Austin, Grice and Strawson: Their shadow from Pittsburgh to Frankfurt

Stephen Rainey
Queen's University, Belfast

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Recommended Citation
Rainey, Stephen (2007) "Austin, Grice and Strawson: Their shadow from Pittsburgh to Frankfurt," Essays in Philosophy: Vol. 8: Iss. 1, Article 17.

Essays in Philosophy is a biannual journal published by Pacific University Library | ISSN 1526-0569 | http://commons.pacific.edu/eip/
Abstract. Austin discusses the supposed opposition between performative and constative utterances in a paper delivered to a French audience in 1962 entitled *Performativ*—*Constativ*. It is his aim in this paper in a sense to recant his earlier views that such a distinction was clear. A translation of this paper made by G. J. Warnock appeared in 1972 in a collection of essays on the philosophy of language, edited by John Searle. Alongside this translation were criticisms and comments by P. F. Strawson and H. P. Grice. Taken altogether, I regard these papers as containing several important insights that have informed contemporary notions regarding meaning and communication, particularly as they are thought of by Brandom and Habermas. I follow the course of Austin's discussion in assessing the status of the distinction that gives his paper its name and consider its merits, as well as drawing upon some of Strawson's and Grice's thoughts on the matter. After these discussions, I hope that it shall be clear how indebted to these past thinkers are those important theorists of our time.

I.

The distinction between constatives and performatives is quite simple: constatives have the character of statements (or assertions), while performatives have the character of actions. A typical constative would be something of the class "The ship is red", while a typical performative would be something of the class "I name this ship Liberté". The major characteristic shared by constatives is their capability of being true or false, while that of performatives is their being more or less 'happy'. The relative 'happiness' of a performative is the metric used by Austin to describe how the action or actions intended to be carried out by a performative can succeed or fail to varying degrees. An out and out failure of a performative action marks an unhappy performative. For example, should I say "I name this ship Liberté" even though I am not the dignitary invited to do the naming, but am instead a lowly welder, my performative proves very unhappy indeed. Similarly, while watching a game on centre-court at Wimbledon, if I shout "Out!" I have another unhappy performative on my hands, whereas if the umpire does the same thing the players on court effect certain behaviours, scores may be changed and so forth. The umpire's "Out!" is a happy performative.

This discussion of the happiness of performatives shows how, while they are not open to criticism on grounds of truth and falsity as are constatives, nonetheless they are criticisable on these other grounds relating to their being uttered in appropriate circumstances. Austin puts it thus:

"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
Austin mentions three facets of what can affect the happiness of a performative.

1. The performative cannot be 'null and void'. This affective category relates firstly to the sense in which the utterer of a performative must be in a proper position to make their utterance. In the example of the tennis fan above the utterer is clearly not in the position to call a ball out, while the umpire is. Also covered by this category is a requirement that the object upon which the performative is intended to act is appropriate to be so acted upon. So, again with the tennis example, not even the umpire can call a player out simply because players aren't the sort of things that can be out in a tennis match. Austin's example in this regard is particularly striking: "...I can't quite bring off the baptism of penguins, those creatures being scarcely susceptible of that exploit." (Austin, 1972: ibid)

2. Besides these constraining factors acting upon the utterance of performatives, and as another dimension from which a performative's happiness may be scrutinised, is their sincerity. In promising to do something, for example, while not having any intention to actually do what I say I will, I make my performative unhappy in the sense that I abuse the formula of promising. After all, making a promise is a complete act; to say "I promise" just is to promise. So, if I do say this, while not actually playing by the rules of promising, I have another unhappy performative.

3. Finally, a third kind of happiness can attach itself to performatives which Austin refers to as 'breach of commitment'. This pertains to situations where performatives have been uttered sincerely by people rightly placed to utter them, yet they fail to come to fruition. In this regard, the performative can be said to be in order if, in the future, some state of affairs comes about that accords with the intent of the performative utterance. So, if I promise to wash your car, sincerely and intending to follow through, and I do indeed wash your car the performative is happy in that its commitments remain intact. Should some intervening factor preclude my fidelity to my promise, however, such as the theft and burning of your car, my performative is unhappy in that its commitments are not (cannot be) fulfilled. Similarly, if I just didn't get round to washing your car, there would be a breach of commitment, though one less dramatic and more blameworthy, perhaps. At any rate, there can be degrees of commitment.

