XII  AUSTIN ON PERFORMATIVES

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

Infelicities

Misfire (act not performed):
  The convention does not exist
  Circumstances are not right
  Act is not performed fully and correctly

Insincerity (act performed insincerely, etc):
  Agents lack the necessary mental states

Misunderstanding (act performed but not taken up)

Duress (act performed, but no responsibility)

Pretence (act not really performed)

Marks of Performatives
Distinction between first person present use (‘I apologize) and second or third person (‘He apologizes’), and past or future tense use (‘I will apologize’)

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

Problems
I apologize; I’m sorry; I feel awful about it (cf. I am apologizing)
The rulings of juries and umpires.
Are statements so different to performatives? Isn’t the act of stating a kind of performative? Parallels to infelicities: ‘The cat is on the mat but I don’t believe that it is’; ‘I promise that I shall be there, but I haven’t the least intention of being there.’

**Austin’s other work**

*How to Do Things with Words*

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

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

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

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