Verb phrases like 'bet you a quarter that it will snow tomorrow', 'congratulate you on your promotion', 'sentence you to 30 days in jail', 'promise to be there', 'deny that I ever said that', 'see your five and raise you ten', and a great many others, have a certain interesting property made familiar to philosophers and linguists by J. L. Austin. This is the property that a verb phrase '\( \phi \)' has just in case a person can, in the right circumstances, \( \phi \) just by uttering the sentence 'I \( \phi \)' or 'I hereby \( \phi \)'. Given the right context, to utter 'I hereby sentence you to 30 days in jail' with appropriate intention is to sentence the addressee to 30 days in jail. Let us say, following Austin, that in virtue of having this property a verb phrase is performative (and the main verb in a performative verb phrase may be called a performative verb).

Actually, this may not be all of the property that Austin had in mind. For, according to this criterion, verb phrases like 'utter a sentence of English', 'utter a sentence of fewer than 15 words', 'whisper in your ear', and 'shout from the back of the room', count as performative. But one may doubt that Austin would have been comfortable classing these as performative. And there is an important difference that distinguishes these from all the verb phrases that Austin did suggest were performative. Each of Austin's examples of performative verb phrases, but none of these verb phrases, is a verb phrase '\( \phi \)' such that if a person \( \phi \)s intentionally then it follows that that person does something (utters sounds, writes marks, gestures) in (or by) doing which he/she means something (in Grice's non-natural sense of 'means'\(^3\)). It is not possible to promise or bet or request or state without making an utterance by which one means something; but it is possible to utter a sentence of English or shout without meaning anything by one's utterance. If a verb phrase '\( \phi \)' is such that a person's \( \phi \)ing entails that that person makes an utterance and means something by so doing, let us call '\( \phi \)' a meaning verb phrase. Perhaps we come closer to Austin's notion of the performative if we say that the criterion I stated in the first paragraph gives only the differentia for the species performative verb phrase and the proximate genus is meaning verb phrase.\(^2\) There are many meaning verb phrases that are not performative, for example: 'berate you', 'pay you a flowery compliment', 'amuse you with a quip', 'describe the scene', 'tell you what time it is', 'insinuate that you are dishonest'. None of these can be used in the
construction 'I (hereby) φ' in order thereby to φ. No matter what the circumstances or one's intentions, one cannot berate someone just by uttering 'I hereby berate you', or describe the scene by uttering 'I hereby describe the scene', or insinuate that someone is dishonest by uttering 'I hereby insinuate that you are dishonest'.

The question I want to consider here is this: Why this difference? Among meaning verb phrases, what is it that the performative ones have that the others lack? How is it that they can be performative whereas the others cannot? In answer to this I want something other than the statement that they satisfy the criterion of performativity, that I have already given. I want to know why they have that property.

The answer I intend to suggest is that a verb phrase, 'φ', is performative in certain circumstances because its descriptive meaning (the nature of the act it signifies) is such as to make it possible in those circumstances to φ by means of stating that one thereby φs: φing is the sort of thing that lends itself to being done just by saying that one, in that very act, does it. This suggestion contradicts something that, apparently, seemed obvious to Austin. In the first lecture of How to Do Things with Words, Austin lists several examples of performative sentences and says that to utter one of these sentences in the appropriate circumstances "is not to describe my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that: I am doing it: it is to do it" (second emphasis mine). One might, of course, agree that to utter one of Austin's sentences in the appropriate circumstances (and with the right intentions) is to perform the act signified by the verb phrase in it. But I do not see why it should be thought, as Austin apparently takes for granted, that this is a reason to deny that in uttering one of those sentences in order to perform the associated act, one also states that one thereby performs that act.

As far as I know, no good reason has been offered by Austin or anyone else for denying this. And there is good reason for not doing so. The sentence 'She thereby promises to be there' can be used to state of another person's current act that by it she promises to be there, and 'I thereby promised to be there' can be used to state of one's own past act that in performing it one promised to be there. Why cannot 'I hereby promise to be there' be used to state of own's own current act that by performing it one promises to be there? Why should a mere shift in person or tense, and from 'thereby' to 'hereby', deprive such a sentence of its power to state that a certain (indexically referred to) act is of a certain sort? There is here a straightforward generalization about indicative sentences differing only in person or tense, and form of indexical

reference, that is prima facie plausible and theoretically economical. It should not be rejected without compelling reason. Complications should not be multiplied beyond necessity.

If we were, nevertheless, to follow Austin in rejecting the generalization and to say that one who φs by uttering 'I hereby φ' cannot be stating that he/she φs in so uttering, what answer could we give to my question? What explanation could we give of what makes the verb phrase 'φ' such that one can φ by uttering 'I hereby φ'? I see no option for the Austonian view but to say that for every performative verb there is just a brute convention of the language that stipulates that that verb plus complement can be used to perform the act signified by the verb phrase.

The explanation that I propose, if it can be made to work, looks better to me on at least two counts. First, as already noted, it is more economical. It needs to appeal only to the very general convention that an indicative sentence is standardly used to state that something is the case and does not need to define a class of exceptions, the performative sentences, and invoke a multiplicity of special conventions (one for each performative verb) to take care of them. Or, to put it another way, it needs to appeal only to the conventions that determine the descriptive meaning of the performative verbs and the performative verb phrases they head, in any person or tense; it does not need to invoke any extra conventions to give them a 'performative meaning' in one particular person and tense. Second, my explanation explains, as the hypothesis of brute performative conventions does not, why only certain meaning verb phrases are performative, why the others are not and, indeed, cannot be.

The thesis I will try to make out is, then, the following: For any performative verb phrase 'φ', first, far from its being impossible both to φ and to state that one thereby φs by uttering 'I (hereby) φ', a perfectly good explanation of how one φs by uttering that sentence is that one does it by means of stating that one thereby φs; and, second, it is the fact that the nature of φing makes it possible, in the right circumstances, to φ (and to intend to φ) by that means that makes φ performative, in those circumstances.

