

## LECTURE V

At the end of the previous lecture we were reconsidering the question of the relations between the performative utterance and statements of various kinds which certainly are true or false. We mentioned as specially notable four such connexions:

- (1) If the performative utterance 'I apologize' is happy, then the statement that I am apologizing is true.
- (2) If the performative utterance 'I apologize' is to be happy, then the statement that certain conditions obtain—those notably in Rules A. 1 and A. 2—must be true.
- (3) If the performative utterance 'I apologize' is to be happy, then the statement that certain other conditions obtain—those notably in our rule *T. 1*—must be true.
- (4) If performative utterances of at least some kinds are happy, for example contractual ones, then statements typically of the form that I ought or ought not subsequently to do some particular thing are true.

I was saying that there seemed to be some similarity, and perhaps even an identity, between the second of these connexions and the phenomenon which has been called, in the case of statements as opposed to performatives, 'presupposition': and likewise between the third of these connexions and the phenomenon called (sometimes and not, to my mind, correctly) in the case of statements,

'implication'; these, presupposition and implication, being two ways in which the truth of a statement may be connected importantly with the truth of another without it being the case that the one entails the other in the sole sort of sense preferred by obsessional logicians. Only the fourth and last of the above connexions could be made out—I do not say how satisfactorily—to resemble entailment between statements. 'I promise to do *X* but I am under no obligation to do it' may certainly look more like a self-contradiction—whatever that is—than 'I promise to do *X* but I do not intend to do it': also 'I am under no obligation to do *p*' might be held to entail 'I did not promise to do *p*', and one might think that the way in which asserting *p* commits me to asserting *q* is not unlike the way in which promising to do *X* commits me to doing *X*. But I do not want to say that there is or is not any parallel here; only that at least there is a very close parallel in the other two cases; which suggest that at least in some ways there is danger of our initial and tentative distinction between constative and performative utterances breaking down.

We may, however, fortify ourselves in the conviction that the distinction is a final one by reverting to the old idea that the constative utterance is true or false and the performative is happy or unhappy. Contrast the fact that I am apologizing, which depends on the performative 'I apologize' being happy, with the case of the statement 'John is running', which depends for its truth on its being the fact or case that John is running. But perhaps

this contrast is not so sound either: for, to take statements first, connected with the utterance (constative) 'John is running' is the statement 'I am stating that John is running': and this may depend for its truth on the happiness of 'John is running', just as the truth of 'I am apologizing' depends on the happiness of 'I apologize'. And, to take performatives second: connected with the performative (I presume it is one) 'I warn you that the bull is about to charge' is the fact, if it is one, that the bull is about to charge: if the bull is *not*, then indeed the utterance 'I warn you that the bull is about to charge' is open to criticism—but not in any of the ways we have hitherto characterized as varieties of unhappiness. We should not in this case say the warning was void—i.e. that he did not warn but only went through a form of warning—nor that it was insincere: we should feel much more inclined to say the warning was false or (better) mistaken, as with a statement. So that considerations of the happiness and unhappiness type may infect statements (or some statements) and considerations of the type of truth and falsity may infect performatives (or some performatives).

We have then to take a further step out into the desert of comparative precision. We must ask: is there some precise way in which we can definitely distinguish the performative from the constative utterance? And in particular we should naturally ask first whether there is some *grammatical* (or lexicographical) criterion for distinguishing the performative utterance.

