Campaign Promises: A Complicated Way of Producing Perlocutionary Effects

by

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ABSTRACT

The current landscape of political speech is ripe for deep philosophical analysis yet has not been thoroughly investigated through the lens of speech-act theory. In this space, I believe I contribute something novel to the area, namely a notion of campaign promises that differs from standard promises that enables a new way of interpreting this kind of speech. Over the course of this paper, it is argued that Campaign Promises (CP) are non-trivially and philosophically distinct from the notion of Standard Promises (SP). There are many philosophical distinctions to draw, including moral, political and logical, but my focus is largely in philosophy of language. I engage the work of Searle, Austin and Wittgenstein among others to investigate what I take to be the following important differences from CP and SP: First, that CP and SP differ in the "best interest" condition, of the condition that a promise must be in the best interest of the promisee in order for that promise to obtain, which in turn, produces the effect of threatening those who do not want the promise to come about. Secondly, that CP serve to reinforce world views in a way that is non-trivially different from SP. To do this, I employ Wittgensteinian language game theory to bridge the gap between traditional Searlian speech act theory to more modern McGowan-style oppressive language models. Through this process I develop and defend this alternative way of understanding and evaluating CP and political speech.

DEDICATION

I dedicate the following work to my wife Brandi, who constantly motivated me to the next milestone, and to my daughter Adeline, who inspired me to reach for greater heights. I also wish to acknowledge my parents, Robert and Rosemary Hanford for their never-ending support.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The current landscape of political speech is ripe for deep philosophical analysis yet has not been thoroughly investigated through the lens of speech-act theory. In this space, I believe I can contribute something novel to the area, namely a notion of campaign promises that differs from standard promises that may give rise to a new way of interpreting this kind of speech.

Over the course of this paper, I will argue that Campaign Promises (CP) are non-trivially and philosophically distinct from the notion of Standard Promises (SP). While I believe that there are many philosophical distinctions to draw, including moral, political and logical, my focus will be in philosophy of language. I will engage the work of Searle, Austin and Wittgenstein among others to investigate what I take to be the following important differences from CP and SP:

I.   That CP and SP differ in the "best interest" condition, of the condition that a promise must be in the best interest of the promisee in order for that promise to obtain, which in turn, produces the effect of threatening those who do not want the promise to come about.

II. That CP serve to reinforce world views in a way that is non-trivially different from SP.

It should also be stated here that while I use Campaign Promises as a short-hand for political promises writ large, they can be uttered in a variety of political contexts, not just while in pursuit of political office. With these propositions in mind, I hope to suggest a

philosophically distinct unit of speech in language, which I see as a component of a more complete picture of political speech.

CHAPTER 2

ON PROMISING, OR A "COMPLICATED FORMULATION"

To start, it is imperative to give some description of what promising is. This is important, as for my proposals to hold, I must show that CP is a modification or subset of SP under the speech-act view. Of course, there are many different conceptions of promises and promising. Austin notes that a promise is a way of binding oneself to others.[1] Scanlon believes that promises are fundamentally moral things, and not *necessarily* social practices.[2] Hobbes took particular interest in the timing of these performances, "or both parts may contract now, to perform hereafter: in which cases, he that is to perform in time to come, being trusted, his performance is called *Keeping of Promise*…"[3] For the purposes of this discussion, I believe a suitable starting point is the one laid out by Searle in *Speech Acts,* which he refers to as "How to Promise: a Complicated Way":

1. Normal input and output conditions obtain.

2. In speaking, the Speaker expresses a proposition P.

3. In uttering P, the Speaker predicates a future act, A of the Speaker.

4. The hearer would prefer that A is performed to its not being performed, and the Speaker believes that the hearer prefers A.

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[1] Austin, *Other Minds* 99
[2] Scanlon, *What We Owe Each Other* 295-299
[3] Hobbes, *Leviathan* 193

5. It is not obvious to either the Speaker or Hearer that A will be performed over the normal course of events.

6. Speaker intends to do A.

7. The Speaker intends to obligate herself to A in uttering P.

8. The Speaker intends to produce the understanding in the Hearer that the Speaker is now obligated to perform A. The Speaker intends to do this through the use of a particular utterance, of which the Hearer knows to have this effect.