The three sources of potential unhappiness for performatives are thus nullity, abuse (insincerity), and breach of commitment. It might further be noted that these three will potentially coincide.

II.

With this extensive characterisation of performatives laid out, and the clear sense in which these differ from the intuitively simple characterisation of constatives, Austin goes on in his paper to attempt to find a test whereby we can easily distinguish cases of the former from the latter. He hopes to find a definitive test that will be able to highlight performatives but, as he shows, this hope is 'in large measure, vain'.

The first avenue of enquiry Austin utilises in looking to discern performatives is in grammar. The asymmetry between utterances in the first person of the present indicative active voice of a verb and
those in other persons can be seen to function as a good marker of a case of 'explicit performatives' in the former case and constatives in the latter. So, saying "I promise..." is an act of promising whereas saying "He promises..." is a report of someone else's promising, not a promising in itself. Verbs in the passive voice in persons other than the first may also be performative, it should be noted, but they can be spotted by seeing whether something like the word 'hereby' can be inserted. So, "Patrons are requested not to handle the paintings" is a performative and can be seen as such by the ease with which the word 'hereby' could be inserted. So with these discussions Austin looks to have found a promising way to spot performatives.

At once, though, it becomes clear that according to these tests, the most we could hope to find is a sub-set of the totality of instances of performatives. These tests show sufficient conditions for the detection of performatives, but not necessary conditions. For instance, saying "I order you to shut the door" is clearly a performative according to the criteria of the tests, but it is clear that so is "Shut the door!", although not according to the tests. Indeed, many utterances can be made to be clearly performative by many more routes besides the devices offered in the tests. Austin points out that intonation or gesture can function every bit as well as the grammatical devices of the tests in marking out utterances as performatives as can the very context in which the utterance is made:

"Does the 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." (Austin, 1972: 16)

What is it, then, that the tests show? These formulations that denote performatives can be seen to function as devices that can make explicit what is already present in the performative utterance whatever its form. That's to say, the explicit formulations of the class "I promise...", or of the potentially 'hereby-able' etc. serve to make explicit and precise the action that the speaker intends to perform with their utterance. Interestingly, Austin supposes that non-explicitly performative utterances are less precise than those explicitly so, and that we should consider the development of these precisely articulated forms of the performative to "...a relatively recent phenomenon in the evolution of language, and [regard this development] as going together with the evolution of more complex forms of society and science" (Austin, 1972: ibid)

The point here is that we can't, simply by inspecting words, discern the presence or absence in every case of performatives.

### III.

Austin's discussion now turns to the distinction that gives the paper its name. Performatives have been discussed at length while constatives have got scarcely a mention. Performatives were taken to be the more complicated of the opposed pairing, and were indeed seen to be more difficult than one might have supposed. Some can look like performatives and be performatives. Others can look like constatives and be performatives. So what about constatives? If they are as straightforward as they seem to be, the distinction is surely not threatened. If they have superficially difficult tokens, however, the idea of a line between these two types will lose credibility. So, the idea that utterances will be either performative or constative will be threatened. Two questions thus arise:

1. Are constatives as clear a phenomenon as they seem to be?
2. Is the performative—Constative distinction as clear as it seems?

1. Constatives were contrasted in the first instance with performatives in that they were apt to be criticised in terms of their truth or falsity. Naturally, a statement 'fails' in a sense if it is not true. Austin distinguishes another three ways besides truth and falsity in which constatives can fail. These are in terms of: presupposition, implication and entailment.

In terms of presupposition, a constative can fail in that a statement may be made such that it refers in a way to an object that, in fact, does not exist. "All of my friends are criminals" implies I have friends. When I refer to my criminal confidantes it is expected that such dire mammals do in fact exist. The discovery that I have no intimates at all irritates the hearer of the sentence not in terms of the truth or falsity of a purported predication, but because my utterance fails to have any purchase owing to its lack of reference. This kind of failure parallels the sort of unhappiness connected with a performative that is null and void, such as the precocious welder.