Every act signified by a meaning verb phrase has as its core an utterance act, an act of producing a certain type of sound or gesture or other perceptible sign: it is by producing a certain type of utterance that an agent means something. The nature of the act signified by any particular meaning verb phrase can be specified by giving the conditions that it imposes on the core act of utterance, the conditions that must be
satisfied by that utterance if performing it is also to be performing that act. These conditions will fall into one or more of the following five categories.

(1) Stage setting. Many types of acts signified by meaning verb phrases can occur only after the stage has been especially set for them. By their very nature they can occur only as an intermediate or culminating step in some routine or procedure or ritual or game. An umpire can call a runner out, for example, only if there is already a game going on in which that person has been duly appointed umpire and there is currently a player legitimately trying to run from one base to another.

(2) Form of the utterance. Some acts signified by meaning verb phrases can be performed only by producing an utterance of a certain prescribed form. For example, it may be a law of tournament bridge that one can bid two spades only by uttering the words 'two spades' at the appropriate time, and not by uttering 'I bid two spades' or 'I guess I'll say two spades'. (Of course, for any act signified by a meaning verb phrase, the range of utterance types that will serve to perform it is limited by the intentions essential to the act (of which we will speak below) plus the repertoire of language and other sign uses the utterer commands and presumes the addressee(s) of the utterance to command.)

(3) Consequences of the utterance. Some sorts of meaning acts occur only if the core utterance act has certain sorts of consequences. Examples are those meaning acts that Austin called perlocutionary, such as persuading someone of something, which occur only if the speaker succeeds in influencing the addressee's mind in a certain way.

(4) External relations of the utterance other than its consequences. Consider the meaning verb phrase 'predict correctly that snow will fall tomorrow'. If the act signified by this is to take place, then the core utterance must express the proposition that snow will fall tomorrow and the world must make this proposition true. If the act signified by the meaning verb phrase 'offer a consideration in favor of Bob's view' is to take place, then the core utterance must express a proposition that, if true, is a consideration in favor of Bob's view. If one performs either of these acts intentionally, then, of course, one must intend that it have the required external relation.

(5) Intentions regarding the consequences of the utterance. Finally, and most important, in any act signified by a meaning verb phrase, if it is performed intentionally, the agent must intend the utterance to have certain consequences, must be trying to achieve certain further results by means of the utterance. The consequences that must be sought will include, of course, any consequences the utterance must have if an act of that sort is to occur; but they are not limited to these: that a person intentionally φs can entail that the person intends to achieve a certain result without entailing that the result is achieved.

One sort of intention regarding consequences of the utterance that is required in any act signified by a meaning verb phrase is, of course, the special sort that constitutes meaning something (in the non-natural sense) by an utterance. The best available guide to the nature of this intention is, I believe, still Grice (1969). Following Grice I will assume that to mean something (non-naturally) by an utterance—at least in the primary paradigm cases of communication—is to intend to achieve a certain effect on the mind of one's addressee(s) by means of their recognition that one has that very intention. In addition, I will assume that when what one means by one's utterance can be expressed in the form 'that p' then the effect on the addressee that one intends to produce (by means of the addressee's recognition of this intention) can be specified as follows: if the sentence 'p' is indicative then the effect is that the addressee should think that one is at the time of the utterance actively thinking that p; if 'p' is of the form '[Addressee] is to VP' then the intended effect is that the addressee should form the intention to VP. Here I can only make these assumptions, not defend them.

Most acts in which a person means something (in the non-natural sense) will be of this sort where what the person means is that p, for some proposition "p" (at least most of those where it is at all easy to say what the speaker means). The act of saying that p, for any indicative sentence 'p', is obviously of this sort: clearly one who states that p must mean that p. Other meaning verb phrases, such as 'tell you how to get there', 'describe the scene', 'scold you for getting in late' imply that there is some proposition "p" such that one who performs the act signified by the verb phrase produces an utterance by which he/she means that p; but they are unlike the verb phrase 'state that p' in that they are not explicit about the content of that proposition but give only incomplete information about it. For instance, in a given utterance A scolds B for getting in late only if, for some proposition "p" that ascribes some specific negative value characteristics to B's getting in late, A means that p by that utterance; but, of course, the verb phrase 'scold you for getting in late' does not give us the content of any such proposition.

In most cases, if the intentional performance of a certain sort of act requires meaning that p, for some proposition "p", it requires other intentions as well. For instance, in order to state that p one must, besides meaning that p, intend to accomplish the objectives of meaning
that *p* via the addressee's recognizing that the sentence uttered (or an appropriate constituent of it) conventionally means that *p* in the context of its utterance. This is, I believe, the only additional intention required in stating that *p*. In other such acts other sorts of intentions are required. For example, in calling a runner out, an umpire must not only mean that the runner is out but must intend his/her addressees to think that he/she regards the utterance as an official umpiring act (rather than, say, just a spectator's comment) and must intend the runner to become out as a consequence of the act. Or consider again the act of scolding someone for doing something: the scolder must not only mean that the scoledee's act merits those negative epithets that the 'scolder applies to it but must also intend to get the scoledee to *feel* the strength of the scoleder's disapproval of the act.

Now let us consider how it is that when a meaning verb phrase *'φ* is performative, and only then, it is reasonable to think that all the conditions for *φ*ing, which are of one or another of the sorts we've just reviewed, can in the right circumstances be fulfilled by means of stating that one thereby *φ*s.

1. *Stage setting.* Any antecedent circumstances required for *φ*ing must, of course, take care of themselves. We need only to explain how, if *'φ'* is performative and the circumstances make it possible to *φ* then one can *φ* by stating that one thereby *φ*s. If the circumstances are not right, then no act that one can perform will be an act of *φ*ing. No act that I can perform now would be an act of sentencing someone to 30 days in jail.