9. The rules of the dialect[4] are such that the utterance is correctly and sincerely formulated IFF 1-8 obtain.[5]

With this framework in mind, we can begin to eliminate many of the ordinary utterances that use promising language but aren't *really* promises, such as "I promise the sun will come up tomorrow" when spoken to a child (fails 3, 5-9) or "I promise I'm only going to work" when a spouse is trying to cover up a clandestine affair (fails 6 and 7). We can understand a broken promise, or one that meets all these conditions, but fails to come to fruition due to some defect in the agent's action.[6] Promises that can misfire are ones where we promise to do our best, or to drive safely, or to be open to a proposition, where the outcome is ultimately negative.

In addition to these kinds of deficient promises, we should also understand how Searle accounts for "insincere" promises within this method. Searle recognizes that

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[4] In his original phrasing of these clauses, Searle uses the term "dialect" which I have reproduced here. This is likely dated, however, and had we been creating these clauses today in the modern corpus of philosophy of language, we might use the term "natural language"

[5] Paraphrase from Searle, *Speech Acts*, 59-61

[6] Moral theorists may have different conditions for broken promises, i.e. some may allow for promises to be superseded by other moral obligations. For my purposes, the moral theory isn't relevant, so long as there are such things as broken promises.

sometimes the force of promises is manipulated in order to deceive or to get someone to do something they otherwise wouldn't, and to preclude these kinds of promises (which clause 6 would appear to do) would leave his account lacking. As such, he proposes an amended version of (6):

6A. S intends that the utterance of T will make him responsible for intending to do A.

The difference between this formulation and the original may seem subtle, but it allows for more explanatory power than its predecessor. Imagine for a moment that I make an utterance such as, "I promise to pay you back for lunch next time we meet." In this case however, I may have some additional background knowledge that I fail to share with you, such as the fact I am moving away and plan never to see you again. Under (6), what I have done in this case is not to promise, but to do something else. With (6A), we can recognize both the fact that I have promised, or at least produced in you the understanding that I have made a promise, and capture what I am really after in withholding information from you about my upcoming move, namely that I plan to skirt *my responsibility* to keep my promise, not that I don't plan to carry out this repayment because what I did wasn't *really* promising anyway.

In addition to Searle's "complicated" description of promising, he also provides some rules for the use of "illocutionary force indicating devices" with regards to promising. Since this paper is largely about the effects that politicians produce in those they wish to persuade or endear to their cause, it will be useful to produce and discuss those rules here:

Rule 1. *Pr* is to be uttered only in the context of a sentence (or larger stretch of discourse) *T*, the utterance of which predicates some future act *A* of the speaker *S*.

Rule 2. *Pr* is to be uttered only if the hearer *H* would prefer *S*'s doing *A* to his not doing *A*, and *S* believes *H* would prefer *S*'s doing *A* to his not doing *A*.

Rule 3. *Pr* is to be uttered only if it is not obvious to both *S* and *H* that *S* will do *A* in the normal course of events.

Rule 4. *Pr* is to be uttered only if *S* intends to do *A*.

Rule 5. The utterance of *Pr* counts as the undertaking of an obligation to do *A*.[7]

We can think of these rules as simply what it means to produce an effect in another by way of a speech-act, tailored to fit the format of promising. For Rule 1, our promise must have some "propositional content", namely a future act. Promises about the sun rising the next day, the road getting easier up ahead, or a pain lessening are not promises but something else, perhaps vacillating on the spectrum between statements, reassurances, and expressions of hope. We might protest that "you promised it would get better!" when the pain gets worse, but we would be criticizing a statement of fact or knowledge, not claiming that you failed an obligation to uphold some end of a promise.

