

Distinctions in Speech Acts

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It has been my experience that most of us, most of the time, fundamentally believe in the old saying, "actions speak louder than words." That is to say, we grew up with sayings such as: "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me," or "That's only words; it's actions that really matter," or some similar variation on the theme. We probably think that words and sentences are pretty much just used to represent things and affairs in the world, at least most of the time, and that when push comes to shove, what really counts is the realm of action. When we talk about action, we are talking about something that happens in the physical world.

This paper is about a philosophical concept that goes against the traditional grain that automatically gives action more weight than words. It looks at a different way of thinking that considers speaking to constitute a type of action that can be every bit as powerful as physical action, and sometimes more so. What I will be talking about here is a philosophical distinction called "speech acts." At the end of the paper I list references from which most of my discussion here is drawn, for any of you who are interested in further exploration.

Background and Purpose

"Speech Act" is a philosophical term coined by the late John L. Austin, philosopher of language at Oxford, during his William James Lectures delivered at Harvard in 1955. These lectures were published posthumously in 1962 as *How to Do Things with Words*. In 1969, John Searle, the U.C. Berkeley professor who had studied under Austin while a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, took Austin's ideas and expanded upon

them to create his own inaugural work, *Speech Acts*. In the decades since that initial publication, Searle has continued to refine and enhance his concepts, applying them not only to philosophy of language, but also his philosophical ideas about consciousness, intentionality, and social reality.

In the late 1970s, Fernando Flores, a former cabinet member of the Chilean government under Salvador Allende who had moved to California while in exile after three years of imprisonment, earned his PhD at Berkeley under John Searle and Hubert Dreyfus. His philosophical work focused on speech acts and their application to computer technology, human communications, and business workflow. Flores further refined some of Searle's work on speech acts, and in the process teamed up for several years with Werner Erhard, the founder of the personal development program originally known as the *est* Training. Together, the two brought speech acts into practical use in the arena of personal development, human transformation, and leadership. It was through Flores and Erhard that I first got my personal exposure to, and fairly in-depth training in speech acts.

Part of what is beautiful about the distinctions of speech acts is their practicality and applicability to daily living. This paper will first discuss in schematic form some of Austin's and Searle's underlying principles of the concept of speech acts, and then lay out several applications as distinguished by Flores and Erhard.

Basic Philosophical Concepts of Speech Acts

While the concept of Speech Acts arose in the second half of the 20th century, the seeds of the concept were planted originally in ancient Greece. Plato and Aristotle first began to explore the relationship human beings have to speech through the

concept of *logos* (discourse / speech). Both philosophers made the observation that *logos* had a number of forms. While he examined and held in highest esteem apophantic *logos*—speaking that describes the world and points out beings in the world, or statements having the properties of being true or false. Aristotle noted that sentences or statements can take other forms, such as prayers and commands (see for example, *On Interpretation*, 17a1-5). Both philosophers also wrote treatises on rhetoric, which in a sense foreshadowed certain aspects of the distinctions of speech acts.

In the first half of the 20th century, the two philosophers who really opened up the philosophical examination of language were Heidegger and Wittgenstein. Heidegger, coming from the continental traditions of modern philosophy, focused heavily on discourse and language from the phenomenological perspective, especially in connection with the question of being. About Wittgenstein, who was associated with the Anglo-American, analytical tradition, I personally cannot speak, so I shall remain silent. No, seriously, what I will say is that he reportedly influenced Austin, and I suspect that his influence came from his concepts of language games. (Refer to Wikipedia if interested.)

John Austin's Work—Genesis of a New Realm in the Philosophy of Language

In his lectures that ultimately comprised *How to Do Things with Words* (HTDT)¹, Austin laid the groundwork by distinguishing a class of speech that he termed performatives. Unlike assertions, judgments, and other statements that attempt to describe the world, all of which adhere to the Greek grammatical concepts of subject-

¹ The lectures whose transcripts are contained in the book Austin claimed to be based on ideas he had originated in 1939 and developed subsequently through many iterations of lectures over the years.

predicate and can be evaluated as being true or false, performatives lie more properly in the realm of actions or deeds. **%Performative+obviously comes from the word %perform,+** which implies taking an action of some sort. Austin asserted that the verb is the operative part of speech that makes a statement a performative, and throughout his exploration, he went about identifying and classifying such verbs.

