany an utterance such as ‘I promise that...’ or ‘I do (take this woman...’ are in fact described by it, and consequently do by their presence make it true or by their absence make it false? Well, taking the latter first, we shall next consider what we actually do say about the utterance concerned when one or another of its normal concomitants is absent. In no case do we say that the utterance was false but rather that the utterance—or rather the act, e.g. the promise—was void, or given in bad faith, or not implemented, or the like. In the particular case of promising, as with many other performatives, it is appropriate that the person uttering the promise should have a certain intention, viz. here to keep his word; and perhaps of all concomitants this looks the most suitable to be that which ‘I promise’ does describe or record. Do we not actually, when such intention is absent, speak of a ‘false’ promise? Yet so to speak is not to say that the utterance ‘I promise that...’ is false, in the sense that though he states that he does, he doesn’t, or that though he describes he misdescribes—misreports. For he does promise: the promise here is not even void, though it is given in bad faith. His utterance is perhaps misleading, probably deceitful and doubtless wrong, but it is not a lie or a misstatement. At most we might make out a case for saying that it implies or insinuates a falsehood or a misstatement (to the effect that he does intend to do something): but that is a very different matter. Moreover, we do not speak of a false bet or a false christening; and that we do speak of a false promise need commit us no more than the fact that we speak of a false move. ‘False’ is not necessarily used of statements only.

1 We deliberately avoid distinguishing these, precisely because the distinction is not in point.
LECTURE II

We were to consider, you will remember, some cases and senses (only some, Heaven help us!) in which to say something is to do something; or in which by saying or in saying something we are doing something. This topic is one development—there are many others—in the recent movement towards questioning an age-old assumption in philosophy—the assumption that to say something, at least in all cases worth considering, i.e. all cases considered, is always and simply to state something. This assumption is no doubt unconscious, no doubt is precipitate, but it is wholly natural in philosophy apparently. We must learn to run before we can walk. If we never made mistakes how should we correct them?

I began by drawing your attention, by way of example, to a few simple utterances of the kind known as performatorics or performatics. These have on the face of them the look—or at least the grammatical make-up—of 'statements'; but nevertheless they are seen, when more closely inspected, to be, quite plainly, not utterances which could be 'true' or 'false'. Yet to be 'true' or 'false' is traditionally the characteristic mark of a statement. One of our examples was, for instance, the utterance 'I do' (take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife), as

uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony. Here we should say that in saying these words we are doing something—namely, marrying, rather than reporting something, namely that we are marrying. And the act of marrying, like, say, the act of betting, is at least preferably (though still not accurately) to be described as saying certain words, rather than as performing a different, inward and spiritual, action of which these words are merely the outward and audible sign. That this is so can perhaps hardly be proved, but it is, I should claim, a fact.

It is worthy of note that, as I am told, in the American law of evidence, a report of what someone else said is admitted as evidence if what he said is an utterance of our performative kind: because this is regarded as a report not so much of something he said, as which it would be hear-say and not admissible as evidence, but rather as something he did, an action of his. This coincides very well with our initial feelings about performatics.

So far then we have merely felt the firm ground of prejudice slide away beneath our feet. But now how, as philosophers, are we to proceed? One thing we might go on to do, of course, is to take it all back: another would be to bog, by logical stages, down. But all this must take time. Let us first at least concentrate attention on the little matter already mentioned in passing—this matter of 'the appropriate circumstances'. To bet is not, as I pointed out in passing, merely to utter the words 'I bet, &c.': someone might do that all right, and yet we might still not agree that he had in fact, or at least entirely,
succeeded in betting. To satisfy ourselves of this, we have only, for example, to announce our bet after the race is over. Besides the uttering of the words of the so-called performative, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. What these are we may hope to discover by looking at and classifying types of case in which something goes wrong and the act—marrying, betting, bequeathing, christening, or what not—is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general unhappy. And for this reason we call the doctrine of the things that can be and go wrong on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the Infelicitics. Suppose we try first to state schematically—and I do not wish to claim any sort of finality for this scheme—some at least of the things which are necessary for the smooth or 'happy' functioning of a performative (or at least of a highly developed explicit performative, such as we have hitherto been alone concerned with), and then give examples of infelicities and their effects. I fear, but at the same time of course hope, that these necessary conditions to be satisfied will strike you as obvious.

(A. 1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

(A. 2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

(B. 1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and completely.

(Γ. 1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves,

(Γ. 2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

Now if we sin against any one (or more) of these six rules, our performative utterance will be (in one way or another) unhappy. But, of course, there are considerable differences between these 'ways' of being unhappy—ways which are intended to be brought out by the letter-numerals selected for each heading.