2. *Form of the utterance.* It follows directly from the definition of a performative verb phrase that if *'φ'* is performative and the meaning of *'φ'* or the rules for *φ*ing, in the context in which the speaker finds him/herself, place any requirements on the form of utterance used to *φ* then those requirements must be satisfied by a form of utterance that can be used to state that, in that very act of uttering it, one *φ*s, either '*I φ*' or '*I hereby φ*'. Thus, if the only form of utterance one is permitted to use in bidding three no trump in tournament bridge is the curt 'three no trump' then *ipso facto* the verb phrase 'bid three no trump' is not performative in the context of tournament bridge. On the other hand, if the correct form is '*I bid three no trump*' then 'bid three no trump' is performative in the context of tournament bridge. Here the details of the particular form of utterance required are rather arbitrary and inessential (though it may not be arbitrary or inessential that some particular form or other be required). If the rules were changed so as to permit only '*I hereby bid three no trump*' as the correct form for bidding three no trump, nothing important about the nature of the act of bidding three no trump would be changed. Or consider the sentence '*I hereby fire you*'. No doubt, a speaker could succeed in firing someone by uttering that sentence. But it sounds odd. The form generally used is '*You are fired*' and perhaps this has the status of a convention. If it does, the arbitrariness of this requirement on the form comes out in the fact that it can be ignored without crippling the act. '*I hereby φ*' is not the only form that can be used to state that one (thereby) *φ*s. Another is '*I am (hereby) φ*'. For many, perhaps most performative verb phrases *'φ'*), it sounds natural in colloquial English to *φ* by uttering '*I am φing*'—for example: '*I am telling you now that...*', '*I am holding you in contempt*', '*I am warning you...', '*I am seeing your five and raising it ten*'. But for some it does not: '*I am congratulating you on your promotion*', '*I am thanking you for your help*'; although here too the odd sounding forms can nevertheless do the job.

Still the possibility of arbitrary requirements on the form used to *φ* opens up the possibility that, although one way of stating that one thereby *φ*s would be a way of thereby *φ*ing, a different way of stating this would not be. It could be appropriate to respond to '*I hereby bid a contract of three in the suit of spades*' by saying '*No, you are wrong, you don't thereby bid that contract*'. So we must attach a slight qualification to my thesis about what makes a meaning verb phrase performative. We can say that a meaning verb phrase *'φ'* is performative in a given context because in that context to state that one thereby *φ*s by uttering '*I hereby φ*' is sufficient in order to *φ* and any other way of stating that one thereby *φ*s is also sufficient or would be so if some arbitrary rule were different.

Are there any non-arbitrary examples, where the essential nature of the act signified by a verb phrase *'φ'* imposes particular requirements on the form of any utterance in which an utterer *φ*s, which requirements can be satisfied by an utterance of '*I hereby φ*'? The only ones I can think of are verb phrases like '*utter a sentence of English*' and '*shout from the back of the room*' that are not meaning verb phrases. So here is another feature that separates these non-meaning verb phrases from Austinian performatives: that an utterance of one of them satisfies the differentia of performativity depends essentially on the utterance's having a certain form and this is so because of what these phrases mean. Because of this, acts like uttering a sentence of English and shouting from the back of the room contrast with acts signified by Austinian performatives in that they cannot be performed by stating that one is performing them *per se*. That is, their very nature dictates that not just
any way of stating that one is performing them will do, that certain ways must fail to be means of performing them. (Incidentally, a sentence like 'I hereby utter a sentence of English', although perhaps not a true performative, offers an especially clear counter-example to the assumption that one cannot in the same utterance both perform a certain act and state that one is thereby performing it.)

3) **Consequences of the utterance.** Given that ‘ϕ’ is a performative verb phrase, how is it reasonable to expect that if, in circumstances right for ϕ-ing, one states that one thereby ϕ-s, then one’s utterance will have the consequences required for ϕ-ing? For some performative verb phrases there are no particular consequences that the utterance must have in order for the act signified by the verb phrase to take place; it is not even necessary that the utterance secure what Austin called ‘uptake’, i.e., the addressee’s recognizing the speaker’s intention to perform that act in the utterance. It seems right to say that I asked you what time it was, by saying, ‘I ask you what time it is’, even if you could not hear me because, say, a loud noise drowned me out. Or consider: ‘I told you that you would need a screwdriver but apparently you weren’t paying attention’. Some performative verb phrases, however, do require the utterance to have certain consequences, even beyond uptake. By uttering ‘I hereby inform you that your account is overdrawn’ I can inform someone that his/her account is overdrawn; but I do not do so if my utterance fails to have the result that the addressee comes to know that his/her account is overdrawn. And it does seem that I cannot intend to ask you what time it is, or intend to tell you that you will need a screwdriver, if I know that you will be unable to perceive my utterance, for I must at least intend to secure uptake for asking you... or telling you... So, in order to make good my claim that for performative ‘ϕ’ it is reasonable to intend to ϕ by means of stating that one thereby ϕ-s, I must explain how it is reasonable to expect that by securing uptake for stating that one thereby ϕ-s one will; at a minimum, secure uptake for ϕ-ing—and, in cases like ‘instruct you that your account is overdrawn’, how it is reasonable to expect to secure the further required result as well. This explanation will emerge below.

4) **External relations of the utterance other than its consequences.** Required relations of this sort will be such that if the utterance is of a certain type and the world has been or will be a certain way (including perhaps there having been established certain conventions of meaning regarding that utterance type), then the utterance has the relation. So the utterer can intend that his/her utterance have a relation of this sort if and only if it can be reasonable for the utterer to believe both that the world has been or will be the appropriate way and that, if so and his/her utterance is of an appropriate type, then it will have the relation. For any performative meaning verb phrase ‘ϕ’, that requires such a relation of the utterance in the act it signifies, it clearly can be reasonable for the utterer to have these beliefs when the utterance type is ‘I (hereby) ϕ’. For example, the meaning of the performative verb phrase ‘predict correctly that it will snow tomorrow’, requires that the act it signifies be performed by an utterance that expresses the proposition that it will snow tomorrow, which proposition must be true. It will be reasonable for an utterer who knows the meaning of that verb phrase to believe that utterance of ‘I (hereby) predict correctly that it will snow tomorrow’ will have that required property, if it is reasonable for that utterer to believe that it will snow tomorrow.

5) **Intentions regarding the consequences of the utterance.** Let us now take up the important matter of the objectives in making the utterance that intentional ϕ-ing requires the utterer to have. In order to explain how, when ‘ϕ’ is performative and the circumstances are right for ϕ-ing, it is reasonable to intend to ϕ by means of stating that one, in that very act, ϕ-s, we need to explain how it is reasonable to intend to achieve the objectives of ϕ-ing by means of achieving the objectives of stating that one ϕ-s. I hypothesize that what makes this intention reasonable just when ‘ϕ’ is a performative verb phrase are the following general requirements on performative verb phrases:

(A) ‘ϕ’ is performative in a given context only if in that context ϕ would express or imply the specific content of the objectives that ‘ϕ’ implies that the subject has.