So far we have considered only a small number of classic examples of performatives, all with verbs in the first person singular present indicative active. We shall see very shortly that there were good reasons for this piece of slyness. Examples are 'I name', 'I do', 'I bet', 'I give'. There are fairly obvious reasons, with which I shall nevertheless shortly deal, why this is the commonest type of explicit performative. Note that 'present' and 'indicative' are, of course, both misnomers (not to mention the misleading implications of 'active')—I am only using them in the well-known grammatical way. For example the 'present', as distinct from 'continuous present', is normally nothing to do with describing (or even indicating) what I am doing at present. 'I drink beer', as distinct from 'I am drinking beer', is not analogous to a future and a past tense describing what I shall do in the future or have done in the past. It is really more commonly the *habitual* indicative, when it is 'indicative' at all. And where it is not habitual but in a way 'present' genuinely, as in a way it is in performatives, if you like, such as 'I name', then it is certainly not 'indicative' in the sense grammarians intend, that is reporting, describing, or informing about an actual state of affairs or occurrent event: because, as we have seen, it does not describe or inform at all, but is used for, or in, the doing of something. So we use 'present indicative' merely to mean the English grammatical form 'I name', 'I run', &c. (This mistake in terminology is due to assimilating, for example, 'I run' to the Latin *curro*, which should really generally be

translated 'I am running'; Latin does not have two tenses where we do.)

Well, is the use of the first person singular and of the present indicative active, so called, essential to a performative utterance? We need not waste our time on the obvious exception of the first person plural, '*we* promise . . .', '*we* consent', &c. There are more important and obvious exceptions all over the place (some of which have already been alluded to in passing).

A very common and important type of, one would think, indubitable performative has the verb in the *second or third person* (singular or plural) and the verb in the *passive* voice: so person and voice anyway are not essential. Some examples of this type are:

- (1) You are hereby authorized to pay . . . .
- (2) Passengers are warned to cross the track by the bridge only.

Indeed the verb may even be 'impersonal' in such cases with the passive, for example:

- (3) Notice is hereby given that trespassers will be prosecuted.

This type is usually found on formal or legal occasions; and it is characteristic of it that, in writing at least, the word 'hereby' is often and perhaps can always be inserted; this serves to indicate that the utterance (in writing) of the sentence is, as it is said, the instrument effecting the act of warning, authorizing, &c. 'Hereby' is a useful criterion that the utterance is performative. If it is not

put in, 'passengers are . . . ' may be used for the description of what usually happens; as for example in 'on hearing the tunnel, passengers are warned to duck their heads, &c.'

However, if we turn away from these highly formalized and explicit performative utterances, we have to recognize that mood and tense (hitherto retained as opposed to person and voice) break down as absolute criteria.

Mood (whatever this may be in English as opposed to Latin) will not do, for I may order you to turn right by saying, not 'I order you to turn right', but simply 'Turn right'; I may give you permission to go by saying simply 'You may go'; and instead of 'I advise [or "recommend"] you to turn right' I may say 'I should turn to the right if I were you'. Tense will not do either, for in giving (or calling) you off-side I may say, instead of 'I give [or "call"] you off-side', simply 'You were off-side'; and similarly, instead of saying 'I find you guilty' I may just say 'You did it'. Not to mention cases where we have only a truncated sentence, as when I accept a bet by saying simply 'Done', and even cases where there is no explicit verb at all, as when I say simply 'Guilty' in finding a person guilty, or 'Out' to give someone out.

Particularly with some special performative-looking words, for example 'off-side', 'liable', &c., we seem able to refute even the rule governing the use of the active or passive which we gave above. Instead of 'I pronounce you off-side' I might say 'You are off-side' and I might say 'I am (thereby rendered) liable' instead of 'I undertake . . .'. So we might think certain *words* might do

as a test of the performative utterance, that we could do it by means of *vocabulary* as distinct from *grammar*. Such words might be 'off-side', 'authorized', 'promise', 'dangerous', &c. But this will not do, for:

I. We may get the performative without the operative words thus:

(1) In place of 'dangerous corner' we may have 'corner', and in place of 'dangerous bull' we may write 'bull'.

(2) In place of 'you are ordered to . . .', we may have 'you will', and in place of 'I promise to . . .' we may have 'I shall'.

II. We may get the operative word without the utterance being performative, thus:

(1) In cricket a spectator may say 'it was over (really)'. Similarly I may say 'you were guilty' or 'you were off-side' or even 'you are guilty (off-side)' when I have no right to pronounce you guilty or off-side.

(2) In such locutions as 'you promised', 'you authorize' &c., the word occurs in a non-performative use.