In terms of implication, a constative can fail in that a statement can be made such that further statements are also made that are at odds with it. Should I utter, "The ambassador's receptions are notable for their host's exquisite taste", and go on to say that the self-same ambassador has a knack for throwing a dismal party, my audience will be dismayed with me in that I seem in my first utterance to affirm something that I immediately go on to deny. The problem here is that I cannot state both utterances. 'Stating' one involves not stating the other, in that part of what it is to state something is to believe it. Note here the parallel between this and a performative's unhappiness owing to abuse (insincerity).

In terms of entailment, a constative can fail in that a statement can be made such that further statements are also made that are incompatible with it. Should I utter "All British are unceremonious" along with "Some English are pretentious", the outrage with which my audience will greet my words will be based in the fact that I cannot state the former along with the latter while respecting all that it entails. And one thing that stating something means is that all the grammatically regulated consequences of that statement are similarly held to. The fact that the English are British, and that I claim to suppose the British to be unceremonious means that I ought to hold to the English being unceremonious. Hence, it is a problem if I affirm them to be pretentious. Something has gone wrong, in fact or derivation, such that I am in error. This looks to parallel the way in which a performative can become unhappy in terms of breach of commitment.

Having noted the parallels between constatives and performatives in their common ability to be unhappy in the same ways, Austin pursues this thread in order to see just how constatives might be as susceptible to unhappiness as performatives. First off, it is noted that it can very well be the case that one can fail to be in any position to utter a statement on some topic. Freedom of speech and fallibility aside, it is the case that I am in no position to pronounce upon whatever antics that may or may not be underway five rooms away simply because there is no way in which I could have relevant information. Am I not in the same predicament as the precocious welder should I try to state that five doors from here they're plotting the end of the world? The fact is that I cannot state this or anything like it. My utterance is void, just as the welder's designation of the ship is.

I am allowed to be misinformed, of course, and I regularly am. The point is that when I have the wrong information, my statement is false. When I have no information at all, my 'statement' is void.
It is a guess, and only describable as a statement with this qualification; "As a guess, he said they were plotting Armageddon up the road", or "He stated that five doors from here they were plotting the end of the world, but he's got no way to know". Again, Austin's example is striking:

"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 you're 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." (Austin, 1972: 20)

So far, Austin has drawn attention to the lack of a purely verbal test to spot performatives, and he has shown constatives to be liable to the same types of unhappiness as performatives. He now goes on to test the distinction between the two.

2. On the surface, a sufficient condition for the discovery of performatives is their liability to be transcribed into a form of the first person singular of the present indicative active of a verb. Well, stating things can be so transcribed. Rather than saying simply "The find is more fleece than golden", I can say "I state that the find is more fleece than golden". In doing this, am I making explicit the act I am performing in making that utterance? Maybe so, but it needs more of a debate than was around in 1962 and so Austin drops this angle and goes on to discuss the apparently privileged position held by constatives of being alethically bivalent.

When a performative is uttered such that it is entirely happy, it may still receive criticism. Performatives can at times come into contact with 'the facts' of a situation and be contestable on the grounds of this contact. Austin uses examples of advice and of a jury's verdict. In the former case, my advice can be uttered from a valid position (I can be a good candidate for offering advice on some issue), I mean what I say as I advise you, and you do succeed in carrying out whatever it is that I advise you to do. Thus, my advising you is a happy performative. Still, though, can't it be asked whether my advice was in fact good advice? In the case of a jury delivering a verdict, again fulfilling the conditions of non-nullity, sincerity and preserving the sanctity of commitments, can't it still be asked if the verdict is fair? If there are some performatives that are open to this kind of quasi-objective assessment, that is enough to warrant a blurring of the supposed line between performatives and constatives.

It is not a good objection against this to say that truth and falsity are clearly more cut and dried than are speculations over the pedigree of some advice or the potential parsimony of a verdict. Austin cites the following two undoubtedly true or false statements:

France is hexagonal.
Oxford is 60 miles from London.

Each, it is clear, is true or false; there are facts there to be had. But when is each true or false? It seems that at different times and in different situations their truth-value can change to suit need. So, for a cartographer, the first must be taken as false, lest sea-captains befall an untimely geometric demise. In contrast, if we were a French native wanting to give a rough idea of where we came from to an Anglophone, a sketch of a hexagon next to two rough triangles might be enough to
indicate our origin as being from a big land mass off to the east of the British Isles. And the same
goes for the Oxford example; it's fine if you want to estimate how long the drive will take, no good
if you want to shell New College.

