In this article the following abbreviations are used: *HTD* for J.L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford 2nd Ed 1976); *PhP* for J.L. Austin, *Philosophical Papers*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford 3rd Ed 1979).

MEANING AND SPEAKER'S INTENTIONS

J. Friggieri

In "Meaning and Truth"[1] Strawson draws a contrast between what he calls "communication-intention theories" and "formal semantics theories" of meaning. According to the former

> it is impossible to give an adequate account of the concept of meaning without reference to the possession by speakers of audience-directed intentions of a certain complex kind.[2]

The opposite view is based on the thought that the sense of a sentence is determined by its truth-conditions.[3]

Strawson described the conflict between these two theories as a "Homeric struggle", and groups together Grice, Austin and the later Wittgenstein as exponents of the first type of theory, and Chomsky, Frege and the earlier Wittgenstein as exponents of the second.

It is not quite clear that Austin would have approved of this classification. Austin had very little to say about meaning - but what he says goes in a direction which is quite different from that followed by "communication-intention theorists" like Grice and Searle. When Austin mentions meaning, he always

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1   P.F. STRAWSON, 'Meaning and Truth', in *Logico-Linguistic Papers* (Methuen Co, 1971) 170-189.
2   Ibid., 171.
3   Ibid.

thinks of it in terms of the Fregean notions of sense and reference.[4] And Austin was quite consistent in keeping apart the notions of locutionary meaning and illocutionary force.

It was Searle who (a) regarded the study of meaning as coextensive with the study of illocutionary acts and (b) cast doubt on Austin's fundamental distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts.

> (a) ...A study of the meaning of sentences is not in principle distinct from a study of speech acts. Properly construed, they are the same study.[5]

> (b) In attempting to explore Austin's notion of an *illocutionary act* I have found his correspondence notion of a *locutionary act* very unhelpful... In this paper I want to explain my reasons for rejecting Austin's distinction...[6]

Again, in *Speech Acts* Searle states that he employs the expression "illocutionary act" "with some misgivings", since he does not accept "Austin's distinction between *locutionary* and *illocutionary* acts",[7] and he refers to his article in the *Philosophical Review* in which, as we have seen, Searle says quite explicitly that he wants to "reject" Austin's distinction. Nevertheless, in the same article he writes:

> The concepts *locutionary* act and *illocutionary* act are indeed different, just as the concepts *terrier* and *dog* are different. But the conceptual difference is not sufficient to establish a distinction between separate classes of acts, because just as every terrier is a dog, so every locutionary act is an illocutionary act.[8]

Here Searle seems to accept that the distinction can be made, at least conceptually. This impression is confirmed by an earlier passage in the same paper where he says:

> The *concept* of an utterance with a certain meaning (that is, the concept of a locutionary act) is indeed a different concept from the concept of an

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4   See *HTD*, pp.93. 94. 95. 100. 109. etc; and there are accounts of conventions of reference and conventions of sense in 'How to Talk' (*PhP*, 135-6) and of their analogues (demonstrative and descriptive conventions) in 'Truth' (*PhP*, 121-2).

5   J.R. SEARLE, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge University Press; Cambridge 1969) 18.

6   J.R. SEARLE, "Austin on Locutionary and Illocutionary Acts", in I. Berlin et al., *Essays on J.L. Austin* (Clarendon Press; Oxford 1973,) 141. Searle's paper was first published in *Philosophical Review*, Vol.77, No.4 (October 1968) 405-424. References in the text are to Berlin et al.

7   SEARLE, *Speech Acts*, 23, f.n.1.

8   SEARLE, "Austin on Locutionary", 149.

utterance with a certain force (that is, the concept of an illocutionary act).[9]
But then he goes on:

> For cases such as the performative use of illocutionary verbs the attempt
> to *abstract* the locutionary meaning from illocutionary force would be
> like abstracting unmarried men from bachelors.[10]

So in the case of at least *one* class of utterances - those marked by the
performative use of illocutionary verbs - even the *concepts* are the same.
Moreover, later on in the essay Searle claims that not only *some* but

> *all* the members of the class of locutionary acts ... are members of the
> class of illocutionary acts, because every rhetic act, and hence every
> locutionary act, is an illocutionary act.[11]

So the "apparent hiatus"[12] which critics have observed in Searle's views
ultimately resolves itself in favour of his recommendation that the concept of a
locutionary act should be dispensed with.