This reduces us to an impasse over any *single simple* criterion of grammar or vocabulary. But maybe it is not impossible to produce a complex criterion, or at least a set of criteria, simple or complex, involving both grammar and vocabulary. For example, one of the criteria might be that everything with the verb in the imperative mood is performative (this leads, however, to

many troubles over, for example, when a verb is in the imperative mood and when it is not, into which I do not propose to go).

I would rather go back a minute and consider whether there was not some good reason behind our initial favouritism for verbs in the so-called 'present indicative active'.

We said that the idea of a performative utterance was that it was to be (or to be included as a part of) the performance of an action. Actions can only be performed by persons, and obviously in our cases the utterer must be the performer: hence our justifiable feeling—which we wrongly cast into purely grammatical mould—in favour of the 'first person', who must come in, being mentioned or referred to; moreover, if in uttering one is acting, one must be doing something—hence our perhaps ill-expressed favouring of the grammatical present and grammatical active of the verb. There is something which is *at the moment of uttering being done by the person uttering*.

Where there is *not*, in the verbal formula of the utterance, a reference to the person doing the uttering, and so the acting, by means of the pronoun 'I' (or by his personal name), then in fact he will be 'referred to' in one of two ways:

(a) In verbal utterances, *by his being the person who does the uttering*—what we may call the *utterance-origin* which is used generally in any system of verbal reference-co-ordinates.

(b) In written utterances (or 'inscriptions'), *by his appending his signature* (this has to be done because, of

course, written utterances are not tethered to their origin in the way spoken ones are).

The 'I' who is doing the action does thus come essentially into the picture. An advantage of the original first person singular present indicative active form—or likewise of the second and third and impersonal passive forms with signature appended—is that this implicit feature of the speech-situation is made *explicit*. Moreover, the verbs which seem, on grounds of vocabulary, to be specially performative verbs serve the special purpose of *making explicit* (which is not the same as stating or describing) what precise action it is that is being performed by the issuing of the utterance: other words which seem to have a special performative function (and indeed *have it*), such as 'guilty', 'off-side', &c., do so because, in so far as and when they are linked in 'origin' with these special explicit performative verbs like 'promise', 'pronounce', 'find', &c.

The 'herby' formula is a useful alternative; but it is rather too formal for ordinary purposes, and further, we may say 'I hereby state . . .' or 'I hereby question . . .', whereas we were hoping to find a criterion to distinguish statements from performatives. (I must explain again that we are floundering here. To feel the firm ground of prejudice slipping away is exhilarating, but brings its revenges.)

Thus what we should feel tempted to say is that any utterance which is in fact a performative should be reducible, or expandible, or analysable into a form, or

reproducible in a form, with a verb in the first person singular present indicative active (grammatical). This is the sort of test we were in fact using above. Thus:

'Out' is equivalent to 'I declare, pronounce, give, or call you out' (when it is a performative: it need not be, for example, if you are called out by someone not the umpire or recorded as 'out' by the scorer).

'Guilty' is equivalent to 'I find, pronounce, deem you to be guilty.'

'You are warned that the bull is dangerous' is equivalent to 'I, John Jones, warn you that the bull is dangerous' or

This bull is dangerous.

(Signed) John Jones.

This sort of expansion makes explicit both that the utterance is performative, and which act it is that is being performed. Unless the performative utterance is reduced to such an explicit form, it will regularly be possible to take it in a non-performative way: for example, 'it is yours' may be taken as equivalent to either 'I give it you' or 'it (already) belongs to you'. In fact there is rather a play on the performative and non-performative uses in the road sign 'You have been warned'.

However, though we might make progress along these lines (there are snags)<sup>1</sup> we must notice that this first

<sup>1</sup> For example, which are the verbs with which we can do this? If the performative is expanded, what is the test whether the first person singular present indicative active is on this occasion performative granted that all others have to be reducible (save the mark!) to this normal form?

person singular present indicative active, so called, is a *peculiar and special use*. In particular we must notice that there is an *asymmetry* of a systematic kind between it and other persons and tenses of the *very same verb*. The fact that there is *this* asymmetry is precisely the mark of the performative verb (and the nearest thing to a *grammatical* criterion in connexion with performatives).