(B) ‘ϕ’ is performative in a given context only if in that context it is possible, by uttering ‘I hereby ϕ’, to state that one thereby ϕ-s.

(C) ‘ϕ’ is performative in a given context only if in that context it is reasonable to think that getting an addressee to think that one states that one thereby ϕ-s will be a means of getting the addressee to think that one has in one’s act the objectives of ϕ-ing.

(D) ‘ϕ’ is performative in a given context only if the objectives of ϕ-ing are such that in that context it is not absurd to expect that getting one’s addressee to think that one has those objectives in one’s act will be a means of achieving them.

Let me discuss each of these in turn.

(A) ‘ϕ’ is performative in a given context only if the specific content
of the objectives that \( \phi \) implies that the agent has would be clearly implied by \( \phi' \) itself in that context. 'Deny that' can be performative only in contexts where there is something deniable that is the intended referent of 'that' and the utterer can reasonably expect it to be clear to the addressee(s) what it is. This requirement is what keeps such verb phrases as 'scold you for your impertinence', 'tell you what time it is', 'make a full confession of my recent misdeeds', from being performative in any context. I tell you what time it is only if, for some specific time, I intend in my utterance to tell you that \( \text{that} \) is the time; but of course no specific time is mentioned, even implicitly, by the phrase 'tell you what time it is'. Contrast the performative verb phrases 'tell you that it is 2 o'clock', 'confess that I left the door unlocked', for which contexts where the consequent of principle (A) holds are easy to come by.

(B) '\( \phi' \) is performative in a given context only if in that context one can, by uttering 'I hereby \( \phi' \), state that one thereby \( \phi s \). This principle discloses a reason why verb phrases like 'insinuate that you are dishonest' cannot be performative: it is impossible to \( \text{state} \) that one thereby – in that very act of utterance – insinuates something. In order to state that \( p \) one must mean that \( p \) by one's utterance \( \text{and} \) one must intend it to be recognized that one means that \( p \) via the recognition that the sentence uttered (or some appropriate constituent of it) conventionally means that \( p \) (in the context of utterance).14 But the beliefs about conventional meaning required for this second intention prevent one's having the beliefs required for the first, the meaning intention, in the case where \( \text{"p"} \) is the proposition 'I hereby insinuate that you are dishonest'. Meaning that \( p \) involves, we said, intending one's utterance to get the addressee to think that at the time of utterance one actually thinks that \( p \). It glares out that I cannot hope, by uttering 'I hereby insinuate that you are dishonest', to get my addressee to think \( \text{both} \) that I intend to be using those words with their conventional meaning \( \text{and} \) that I think that I \( \text{do} \) thereby insinuate that the addressee is dishonest.

A similar obstacle prevents the performativity of verb phrases of the form 'persuade you that \( p \)'. It is impossible in an utterance to state that one thereby – in that very act – persuade someone of something. To persuade you that \( p \) is to state to you reasons for believing that \( p \) that you find sufficiently cogent to change you from not believing to believing that \( p \). Clearly, that I persuade you that \( p \) cannot be for you a reason for your changing from not believing to believing that \( p \). Therefore, if my act is merely one of stating that I persuade you that \( p \), it cannot be an act of persuading you that \( p \): in stating that, I do not state anything that could be a reason for you to come to believe that \( p \). This is sufficiently obvious that no utterer could hope, by uttering 'I hereby persuade you that \( p \)', to get an addressee to think \( \text{both} \) that the utterer intends those words (in accordance with their conventional meaning) to express the proposition that the utterer thereby persuades the addressee that \( p \) and that the utterer thinks that that proposition is true. Yet, to get the addressee to think both these things is what the utterer would have to intend if the utterer were trying to state that he/she thereby persuades the addressee that \( p \). (Note that there is no such obstacle to the performativity of verb phrases of the form 'offer you evidence that convinces you that \( p \).' Indeed, 'offer you evidence that convinces you that I speak English', for example, could, in the right context, be used to perform the act it signifies. But, unlike ones of the form 'persuade you that \( p \)', such verb phrases are not meaning verb phrases.)

(C) \( \phi' \) is performative in a given context only if in that context one can reasonably expect that getting one's addressee(s) to think that one states that one thereby \( \phi s \) will be a means of getting the addressee(s) to think that one has in one's act the objectives of \( \phi \)ing. If one succeeds in one's utterance in \( \text{stating} \) that one thereby \( \phi s \), then by means of that act to get the addressee to think that one has the objectives of \( \phi \)ing is a cinch. As we've said, in stating that one thereby \( \phi s \) one intends to get the addressee to think that at the time of utterance one actively thinks that one \( \phi s \) in that utterance. If that intention gets fulfilled then the addressee has only to infer from the premises that one thinks that one \( \phi s \) to the conclusion that one has the intentions required for \( \phi \)ing. This is a thoroughly reasonable inference for the addressee to make and for one to expect the addressee to make.15 Suppose that you address me the utterance 'I see your five and raise you ten'. It is not easy to imagine what reasons I could have for doubting that you intend thereby to see my five and raise me ten that would not also be reasons for doubting that you think that you do thereby see my five and raise me ten.

(D) \( \phi' \) is performative in a given context only if the objectives of \( \phi \)ing are such that in that context it is not absurd, to hope that getting the addressee(s) to think that one has those objectives in one's utterance will be a means of accomplishing them.16 Given our Gricean assumptions about speaker's meaning, this point is clear with respect to any intention essential to intentional \( \phi \)ing that is constitutive of meaning that \( p \) for some proposition \( "p" \): it follows from those assumptions that the object of the meaning intention must be one that the speaker can hope to accomplish by means of the addressee's recognizing the speaker's intention. I cannot, for example, utter 'I was born yesterday' and by so uttering mean (literally) that I was born yesterday. I and my addressee must know, and know that the other knows, that there is absolutely no
chance of my getting the addressee to think that I am actively thinking that I was born yesterday by uttering that (or any other) sentence.