The point of this brief discussion is to suggest that discussions of truth and falsity are not simply
decided once and for all when a quality is ascribed to an utterance. Instead, truth and falsity
represent poles on a broader dimension of possible criticism of utterances. Besides facts and the
bearing they have upon the utterance, among the other things that may need to be brought into the
account are; the situation of the speaker, the speaker's purpose, the nature of the audience, the
requirements of precision. We are as scuppered by too little attention to detail in one instance as we
are by too much in another.

IV.

This then represents the motivation that lies behind Austin's criticism of the performative—
constative distinction and his desire to see a different theory that accounts more fully for 'speech
acts' as a whole, without arbitrary internal distinctions. This challenge is taken up, of course, by
Austin himself in How To Do Things With Words of 1962, as well as being discussed by Strawson,
Grice, Searle, Putnam and in more modern times by Rorty, Brandom, Quine, Davidson and
Habermas.

Illocutionary Force and Illocutionary Act

V.

Using the concepts of illocutionary force and illocutionary act, Strawson examines Austin's thinking
on speech acts with particular interest paid to the role of convention and intention in Austin's
account. Strawson reconstructs some key ideas differentiating these two key concepts under four
headings in an article entitled Intention and Convention in Speech Acts. These are given as
follows;

"1. Given that we know (in Austin's sense) the meaning of an utterance, there may still be a further
question as to how what was said was meant by the speaker, or as to how the words spoken were
used, or as to how the utterance was to be taken or ought to have been taken [...]. In order to know
the illocutionary force of the utterance, we must know the answer to this further question.

2. A locutionary act is an act of saying something; an illocutionary act is an act we perform in
saying something. It is what we do, in saying what we say. Austin does not regard this
characterization as by any means a satisfactory test for identifying kinds of illocutionary acts since,
so regarded, it would admit many kinds of acts which he wishes to exclude from the class [...].

3. It is a sufficient, though not, I think, a necessary condition of a verb's being the name of a kind of
illocutionary act that it can figure, in the first person present indicative, as what Austin calls an
explicit performative.

4. The illocutionary act is a 'conventional act; an act done as conforming to a convention' [...]. As
such, it is to be sharply contrasted with the producing of certain effects, intended or otherwise, by
means of an utterance. This producing of effects, though it too can often be described as an act to
the speaker (his perlocutionary act), is in no way a conventional act [...]." (Strawson, 1972: 24)

Strawson goes on to emphasise that Austin makes much of the conventional nature of illocutionary
acts as he does of the conventions of illocutionary force.

VI.

In an obvious sense, any speech act at all is a conventional act, an act done as conforming to a
convention. In that the speech act is composed of bits of language, it must be somehow
conventional since any language must be at least some way conventional. This can't be what Austin
is emphasising. His point concerns illocutionary acts and their conventional nature. The conventions
of a language can be used to fix the meaning of a locutionary act, that's to say, of an instance of
uttering. This is a purely semantic point. Austin's point is that this exercise in fixing the meaning of
a locution does not fully determine the illocutionary act. If I say "I am sorry for what I have done"
the meaning is plain enough from looking at the words and their order. However, if the utterance is
not taken by an audience as an apology, the illocutionary act of apologising fails. What Strawson
seeks to emphasise is that Austin must be saying that over and above the fixing of meanings, the
illocutionary acts performed in locutions themselves are fixed conventionally but separately to the
meaning. So, a non-verbal convention regarding an act of apology, like a bowed head maybe, is
conventionally an apology in the same way as is an illocutionary, verbal act of apology.

Strawson takes issue with this conception in that it supposes every illocutionary act to have a
convention associated with it. He thinks it is true that there are indeed very many cases where
illocutionary acts are governed by particular conventions, such as acts of judging in courts, or
making decisions in sports, but denies that in every case this must be so. The point Strawson is
making is that it is troublesome to suppose that in every case of performing an illocutionary act
with a locution one is conforming to some particular convention. For example, if I were to threaten
you there are obviously conventionalised ways in which I may go about this; I can lower the tone of
my voice, point a finger, ask whether you like hospital food and so on. It is also clear that the
particular ways in which I can threaten you will depend upon our individual and our shared
circumstances, my intentions and much more besides. Clearly, with the resources supplied by
having knowledge of these variables, I could have wide scope for the act of threatening which I end
up performing. What is not clear is whether we can faithfully say that in every instance of
'threatening' a convention is conformed to.