Rule 2 represents what Searle calls the first of two "preparatory conditions", namely conditions that should an utterance fail, they simply aren't promises. If a particular act, say cutting your finger off, would simply never be something that you would prefer to not having your finger cut off, there is no way I can formulate my utterance in such a way as to convince you that it is something I am promising. I may be making some sort of threat or other guarantee, but I can't twist my language in order to *produce in you* the effect of a

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[7] Searle, *Speech Acts* 63

promise. Our knowledge or beliefs may be updated in a similar way to a promise, but the fact remains, you must prefer an action to its non-commission, and I must believe that you have that preference.[8]

Rule 3 is the second of the so-called "preparatory conditions", and like Rule 2, shows us forcefully what a promise *is not*. A promise to wake up in the morning (if I regularly do so) is no promise at all if I am lacking any serious illness that would prevent me from doing so or have made other sleeping arrangements (interestingly, however, we can imagine many scenarios where even this rather simple statement *is* a promise under Rule 3); but a promise to clean the yard when I have been notoriously resistant to doing *is* a promise, due in part to the fact that my cleaning of the yard is not usually to be counted on.

Rule 4 represents the "sincerity condition" discussed earlier, and Searle notes it as such. What is interesting to note about the sincerity condition in Searle's extension of the analysis is his claim that in promising, "I imply that the thing promised is in the hearer's interest"[9] because my utterance also implies my acceptance of the preparatory conditions. This is important to CP as I will demonstrate later, since when a politician makes a promise, they often validate a particular world view or value system as well.

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[8] Rule 2 represents a problematic area when promising to a group and is part of the tension between CP and SP that will be discussed at length.

[9] This way of phrasing by Searle may seem to be inaccurate, as the original formulation states that the hearer would merely prefer one action over another, as in my meeting you for lunch to my not meeting you for lunch. What Searle seems to imply here is that my acceptance of the preparatory conditions is only to imply that an action is in your best interest. This could lead to cases where I "promise" you something you *don't* prefer, like an unnecessary vaccination. I don't think Searle's goal at this juncture is to dissect preference and the notion of "best interest", so I will be treating his language as a stand-in for "hearer prefers the performance of *A* to its not being performed".

Rule 5, however, is more interesting and represents what Searle considers to be the "essential rule". Rule 5 reminds us that in making this kind of utterance, one that meets these conditions, counts as the obligation forming device. There need not be any other action taken to cement a promise, the effect is produced in the hearer and that is that. This contrasts with other ritualistic speech-act ceremonies, such as the christening of a ship. It is not enough to merely utter the words, "I christen this vessel the USS John McCain", one must also crack a bottle of champagne across the bow, if that is the correct series of actions in a given society. Promising is like thanking, on the Searlian account, where merely correctly performing an utterance of thanking *counts* as an expression of gratitude, a gift or handwritten card would be additional expressions of gratitude.

CHAPTER 3

WHAT IS POLITICAL SPEECH?

With a structured view of promising in mind, it is now important to understand the contextual differences that may arise between SP and CP. One of my underlying assumptions about CP is that for a Campaign Promise to be such, it must be uttered as a unit of political speech. Context is important to the uttering of a promise, and for CP, there is a requirement of that context being within the confines of political speech. Political speech is uttered in a certain context or about a certain context, and to draw out the unique properties I will follow the approach of Austin's dialectical method. As such, here are some examples of contexts:

A. "I promise to fix the roads" – uttered at a rally by a political candidate.

B. "I promise to fix the roads" – uttered by an elected representative to a constituent over the phone

C. "If we win in November, the roads will be fixed" – uttered by a pundit on a TV show.

D. "When we mobilize, we can get the right politicians to get in there and fix the roads" – uttered by an activist at a demonstration

E. "I think Politician X will fix the roads" – uttered by a college student to a friend.

A through D certainly look like political speech, with B being unique in that it is not speech uttered to a group. All these speech acts are either in a certain context, i.e. a political rally, a demonstration, or by an individual who has the implicit endorsement of the party.

 E, however, is not political speech at all, despite being about politics and politicians. This is useful for us and represents a guidepost by which we might evaluate other utterances. But why isn't it political speech?

1. It is a speech act uttered in private.

2. It is a speech act uttered by a non-political actor (or so we will assume in this case, it is very often that college students are engaged in activism, but in this case, we are envisioning the average bewildered freshman). A non-political actor may be one who has no intent to affect any views, nor works for any political campaign or activist group. They may be your average well-informed citizen who votes. In this case, however, they are merely expressing a statement of fact or belief, not engaging in political speech.