Among the first examples of performatives that he examined were the statements **%do+(as in %ake this man or woman to be my lawfully wedded spouse+in a marriage ceremony) and %bet+(as in %wenty dollars on Lucky Lover+at the race track).** When both parties of a couple utter the **%doõ +statement,** their saying is the effective part of the action of getting married. Likewise, when you or I utter the **%betõ +statement,** we are doing more than saying something like, **%think Lucky Lover is going to win the race.+We are taking an action that will lead either to winning or losing some money.** Both of these situations, incidentally, involve social conventions.

Such kinds of statements don't attempt to describe the world, and they also are not what a listener or observer would typically think of as being true or false. They can, however, be subject to all kinds of things that could go wrong. For example, they can be misunderstood. Likewise, they can be invalid or effectively meaningless, such as if one pronounces the **%doõ +statement** in a situation that is not socially accepted (e.g. not in the presence of a person legally designated to declare the successful completion of a marriage ceremony). They can also be deceitful, such as if I say that I am placing a bet but have absolutely no intention of paying in the event of losing. These, and other kinds of **%unhappy+situations** Austin broadly classifies as types of **%unfelicities.+They lie** outside the traditional boundaries of accuracy or correctness, but fall more in the arena

of being subject to fulfillment or failure, just like any other type of human action. In other words, performatives can be subject to %happy+or %unhappy+outcomes.

Austin spent a great deal of time exploring the territory of infelicities, as well as analyzing what he considered to be necessary structural components of happy performatives. In a similar way to the manner in which we judge scientific statements to be true or false, depending upon sufficiency of evidence compiled through experimentation in the real world, performatives have their ways of being judged for effectiveness or felicitousness. In a nutshell he laid out this schematic structure:

- ö(A-1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,
- (A-2) the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure involved.
- (B-1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and
- (B-2) completely.
- (C-1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further
- (C-2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.ö (*HTDT*, pp 14-15)

To put it more simply, felicitous or happy performative utterances involve some sort of conventional procedure, depend upon a proper social context, require appropriate and complete execution, and are uttered in good faith. Otherwise, things just fall apart somewhere.

In his analysis of performatives, Austin further created three linguistic distinctions (refer to lectures VIII . XI):

1. Locutionary acts are the physical acts of saying something. This pertains to the full uttering of any type of utterances, not just performatives, whether orally spoken or written. The locution is essentially what the words say, and Austin was the first to coin this term.

2. Illocutionary acts he distinguished as saying things that contain a performative kind of force, which he termed illocutionary force. An illocutionary act carries an intended action on behalf of the speaker in its meaning. Saying "I do" in the above example expresses the speaker's intention to get married, as well as all that hopefully comes along with that state of affairs. Note that a locutionary act may or may not be an illocutionary act, whereas an illocutionary act is always a locutionary act.
3. Perlocutionary acts represent the actual outcomes or effects on the listener. In a successful illocutionary act of saying "I do", the couple winds up married. (Note that the minister's subsequent illocutionary act "I pronounce you" is also generally required for that perlocution's successful completion.) On the other hand, one unsuccessful perlocution could be the husband-to-be's bolting from the room. Thus, the perlocution reflects the degree of success or failure of the speaker's intended illocution.

As he carried his analysis further, seeking to identify all of the performative verbs he could find, Austin eventually arrived at two general conclusions. First, he coined the term "speech act" to encompass all types of utterances, not just performatives, apparently after concluding that it provided a better formulation than his earlier exclusive focus on just performatives. In other words, Austin concluded that most speaking involves taking some kind of action, including the kind of speaking that makes assertions and assessments about things.

Second, he proposed five general classes of utterances based upon their broad distinctions in their illocutionary forces (see final lecture XII):

1. Verdictives ó speech acts that tend to give verdicts or findings of fact, including as examples the verbs assess, characterize, rule, estimate, calculate, measure, analyze, describe, interpret, convict, acquit, and others.
2. Exercitives ó speech acts that exercise power or involve rights or influence; examples include order, annul, bequeath, pardon, sentence, levy, direct, grant, nominate, vote for, and many others of this kind of ilk.
3. Commissives ó speech acts that are typified of promising or otherwise committing; his list includes promise, contract, undertake, intend, plan, shall, contemplate, pledge, and agree, and so on.
4. Behabitives (õa shocker thisö) ó speech acts that have to do with miscellaneous social attitudes and behavior; examples are apologize, congratulate, commend, compliment, curse, challenge, thank, welcome, forgive, etc.
5. Expositives ó those that involve the expounding of views (sometimes these can overlap with verdictives or commissives); some examples are affirm, deny, ask, remark, testify,

mention, accept, concede, inform, tell, postulate, explain, deduce, etc.