The first big distinction is between all the four rules A and B taken together, as opposed to the two rules Γ (hence the use of Roman as opposed to Greek letters). If we offend against any of the former rules (A's or B's)—that is if we, say, utter the formula incorrectly, or if,

1 It will be explained later why the having of these thoughts, feelings, and intentions is not included as just one among the other 'circumstances' already dealt with in (A).
say, we are not in a position to do the act because we are, say, married already, or it is the purser and not the captain who is conducting the ceremony, then the act in question, e.g. marrying, is not successfully performed at all, does not come off, is not achieved. Whereas in the two cases the act is achieved, although to achieve it in such circumstances, as when we are, say, insincere, is an abuse of the procedure. Thus, when I say ‘I promise’ and have no intention of keeping it, I have promised but .... We need names for referring to this general distinction, so we shall call in general those infelicities A. 1—B. 2 which are such that the act for the performing of which, and in the performing of which, the verbal formula in question is designed, is not achieved, by the name MISFires: and on the other hand we may christen those infelicities where the act is achieved ABUSES (do not stress the normal connotations of these names!) When the utterance is a misfire, the procedure which we purport to invoke is disallowed or is botched: and our act (marrying, &c.) is void or without effect, &c. We speak of our act as a purported act, or perhaps an attempt—or we use such an expression as ‘went through a form of marriage’ by contrast with ‘married’. On the other hand, in the I cases, we speak of our infelicitous act as ‘professed’ or ‘hollow’ rather than ‘purported’ or ‘empty’, and as not implemented, or not consummated, rather than as void or without effect. But let me hasten to add that these distinctions are not hard and fast, and more especially that such words as ‘purported’ and ‘professed’ will not bear very much stressing. Two final words about being void or without effect. This does not mean, of course, to say that we won’t have done anything: lots of things will have been done—we shall most interestingly have committed the act of bigamy—but we shall not have done the purported act, viz. marrying. Because despite the name, you do not when bigamous marry twice. (In short, the algebra of marriage is BOOLEAN.) Further, ‘without effect’ does not here mean ‘without consequences, results, effects’.

Next, we must try to make clear the general distinction between the A cases and the B cases, among the misfires. In both of the cases labelled A there is misinvocation of a procedure—either because there is, speaking vaguely, no such procedure, or because the procedure in question cannot be made to apply in the way attempted. Hence infelicities of this kind A may be called Misinvocations. Among them, we may reasonably christen the second sort—where the procedure does exist all right but can’t be applied as purported—Misapplications. But I have not succeeded in finding a good name for the other, former, class. By contrast with the A cases, the notion of the B cases is rather that the procedure is all right, and it does apply all right, but we muffle the execution of the ritual with more or less dire consequences: so B cases as opposed to A cases will be called Miseexecutions as opposed to Misinvocations: the purported act is vitiated by a flaw or hitch in the conduct of the ceremony. The Class B. 1 is that of Flaws, the Class B. 2 that of Hitches.
We get then the following scheme:¹

\[
\begin{array}{cccc}
\text{AB} & \text{F} \\
\text{Misfires} & \text{Abuses} \\
\text{Act purported but void} & \text{Act professed but hollow} \\
\text{A} & \text{B} \\
\text{Misinvocations} & \text{Misexecutions} \\
\text{Act disallowed} & \text{Act vitiates} \\
\text{A}. \ 1 & \text{A}. \ 2 & \text{B}. \ 1 & \text{B}. \ 2 \\
? & \text{Misapplica-Flaws} & \text{Hitches} & \text{Insincerities} \\
\end{array}
\]

I expect some doubts will be entertained about A. 1 and \( F'. 2 \); but we will postpone them for detailed consideration shortly.

But before going on to details, let me make some general remarks about these infelicities. We may ask:

1. To what variety of 'act' does the notion of infelicity apply?
2. How complete is this classification of infelicity?
3. Are these classes of infelicity mutually exclusive?

Let us take these questions in (that) order.

1. How widespread is infelicity?

Well, it seems clear in the first place that, although it has excited us (or failed to excite us) in connexion with certain acts which are or are in part acts of uttering words, infelicity is an ill to which all acts are heir which have

¹ [Austin from time to time used other names for the different infelicities. For interest some are here given: A. 1, Non-plays; A. 2, Misplays; B, Miscarriages; B. 1, Misexecutions; B. 2, Non-executions; F, Disrespects; F'. 1, Dissimulations; F'. 2, Non-fulfilments, Disloyalties, Infractions, Indisciplines, Breaches. J. O. U.]
of them have the general character, in whole or part, of conventional or ritual acts, and are therefore, among other things, exposed to infelicity.