3. There seems to be something about the fact that the speech act doesn't engage one politically.

It would seem that anyone can engage in political speech given the right context. For example, we could imagine our bewildered freshman from the previous example attending a demonstration and being so moved by the speakers that she takes the stage herself and expresses her experiences to an audience. Obviously, there is some level of endorsement in this case. It is important to make a distinction between someone running up on stage and shouting racist slogans and someone being invited up on stage to speak about their time as a Mexican immigrant. These two factors form the important pillars of *who* can engage in political speech:

a) Anyone can engage in political speech given the right context and

b) They must be given legitimacy by a political party or group

This "legitimacy" can arise in many ways. It can be as simple as being invited on stage, it can be that an individual is elected as a representative of the party or nominated as a candidate, it can be that an individual is a recognized donor to the party and so on. Through these processes and others, individuals can "speak" for the party. Importantly, political groups or parties function as collectives, and those collectives have agency in who they endorse. Similarly, the National Football League selects specific individuals to referee the game of American Football and does not recognize the jeering of fans of certain calls. Those fans who shout "Pass Interference" may be performing a similar utterance to the referees on the field, but since it is not endorsed by the NFL, it has a very different function.

As we will see in further discussions, this understanding forms the basis of my second proposition, that CP's serve to reinforce worldviews. All these examples of political speech serve to lay planks in a party's platform, and if not lay new planks, reinforce old

ones. Throughout this work I will continue to reference these "platforms", despite that a party's published platform may differ from its *implicit* or informal platform.

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE GAMES AND CAMPAIGN PROMISES

What of Political or Campaign promises then? CP often do not take the form of standard promises in the vein of "I promise that…" Instead, they often employ language that insinuates commitment without deploying the more typical language of promising, "Read my lips: No New Taxes".[10] Still, they are attributed the moniker "promises" and are often held up as similar failures of obligation. Bush Senior certainly knows this well, after he signed new taxes into law, as his own words likely caused the end of his presidency. I believe that since these promises function differently than SP, we should analyze them as this alternative promising-type speech act.

In trying to understand the differences between SP and CP, as well as to argue for the propositions I laid forth at the outset, it will be useful to follow Searle's rules to get a better picture of where these kinds of promises fall within the model. For (1), we must know that the Speaker and Hearer can understand each other. In Searle's discussion of this clause, he notes that "…they are not acting in a play or telling jokes, etc." A modern-day example of this kind of promising play-acting might come in the form of Sasha Baron Cohen-style guerrilla comedy. In his show, "Who is America?", he plays a mirror to what most would consider the far-right in America. He acts sincere about things like endorsing the use of firearms by toddlers and convinces his interlocutors that this is a

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[10] George HW Bush, 1988 Republican National Convention

useful pursuit as well. We might imagine that in the course of these discussions, he makes some assurances or guarantees that some information or statements will be kept confidential. Unlike a play or a movie (despite that the content is then used for entertainment) Cohen's interlocutors have no idea that they are part of a pretend-promise and may well have the "effect" of a promise produced in them. Regardless, this is not a sincere promise on the Searlian formulation, as Cohen is merely using the people in his discussions as set pieces, and likely finds it beneficial to his pursuit of art and comedy to compel the most outlandish statements possible. Cohen is generally playing a consistent character, and we might imagine that those featured in the show do believe (or have the effect of belief produced in them, to put it in speech-act terms) that the promise is genuine. Certainly, this is an example of something that Searle would consider to be an insincere promise.[11]

As a component of CP, politicians often "put on a show" (meaning that politicians must often give more full-throated support to certain issues than they would otherwise, or endorse certain positions that they disagree with in order to retain power) to garner the support of their constituency.[12] This, functionally, is different from what we ordinarily have in mind when we think about promising. When I promise to pick up your children from soccer practice, I'm not employing terms that have special meaning, and so you take me at my word—I have obligated myself to pick up your children from soccer practice

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[11] Thanks to Dr. Steven Reynolds for suggesting this remark. This case is unique in that unlike watching a Shakespearian play and seeing one actor make a promise to another, the line between play-acting and reality is somewhat blurred.