Let us, therefore, trace the steps by which Searle arrives at his conclusion
that Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts is un-
founded. Searle develops his attack on Austin mainly in his 1968 paper;[13] and
it is on this paper that I shall concentrate.

Searle on meaning and force

Searle starts by recalling Austin's point that a sentence which is not am-
biguous with regard to meaning can nevertheless be used with different forces
on different occasions.

> A serious literal utterance by a single speaker of the sentence "I am going
> to do it" can be (can have the force of) a promise, a prediction, a threat,
> a warning, a statement of intention, and so forth.[14]

For this reason

> Utterances which were different tokens of the same locutionary type
> could be tokens of different illocutionary types.[15]

However, Searle says, not all utterances have this characteristic "openness" with
regard to force. In the case of *one* class of utterances, namely, explicit perfor-

9   Ibid., 144.
10   Ibid.
11   Ibid., 148-9.
12   DAVID HOLDCROFT, *Words and Deeds*. (Clarendon Press; Oxford 1978) 33.
13   See f.n.6.
14   SEARLE, "Austin on Locutionary", 142.
15   Ibid., 143.

matives, meaning determines at least one illocutionary force of the utterance. A sentence like "I hereby promise that I am going to do it" *may* perhaps on occasion be used as a threat, but it *must* at least be a promise - that is, an illocutionary act of a certain type.

> The meaning of the sentence determines an illocutionary force of its utterances in such a way that serious utterances of it with that literal meaning will have that particular force.[16]

Why does Searle consider this to be a difficulty for Austin? The distinction between meaning and force as Austin defines it does not depend on the fact that on some occasions the force of an utterance may be ambiguous. Austin's examples of utterances whose meaning is perfectly clear but whose force must be determined in the context of the utterance (e.g. "The bull is about to charge") is useful from a pedagogical point of view because it brings out sharply the point of the distinction which he wants to make. But once we grasp the distinction we can apply it to *all* cases, not just to the ones whose force is yet to be determined.

Now the characteristic feature of explicit performatives is precisely this: that they make explicit the force of the embedded primary utterance. And they do this *via* the meaning of the performative prefix. We need not deny, then, that there is a close connection between the meaning of an explicit performative and the force by which it is uttered. But nothing in this shows that meaning and force are the same thing. Searle is right in calling our attention to a special feature of a special class of utterances; wrong in thinking that such utterances raise a problem for Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts.

At the beginning of the discussion Searle focussed his attention on explicit performatives because he thought of them as constituting an exception to Austin's definition of locutionary and illocutionary acts. If what he said about explicit performatives was true, then, Searle argued, Austin's distinction could not be completely general.[17]

This implied that there were many other kinds of utterances (i.e. non-performatives) to which the distinction could still be applied. There were, after all, all these other cases where meaning and force *did* "come apart"; and for them at least Austin's distinction seemed to work well enough. But in Section II Searle goes on to claim that the distinction collapses even for non-performatives. This is how he performs the hazardous leap:

> We saw above that the original locutionary-illocutionary distinction is best designed to account for those cases where the meaning of the sentence is, so to speak, force-neutral - that is, where its literal utterance

16   Ibid., 143
17   Ibid.

did not serve to distinguish a particular illocutionary force. But now further consideration will force us to the following conclusion: no sentence is completely force-neutral. Every sentence has some illocutionary force potential, if only of a very broad kind, built into its meaning.[18]

Searle re-iterates his conclusion in a number of ways:

> there is no specification of a locutionary act performed in the utterance of a complete sentence which will not determine the specification of an illocutionary act.[19]