As we noted, there are intentions other than meaning intentions required in the intentional performance of acts signified by performative verb phrases, intentions whose objects are also that the utterance have certain consequences. These too must be such that it is not absurd to hope to fulfill them by getting one’s addressee to recognize that one has those intentions in making the utterance. If a verb phrase ‘\( \phi \)’ signifies an act such that its intentional performance requires the agent to intend the act to have certain consequences, and if, in a given context, it would be impossible to hope to fulfill that intention by means of uttering ‘I (hereby) \( \phi \)’ and thereby getting an addressee to recognize that one had that intention in one’s utterance, then ‘\( \phi \)’ cannot be performative in that context. In that context the utterance of the performative sentence could not be intended or regarded as a serious attempt to perform the act. It could be acting as if one were \( \phi \)-ing, kidding perhaps, but it could not be really \( \phi \)-ing.

Consider the meaning verb phrase ‘request that you become my slave for the rest of your life’. Is a person’s becoming a slave something that can be requested of him/her? It seems doubtful, at least for all but the most unlikely circumstances. Principle (D) gives the reason and explains why this verb phrase is disabled as a serious performative. It is in the nature of requesting that what one requests must be something that it is not utterly preposterous to hope to get the addressee to do by means of getting the addressee to recognize in one’s utterance the expression of one’s desire that he/she do it and to take as a reason for doing it if the addressee has no objection to doing it that outweighs for him/her the consideration that one desires that he/she do it. Of course, a request can be unreasonable, even absurd, and yet not a joke. But there are limits: one can take a wild and hopeless shot, but if it is too wild and hopeless it is no longer a shot.

The verb phrase ‘order you to become my slave for life’ sounds less odd. It is easier to imagine a situation in which a person is in a position – has, or is taken to have, the authority – to order someone into slavery than it is to imagine one in which a person is in a position to request someone to become a slave. This is because it is essential to ordering that one intend to give one’s addressee a motive for doing the thing ordered that is much stronger than the motive one intends to give in requesting, namely, the motive that, in virtue of one’s authority, one’s having ordered the addressee to do it makes doing it the addressee’s duty, violation of which is understood to carry a more serious penalty for the addressee than merely the knowledge that he/she has disappointed the speaker.

Take the example ‘ask you to run a mile in one minute’. Only in fiction could this be a serious performative, since in any actual circumstances it will be clear to all parties that a would-be addressee of the utterance ‘I ask you to run a mile in one minute’ is far from capable of running a mile in a minute. Therefore, it will be clear that the addressee would be unable even to consider doing it, much less to be led to do it by the consideration that the speaker has conveyed to the addressee the speaker’s desire that the addressee to it. Here it hardly decreases the oddity to change ‘ask’ to ‘order’. No matter how strong a reason one has for wanting to run a mile in a minute, as long as one knows that there is not the slightest chance that in running as fast as one can for a minute one will run a mile, one cannot so much as try to run a mile in a minute. So another person who also knows this cannot so much as hope to get one to do this, even by providing one with the strongest possible motive for doing it, and, therefore, cannot have all the intentions required in ordering one to run a mile in a minute.

Consider the meaning verb phrase ‘try to divert your attention from the danger behind you by telling you that your shoe is untied’. In any act satisfying this description, the speaker must intend to divert the addressee’s attention from the danger behind the addressee by telling the addressee that the addressee’s shoe is untied. But only in the most farfetched circumstances would it be other than absurd for a speaker to hope that the addressee’s recognizing that the speaker acted with that intention will lead the addressee to fulfill it. Therefore, by principle (D), only for such circumstances is that verb phrase performative. For contrast, consider ‘try to keep you from seeing something you would rather not see by telling you that you will regret it if you look behind you’. Though this is, perhaps, not more likely to be used to perform the act it signifies than the previous example, it certainly could be so used and circumstances enabling this are much more likely.

‘I hereby inform you that there is no God.’ This could hardly be a serious utterance. Why not? If I intend to inform you that \( p \) I intend to bring you to know that \( p \) by means of your knowing that I think that \( p \) and that I am in a position to know whether or not \( p \). I would be silly to expect anyone who understands the proposition to think that I am in a position to know whether or not there is no God (at any rate, anyone who does not already know this).

Finally, consider again ‘scold you for being late’. We’ve already seen
one reason why that meaning verb phrase cannot be performativ. Principle (D) gives another: in order to scold you for being late I must intend to make you feel the strength of my annoyance at your being late and this is something that I can hardly expect to achieve merely by making you aware that I have that objective.

Now contrast the objectives implied by meaning verb phrases that are ordinary, clear cases of performatives. For example, the act signified by ‘ask you to tell the court what happened’ requires the agent to have the objective of getting the addressee to tell the court what happened, by means of getting the addressee to recognize that the act expresses the agent’s desire that the addressee do so, to take that as a reason for doing so, and to do so if the addressee has no overriding objection. One context (not the only one) in which ‘I ask you to tell the court what happened’ might be uttered as a serious performativic is that of a court trial, where speaker and addressee both know that the addressee is a witness on the stand and that the speaker is empowered to question witnesses before the court. In these circumstances, the speaker can reasonably hope to accomplish the objective mentioned just by uttering that sentence and thereby getting the addressee to think that the speaker’s utterance has that objective.

‘I hereby inform you that your salary for the next year will be...’. Normally, one who utters such a sentence with the intention of informing the addressee’s salary for next year will be... will know whereof he/she speaks. If so, and if the utterer also knows that he/she speaks the truth (and believes that the addressee does not already know what his/her salary next year will be), then the utterer can expect the addressee to come to know that his/her salary next year will be... as a result of recognizing that the utterer intended the utterance to bring the addressee to know this. (If the addressee does already know this, then, of course, the utterer does not inform the addressee of it, however reasonable the utterer’s belief that this is what he/she is doing; one cannot be informed of what one already knows.)