In the end, Austin claimed to have identified more than 1000 English verbs that he considered to be typical of speech acts having some kind of illocutionary force. Unfortunately, he died at the age of 48, without leaving a complete list for posterity. As a personal note, I consider his *HTDT* to be a delightful read, both for his originality and his British style of expression and humor.

John Searle's Work—A Formal Philosophical Theory of Speech Acts

Through his two works devoted to the concepts of speech acts— *Speech Acts* (SA) and *Expression and Meaning* (EM)— Searle brought Austin's initial concepts into a formal theory within the philosophy of language. From the outset, Searle took issue with Austin's use of the term illocutionary act as being distinct from locutionary act, perhaps considering the former to be unnecessary or redundant, and he chose to consider a complete speech act as being effectively the same as locutionary act. (SA p. 23). He noted that different sentences that contain the same words being used for both reference (for example, the subject Sam) and predication (e.g. smokes habitually) could in fact be performing completely different illocutionary acts. His examples: Sam smokes habitually is an assertion; Does Sam smoke habitually? is a question; and Sam, smoke habitually! is a command. While a reference expression (Sam) is a speech act, and a predication (smokes habitually) is a speech act, only a complete sentence (such as one of the three listed above) constitutes a complete speech act, or illocutionary act. Likewise, only a complete speech act actually says anything (see SA pp24-27).

In *SA*, Searle spends a lot of time developing terminologies for his theory, as well as some formal, mathematically symbolized notations to analyze various aspects and components of his theory of speech acts. (Searle seems fond of the mathematical.) In particular, he devotes entire chapters to the nature of expressions, references, predications, propositions and rules. These are too numerous to get into here. However, one general area is worth noting. In chapter 3, he analyzes in depth the structure of several types of illocutionary acts that he considers key exemplars, probably for their frequency and widespread use in day to day conversation. These include promises, orders (commands), requests, assertions, questions, advice, thanks, warnings, greetings and congratulations.

For each of these types of acts, he discusses the rules that comprise the primary structural components. Using his symbolic notations, which I am providing here in the example of a request, he develops the following rules for the structure of the complete speech act of requesting:

1. The *form* of propositional content $\hat{=}$ a future act A on the part of the hearer H;
2. The *preparatory condition* for the act to be successful $\hat{=}$ H is able to do A and the speaker S believes H can do A;
3. The *sincerity* or psychological rule $\hat{=}$ S wants H to do A; and
4. The *essential condition* under which the act is uttered $\hat{=}$ a request counts as an attempt by S to get H to do A.

Searle also notes that some illocutionary acts are actually subsets of others. For example, an order or command is actually the same thing as a request, except with the additional preparatory rule that S must be in a position of authority over H.

The last distinction I want to mention that Searle creates in *SA* is his theory of brute facts and institutional facts. In his discussion of expressions and meaning in chapter 2, after laying out a symbolic notation for denoting the illocutionary force of a

proposition, he lays out his concept of rules. Searle maintains that speaking a language involves performing acts according to rules. He maintains that there are two general classes of rules- constitutive and regulative. The first create the possibility of new forms of behavior. Such constitutive rules often take the form, % counts as Y in the context C.+A simple example could be % promise counts as an obligation in the context of human relationships.+

Whereas many aspects of human experience and knowledge lie in the realm of % brute facts,+such as the stone that lies next to the house and could foul up the lawnmower, there are other kinds of experience and knowledge that live strictly in conventions of language. For example, a marriage is a purely linguistic % fact.+He calls such kinds of facts % institutional facts.+Furthermore, all institutions are systems of constitutive rules, most commonly of the form % counts as Y in the context C.+He summarizes his discussion by saying, % Our hypothesis that speaking a language is performing acts according to constitutive rules involves us in the hypothesis that the fact that a man performed a certain speech act, e.g. made a promise, is an institutional fact.+ In other words, a marriage is an institutional fact that exists as the perlocutionary outcome of Austin's % do example of an illocutionary act. This discussion lays the groundwork for Searle's 1995 work, *The Construction of Social Reality*, which some of us have recently studied together.

