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INTERPRETING J. L. AUSTIN

In this volume, Savas L. Tsohatzidis brings together a team of leading experts to provide up-to-date perspectives on the work of J. L. Austin, a major figure in twentieth-century philosophy and an important contributor to theories of language, truth, perception, and knowledge. Focusing on aspects of Austin's writings in these four areas, the volume's ten original essays critically examine central elements of his philosophy, exploring their interrelationships, their historical context, their reception, and their implications for key issues of contemporary philosophical research. The volume deepens our understanding of Austin's philosophy while illustrating its continuing significance, and will appeal to students and scholars of modern philosophy, particularly to those interested in the philosophy of language and epistemology.

SAVAS L. TSOHATZIDIS is Professor of General Linguistics and the Philosophy of Language at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. His previous publications include *John Searle's Philosophy of Language: Force, Meaning, and Mind* (Cambridge, 2007) and *Intentional Acts and Institutional Facts: Essays on John Searle's Social Ontology* (2007).

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Critical Essays

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SAVAS L. TSOHATZIDIS
Aristotle University of Thessaloniki



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For Olga and Sophia

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Introduction

Savas L. Tsohatzidis

J. L. Austin published few papers in the course of his short life (1911–1960) – they were brought together, along with a few until then unpublished ones, in the 1961 collection of his *Philosophical Papers* – and it is unlikely that the two slim books published in 1962 on the basis of his notes for two series of lectures – *How to Do Things with Words* and *Sense and Sensibilia* – would have been published by him in the sometimes sketchy form in which they have been preserved for posterity.¹ But his surviving output contains enough material for understanding the fascination that his work has exercised on many of his philosophical contemporaries, as well as the unease that it has provoked in some others among them.

The fascination was evidently related to the striking originality of the proposals that he was led to make in discussing almost all of the time-honoured topics he has written about, and to his remarkable skills in working out his way to those proposals by noticing hitherto unsuspected differences between deceptively similar phenomena, as well as hitherto unsuspected similarities between superficially unrelated phenomena, often on the basis of an uncommonly patient and perceptive examination of the variety and complexity of the ways in which linguistic expressions are related to the contexts in which they are used. The unease was probably due to the fact that his proposals appeared to constitute not so much answers to the questions traditionally asked about the time-honoured topics whose discussion had occasioned them, but rather invitations to pose different kinds of questions regarding those topics, and to set out to answer *them* without making the sorts of mistakes that, in his view, rendered the traditional answers and the traditional questions suspect – most prominently, the mistake of seeking and formulating generalizations without

¹ Throughout this volume, references to Austin's three books are to their latest editions: third edition (Austin 1979) for *Philosophical Papers*, second edition (Austin 1975) for *How to Do Things with Words*, first edition (Austin 1962) for *Sense and Sensibilia*.

antecedently examining lots of relevant cases, and without paying attention to how differences and similarities between particular cases would *ordinarily*, as opposed to academically, be described and understood.

Austin's work has influenced various subsequent developments within analytic philosophy and related fields, sometimes in ways that are not widely known,² both by providing fresh insights into familiar topics and by creating the conceptual space for the discussion of some unfamiliar ones. And its impact has been increasing in recent years, as suggested by the number of books in diverse philosophical subfields that rely on Austinian ideas at key points in the development of their arguments (for example, Schwartz 2006; Cray 2007; Fiengo 2007; Travis 2008; Langton 2009; Fischer 2011; Lawlor 2013; Bauer 2015; de Gaynesford 2017) or are specifically dedicated to the examination of Austin's own arguments (Gustafsson and Sørli 2011; Laugier and Al-Saleh 2011; Garvey 2014) and of their metaphilosophical implications (Baz 2012; Laugier 2013; Maddy 2017).

The present volume is a further outcome of the current intensification of interest in Austin's work. Its ten original essays critically address key aspects of his contributions in, primarily, four areas – the theory of truth, the philosophy of language, the philosophy of perception and the theory of knowledge –, aiming to deepen our understanding of those contributions and of their contemporary significance.

The volume begins with Marga Reimer's essay, 'Exploring Austin's Galaxy: Searching for Truth through the Lens of Ordinary Language', whose focus is on the account of truth that Austin presented in his 1950 article 'Truth' and further defended in his later, posthumously published paper 'Unfair to Facts' – an account in which Austin eschews the idea of an isomorphism between vehicles of representation and objects of representation that was characteristic of traditional formulations of the correspondence theory of truth, and proposes a novel formulation that aims to make better sense of the way in which truth is commonly conceptualized. According to Reimer, the basis of Austin's elaboration of the correspondence idea in these two papers is the observation that the often densely metaphorical vocabulary usually deployed in discussing the 'fit' between words and world that the correspondence theory purports to elucidate represents the 'fit' in question as a matter of degree; and the distinctive outcome of

² To give just one example, Austin's account of truth has been an important inspiration for the development of situation semantics within linguistics and philosophy; see Barwise and Perry (1983) and Barwise and Etchemendy (1987) for two key works in that tradition which acknowledge the Austinian influence, and Kratzer (2014) for an overview of recent developments.