In calling a runner out the umpire must, we said, have the intention that the runner will become out as a result of the umpire’s utterance. It will, normally, be reasonable for the umpire to expect this consequence to flow from recognition on the part of the addressees – the runner and the other players – that this was the intention of the umpire in the utterance, since it will normally be reasonable for the umpire to assume that the players believe that he/she is a duly appointed umpire in the game. (It is not, however, more than a highly reasonable expectation that the runner’s being out will ensue if that assumption is true and the players recognize the

umpire’s intention. The runner’s being out is not a logical consequence of the player’s knowing that a duly appointed umpire has called the runner out: the players could then and there decide on a rule change or they could all just ignore that call and continue playing as if the runner were not out. Of course, that sort of thing cannot happen too often if there is to be any such thing in the game as an umpire’s authority to call runners out.)

As a final illustration consider the most discussed of all performativ verb phrases, those headed by the verb ‘promise’. If I promise you to be there, I make an utterance by which I manifestly intend to get you to think that, because of my utterance, you are entitled to treat me as under a special obligation to you to be there. But it is reasonable for me to expect that you will so think if you think that I had that intention in my utterance and that I understand the rules of the promising practice. For, according to those rules, my acting with the manifest intention of getting you to think that you have that title is sufficient to give it to you.

In sum, we see in these examples – and it would not be hard to see in many others – the characteristic pattern that makes a meaning verb phrase ‘ϕ’ performativic in a given context. The meaning of ‘ϕ’ is such that, given the context, one can expect ϕ by stating that in that very act one ϕs: And this is so because, first, the context provides whatever stage-setting ϕing requires; second, the sentence ‘I (hereby) ϕ’ conforms to whatever requirements the nature of ϕing, or the rules for ϕing in that context, impose on the form of utterance used to ϕ; third, in that context it is reasonable to believe that utterance of ‘I (hereby) ϕ’ will have whatever non-consequential external relations the nature of ϕing requires the utterance to have; fourth, the full, specific content of the objectives required in ϕing is, in that context, implied by the verb phrase ‘ϕ’; and, fifth, these objectives are of such a nature that it is not absurd to hope to achieve them through saying to one’s addressee that one thereby ϕs and by so saying getting the addressee to realize that one has those objectives in the utterance (by addressee’s inferring from one’s having said that one thereby ϕs to one’s then thinking that one thereby ϕs, and from that to one’s intending thereby to ϕ)."
properties by themselves enable ‘ϕ’ to be performative. Even if it has never been done before, in suitable circumstances a speaker can utter ‘I hereby ϕ’ with the expectation that addressees who grasp the meaning of ‘ϕ’ will take it that in so uttering the speaker does ϕ (provided there is no convention prohibiting ϕing in that way). If, on the other hand, a verb phrase ‘ϕ’ lacks some of the properties I’ve cited—if, for example, the nature of the act signified by ‘ϕ’ makes it impossible to state that one there by ϕ’s (as when ‘ϕ’ is ‘hint that your motives are improper’), or requires of the core utterance either a form not possessed by ‘I hereby ϕ’ (as when ‘ϕ’ is ‘somewhat reluctantly bid four spades in this game of tournament bridge’) or objectives whose full content is not revealed by the utterance of ‘ϕ’ in that context (as when ‘ϕ’ is ‘tell you a secret’) or objectives that one cannot in circumstances suitable for ϕing hope to accomplish just by getting the addressee(s) to think that one regards one’s act as ϕing through applying that description to it (as when ‘ϕ’ is ‘make you see that freedom of the will is incompatible with determinism’) — then no attempt to stipulate or adopt a convention that to utter ‘I hereby ϕ’ in certain circumstances is to ϕ could succeed in making it possible thereby to do so. No such stipulation could be taken seriously; no such convention could arise. In short, in the presence of the properties I’ve discussed a brute convention is unnecessary and in their absence it is powerless to make a verb phrase performative.\footnote{Cornell University}

