WHEN it was suggested that we embark on a programme of making a list of explicit performative verbs, we ran into some difficulties over the matter of determining whether some utterance was or was not performative, or anyway, purely performative. It seemed expedient, therefore, to go back to fundamentals and consider how many senses there may be in which to say something is to do something, or in saying something we do something, or even by saying something we do something.

We first distinguished a group of things we do in saying something, which together we summed up by saying we perform a locutionary act, which is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with a certain sense and reference, which again is roughly equivalent to ‘meaning’ in the traditional sense. Second, we said that we also perform illocutionary acts such as informing, ordering, warning, undertaking, &c., i.e. utterances which have a certain (conventional) force. Thirdly, we may also perform perlocutionary acts: what we bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading. Here we have three, if not more, different senses or dimensions of the ‘use of a sentence’ or of ‘the use of
language (and, of course, there are others also). All three kinds of 'actions' are, simply of course as actions, subject to the usual troubles and reservations about attempt as distinct from achievement, being intentional as distinct from being unintentional, and the like. We then said that we must consider these three kinds of act in greater detail.

We must distinguish the illocutionary from the perlocutionary act: for example we must distinguish 'in saying it I was warning him' from 'by saying it I convinced him, or surprised him, or got him to stop'.

It is the distinction between illocutions and perlocutions which seems likeliest to give trouble, and it is upon this that we shall now embark, taking in the distinction between illocutions and locutions by the way. It is certain that the perlocutionary sense of 'doing an action' must somehow be ruled out as irrelevant to the sense in which an utterance, if the issuing of it is the 'doing of an action', is a performatifive, at least if that is to be distinct from a constative. For clearly any, or almost any, perlocutionary act is liable to be brought off, in sufficiently special circumstances, by the issuing, with or without calculation, of any utterance whatsoever, and in particular by a straightforward constative utterance (if there is such an animal). You may, for example, deter me (C. a) from doing something by informing me, perhaps guilelessly yet opportunely, what the consequences of doing it would in fact be: and this applies even to

1 See p. 102 for the significance of these references.

(C. a) for you may convince me (C. a) that she is an adulteress by asking her whether it was not her handkerchief which was in X's bedroom, or by stating that it was hers.

We have then to draw the line between an action we do (here an illocution) and its consequences. Now in general, and if the action is not one of saying something but a non-conventional 'physical' action, this is an intricate matter. As we have seen, we can, or may like to think we can, class, by stages, more and more of what is initially and ordinarily included or possibly might be included under the name given to 'our act' itself as really only consequences, however little remote and however naturally to be anticipated, of our actual action in the supposed minimum physical sense, which will then transpire to be

1 See p. 102 for the significance of these references.

2 That the giving of straightforward information produces, almost always, consequential effects upon action, is no more surprising than the converse, that the doing of any action (including the uttering of a performatifive) has regularly the consequence of making ourselves and others aware of facts. To do any act in a perceptible or detectable way is to afford ourselves and generally others also the opportunity of coming to know both (a) that we did it, and further (b) many other facts as to our motives, our character or what not which may be inferred from our having done it. If you hurl a tomato at a political meeting (or bawl 'I protest' when someone else does—if that is performing an action) the consequence will probably be to make others aware that you object, and to make them think that you hold certain political beliefs: but this will not make either the throw or the shout true or false (though they may be, even deliberately, misleading). And by the same token, the production of any number of consequential effects will not prevent a constative utterance from being true or false.

3 I do not here go into the question how far consequences may extend. The usual errors on this topic may be found in, for example, Moore's Principia Ethica.
How to do things with Words

the making of some movement or movements with parts of our body (e.g. crooking our finger, which produced a movement of the trigger, which produced... which produced the death of the donkey). There is, of course, much to be said about this which need not concern us here. But at least in the case of acts of saying something, (1) nomenclature affords us an assistance which it generally withholds in the case of 'physical' actions. For with physical actions we nearly always naturally name the action not in terms of what we are here calling the minimum physical act, but in terms which embrace a greater or less but indefinitely extensive range of what might be called its natural consequences (or, looking at it another way, the intention with which it was done).

We not merely do use the notion of a minimum physical act (which is in any case doubtful) but we do not seem to have any class of names which distinguish physical acts from consequences: whereas with acts of saying something, the vocabulary of names for acts (B) seems expressly designed to mark a break at a certain regular point between the act (our saying something) and its consequences (which are usually not the saying of anything), or at any rate a great many of them.1

1 Note that if we suppose the minimum physical act to be movement of the body when we say 'I moved my finger', the fact that the object moved is part of my body does in fact introduce a new sense of 'moved'. Thus I may be able to waggle my ears as a schoolboy does, or by grasping them between my finger and thumb, or move my foot either in the ordinary way or by manipulating with my hand when I have pins and needles. The ordinary use of 'move' in such examples as 'I moved my

(2) Furthermore, we seem to derive some assistance from the special nature of acts of saying something by contrast with ordinary physical actions: for with these latter even the minimum physical action, which we are seeking to detach from its consequences, is, being a bodily movement, in pari materia1 with at least many of its immediate and natural consequences, whereas, whatever the immediate and natural consequences of an act of saying something may be, they are at least not normally other further acts of saying something, whether more particularly on the speaker's own part or even on the part of others.2 So that we have here a sort of regular natural break in the chain, which is wanting in the case of physical actions, and which is associated with the special class of names for illocutions.

