

# Philosophy 104

2.1 Notes

# Conventions

- ▶ Conventions are those funny things about language that people follow in order to be understood but that don't automatically suggest themselves to reason.
- ▶ Hey, look, another distinction:
  - grammar: The system of rules implicit in a language, viewed as a mechanism for generating all sentences possible in that language.
  - convention: A normative or prescriptive set of rules setting forth the current standard of usage for pedagogical or reference purposes.

# Convention and Semantics

- ▶ As a matter of convention certain words become used in certain ways by some mysterious form of implicit agreement.
- ▶ Often, we will get into disputes that someone will describe as “merely semantic” or “just a matter of definition”.
- ▶ While sometimes people do in fact argue about what language it is appropriate to use, these disputes are seldom “merely semantic”, otherwise a simple dictionary could resolve matters.
  - Consider the use, or non-use of the word ‘genocide’ in Rwanda
  - Consider the use, or non-use of the word ‘murder’ in abortion law

# Convention and Truth

- ▶ Since our language (at least those sentences that express propositions) refers to states of affairs, changing which words or phrases one uses doesn't affect the reality to which the language refers.

# Linguistic Acts (1 / 2)

- ▶ A linguistic act is accomplished when someone has said something meaningful in a language.

# Linguistic Acts (2 / 2)

- ▶ Semantic conventions:
  - Give meanings to words
  - meaning is a public activity
- ▶ Syntactic conventions
  - Refers to rules of grammar or structure that affect meaning

# Speech Acts

- ▶ Performatives:
  - In saying “I \_\_\_\_\_” I thereby \_\_\_\_\_.
  - Example: “I hereby resign as President of the United States”
    - Richard Nixon
      - Context must be appropriate
      - Can fail to do a performative
- ▶ Argumentative performative:
  - “I grant...” “I conclude...” “I assert...” etc.

# Ch2 EII, 1-13

1. EP
2. EP
3. N
4. N
5. N
6. N
7. N
8. N
9. N
10. N
11. EP
12. EP
13. N



# Speech Act Rules

1. Must the speaker use any special words or formulae to perform the speech act?
  - ▶ Consider: Resigning from a job, “Swearing in” in court

# Speech Act Rules

2. Is any response or uptake needed to complete the speech act?

Consider: making a bet, making a promise

# Speech Act Rules

3. Must the (a) speaker or (b) audience hold any special position for the speaker to perform the speech act?

Consider: Absolving a sin, Declaring bankruptcy

# Speech Act Rules

4. Are there any other special circumstances required for the speech act?

Consider: Confirming a supreme court justice, getting married

# Speech Act Rules

5. What feelings/desires/beliefs is the speaker expected to have?

Consider: taking an oath of office, pledging allegiance to the flag

# Speech Act Rules

6. What general purpose or purposes are served by this kind of speech act?

Consider: “swearing in” in court, saying “I do” in a wedding ceremony