Supposing that behind every illocutionary act lies a convention could be seen as a way to try and
keep something normative on the table regarding speech acts. As long as an established
conventional practice underlies particular instances of illocutionary acts, they can be said to be
correctly or incorrectly done. What's more, with this conventional background for illocutionary acts,
failure of uptake can be explained too in a dimension besides mere non-recognition on the part of an
audience. In attacking this, Strawson looks to be opening a dangerous breach in that without
conventions for, say, threatening or apologising or warning, there might be no way at all in which
to differentiate illocutionary acts from one another. And if this is coupled with Austin's later
scepticism regarding the performative—constative distinction, this would spell trouble indeed for an
account of language.
As it happens, Strawson is not trying to open this dangerous breach. His argument is that on many occasions illocutionary acts can be identified upon a basis of only those linguistic conventions that govern the meanings of the utterances in which they appear.

"In the course of a philosophical discussion [...] one speaker raises an objection to what the previous speaker has just said. X says (or proposes) that $p$ and Y objects that $q$. Y’s utterance has the force of an objection to X’s assertion (or proposal) that $p$. But where is the convention that constitutes it an objection? That Y’s utterance has the force of an objection may lie partly in the character of the dispute and of X’s contention (or proposal) and it certainly lies partly, in Y’s view of these things, in the bearing which he takes the proposition that $q$ to have on the doctrine (or proposal) that $p$. But although there may be, there does not have to be, any convention involved other than those linguistic conventions which help to fix the meanings of the utterances." (Strawson, 1972: 27)

Some illocutionary acts are conventional, and may well be easily spotted on that account, but not all can be said to be governed by conventions other than those that bear on semantics.

Strawson doesn't believe Austin to have simply generalised from a few cases to every case. The fact that Austin makes so much of the conventional nature of the illocutionary act and yet these difficulties are apparent leads Strawson to suppose that Austin means something quite particular by his characterization which must be discovered. To that end, he quotes the following line from How To Do Things With Words which appears as the first characterisation of the illocutionary act. Austin says that an illocutionary act, or an utterance with a particular illocutionary force;

"...may be said to be conventional in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula."

To explicate the full import of this short comment, a brief excursion is required into the realm of Grice's nonnatural meaning.

Since Grice's 1957 article “Meaning” in the Philosophical Review, a discussion of meaning and of communicative meaning in particular would hardly be complete without mentioning him. I am not aiming for completeness just now, however, so this discussion will be mercifully brief, more of a mention really.

Grice’s analysis of such phrases as ‘means’, ‘means something’ and ‘means that’ results in a twofold categorization of meaning. In one instance, these phrases can be used in such a way as to indicate natural meaning, while in the other they may be used to indicate nonnatural meaning (meaningNN). Natural meaning is that sort of meaning involved in statements such as “Smoke means fire”, or “Falling pressure means rain”. Nonnatural meaning is that sort of meaning involved in statements such as “The flashing lights mean last orders”, or “The conductor’s bow means the concert is over”.

It can be seen from these examples that statements involving natural meaning can readily be paraphrased into a form like “The fact that $p$ means that $q$” in such a way that they are incompatible
with \( q \)'s not being the case. It is nonsensical to say "The fact that there is smoke means that there is fire, but there's no fire", or "The fact that barometric pressure is falling means that there will be rain, but there won't be any rain". With cases of nonnatural meaning, this is not the case. It's quite straightforward to say "The flashing lights mean last orders, but it's not last orders", or "The conductor's bow means the concert is over, but the concert isn't over". The lights could be flashing at 8pm due to a dodgy fuse and hence not be indicative of the landlord's desire to close, and the conductor could merely have stooped to collect a dropped penny, but there can be no smoke without fire and barometric pressure can't drop without rain resulting.