[12] Can a relevant distinction be made between politicians who "really" believe a particular world view and those that are merely "play-acting" to win a political seat? Surely this happens with some frequency, namely that individuals lobby and vote for things that they do not believe in fully themselves on behalf of their constituents, or less scrupulously, to get re-elected. This may prove to be an additional divergence of CP from standard promising.

and should I fail to do so (barring any countervailing reasons), I will be morally blameworthy. A politician, who makes a promise along the lines of, "I promise to fix the roads", again, is not using any specialized meanings and we would think them obligated to follow through on this promise should they wish to avoid being found blameworthy. However, I do not think that politicians generally employ explicit promising language, and I also believe that the language they do use is coded to match the language of their supporters (i.e., employing terms like "Pro-Life", "Illegal Immigrants", and "SJWs"). In fact, much of what is later held up as "campaign promises" employ no promising signaling device and may instead employ some form of transactional language along the lines of "A vote for me is a vote for a brighter future for our children as I will introduce new environmental legislation".

While this kind of role-playing may be wholly different than what Searle is mentioning in clause (1), one must consider that when a sociopolitical environment becomes particularly polarized, ideological stances are so rigidly defined that deviance from the core is often a recipe for political failure. As I hope to show throughout these pages, tokens of political speech are employed in order to whip up support within a party for a particular candidate, and often these tokens are deployed in the context of a campaign promise. When these promises fail or misfire or otherwise do not come to fruition, then, not only do they have the effect of letting down the "base", they have the additional effect of inciting retaliation. This was the case for Bush Senior. It may have been his deeply held belief that new taxes were bad for the country and based on this belief he would not allow any to be enacted on his watch. When evidence was presented to him that caused him to update his belief (i.e. that new taxes were in fact beneficial for

the country), he was likely faced with a choice—uphold his promise and ignore this new information or do the best thing for everyone and break it at the cost of his second term.[13]

One might wonder, however, how these groups become so polarized and so non-responsive to persuasive arguments from opposing viewpoints. While there are likely swaths of empirical data on the subject, the answer is thus explained from a philosophical perspective by Wittgenstenian language games more than anything. We know that there are many kinds of games in life, board games, ball games, card games, games played with teams, games played alone, games played outside, and games played on a computer and so on. One salient commonality among all these games, is that in order to play them, you need to know that you are playing the game in question. As many others have noted, Searle among them, to simply move the chess pieces on the board is not to be playing chess. Put another way, we might argue that "Anyone playing chess *knows* they are playing chess, and not something else". We could create a maxim for all these kinds of games along the same line. The problem with language and other meta-games is that we often do *not* hold conscious the fact that we are playing some type of game, and in doing so, are not playing some other type of game. How can this be? Take for a moment a discussion between two wrestlers, and one mentions to another that they prefer a certain style over another because of its use of *grapples*. Certainly, this wrestler could have used more imprecise language that was not as meaningful in the language game of wrestling, namely "moves relating to me using my body to prevent the motion of the limbs or body

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[13] "Read My Lips: No New Taxes" sounds like a promise that lacks any specialized language, and it is, of course, an implicit promise. As I will discuss in later sections, even words that may have plain meanings in other contexts, as in when you might ask how much sales tax there is on an item, in these political contexts, they may have wholly different values or *effects* to different political groups. One group might associate taxes with better access to services, more safety, while another side may feel just the opposite.

of my competitor", but since this wrestler is talking to another, she feels confident in deploying this language-game token in this way. She also does not mean to employ this token in a way that it is used in other games, when she utters "grapple" she does not mean grape-apple hybrids or a specialized attack in *Dungeons and Dragons.* In this way, she has deliberately selected a language game token for use in the conversation with another peer but has not *consciously* recognized the fact that she is engaging in some specialized conversation. This failure to hold conscious is a common effect and is put most on display when we "accidentally" deploy these terms to individuals who are not participants in the language game we are referencing. Recently, for instance, I reported to a school's administration office to meet with a *TVI*. When I made this utterance to the administration employee, they responded confused and did not know what I was referring to. It was then that I realized I was employing a specialized short-hand that would only be understood by those in the special education field. What I *really* was requesting was a meeting with the school's *Teacher of the Visually Impaired*. Wittgenstein himself saw the apparent friction in translation this way:

> 531. We speak of understanding in a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense that it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than a musical theme can be replaced by another). In the one case, the thought in the sentence is what is common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. (Understanding in a poem.)[14]

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[14] Wittgenstein, *Philosophilcal Investigations* 152

Here Wittgenstein speaks to the effect thus far described, we can approximate translations of phrases like TVI and Grapples as I used above, otherwise I would have been unable to provide the reader with a general picture of what they meant. However, as Wittgenstein points out, to those that can recognize those items in their natural places, there is an additional level or modality of understanding conveyed to the listener.

This effect is pronounced even more so in the case of politics. While modern-day specific examples such as "Pro-Life" and "Pro-Choice" will be discussed later, it is interesting to look back on examples that seem straightforward and undisputed. For example, I believe that in the United States people refer to any party that is not Democrat or Republican as "third-party", and I take it that they would mean any party that is not truly competitive in the way that the two major parties are. To wit, Merriam Webster refers to "third-party" in a similar way: "a major political party operating over a limited period of time in addition to two other major parties in a nation or state normally characterized by a two-party system."[15] However, the *Pocket Dictionary of American Slang*, originally published in 1960, has a different interpretation of what a third-party is "[a]ny new, completely American, completely political party other than the Republican or Democratic party."[16] The work goes on to describe examples of third parties in this way:

> From time to time such parties are formed, usu[ally] by dissatisfied factions of one of
>
> the two major parties. Generally speaking, the Socialist Party is not new enough nor

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[15] Merriam Webster, *Third Party*

[16] Harold Wentworth and Stuart Berg Flexner, *The Pocket Dictionary of American Slang*

the Communist Party sufficiently American to be called third parties; such as the

Vegetarian Party are not completely political…[17]

As we can see, the usage of these terms has evolved, and we can imagine that by

employing the term third party in a way that denies certain groups political legitimacy,

one is engaging in a specialized usage of terms that not all will recognize.

Now that we understand this lack of holding conscious, I believe that language

games are the best way to understand how these tight-knit language communities are

formed and why they are resistant to change (namely, I am reluctant to change my beliefs

about a particular topic because the language I employ reinforces my belief in a certain

position, and since I lack this objective perspective about the language I am using by

being a member of a language, it is extremely difficult for me to get out of the linguistic

trap I am in). Language games, since they are by their nature collective activities where

groups of people work often unconsciously to attach meaning or significance to words in

ways that might vary from others, are a useful explanatory tool to show how political

groups can be engendered and how CP can have different effects than SP. To expand on

this point, it will be useful to reference an example:

The UFO Believer

Jane is your average educated individual who landed a job as a social media

coordinator. Spending most of her time online, she learned to be skeptical of things she

saw online, and she held a standard set of beliefs about the universe, planets, science and

so on, but had not had to spend much time learning or researching those things on her

own. On her way home one evening, she saw a low, bright flash of light that she had

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[17] *Ibid.*

never in her life seen before, and she could not explain it using her current knowledge.

She raced online to find a community of people who had similar experiences, describing

them with vivid detail. Again, she was skeptical, but the more she researched and talked

to people in the community, she began to gain comfort with the idea. What she had seen

was a UFO. As part of joining this community, she gained access to a variety of terms

unique to the community of UFO. She knew what crop circles were and how to interpret

them. She could discern between "cigar-shaped" and "sphere-shaped". Her access to

these special terms allowed her to retreat to them when faced with contrary evidence. Her

interlocutors simply weren't speaking the same language she was.

An example of this kind of "special access" to language enabling Jane to

disregard evidence to the contrary might be a scenario in which a local news report shows

images of what appears to be long flashes of light in the night sky. They might even enlist

the help of an astronomical expert to tell a story of how various effects in the Earth's

atmosphere contribute to brief flashes of light in the sky. Jane, at this point, however, has

already disregarded the argument. The images to her are not "long flashes of light", but

"cigar-shaped unidentified objects" and for someone to fail to recognize this other story

means that Jane need not consider the alternative view.