> there are (in the utterance of complete sentences) no rhetic acts as opposed to illocutionary acts at all.[20]

> ... it does not seem that there are or can be acts of using those vocables in sentences with sense and reference which are not already (at least purported) illocutionary acts.[21]

> there is no way to abstract a rhetic act in the utterance of a complete sentence which does not abstract an illocutionary act as well, for a rhetic act is always an illocutionary act of one kind or another.[22]

> ... every rhetic act and hence every locutionary act, is an illocutionary act.[23]

> Every serious literal utterance contains some indicators of force as part of meaning, which is to say that every rhetic act is an illocutionary act.[24]

Searle's argument for the abolition of the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts hinges round this central point:

> Every sentence has some illocutionary force potential if only of a very broad kind, built into its meaning.[25]

18 Ibid., 148.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 149.
24 Ibid., 148.
25 Ibid.

> Every serious literal utterance contains some indicators of force as part
> of meaning ...[26]

Searle claims that there should be at least one very general force indicator
which could be extracted from the meaning of each and every sentence, one
illocutionary verb of such wide connotation as to include all possible illocution-
ary verbs within its meaning and be related to them as genus to species.[27] Such
a verb, however, does not exist. Searle suggests that in the case of imperative
illocutionary verbs, "tell one to" is the generic verb and "order", "insist", etc.
the specific ones. But as David Holdcroft shows, "tell one to" is insufficiently
general to qualify as the generic verb.[28] And if "tell one to" does not qualify it
is very unlikely that any other verb will. The same applies to indicative illocu-
tionary verbs.[29]

Searle, then, fails to establish that every sentence contains an illocutionary
force indicator, if only of a very broad kind. But even if non-performatives did
contain such general indicators of force as part of their meaning, it would still
be impossible to tell, on the basis of that, what the *specific* illocutionary force of
the utterance was.

Take the sentence "I am waiting for Joseph". I may use that sentence, whose
meaning is perfectly clear, to (a) inform you about my present business; (b)
refuse your invitation to go to the cinema; (c) express my frustration that Joseph
is late again; (d) express my delight that Joseph is coming back after a long
absence; (e) tempt you to stay with me; (f) warn you that a row is going to break
out soon; (g) seek your advice about how to behave when he arrives; (h) let you
know that I have made it up with my friend; (i) reveal a secret; (j) hint that I may
be getting married soon. And so on. Even if it was always the case that if someone
said seriously "I am waiting for Joseph" then he must have been asserting (at
least) that he was waiting for Joseph, we would still not be able to tell, from
understanding the meaning of the very general illocutionary force indicator "He
asserted that", which of the variety of things (a) to (j) - and, indeed, which of
the greater variety of things not mentioned in that list - the speaker intended to

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26   Ibid., 149.
27   Ibid.
28   "Maybe to order someone to do something is to tell him to do it. But to dare him to do it is
      not to tell him to do it, any more than to request him to do so is to tell him to do so".Holdcroft,
      Words and Deeds, 39.
29   The most plausible candidate here would be "asserting". "But though, for instance, hinting
      may involve asserting, what is hinted is not asserted, and neither is what is suggested.
      Estimating is not asserting; and, sometimes anyway, neither is ruling, since what is ruled to
      be so is so only in virtue of the ruling". Holdcroft, *Words and Deeds*, 40.

achieve.

The same problem would arise in connection with imperatives. Consider:

"Give me that weapon".

In issuing that utterance, whose meaning is, once again, totally unambiguous, I may be (a) ordering you to lay down your arms; (b) inviting you to start negotiations; (c) hinting that you are ambushed; (d) making it clear that it is too early to go hunting; (e) suggesting that we should go fishing instead; (f) asking you to lend me your pistol; (g) pleading with you not to shoot the piano-player; (h) daring you to fight unarmed. And so on. There is no *particular* speech-act which can be determined by the meaning of the sentence.