This demonstrates that statements involving nonnatural meaning cannot be paraphrased into the "The fact that \( p \) means that \( q \)" form whilst preserving their meaning. They may be paraphrased into a form that utilises inverted commas, like so "The conductor's bow means 'the concert is over'". The important difference here between natural meaning and nonnatural meaning is that in cases of nonnatural meaning, whatever the part of the statement prior to 'means' is it may be used as an argumentative basis for the part of the statement after 'means'. That's to say, when I state that the conductor's bow means (at least, ought to mean) the concert is over, I'm not saying that her bowing in itself stops the show; her intending to indicate the end by means of a bow does. MeaningNN

So, Grice gives a three-part intentional account of what it means for a speaker to meanNN something by an utterance for an audience. A speaker's utterance is intended (i1) to elicit an effect in an audience and intends (i2) that the audience recognise her (i1) and intends (i3) that this recognition by the audience of (i1) will feature in the set of reasons that would be given by them for the production of their effect.

Strawson sees a problem with this characterisation, as it happens, in that a speaker could be thought of as conforming to it while not really being in communication. Suppose I know you to be spying on me, and suppose I also know that you don't know that I know you to be spying on me. Under these circumstances, I could go about arranging evidence that I reckon will lead you to some conclusion such that, were you asked to justify your conclusion at some point, you would mention your covert activities in the justification. In such a scenario, the three conditions of Grice's account are met, but we would hardly call it communication. The difference here is like that between 'trying to get you to think that \( p \)' and 'trying to let you know that \( p \)'. The difference may be subtle, but I think it has implications that can be of enough importance\(^6\) to warrant the addition of a fourth condition which Strawson supplies, viz. The speaker must intend (i4) that the audience recognise her intention (I2).

There are now the resources to interpret Austin's remark in an explanatory way. An illocutionary act was to be characterisable as conventional if it could be made explicit by the performative formula. Whenever we address an audience, we have an authority to speak of our intentions in a way we don't have to speak of our effects on them. We can plainly, honestly and sincerely say "I am trying to help!" even though our audience are booing and assembling a lynch-mob. However, when we consider the Gricean model of meaning, there is more at stake in an address of some audience than simply the speaker's intention and the audience's reaction. There is a complex of intentions among which is the intention (I2) to have the audience recognise an intention (I1). And on Strawson's modification, there is the further intention (I4) to have an audience recognise an intention (I2) that they recognise an intention (I ). So on this model, an illocutionary act will fail where an audience
fails to grasp this complex of intentions. This is what would be called a failure of 'uptake'. If speaker wishes to make any illocutionary act whatsoever, it is incumbent upon them to strive to bring about in their audience the grasping of just this complex of intentions, to secure uptake. Naturally, the most simple way of doing this is to add a clause to the speaker's utterance that explicitly acknowledges what it is they are trying to do. So, for example, I might begin by saying "I am advising you that..." and then go on to describe some complicated solution to a perceived problem. By so prefixing my actual advice, I make it clear that I am not commanding, or sarcastically lampooning a misfortune, or anything else. By means of the prefix I make explicit what I intend to be enacted by my utterance. And I make it so explicit by utilising the explicit performative formula.

Since by Strawson's reckoning intention (i4) is part of the illocutionary act, it is not the case that by the prefix the speaker is merely self-ascribing an attitude. This is because the intention to have an audience recognise an intention on the part of the speaker to have the audience recognise an intention that the audience might recognise an intention the speaker has is itself motivation for being as explicit as possible when actually trying to perform an illocutionary act. Moreover, if the speaker fails to have the complex of intentions recognised by the audience, their attempted illocutionary act fails. Thus, in a situation where a speaker really is trying to communicate something by means of an illocutionary act, everything they do to make that as clear as possible to the audience can be seen as a part of that illocutionary act. Hence, using Grice's model, Austin's referral to this use of the explicit performative formula as making explicit what act is really being performed in the utterance is clarified. This clarity, thus, is owed to a Gricean turn.

VIII.

The fact that achieving uptake in the manner outlined by whatever practice was employed could in principle go on to become an established way of securing uptake in relevantly similar circumstances must be what Austin meant by speaking of 'conventional' in the sense that a sentence with a certain illocutionary force 'could be made explicit by the performative formula'. But what Strawson's analysis in terms of his modified Gricean conception of meaning is most interesting as is an explanatory account of non-conventional illocutionary acts in terms of uptake. If I can be thought of as trying to secure uptake for my utterance along non-conventionalised lines, which I must surely be thought at least capable of, then:

1. The idea of communicating is broadened beyond the bounds of any particular medium. No format for communication can be privileged over any other when what's at stake is mutual understanding gained through recognition of complex intentions.