While not everyone is susceptible to beliefs about UFOs in this manner, we can

see how our ordinary social groups help to form our understandings of certain issues.

Academia represents an extreme example of this self-sorting, as philosophers can often

engage in discussions where they are talking past each other. As Goodman notes in *A*

Critical Discussion of Talking Past One Another, "philosophers talk past one another

when each has a different meaning or concept in mind for a term that is crucial to their

discussion."[18] This kind of effect is evident in the geographical self-sorting of 21st century American politics. Data-driven publication 538 noted that this effect intensified in 2016 and lamented that "[i]n an increasing number of communities like Baldwin County, Alabama, which gave Trump 80 percent of its major-party votes, and San Mateo, California, which gave Clinton 80 percent, an entire generation of youth will grow up without much exposure to alternative political points of view."[19] Again, this separation does not rob individuals of a common language, but it does lend credence to the idea that different tokens of political speech will produce radically different perlocutionary effects in different places even if definitions are held fixed.

Returning to our discussion of (1) for CP, we must understand that this kind of extreme self-sorting occurs in politically polarized societies, so that while a politician may utter a CP in a language common to all, it may contain terms unique to one political persuasion. While politician X may not believe that "Pro-Life" is the right phrase to capture their view on abortion (more on this in a moment), they might need to employ the term (i.e. "I promise to continue to fight for the pro-life community") in order to garner the appropriate support. As a result, if someone is not familiar with the term or its usage in the pro-life game, they, under (1), cannot be said to be the receivers of the promise. In this way, intended or not, under the Searlian approach, promises are made only to the "base", or those that agree with the views of the politician and engage in the same use of language.

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[18] Jeffrey Goodman, *A Critical Discussion of Talking Past One Another*
[19] David Wasserman, *Purple America has all but Disappeared*

This feels like an unintuitive result, however. Surely an individual who makes a CP is promising something not just to supporters, they are promising to the public at large (the voting public, perhaps). But as we will see in continuing down this path of Searle's structure, CP's may be something other than promises in the eyes of non-supporters. They may be mere statements of position, if someone is neutral about an issue, or they may be threats, if someone feels that the content of the promise would be harmful to their way of life.

What would it mean for a politician to use a term identified from a party language-game, such as Pro-Life, in the course of a campaign promise, and how could that term not accurately capture one's position? I believe that these tokens of political language games often come loaded with very strict definitions and are highly resistant to modification. Consider another game such as chess. When a player refers to a piece as a pawn or a knight, those terms have strict definitions that defy aberration. We know that regardless of if the knight is white or black, or shaped like a boat or a sheep in some novelty set, that it moves in an L shaped pattern. Regardless, when I employ the token "knight" in the context of a chess conversation, the illocutionary effect may be an object that is *either* black or white, and likely shaped like a horse. You may understand what I am referring to, but what I am holding conscious when I deploy the term is an M-1 Abrams piece that was part of my family's chess set. We are discussing the same token, which obeys the same rules, but it may appear different in each of our mental images.

Likewise, politicians who generally are more engaged in policy than their constituents, likely have nuanced views of the various positions they hold. One might think that abortion rights are important, and that everyone should have equal and

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confidential access to it, but they might feel squeamish about supporting that right beyond a certain point in pregnancy. Conversely, one might think that abortion is fundamentally morally wrong, but believe that certain things constitute morally overriding reasons such that abortions in the case of rapes or in cases where the mother is at mortal risk are morally acceptable as well. Unfortunately, crafting these nuanced positions are often not associated with electoral success, so politicians rely on the short-hand of "Pro-Life" and "Pro-Choice", which represent the dogmatic absolutes of these positions. As such, one may interpret a promise made for one position or another to be either salvation or life-threatening, but often it is nowhere in between.

A lengthy discussion of (2), or "In speaking, the Speaker expresses a proposition P", in the framework of CP is not necessary, but it is a useful point to reiterate for the purposes of evaluation. If we are to engage in serious discussion of a particular CP, it must be something that can be evaluated. "I promise to help get our veterans the healthcare they need" and "Read my lips: no new taxes" may both be examples of propositions *that P*, but "Make America Great Again"[20] may not be. The latter kind of utterances may be some type of performative utterances, but we cannot be sure that they fit into the category of promises.