In his second work, *EAM*, which came in 1979, ten years after *SA*, Searle deals with various aspects of the problem in an attempt to deepen and round out the theory of speech acts. I will mention three of them briefly here. First, he looks at the factors that create the major differences among the different types or classes of illocutionary acts.

There is one powerful factor² which he terms the %difference in the direction of fit between words and the world.+(*EAM* pp 3-4). Speech acts fall either into a %word-to-world+fit or a %world-to-word+fit. Assertions are in the former category, while promises and requests are in the latter. In the first case, the speaker is attempting to match the words to fit the world. In other words, to describe the world. In the second group, the speaker is trying to have the world line up with his or her words. This is what happens with a promise or a request. This is a very powerful distinction that I will talk more about in a bit.

The second aspect I will mention here is that Searle rejects Austin's classes of illocutionary acts and comes up with his own. Remember, this book came after ten years of further thought and research. Searle's taxonomy breaks down as follows (see *EAM* pp 13-29):

1. Assertives ó speech acts that the speaker intends to commit to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed proposition; such acts include assertions, assessments, hypotheses, etc. They can be evaluated as being true or false to the degree they line up with conditions in the world, and the direction of fit, as discussed above, is word-to-world.
2. Directives ó speech acts that are intended by the speaker to get the hearer to do something; examples obviously include requests, invitations, orders, suggestions, hints, etc. The direction of fit is world-to-word, and the sincerity condition is want (wish or desire).
3. Commissives ó speech acts whose point is to commit the speaker to a course of action; closely adopted from Austin's commissives, this list includes promise, contract, undertake, pledge, and agree, and so on. The direction of fit is world-to-word, and the sincerity condition is intention.
4. Expressives ó speech acts that have the point of expressing the psychological state of the speaker; from Searle's perspective, they do not have a direction of fit, and examples are apologize, congratulate, thank, condole, deplore, welcome, etc.
5. Declarations ó speech acts whose successful performance of one if its members brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality. I will provide a far superior distinction of declarations in the last section of the paper.

² Searle credits Elizabeth Anscombe for this discovery.

The final aspect of Searle's *EAM* that I want to highlight is his discussion of indirect speech acts. Illocutionary acts can be explicit or indirect. An explicit one will always take the form of a complete sentence, where it is easy to identify the reference, predication and illocutionary verb. An indirect one could be as simple as the word "Go," which could immediately be interpreted as a command or a wish or a piece of advice. An indirect one is often ambiguous, such as saying "I want a glass of water," which could be understood as either making a request or simply expressing thirst. Indirect illocutionary acts require more on the part of the listener to interpret from the context. I'll say more about this also in the last section. The basic problem of indirect speech acts is how the speaker can be saying one thing in words, but meaning something else entirely. He devotes the entire second chapter to various aspects of this problem.

As I mentioned before, Searle later went on to incorporate speech acts into his theories of intentionality and the construction of social reality. As another personal note, I find Searle's writings exceptionally clear and rationally presented, although sometimes longwinded and redundant.

Transformational Applications of Speech Acts

In this section I am going to talk a bit about what I consider to be revolutionary innovations in the distinctions of speech acts that Fernando Flores and Werner Erhard have developed, rooted in the foundational work of Austin and Searle. Some elements of this I will draw from Flores's book, *Conversations for Action and Collected Essays* (CFAE). Others I will draw from personal teachings from Flores and Erhard that I gleaned over the last 30 years.

One key distinction that lies at the heart and foundation of their distinctions is that there are essentially two kinds of speech: (1) speaking that describes the world (recall the %word-to-world+fit); and (2) speaking that creates. The latter kind of speaking has the possibility of altering the world (the %world-to-word+fit). In the case of one speech act in particular, a person can bring an entire realm of possibility into the world- new possibilities that were not present before. I will speak of these more specifically in the next sections.

I refer to these distinctions as %transformational+for two reasons: (1) Erhard and Flores have long been committed to the work of personal and institutional transformation, and (2) the distinctions themselves hold the very real possibility of transforming people's lives in very practical ways. I can attest to their effectiveness from my own personal experience as well as the experiences of others with whom I have worked, not only in my own former company, but particularly in Northern Ireland and Israel in volunteer settings.