This may get us some little way, but, it may be asked at this point, are not the consequences imported with the nomenclature of perlocutions really consequences of the acts (A), the locutions? Ought we not, in seeking to finger' is ultimate. We must not seek to go back behind it to 'pulling on my muscles' and the like.

1 This in pari materia could be misleading to you. I do not mean, as was pointed out in the previous footnote, that my 'moving my finger' is, metaphysically, in the least like 'the trigger moving' which is its consequence, or like 'my finger's moving the trigger'. But 'a movement of a trigger finger' is in pari materia with 'a movement of a trigger'.

Or we could put the matter in a most important other way by saying that the sense in which saying something produces effects on other persons, or causes things, is a fundamentally different sense of cause from that used in physical causation by pressure, etc. It has to operate through the conventions of language and is a matter of influence exerted by one person on another: this is probably the original sense of 'cause'.

2 See below.
detach 'all' consequences, to go right back beyond the illocution to the locution—and indeed to the act (A. a), the uttering of noises, which is a physical movement.\footnote{1} It has, of course, been admitted that to perform an illocutionary act necessarily to perform a locutionary act; that, for example, to congratulate is necessarily to say certain words; and to say certain words is necessarily, at least in part, to make certain more or less indescribable movements with the vocal organs.\footnote{2} So that the divorce between 'physical' actions and acts of saying something is not in all ways complete—there is some connexion. But (i) while this may be important in some connexions and contexts, it does not seem to prevent the drawing of a line for our present purposes where we want one, that is, between the completion of the illocutionary act and all consequences thereafter. And further (ii), much more important, we must avoid the idea, suggested above though not stated, that the illocutionary act is a consequence of the locutionary act, and even the idea that what is imported by the nomenclature of illocutions is an additional reference to some of the consequences of the locutions;\footnote{3} i.e. that to say 'he urged me to' is to say that he said certain words and in addition that his saying them had or perhaps was intended to have certain consequences. We should not, if we were to insist for some reason and in some sense on 'going back' from the illocution to the phonetic act (A. a), be going back to a minimum physical action via the chain of its consequences, in the way that we supposedly go back from the death of the rabbit to the movement of the trigger finger. The uttering of noises may be a consequence (physical) of the movement of the vocal organs, the breath, &c.: but the uttering of a word is not a consequence of the uttering of a noise, whether physical or otherwise. Nor is the uttering of words with a certain meaning a consequence of uttering the words, whether physical or otherwise. For that matter, even phatic (A. b) and rhetoric (A. c) acts are not consequences, let alone physical consequences, of phonetic acts (A. a). What we do import by the use of the nomenclature of illocution is a reference, not to the consequences (at least in any ordinary sense) of the locution, but to the conventions of illocutionary force as bearing on the special circumstances of the occasion of the issuing of the utterance. We shall shortly return to the senses in which the successful or consummated performance of an illocutionary act does bring in 'consequences' or 'effects' in certain senses.\footnote{4}

\footnote{1} We may still feel tempted to ascribe some 'primary' to the locution as against the illocution, seeing that, given some individual rhetic act (A. c), there may yet be room for doubt as to how it should be described in the nomenclature of illocutions. Why after all should we label one A the other B? We may agree on the actual words that were uttered, and even also on the senses in which they were being used and on the realities...
I have so far argued, then, that we can have hopes of isolating the illocutionary act from the perlocutionary as producing consequences, and that it is not itself a ‘consequence’ of the locutionary act. Now, however, I must point out that the illocutionary act as distinct from the perlocutionary is connected with the production of effects in certain senses:

(1) Unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act will not have been happily, successfully performed. This is not to say that the illocutionary act is the achieving of a certain effect. I cannot be said to have warned an audience unless it hears what I say and takes what I say in a certain sense. An effect must be achieved on the audience if the illocutionary act is to be carried out.

to which they were being used to refer, and yet still disagree as to whether, in the circumstances, they amounted to an order or a threat or merely to advice or a warning. Yet after all, there is ample room, equally, for disagreement in individual cases as to how the rhetoric act (A. x) should be described in the nomenclature of locutions (What did he really mean? To what person, time, or what not was he actually referring?): and indeed, we may often agree that his act was definitely one say, of ordering (illocution), while yet uncertain what it was he was meaning to order (locution). It is plausible to suppose that the act is at least as much ‘bound’ to be describable as some more or less definite type of illocution as it is to be describable as some more or less definite locutionary act (A).