Let us take an example: the uses of 'I bet' as opposed to the use of that verb in another tense or in another person. 'I betted' and 'he bets' are not performatives but describe actions on my and his part respectively—actions each consisting in the utterance of the performative 'I bet'. If I utter the words 'I bet . . .', I do not state that I utter the words 'I bet', or any other words, but I perform the act of betting; and similarly, if he says he bets, i.e. says the words 'I bet', he *bets*. But if I utter the words 'he bets', I only state that he utters (or rather has uttered) the words 'I bet': I do not perform his act of betting, which only he can perform: I describe his performances of the act of betting, but I do my own betting, and he must do his own. Similarly an anxious parent when his child has been asked to do something may say 'he promises, don't you Willy?' but little Willy must still himself say 'I promise' if he is really to have promised. Now this sort of asymmetry does not arise at all in general with verbs that are not used as explicit performatives. For example, there is no such asymmetry between 'I run' and 'He runs'.

Still, it is doubtful whether this is a 'grammatical'

criterion exactly (what is?), and anyway it is not very exact because:

(1) The first person singular present indicative active may be used to describe how I habitually behave: 'I bet him (every morning) sixpence that it will rain' or 'I promise only when I intend to keep my word'.

(2) The first person singular present indicative active may be used in a way similar to the 'historic' present. It may be used to describe my own performances elsewhere and elsewhere: 'on page 49 I protest against the verdict'. We might back this up by saying that performative verbs are not used in the present continuous tense (in the first person singular active): we do not say 'I am promising', and 'I am protesting'. But even this is not entirely true, because I can say 'Don't bother me at the moment; I will see you later; I am marrying' at any moment during the ceremony when I am not having to say other words such as 'I do'; here the utterance of the performative is not the whole of the performance, which is protracted and contains diverse elements. Or I can say 'I am protesting' when performing the act by, in this case, means other than saying 'I protest', for example by chaining myself to park railings. Or I can even say 'I am ordering' while writing the words 'I order'.

(3) Some verbs may be used in the first person singular present indicative active simultaneously in two ways. An example is 'I call', as when I say 'I call inflation too much money chasing too few goods' which embraces both a

performative utterance and a description of a naturally consequent performance.

(4) We shall be in apparent danger of bringing in many formulas which we might not like to class as performatives; for example 'I state that' (to utter which *is* to state) as well as 'I bet that'. In both examples there is the same asymmetry between first person and other uses.

(5) We have cases of suiting the action to the word: thus I may say 'I spit me of you' or *'adoubé* said when I give check, or 'I quote' followed by actually quoting. If I define by saying 'I define *x* as follows: *x* is *y*', this is a case of suiting the action (here giving a definition) to the word; when we use the formula 'I define *x* as *y*' we have a transition to a performative utterance from suiting the action to the word. We might add, too, that there is likewise a transition from the use of words as what we may call markers, to performatives. There is a transition from the word END at the end of a novel to the expression 'message ends' at the end of a signal message, to the expression 'with that I conclude my case' as said by Counsel in a law court. These, we may say, are cases of *marking* the action by the word, where eventually the use of the word comes to be the action of 'ending' (a difficult act to perform, being the cessation of acting, or to make explicit in other ways, of course).

(6) Is it always the case that we must have a performative verb for making explicit something we are undoubtedly doing by saying something? For example, I

may insult you by saying something, but we have not the formula 'I insult you'.

(7) Is it really the case that we can always put a performative into the normal form without loss? 'I shall . . . ?' can be meant in different ways; perhaps we trade on this. Or again we say 'I am sorry'; is this really exactly like the explicit 'I apologize'?

We shall have to revert to the notion of the explicit performative, and we must discuss *historically* at least how some of these perhaps not ultimately serious perplexities arise.