Fernando Flores—Speaking that Generates Productivity in the Real World

In 1980, the American people elected Ronald Reagan as president of the United States. Many spoke of this as a conservative backlash against the direction lots of people perceived things to have been going- notably the long period of economic inflation, the gas shortages, the Iranian hostage crisis, and social permissiveness of the 60s and 70s. One particular trend that Fernando Flores, who had witnessed the overthrow of democracy in Chile, considered significant was the fall in productivity in American business and the rise of the economic threat from (at that time) Japan.

Flores saw an opportunity to use the distinctions of speech acts, at the very least to improve, and perhaps even to revolutionize American productivity and effectiveness. He developed courses and workshops that put forth carefully refined concepts and practices in types of speaking designed to forward human communication in a way that could accomplish that end.

Flores shifted the philosophical concepts of speech acts out of the theoretical domain into the arena of practical action. Part of how he approached this was by framing the nature of a *conversation* as being constituted by speech acts. In other words, he began to focus on the domain of conversation, versus individual illocutionary acts. His most basic and key distinction was the *conversation for action*:

in its simplest form, the conversation for action consists of four separate speech acts:

1. Request or offer,
2. Promise or acceptance,
3. Declaration of completion, and
4. Declaration of satisfaction. (CFA, p. 5.)

When people consciously generate a conversation for action, employing the above speech acts in an explicit, clear form, then the productivity and effectiveness of the involved parties become greatly enhanced. In general, the more explicitly each speech act is stated, the better the opportunity is for that conversation to result in a successful or satisfactory outcome. In Flores's analysis, the true power that people can gain comes out of employing complete conversations that incorporate each of the essential speech acts indicated above.

Flores pretty much drops the formal terminology of illocution and perlocution in favor of focusing on the simpler sounding notion of speech act, and he effectively

determines a speech act to be what Searle had termed a ~~%~~complete speech act. In the process, he develops some of his own terminology, which I will get to in a moment.

A conversation for action begins with one party (~~%~~party 1) making either a request of or an offer to another party (~~%~~party 2). For the conversation to continue, party 2 then responds either with a promise accepting that request, or an acceptance of the offer. These speech acts are followed in turn by the relevant party undertaking the actions agreed upon by the offer or promise. Once the actions are complete, the acting party declares the action completed, and the person who had made the request (party 1) or accepted the offer (party 2) declares satisfaction. The conversation is complete when satisfaction has been declared.

At different points in a conversation for action, the conversation can be terminated by other means. For example, with either a request or an offer, party 2 can decline that request or offer - end of conversation. There are other directions a conversation for action can take. For example, in the case of an initial request, party 2 can decline that request but make a counteroffer. Party 1 can then accept the counter offer or not - if not, end of conversation. Likewise, party 1 can cancel the request or revoke the offer, and that would end the conversation. Alternatively, if party 2 made a promise in response to a request, party 2 could revoke the promise. Any of these events would conclude the conversation *successfully*, even though the actions may not have been completed in accordance with the original request or offer.

The keys to having a satisfactory outcome (a ~~%~~happy result as Austin would put it) are that the parties remain in communication, that both parties be speaking and acting in good faith, and that the speech acts themselves be constructed (performed)

cleanly. This last condition is imperative. By %cleanly,+I mean here that each speech act contain all of its fundamental elements. Two of the speech acts that Flores analyzes in great depth are requests and promises. The following lists summarize what Flores describes as the fundamental elements of a request and a promise/offer. (These are somewhat paraphrased.)

Fundamental Elements of a Request (see *CFA* p. 7)

1. A speaker and a hearer (particular individuals)
2. An action to be undertaken on the part of the hearer, and the "conditions of satisfaction" (or "COS", the specifically stated condition that will determine whether the requested action on the part of the hearer has been completed)
3. A "background of sufficient obviousness" (what can allow for the COS to be successful)
4. A specified time by which the request is to be fulfilled (most important!)
5. Brings forth something missing (i.e. makes something happen), and
6. Sincerity

Fundamental Elements of a Promise (or offer; see *CFA* p. 10)

1. A speaker and a hearer (particular individuals)
2. An action to be undertaken on the part of the speaker, and the "conditions of satisfaction" (or "COS", the specifically stated condition that will determine whether the requested action on the part of the speaker has been completed)
3. A "background of sufficient obviousness" (what can allow for the COS to be successful)
4. A specified time by which the request is to be fulfilled (most important!)
5. Brings forth something missing (i.e. makes something happen), and
6. Sincerity

The only effective difference between a promise and an offer is that an offer is conditional upon acceptance by the hearer, and a promise is unconditional. The effective difference between a request and a promise/offer is who will be taking the action to fulfill the conditions of satisfaction.