2. The idea of epistemic responsibility, both on the part of speaker and audience, is played up. Since the possibility is acknowledged that uptake may be achieved by various means, and that uptake may be achieved regardless of any pre-existing convention in some particular respect, then it is clear that the burden of a speaker's intention-explication and interpretation of said by an audience is greatly enlarged. Put in a misleadingly radical sounding phraseology; in the absence of established conventions and a fixed medium of communication, in a sense, all of meaningful language collapses into 'communication situations'.
What Strawson's model looks like being is a proto-interpretive model of meaning, i.e. one in which what counts is mutual recognition between speaker and audience of a complex of (not necessarily articulated) intentions. What Strawson's account could be taken as motivating is an account of communication more radical even than the Gricean model, a communicative model based upon the idea of mutual, or interpersonal praxis aimed at understanding (uptake), as opposed to peer to peer transmission of data by conventional means in a fixed (linguistic) format.

IX.

A discussion of Austin and Strawson with Grice has yielded many important, useful and explanatory concepts pertinent to the idea of communication. Among the most important is the sense of meaning that is yielded from Grice. Through a critical analysis of the idea of uptake in Austin, through Strawson's lens, and by Gricean means, a point of departure has been established from which a fairly radical and productive account of communication can be continued through the thought of such varied theorists as Sellars, Rorty, Brandom and Habermas. Each of these theorist's interesting accounts have central places for the cluster of concepts of intention, audience, interpretation, understanding and convention.

If we think of the philosophy of language from the seventeenth century up until Quine, we can see a clear sense in which objectivity has been the watchword for theorists. With the scientific revolution there came a gradual decrease in confidence in theories that had subject-referring elements. One example of this is the lack of a place for secondary qualities in the new sciences. The hope, and the vision among thinkers across a variety of fields of enquiry was that an eternal, fixed description could be achieved that would explain all of reality. The confidence that inspired this bold project generally, also inspired those who sought to explain human behaviour. Perhaps the most striking feature of human beings as opposed to other animals is our linguistic capability. So, it seemed necessary to try to account for this striking talent in objective terms. The methods of the natural sciences yield so much of undeniable value that their application to this central facet of human life was hoped to bring a new depth of self-understanding. I think that, while not all might agree, this project can be seen to have failed. Its apogee could be seen as behaviourism and its modern spokesperson could have been seen as Quine. However, far from bringing greater self-understanding, behaviourism seems to bring either bewildering paradoxes that deny self-knowledge, or patent absurdities such that we lose sight of ourselves as thinkers at all.

In thinking of communication as presented above, essential reference is made to subjects, to actual speakers and their thoughts and intentions. In this, a new shift toward old ideas can be seen. In Brandom and Habermas we see a blueprint for not only cognition and intersubjective understanding, but also for self-understanding in a quite comprehensive way. In each of their works we can see a central position for thought and intention that accounts for a sense of human identity in a deeper and more profound way than any objectivist behaviourism could. This new vein of thinking that accounts for deliberative expression thus gives an account of how we rational animals can be objectively part of the world discoverable by the natural sciences, but also privy to a subjectivity that, perhaps, is what makes us valuable. With careful attention, the extension of the projects initiated by the likes of Brandom and Habermas could thus open an exciting new chapter in a philosophy of language that sheds light upon what makes us each and together who we are. The points made in this brief investigation, furthermore, might serve to emphasise some of the debts owed to Austin, Grice and Strawson from Pittsburgh to Frankfurt.
Notes


2. This is interesting with regard to Habermas' view of society as potentially embodying structures of rationality. Austin, in connecting evolution (viz betterment) with society in terms of a greater ability to express oneself looks quite compatible with this.

3. As it happens, I consider Brandom's Making it Explicit of 1994 to be a modern discussion of what's relevant in this field. The clue, after all, is in the name; Austin refers to ‘making explicit’ in his 1962 paper in much the same pragmatic sort of sense as does Brandom in his 1994 volume.


5. I have excised page references given by Strawson that indicate passages in Austin's How To Do Things With Words.