Even if we knew that the speaker *asserted* that he was waiting for Joseph, we would still not be able to tell whether he was expressing his frustration, revealing a secret, expressing his delight, warning that a row was about to break out, etc. The same could be said about the imperative "Give me that weapon". The meaning of Searle's "general force indicators" could never determine the specific force of an utterance. None of the specific aspects of the force of an utterance are contained in, or "built into", the meaning of the words.

Searle seeks to close the gap between the literal meaning of a sentence and the intended force of its utterance (as illustrated by the example "I'm going to do it") but arguing that

> that is only a special case of the distinction between literal meaning and intended meaning, between what the sentence means and what the speaker means by its utterance.[30]

But if Searle wants to prove that meaning determines force, even if only partly, then he must show that the meaning of the sentence itself - not what the speaker means by it - can do the job. On pain of arguing in a circle, Searle cannot appeal to the intentions of the speaker at this point.

To make his strategy work Searle needs to convince us *not* that by saying "I am going to do it" the speaker may have meant (i.e. intended) to alarm us, or warn us, or assure us, or threaten us, or whatever, but that we can discover all this for ourselves just by attending to the meaning of the words "I am going to do it". Since Searle does not seem to have shown this, Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts remains untouched by Searle's criticism.[31]

30 Searle, "Austin on ...", op.cit., p.149.

31 In a later paper, "Indirect Speech Acts" in P. COLE and J. MORGAN (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol.3, (New York 1975) 59-82 Searle claims that primary illocutionary acts are

Grice on speaker's intentions

Grice's main concern is with connecting linguistic meaning with the notion of a speaker's having certain intention and beliefs.[32] Grice's original analysis of speaker's meaning was:

S means something by uttering x if he intends

(i) to produce a response r in an audience A;

(ii) A to recognize S's intention (i);

(iii) A's recognition of S's intention (i) to be part of his reason for producing r.[33]

Put less formally this means that the speaker must intend his audience to believe that he believes something; he must also intend his audience to arrive at this belief in virtue of recognizing the speaker's intention.

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performed by performing secondary illocutionary acts. This distinction seems to be intended to replace Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts. For example, noticing that I may request you to get off my foot by saying "You are standing on my foot", Searle proposes that my stating literally that you are standing on my foot is the *secondary* illocutionary act, by which I perform the *primary* act of requesting that you get off my foot (whereas Austin would say that my saying literally, i.e. with a certain fixed sense and reference, "You are standing on my foot" is the *locutionary* act). For Searle, the primary act is performed *indirectly*, and captures what is meant that goes beyond the literal statement made. Thus, "I mean not only: you are standing on my foot, but also: please get off my foot". Searle gives this as an uncontroversial case in which what is meant exceeds what is literally stated. The primary utterance ("Please get off my foot") is not being literally expressed but nevertheless it is implied by what the secondary utterance ("You are standing on my foot") means. As ROD BERTOLET has shown, Searle's argument on this occasion turns on an equivocation on "mean". "The speaker clearly *intends that* his utterance will result in less pressure on his foot, and perhaps he *intends it to be* a request, but equally clearly he does not *mean that* the man should please get off his foot *in the same sense that* he means that the man is standing on his foot". (ROD BERTOLET, "Referential Uses and Speaker's Meaning", *The Philosophical Quarterly* 31 (1981) 254-255. See also DENNIS STAMPE, "Meaning and Truth in the Theory of Speech Acts", in P. COLE and S. MORGAN (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, vol.3, *Speech Acts* (Academic Press; London 1975).

32 H.P. GRICE, "Meaning", *Philosophical Review* 66 (1957) 377-88; "Utterer's Meaning, Sentence-Meaning, and Word-Meaning", *Foundations of Language* 4 (1968) 225-42; "Utterer's Meaning and Intentions" *Philosophical Review* 78 (1969) 147-77.

33 GRICE (1957) On this account the speaker would be held to intend his utterance to get his audience to believe that, e.g., the cat is on the mat, by means of reconition of the intention. Later Grice proposed two different ways of dealing with relevant counter - examples. In his second version (1969) the speaker intends that his audience should think that he believes, e.g., that the cat is on the mat, again as a result of recognizing that intention. The differences between the two versions need not concern us here.