The terms "conditions of satisfaction" and "background of obviousness" are inventions by Flores, and one big refinement on his part that contributes to the power of

his formulation of these speech acts is the insistence upon a specific timeframe. For Flores, a request or promise that do not state a specific time might as well be considered to live in the domain of wishful thinking. It might happen, or it might not. The timeframe is what brings these speech acts into the realm of commitment, which is what eventually makes a conversation for action likely to produce satisfactory outcomes.

Flores further developed his conceptions of speech acts and various kinds of conversations, and he applied them rigorously to case studies in business and workflow. The essays contained in *CFA* are specifically tailored to the business world with the commitment to support organizations in revolutionizing productivity. However, their applicability extends to all arenas of human interaction, from personal relationships to political leadership.

Werner Erhard—Speech Acts and Transformational Leadership

Werner Erhard has devoted his career to developing courses and distinctions to empower people in achieving their personal commitments. In the last two decades, he has placed a large share of his attention on distinctions in transformational leadership. Expanding in large part on the platform of Heidegger's work on the relationship humans have to language, Erhard has developed the view that for human beings, the world occurs in language (at least chiefly). Effective speech acts provide some of the greatest tools for effective leadership that can make a difference in the world.

In Erhard's view, most people spend most of the time in conversations that don't make a difference. Most of what we say falls in the category of expressions, which include beliefs, opinions, judgments, and other modes of talking about things, but which really amount to little more than expressing our own internal states. For example,

feel, think, believe, and the like. What is lacking is a commitment required to cause something to happen. Like an assertion, expressions have a word-to-world fit, in that both attempt to describe the world.

Unlike an expressive, however, a well-considered, effective assertion requires a level of commitment on the part of the speaker to provide evidence that the hearer could consider valid. To do this, the speaker must be willing to step into the shoes of the hearer far enough to be able to see at least some aspect of their world. The power of assertion, as is true of Flores's concepts of requests and promises, ultimately must be developed as an art form through practice. For Aristotle, who first formulated the nature of an assertion, the assertion was simply a statement of relationship between a subject and a predicate. Kant transformed the assertion by connecting the subject, the predicate, the object in the world to which the assertion refers, and the person (the speaker) making the assertion (ref. Martin Heidegger). For both Flores and Erhard, a valid, powerful assertion must take the additional step of connecting the speaker and the hearer in a relationship of commitment, and this relationship requires powerful commitment to listening on the part of the speaker.

The last thing I am going to touch on here is what I consider to be the pinnacle of the speech acts: the declaration. While a request and a promise bring something new into the world: the request and the promise themselves: and these can become the source of new action in the world, it is the speech act of declaration that brings into the world possibility itself. A declaration lays the ground upon which requests and promises can stand and thus have their effects. The declaration sets the context for action, by creating the context of possibilities inside of which the action can be seen as wanted

and needed. Declaration actually sets up an entire possible future that did not exist before the declaring. Declaration could be said to be the highest, most powerful form of speech act available to human beings.

You and I are making declarations all the time in our lives. We just for the most part are not aware that this is what we are doing. When I wake up in the morning, see rain outside, and say to myself, "What a crappy day!" I have unwittingly declared a set of possibilities that will shape my attitudes, and my sphere of possible actions I can take that day. When the preacher says, "I declare that you are now husband and wife," following Austin's "I do" exchange during a marriage ceremony, that couple now have before them a future shaped by that possibility that comes with being married. When the judge says, "I declare (find) you guilty as charged," the person previously on trial is now a criminal, and has a future shaped by the possibility defined by prison.

What comes to my mind whenever I think of the power of the speech act of declaration is the American Declaration of Independence. Recall these words:

We, therefore, the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA...do, in the Name, and by the Authority of the good People of these Colonies, solemnly Publish and Declare, That these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES....And for the support of this Declaration, ...we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor.

Prior to their signing this declaration, the United States did not exist. From the moment of its signing, the United States of America became an entirely new possibility in the world. Declaration does not make something a fact. However, it creates possibility in the world, a possibility inside of which one can discover and take actions to have the world come to fit one's words. This is the ultimate power of the speech act.

Conclusion

I know that this has been a pretty long paper. If you are reading this paragraph, that means you made it through.

Thank you for reading it.

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