

## Antonín Šmíd, bakalářská práce: „Austin, Derrida, and Searle on Intention in Communication“

### Posudek oponenta

This Bachelor's thesis investigates the polemical exchange between Jacques Derrida and John Searle concerning interpretation of the speech-act theory of J.L. Austin as put forward in *How to do things with words*. The particular focus is the question of the extent that intention is constitutive of meaning. The author, after setting forth his own nuanced interpretation of how intention relates to meaning in Austin's speech act theory, argues that both Derrida and Searle misread Austin, sharing the mistaken assumption that Austin treats intention as decisive. This is not to say that intention is irrelevant to meaning and force for Austin, but its influence is subtle and somewhat peripheral, and convention is of greater importance, at least as far as illocutionary force is concerned, or so the author argues.

In the author's view, Derrida significantly downplays, or even ignores, Austin's own appeal to the "context of reception" (p. 26) which actually plays an essential part in the speech act for Austin. Searle, on the other hand, tends to ignore the fundamental role of convention in Austin's understanding of illocutionary force, as if the speaker's goal of making their intentions apparent to the audience by the illocutionary act might also be achieved by non-conventional means and yet still retain illocutionary force (p. 30). Both Derrida and Searle are therefore deemed to fall short in their representations of the actual views of Austin. In the final part of the text, the author seeks a *rapprochement* between all three philosophers in this area, arguing that each of them, in different ways, recognizes the importance of "audience reception" to the meaning of speech acts (pp. 37-39), and their theories should not be treated as mutually exclusive.

The problem of the role of intention in constituting the meaning and force of linguistic utterance is an important problem in the philosophy of language and this bachelor's work sets itself an excellent goal in getting to the bottom of the dispute between Derrida and Searle over how to interpret Austin on this question. The author displays sensitivity in his reading of Austin and, I believe, reveals questionable assumptions in the diverging approaches of Derrida and Searle to Austin's work on speech acts. In addition, the author makes a series of positive proposals that display an ability to grasp and pursue the central philosophical question at issue and to go beyond a mere commentary on the different textual interpretations. The work is well organized and clearly written and is, overall, a constructive philosophical contribution to the theory of speech acts and linguistic meaning.

The author is by no means uncritical towards Austin, and in fact he makes a number of observations that reveal limitations in the analysis presented in *How to do things with words*. I was particularly pleased to see an important distinction drawn (p. 13) between two kinds of intention that are relevant to Austin's classic case of a performative—the act of promising. There is the intention to either keep or not keep the promise (something noticed and commented upon by Austin), but also the intention to make the promise in the first place (passed over by Austin). This distinction is then used, later, to explain why Austin does not adequately recognize the difference between intentions that are involved in establishing the convention-based illocutionary act and intentions involved in seeking to bring about certain effects through the perlocutionary act (p. 19).

As opponent I would raise two points that might be discussed in the defence.

(i) The author tends to view the illocutionary act as governed by convention which binds the speaker, restricting the scope of intention. In other words, an opposition is assumed between convention and intention: the more pronounced the convention, the less room for intention. Convention is seen as a countervailing force to intention. “If we intend something which unfortunately lacks the proper procedure, for example if we decide to baptise a penguin, the speech act would be unsuccessful, despite our intentions” (p. 24). But this charming example, derived from Anatole France (via Austin) may obscure the more elementary fact that convention enables and makes possible baptism in the first place. Without convention there would be no possibility of intending to baptize (or promise etc), let alone implementing such an intention. I would suggest that the convention of the illocutionary act *makes possible* intention even as it limits its scope.

(ii) A converse consideration about intention might be raised in relation to the perlocutionary act. The author tends to see the perlocutionary act as giving free rein to our intentions. “[T]he unique perlocutionary effects are something that does follow consequently from our intentions” (p. 17). But the effects only follow in cases of “successful” perlocutionary acts. The success or failure of a perlocutionary act, however, is determined by people and forces independent of ourselves, and we are dependent on good fortune and the reactions of our fellows. The intention to warn someone (an illocutionary act), can be fulfilled, given minimal uptake, without our relying on whether the recipient heeds the warning or acts regardless of it. This is not the case with perlocutionary acts such as *convincing* someone or *alarming* someone, which are conditional on someone reacting in the appropriate way. Is not intention in the case of perlocutionary acts limited by reality, just as it is limited by convention in the case of illocutionary acts?

Overall I consider this to be a very accomplished bachelor’s thesis that shows a mature grasp of a difficult topic as it is discussed in diverging traditions of philosophy and I recommend the top grade of excellent (*Vjborně*).

prof. James Hill, 4.6.24