But now we ask ourselves: what is it to say that S means something by uttering x? A little reflection will show that it is impossible to explain what it is for a *speaker* to mean something by using certain sentences without explaining what it is for the *sentences* to mean what they mean. If I say "You're standing on my foot", my hope that you interpret the utterance as a request that you step off my foot clearly presupposes your understanding, your grasping the meaning, of what I have said.

> An account of the meaning of one's words is not given by an account of what it is to mean what one says, yet it is only on the latter that [Grice's] style of analysis appears to have any hearing.[34]

Grice criticizes C.L. Stevenson's causal theory of meaning[35] on the grounds that in it

> No provision is made for dealing with statements about what a particular speaker or writer means by a sign on a particular occasion (which may well diverge from the standard meaning of the sign).[36]

He adds that

> One might even go further in criticism and maintain that the causal theory ignores the fact that the meaning (in general) of a sign needs to be explained in terms of what users of the sign do (or should) mean by it on particular occasions.[37]

Grice concludes that "the latter notion", i.e. the notion of "what users of the sign do (or should) mean by it on particular occasions", which is unexplained by the causal theory, "is in fact the fundamental one".[38]

Immediately problems arise for Grice over the use of the word "standard" and of the phrase "what users of the sign *should* mean by it". It is clear that one can mean something by using a certain utterance where what he means (what he intends to convey) is quite different from what that utterance normally means. But can we say of a sentence what it is normally used by speakers to mean without saying what the sentence normally means? But if we have to invoke the notion of what a sentence normally means, then we are involved in circularity. As Mark Platts pointed out:

> Grice's work ... will play a crucial role in our understanding of one element in the theory of force; but it is inherently ill-equipped to play any role within the theory of sense.[39]

34   BEDE RUNDLE, *Grammar in Philosophy* (Clarendon Press; 1979 Oxford) 407.
35   See C.L. STEVENSON, *Ethics and Language*, (New Haven 1944) Ch.3.
36   GRICE. "Meaning", 381.
37   Ibid.
38   Ibid.
39   MARK PLATTS, *Ways of Meaning*. (RKP; 1979, London) 93.

In discussing locutionary meaning before illocutionary force Austin recognized the primacy of semantics in the philosophy of language. Any project which blurs the distinction between the two concepts, or reverses the order of their definition, or attempts to derive one from the other, or reduce one to the other, is bound to fail. Speakers can use almost any sentence to do almost anything. They may even use meaningless noises to achieve certain effects. Consider Paul Ziff's strange character, George, the academic who pretends to be insane in an attempt to avoid conscription.[40] On being asked to identify himself George replies "Ugh ugh blugh blugh ugh blugh blugh". He *means to* achieve something by his utterance. But, of course, his utterance *means* nothing. One cannot give an account of the meaning of one's utterance by giving an account of what one (i.e. the speaker) means to achieve by it. While a person may mean something by a nonsensical utterance, such an utterance will not, by virtue of that fact, mean anything.

Or take Searle's American soldier captured by Italian troops, who imagines that he can trick his captors into believing that he is German by addressing them with the words "Kennst du das Land wo die Zitronen blühen?"[41] What the soldier intends to convey to his captors is the impression that he is German. What the words mean, however, is "Do you know the land where the lemon-trees bloom?"

X says at a party: "I prefer it if you left very soon". But X could use practically any sentence to draw the attention of the people at the party that he wants them to leave. "We must all wake up early tomorrow", or conversely, "I have no desire to watch the sunrise", would serve his purpose just as well.

Let us go back for a while to Austin's classification of what one does when one says something.

S uttered these noises: ...

S said "....."

S said that_____.