Difficulties about conventions and intentions must arise in deciding upon the correct description whether of a locution or of an illocution: deliberate, or unintentional, ambiguity of meaning or reference is perhaps as common as deliberate or unintentional failure to make plain ‘how our words are to be taken’ (in the illocutionary sense). Moreover, the whole apparatus of ‘explicit performatives’ (see above) serves to obviate disagreements as to the description of illocutionary acts. It is much harder in fact to obviate disagreements as to the description of locutionary acts. Each, however, is conventional and liable to have a ‘construction’ put on it by judges.

How should we best put it here? And how can we limit it? Generally the effect amounts to bringing about the understanding of the meaning and of the force of the locution. So the performance of an illocutionary act involves the securing of uptake.

(2) The illocutionary act ‘takes effect’ in certain ways, as distinguished from producing consequences in the sense of bringing about states of affairs in the ‘normal’ way, i.e. changes in the natural course of events. Thus ‘I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth’ has the effect of naming or christening the ship; then certain subsequent acts such as referring to it as the Generalissimo Stalin will be out of order.

(3) We have said that many illocutionary acts invite by convention a response or sequel. Thus an order invites the response of obedience and a promise that of fulfilment. The response or sequel may be ‘one-way’ or ‘two-way’: thus we may distinguish arguing, ordering, promising, suggesting, and asking to, from offering, asking whether you will and asking ‘Yes or no?’ If this response is accorded, or the sequel implemented, that requires a second act by the speaker or another person; and it is a commonplace of the consequence-language that this cannot be included under the initial stretch of action.

Generally we can, however, always say ‘I got him to’ with such a word. This does make the act one ascribed to me and it is, when words are or may be employed, a perlocutionary act. Thus we must distinguish ‘I ordered him and he obeyed’ from ‘I got him to obey’. The
general implication of the latter is that other additional means were employed to produce this consequence as ascribable to me, inducements, personal presence, and influence which may amount to duress; there is even very often an illocutionary act distinct from merely ordering, as when I say 'I got him to do it by stating x'.

So here are three ways, securing uptake, taking effect, and inviting a response, in which illocutionary acts are bound up with effects; and these are all distinct from the producing of effects which is characteristic of the perlocutionary act.

The perlocutionary act may be either the achievement of a perlocutionary object (convince, persuade) or the production of a perlocutionary sequel. Thus the act of warning may achieve its perlocutionary object of alerting and also have the perlocutionary sequel of alarming, and any argument against a view may fail to achieve its object but have the perlocutionary sequel of convincing our opponent of its truth ('I only succeeded in convincing him'). What is the perlocutionary object of one illocution may be the sequel of another. For example, warning may produce the sequel of deterring and saying 'Don’t', whose object is to deter, may produce the sequel of alerting or even alarming. Some perlocutionary acts are always the producing of a sequel, namely those where there is no illocutionary formula: thus I may surprise you or upset you or humiliate you by a locution, though there is no illocutionary formula 'I surprise you by . . .', 'I upset you by . . .', 'I humiliate you by . . .'.

It is characteristic of perlocutionary acts that the response achieved, or the sequel, can be achieved additionally or entirely by non-locutionary means: thus intimidation may be achieved by waving a stick or pointing a gun. Even in the cases of convincing, persuading, getting to obey and getting to believe, we may achieve the response non-verbally; but if there is no perlocutionary act, it is doubtful whether this language characteristic of perlocutionary objects should be used. Compare the use of 'got him to' with that of 'got him to obey'. However, this alone is not enough to distinguish illocutionary acts, since we can for example warn or order or appoint or give or protest or apologize by non-verbal means and these are illocutionary acts. Thus we may cock a snook or hurl a tomato by way of protest.

More important is the question whether these responses and sequels can be achieved by non-conventional means. Certainly we can achieve the same perlocutionary sequels by non-conventional means (or as we say 'unconventional' means), means that are not conventional at all or not for that purpose; thus I may persuade some one by gently swinging a big stick or gently mentioning that his aged parents are still in the 'Third Reich. Strictly speaking, there cannot be an illocutionary act unless the means employed are conventional, and so the means for achieving it non-verbally must be conventional. But it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end; thus I may warn him by swinging a stick or I may give him something by merely handing it to him. But if I warn
him by swinging a stick, then swinging my stick is a warning: he would know very well what I meant: it may seem an unmistakable threatening gesture. Similar difficulties arise over giving tacit consent to some arrangement, or promising tacitly, or voting by a show of hands. But the fact remains that many illocutionary acts cannot be performed except by saying something. This is true of stating, informing (as distinct from showing), arguing, giving estimates, reckoning, and finding (in the legal sense); it is true of the great majority of verdictives and expositives as opposed to many exercitives and commissives.¹

¹ [For the definition of verdictives, expositives, exercitives, and commissives see Lecture XII.—J.O.U.]