Lastly we may ask—and here I must let some of my cats on the table—does the notion of infelicity apply to utterances *which are statements*? So far we have produced the infelicity as characteristic of the *performative* utterance, which was ‘defined’ (if we can call it so much) mainly by contrast with the supposedly familiar ‘statement’. Yet I will content myself here with pointing out that one of the things that has been happening lately in philosophy is that close attention has been given even to ‘statements’ which, though not false exactly nor yet ‘contradictory’, are yet outrageous. For instance, statements which refer to something which does not exist as, for example, ‘The present King of France is bald’. There might be a temptation to assimilate this to purporting to bequeath something which you do not own. Is there not a presupposition of existence in each? Is not a statement which refers to something which does not exist not so much false as void? And the more we consider a statement not as a sentence (or proposition) but as an act of speech (out of which the others are logical constructions) the more we are studying the whole thing as an act. Or again, there are obvious similarities between a lie and a false promise. We shall have to return to this matter later.¹

(ii) Well, the first thing to remember is that, since in uttering our performatives we are undoubtedly in a sound enough sense ‘performing actions’, then, as actions, these will be subject to certain whole dimensions of unsatisfactoriness to which all actions are subject but which are distinct—or distinguishable—from what we have chosen to discuss as infelicities. I mean that actions in general (not all) are liable, for example, to be done under duress, or by accident, or owing to this or that variety of mistake, say, or otherwise unintentionally. In many such cases we are certainly unwilling to say of some such act simply that it was done or that he did it. I am not going into the general doctrine here: in many such cases we may even say the act was ‘void’ (or voidable for duress or undue influence) and so forth. Now I suppose some very general high-level doctrine might embrace both what we have called infelicities and these other ‘unhappy’ features of the doing of actions—in our case actions containing a performative utterance—in a single doctrine: but we are not including this kind of unhappiness—we must just remember, though, that features of this sort can and do constantly intrude into any particular case we are discussing. Features of this sort would normally come under the heading of ‘extenuating circumstances’ or of ‘factors reducing or abrogating the agent’s responsibility’, and so on.

(ii) Secondly, as *utterances* our performatives are also heir to certain other kinds of ill which infect *all* utterances. And these likewise, though again they might be

¹ [See pp. 47 ff. J. O. U.]
brought into a more general account, we are deliberately at present excluding. I mean, for example, the following: a performative utterance will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy. This applies in a similar manner to any and every utterance—a sea-change in special circumstances. Language in such circumstances is in special ways—intelligibly—used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use—ways which fall under the doctrine of the *citations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. Our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances.

(iii) It is partly in order to keep this sort of consideration at least for the present out of it, that I have not here introduced a sort of 'infelicity'—it might really be called such—arising out of 'misunderstanding'. It is obviously necessary that to have promised I must normally

(A) have been *heard* by someone, perhaps the promisee;

(B) have been understood by him as promising.

If one or another of these conditions is not satisfied, doubts arise as to whether I have really promised, and it might be held that my act was only attempted or was void. Special precautions are taken in law to avoid this and other infelicities, e.g. in the serving of writs or summonses. This particular very important considera-

(3) Are these cases of infelicity mutually exclusive? The answer to this is obvious.

(a) No, in the sense that we can go wrong in two ways at once (we can insincerely promise a donkey to give it a carrot).

(b) No, more importantly, in the sense that the ways of going wrong 'shade into one another' and 'overlap', and the decision between them is 'arbitrary' in various ways.

Suppose, for example, I see a vessel on the stocks, walk up and smash the bottle hung at the stem, proclaim 'I name this ship the *Mr. Stalin*' and for good measure kick away the chocks: but the trouble is, I was not the person chosen to name it (whether or not—an additional complication—*Mr. Stalin* was the destined name; perhaps in a way it is even more of a shame if it was). We can all agree

(1) that the ship was not thereby named;

(2) that it is an infernal shame.

One could say that I 'went through a form of' naming the vessel but that my 'action' was 'void' or 'without effect', because I was not a proper person, had not the 'capacity', to perform it: but one might also and

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1 Naming babies is even more difficult; we might have the wrong name and the wrong cleric—that is, someone entitled to name babies but not intended to name *this* one.
alternatively say that, where there is not even a pretense of capacity or a colourable claim to it, then there is no accepted conventional procedure; it is a mockery, like a marriage with a monkey. Or again one could say that part of the procedure is getting oneself appointed. When the saint baptized the penguins, was this void because the procedure of baptizing is inappropriate to be applied to penguins, or because there is no accepted procedure of baptizing anything except humans? I do not think that these uncertainties matter in theory, though it is pleasant to investigate them and in practice convenient to be ready, as jurists are, with a terminology to cope with them.

LECTURE III

In our first lecture we isolated in a preliminary way the performative utterance as not, or not merely, saying something but doing something, and as not a true or false report of something. In the second, we pointed out that though it was not ever true or false it still was subject to criticism—could be unhappy, and we listed six of these types of Infelicity. Of these, four were such as to make the utterance Misfire, and the act purported to be done null and void, so that it does not take effect; while two, on the contrary, only made the professed act an abuse of the procedure. So then we may seem to have armed ourselves with two shiny new concepts with which to crack the crib of Reality, or as it may be, of Confusion—two new keys in our hands, and of course, simultaneously two new skids under our feet. In philosophy, forearmed should be forewarned. I then stalled around for some time by discussing some general questions about the concept of the Infelicity, and set it in its general place in a new map of the field. I claimed (1) that it applied to all ceremonial acts, not merely verbal ones, and that these are more common than is appreciated; I admitted (2) that our list was not complete, and that there are indeed other whole dimensions of what might be reasonably called ‘unhappiness’ affecting ceremonial