\begin{notes}
1 Grice (1957). I do not mean here Grice’s proposed analysis of the non-natural sense. Where the verb ‘means’ has a person for its subject, it has the non-natural sense if it is not being used as a synonym for ‘intends’. If Grice’s analysis is on the right track, as I think it is, then to mean that p, in the non-natural sense, in uttering some words is to intend certain things in uttering them, but not: that p. 2 It seems clear that anything that would have been called an illocutionary act by Austin, or by the many philosophers and linguists who have used this notion since Austin introduced it, is such that if saying that ‘ϕ’ ϕing is to ascribe to ‘S’ an illocutionary act then ‘ϕ’ is a meaning verb phrase. The converse is not true, however. ‘Talk him into staying’ is a meaning verb phrase but to say that ‘S talked him into staying’ is to ascribe to ‘S’ a perlocutionary and not an illocutionary act. It also seems clear that any act signified by a performative verb phrase is an illocutionary act, in Austin’s sense. Perhaps the converse of this is clear as well, if we take Austin’s remark that “the use of ‘language’ for” performing illocutionary acts is “conventional, in the sense that at least it could be made explicit by the performative formula” (Austin (1962), p. 103) as a stipulation about the notion of an illocutionary act. But some linguists (e.g., McCawley (1977), Sack (1974)) quite plausibly classify as illocutionary certain acts that cannot be performed by means of performatives, such as echo-questioning (“She forgot to tell you what?”). It does not follow that ‘describe’, or even ‘berate’, is not a performative verb. It is possible to describe the scene as... by uttering the sentence ‘I (hereby) describe the scene as...’; and it might be possible to berate someone for his/her deeds by uttering the sentence ‘I (hereby) berate you for your...’; provided that what fills the blank is language of a sufficiently berating sort. But it is impossible to insinuate... by uttering the sentence ‘I (hereby) insinuate...’ ‘Insinuate’ (like ‘hint’ and ‘imply’) is not a performative verb. 4 Vendler (1976) (which started me thinking about this topic when I heard it delivered at Oberlin in 1972) raises essentially the same question and, prompted mainly by examples like ‘infiltrate that you are dishonest’, suggests that the reason that a non-performative meaning verb phrase (which he there calls a ‘quasi-performative’) fails to be performative is that the attempt to use it performatively would be self-defeating: its meaning is such as to require the speaker in any such attempt to have conflicting intentions (for the example mentioned, to make something barely implicit in what is said and also to make it explicit). Strawson (1964) offers the following similar explanation of why insinuating is not a type of illocutionary act and, therefore, on his view, why ‘insinuate’ is not a performative verb (p. 454): “The whole point of insinuating is that the audience is to suspect, not more than suspect, the intention to induce or disclose a certain belief. The intention one has in insinuating is essentially non-avowable.” This sort of explanation works well enough for some, but not all, non-performative meaning verb phrases, not, for example, for ‘describe, the scene’, ‘enumerate my faults’, ‘extol your virtues’, or ‘persuade you to see a doctor’. In these cases there is no clash between the intentions essential to the act and the intention of openly avowing that one intends to be performing that act. How my explanation handles cases like these comes out below, pp. 253–255. 5 This is, of course, compatible with there being other means of performing the act signified by ‘ϕ’, made available by linguistic or other conventions or other circumstances. 6 Perhaps Austin based his conviction in this denial (at least partly) on the premises that it would always be odd to say of a speaker who used a sentence of the form ‘(I hereby) ϕ’ to ϕ that he/she stated or said that he/she ϕed, or that he/she said something true or false. The inference is dubious and so is the premises. None of the following bits of dialogue seems odd to me: ‘What did he say after you offered him the use of your tennis court tomorrow?’ ‘He said that he felt me sixpence it would rain tomorrow.’ ‘What did she say when you told her about your promotion?’ ‘She said that she commended me for my patience.’ ‘What did the judge say after the defendant’s outburst?’ ‘She said that she held (was holding) the defendant in contempt of court.’ ‘Did she say that it will be fixed by Wednesday?’ ‘Not only that: she said that she personally guarantees that it will be.’ A judge is murdered one night and an imposter takes her place on the bench the next day. In the courtroom is B who knows about the murder and the imposture. Impostor: “I hereby sentence the defendant to 30 days in jail.” B: “No, you are wrong. You don’t have the authority to sentence anyone to anything.” Stampe (1973) suggests (p. 29) that “the reason he [one who says I promise or I request] is not reporting or stating [that he promises or that he requests] may be this: What one reports or states is, if what one says be true, a fact that enters into the causal explanation of his uttering that sentence. Whether, this conjecture about reports and statements is correct or not remains to be seen.” I don’t think it does remain to be seen. Consider: He stated that Goldbach’s conjecture is true. He stated that their current supply of coal will be used up by the end of the month.’ 7 As Kent Bach (1975) asks (p. 230), rhetorically, “Why cannot one perform an act and in the same breath state that one is performing it? Why should the use of certain verbs in a performative utterance be any less of a statement than the use of the same verbs in non-performative utterances?”
\end{notes}
Stampe (1975) says (p. 22), "... other things being equal, the better account [of explicit performative] will provide the same kind of view of oratio obliqua sentences in any PERSON: and... in any TENSE including the noncontinuous present." It appears, however, that Stampe either does not think that other things are equal (or sufficiently close to it), or else does not have in mind the generalization I speak of. For he goes on to say (pp. 24-25) that in uttering 'I hereby promise that I will come' seriously and literally, thereby promising to come, a speaker "does not report, state, or assert that someone (he) promises to come." According to Stampe, the speaker only "explicitly indicates" or "makes it clear" that he promises to come.

Searle (1969, Chaps. 2-3) seems to suggest that 'I promise' in the performative use of 'I promise that p' is an 'illocutionary force indicating device' on a par with the question mark in the inscription 'You are leaving?'. Thus he seems to suggest that it is as much a brute convention of meaning that 'I promise' prefixed to a sentence is usable to promise the truth-value of the proposition expressed by that sentence. On my view of a performative verb phrase 'φ', it is, of course, a matter of linguistic conventions that an utterance of 'I (hereby) φ' is a means of φ'ing, but just of the conventions that determine the descriptive meaning of 'φ'.

Hare (1970) seems to take the 'brute convention' view of performativity when he endorses (p. 40) the claim that the meaning of a certain word e.g., 'promise' can be explained, or partly explained, by saying that, when incorporated in an appropriate sentence in an appropriate place, it gives to that whole sentence the property that an utterance of it could be, in the appropriate context, a performance of a certain kind of speech act e.g., promising.

He goes on (pp. 6-7) to draw a parallel between the use of 'I promise' to indicate that the speaker is promising and the use of the indicative mood to indicate that the speaker "is performing one of the genus of speech acts which we may call 'assertions'". Warneck (1971) criticizes Hare's claim, saying (pp. 82-83) that if it means that "uses in general of the word 'promise' are to be explained, and can be explained only, in terms of the explicitly performative use of 'I promise', then it is wrong because it is upside down. In order to understand 'I promise', we have to know what promising is—that is (in English) to know in general what 'promise' means. But that of course is to say that in this case, as surely in others, the explicitly performative use is secondary to, presupposes understanding of, is to be explained in terms of, other uses or the word; and not vice versa.

When I say that I see no option for the Austinian view but an appeal to brute performative conventions for the performative verbs, I mean that I see nothing else in the way of a general explanation of why performative verbs are performative. One might, of course, come up with explanations for certain performatives, or certain classes of performatives, that appeal neither to brute performative conventions nor to the claim that the φ'ing utterer of 'I (hereby) φ' states that he/she φs. Such an explanation for the performative verb 'promise' is suggested in Stampe (1975). He claims (p. 23) that promising that one will come requires saying that one will come and that, in using the explicit performative 'I hereby promise that I will come' to promise to come, one is saying that one will come. He also notes that one can promise to come just by saying that one will come, without the use of any explicit 'illocutionary force indicating device'. Putting these together one gets the suggestion (Stampe does not put it in these terms) that one who promises to come in uttering the performative 'I hereby promise that I will come' does so by means of saying that he/she will come. This is surely a plausible suggestion for at least some (perhaps most) cases. Of course, even in cases where this suggestion is true it by no means follows that another means by which the speaker promises to come, in uttering 'I hereby promise that I will come', is saying that he/she thereby promises to come. One may simultaneously use more than one means to the same end. Nor do I see any objection to allowing that one can say more than one thing in the same non-conjunctive utterance. Typically, in uttering 'I know that it was there this morning' one says both that it was there this morning and that one knows that it was. Moreover, it does not seem that merely saying that one will come must always be an adequate means of promising that one will come. Suppose one's promise has been stingy too many times by people who've said they will come and then haven't and when reproached have said that they never said that they promised. If one says merely, 'I'll come' when asked by such a promisee to promise to come, he/she may well say that that is not good enough and refuse to accept one's so saying as a promise, in which case the only means by which one can promise is to say that one promises.