On the first and second levels we are not yet thinking of ourselves as understanding anything, or as producing meaningful utterances. Understanding and

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40   PAUL ZIFF, "On H.P. Grice's account of meaning", *Analysis* 28 (1967) 1-8.
41   JOHN SEARLE, "What is a Speech Act?", in Searle (ed.), *The Philosophy of Language*, (Oxford 1971) 45-46. Also in *Speech Acts*, 44-45.

meaning (understanding the meaning of the utterance "...") only comes in at the third level. What someone who doesn't understand a language lacks is the capacity to move from level two to level three. An English speaker who knows no Latin can make a report of what he saw at the churchyard by faithfully reproducing the words of a Latin inscription engraved on one of the tombstones. And he can write in his diary: "The instription said: "Non omnis moriar"". What he cannot produce is a report of the meaning of those words for the sake of someone who, like himself, does not understand Latin.

The situation becomes more vivid if we think of ourselves as listening to a group of people conversing in a language which we do not understand. In such a situation we are impressed by the force and vitality of the language. Because we are not able to understand, we feel left out, cut off, isolated, even though physically we may form part of the group. It is in this kind of situation that we often wonder: what is it that they know and we don't? Obviously they must know the meaning of the individual words and understand their mode of combination. And this is what we must learn in order to be able to participate in their conversation, make ourselves understood, and understand what they are saying.

Or we may think of the signs on the wall of some prehistoric cave and ask ourselves

> are they merely marks made at random by a stonemason testing a chisel, or do they collectively form part of a language whose script this is?[42]

The hypothesis that they are signs in a language, not merely random marks, can only be entertained on the basis of a belief that we may (one day) discover what they mean. But in order for this to be possible, they have to have a certain feature which, as it were, *dictates* their meaning to us. I may, of course, mistakenly believe certain marks to be a script of a language and interpret them on the basis of that false belief. In that case, however, I would be inventing a new language[43] rather than understanding one which is already there.

> When a fluent speaker of a language understands a sentence ... he is ... guided and directed by the signs themselves.[44]

Wittgenstein wrote:

> Every proposition must *already* have a sense: it cannot be given a sense by affirmation. Indeed its sense is just what is affirmed.[45]

42 The example is from BERNARD HARRISON, *An Introduction to the Philosophy of Language*, (London 1979 Macmillan) 3.

43 In the sense in which this can clearly be done, i.e. by coining new words and stipulating their meaning. Something like this happened when Esperanto was invented.

44 HARRISON, *Introduction*, 5.

45 L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 4.064

When we say that a study of semantics is fundamental to a study of language, clearly we are not saying that semantics could tell us all we need to know about language. We realize this the moment we pass from elucidating each word in turn and explaining how it combines with other elements in the sentence to examining the *use* of language, for example in conversation.[46] As Austin saw, we have to attend not just to the locutionary aspect of speech, but to its illocutionary and perlocutionary aspects as well. We need to elucidate not only what words and sentences mean but also what we use our sentences for (e.g. to ask questions, issue warnings, give orders, etc.), what we achieve in and by using them. We need another component of our theory which will deal precisely with these aspects of language. This component is the theory of force. And insofar as we need such a theory, there is reason to think that we need it even in the case of indicative sentences. Austin discovered this need half-way through *How to Do Things with Words* when he came to deal with assertions. On Austin's account, then, the two theories which Strawson saw as rivals can actually form part of one system; and an account of meaning of the kind Strawson imputes to formal theories can interact with a Gricean type of analysis of speaker's intentions, rather than act against it.

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46   H.P. GRICE's notion of conversation implicatures and David Lewis's idea of *rules of accomodation* are both intended to throw light on the various mechanisms which make conversation a rational enterprise. Grice developed his views in the William James lectures at Harvard in 1968, especially in Lecture II. (Parts of Grice's lectures were subsequently published under the title "Logic and Conversation" in P. COLE and J. MORGAN (eds) *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol.3, *Speech Acts*, (Academic Press; London 1975). See also H.P. GRICE, "The Casual Theory of Perception", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. Vol.35, (1961) 121-168, esp. section 3. For LEWIS's idea see DAVID LEWIS, "Scorekeeping in a Language Game", *Journal of Philosophical Logic* (1979).