Besides promising you that p' there are a number of other performative verb phrases—e.g., 'maintain/inform you/tell you/warn you/predict that p'—that signify acts that one can perform by just saying (stating) that p. With respect to any of these it might be held that when the act is performed by uttering the performative sentence, it is performed by means of saying that p. But there are many other performative verb phrases for which such an account is out of the question—e.g., 'sentence you to 30 days in jail', 'advise you to accept the offer'. If I sentence you by uttering 'I hereby sentence you... ', I say (in the sense of state) nothing other than that I thereby sentence you... (and such obvious logical consequences of this as you are sentenced...).

I mean by 'stating' here what the more ordinary word 'saying' would mean in the same context. I use 'state' rather than 'say' in formulating my claims because 'state' is the term Austin used in the remark quoted above. He too, I believe, meant by 'state' nothing more portentous than would be meant by 'say' in the same context.

David Lewis (1972) could have something like this idea in mind when he remarks (p. 210), "Austin says: [the sentence] 'I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow' is neither true nor false. I think it is true, however, by his remark (p. 211) that 'I command you to be late' 'can be used to command... It can be used instead to describe what I am doing; thus used, it cannot be paraphrased as an imperative, and it is likely to be false when uttered because it is difficult to issue a command and simultaneously say that I am doing so" (emphasizes mine). Lewis also says (p. 211):

I see no decisive reason to insist that there is any distinction in meanings associated between the difference between performatives and self-descriptive uses of performative sentences, if the contrary assumption is theoretically convenient.

I agree, of course, and add that performative uses of performative sentences are such by means of being also self-descriptive uses.

Bach (1975) advances the same claim as this part of my thesis and criticizes several (poor) arguments for the contradictory, most notably that given in Schiffer (1972), pp. 108-110. At the end of the paper Bach gives a brief sketch (quoted below in Note 19) of how, in his view, it is possible to perform an act by means of stating that one is performing it.
Actually, I think that the possibility of the “counter-suggestible” addressee (Grice 1969, pp. 167–173) shows that the correct specifications of the intended effects in meaning that ϕ require an additional layer. For the indicative: the addressee should think that one is trying in one’s utterance to get the addressee to think that at the time of the utterance one is actively thinking that ϕ. For the other: the addressee should think that one is trying in one’s utterance to form the intention to make it the case that ϕ. But it will be safe, and convenient, to ignore these complications here.

Another clear example is David Lewis’s ‘In hexameter trochaic am I talking’, Lewis (1972), p. 211.

(The only further thing that is required for stating or saying that ϕ is that the sentence uttered (or an appropriate constituent) be an indicative sentence that, in virtue of its conventional meaning, expresses the proposition that ϕ (in the context of the utterance). It is curious that many who have shrank from saying that in φ-ing by uttering ’I (hereby) ϕ’ one says or states that one thereby-φs, have been willing to admit that in φ-ing one makes explicit (Austin 1962), or (explicitly) signals (Sadock 1974), or (explicitly) indicates (Stampe 1975), or (explicitly) tries to communicate (Sadock), that one thereby-φs. Is it a real step from saying any of these things about such an utterance, where the indicative ’I (hereby) ϕ’ does conventionally express the proposition that the speaker thereby-φs, to saying that in it the speaker says he/she φs? Not if I am right that the conditions I’ve mentioned are sufficient for saying that ϕ.

Strawson (1964) may have a similar point in mind when he says (p. 450), by way of explaining “the general suitability of an illocutionary act for performance with the help of the explicitly performative formula for that act”, that a person “can speak of his intention in performing an action with a kind of authority which he cannot command in predicting its outcome”.

Strawson (1964) seems to have a similar point in mind when he suggests (p. 450), that in an illocutionary act “there is not simply an intention to produce a certain response in an audience, but an intention to produce that response by means of recognition on the part of the audience of the intention to produce that response”. He also says (p. 452), however, that it would be a mistake to claim that “just this kind of intention lies at the core of all illocutionary acts”. Perhaps, but my claim is that any intention essential to any act signified by a performative verb phrase (in Strawson’s terms, any act suitable for performance with the help of the explicitly performative formula for it) whose object is some further consequence of the utterance (not lying in the utterance itself) must be an intention that it is reasonable to hope to be able to fulfill by means of getting the audience to recognize that intention in one’s utterance.

The accounts of requesting and ordering used here are along familiar lines. See, e.g., Searle (1969), pp. 64–71, and, especially, Stampe (1975), pp. 37–38.

This has already received some attention in Note 9. What the present paragraph says about promising is along familiar lines. See, e.g., Rawls (1955), pp. 12–32, and Searle (1969), pp. 60–62.

Compare the account Bach (1975) gives (p. 234) of how “taking a performative utterance as a statement may explain why it is a performative as well”:

... in the case of performative utterances... normally the audience reasons, and is intended to reason, as follows: (1) He is saying ’I order you to leave’. (2) He is stating that he is ordering me to leave. (3) If his statement is true, then he must be ordering me to leave. (4) If he is ordering me to leave, it must be his utterance that constitutes the order (what else could it be?). (5) Presumably, he is speaking the truth. (6) Therefore, in saying ’I order you to leave’, he is ordering me to leave.

My account points out that the inference from (1) to (2) in Bach’s schema is not legitimate for just any utterance of the form ’I (hereby) ϕ but must be permitted by the meaning of the verb phrase the speaker used, which feature of its meaning is an ingredient in its performativity. It also points out that the reasonableness of Bach’s step (5) must be guaranteed by the meaning of the verb phrase, another condition on its performativity. And my account explains how it is that the meaning of a performative verb phrase ’ϕ’ makes it reasonable to adopt stating that one ϕs as a means to ϕing: it is because the intentions regarding consequences of the utterance that are required in intentional ϕing have the feature that it is reasonable to expect their fulfillment to flow from the addressee(s) recognizing them in the utterance.

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