Clause (3) reads as follows:

3. In uttering P, the Speaker predicates a future act, A of the Speaker.

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[20] Throughout this paper I have left the scope of CP fairly open, since as previously discussed, rarely do politicians employ specific promising markers. Here may mark some delineation, as I worry that CP must at a minimum point to some relatively specific content. Typical promises and platforms involve "keeping government small" "ensuring safety nets for the disadvantaged" and "providing equal opportunities in education". "Make America Great Again" seems to lack any specific content (unless one could argue that under the framework I have provided, it is a dog whistle of some sort and *does* point to some specific content).

This is where Searle's analysis diverges slightly from CP. The clause is clear, in making a promise, we are predicating a future act that we will perform. This again limits the scope of what we can promise, i.e. we cannot promise that the sun will rise tomorrow or that the road up ahead gets easier, as these are not things that are future acts we can perform (or that we can have an affect over in normal circumstances).

The reason that this is important with regards to CP is that politicians often make, and form "promises" involving propositions that do not rely only on their actions. As to the first part, we may not see any space for them and feel it unnecessary to afford them any escape from their predicative abilities, but I do feel it necessary to note that often people are elected before having the experience of policymaking. However, CP must create space for this more limited involvement in action, since despite making broad claims ("A vote for me is a vote to build a land bridge between Alaska and Russia"), they are often viewed as promises. Consider then a 3* for CP:

3*. In uttering P, the Speaker predicates a future state of affairs, *A*, which the Speaker will attempt to bring about.

This formulation is important, because political societies may have many different organizational structures and methods of enacting policy. Unlike standard promises, a politician may have to take on a variety of actions, or no actions at all, to bring about a policy. There may be actions they need to take on that they could not have predicted in order to realize a certain state of affairs, such as the signing of a new treaty between the US and Russia in order to build said land bridge. As such, trying to predict a "state of affairs" instead of a "future act" seems to be a more apt description of what a politician is doing when they promise.

The word "attempt" here may seem to be another problematic insertion into the formulation as well, but I think it to be important. More so even than in standard promises, there seems to be a spectrum along which a promise is said to be fulfilled by a politician, and largely that is due to the public perception of a politician's "attempt" to bring about what they claimed they would. Naturally, this perception is sometimes fickle, but generally, politicians are rewarded by their supporters when they do what they can to carry out promised policy ideas even when they fail.

Clause (4) reads as follows:

4. The hearer would prefer that A is performed to its not being performed, and the Speaker believes that the hearer prefers A.

This clause may illuminate the most significant divergence of Searle's Formulation from CP, at least in understanding. While it is evident that a promise must in general be something a promisee prefers to be a promise (otherwise it is a threat or something else), there may be some friction between what an agent desires and what would *really* benefit them. For example, US politics is rife with examples where what appears to be the immediately rational choice for a certain voting bloc is not the one that is selected, i.e. those in poor or impoverished locations voting for taxes or benefits that they might never realize. In these cases, we can often point to a value system derived from party and cultural membership that may give agents *some* reason to prefer things that may not practically benefit them. A prime example may be a group or party that supports "small government" at the cost of services that might benefit them, such as financial safety nets or even well-maintained roads.

However, if we allow this value-system question to be too broad, we may end up in situations where not only is an agent's (or voter's) preference not good for them, but *good for no one*. In the case of standard promises, this line is firmer around the domain of rationality, if I promise you that I am going to burn the building we are in down with both of us in it, not only would this normally be considered a threat, but if you were to prefer it, we might think that you have faulty preferences. In the case of CP, however, there may be policies that seem equivalent to burning the building down, (I promise to return coal fired factories to industrial-revolution era levels), but they may be justified by some combination of values or political theory and the distance from the promise to the result. I believe that this is an interesting question to explore further, namely the difference between irrational preferences when an agent is thinking about personal consequences and irrational preferences when an agent is considering political theories, but I leave that for another space.

Clause (5) of Searle's Formulation is as follows:

> 5. It is not obvious to either the Speaker or Hearer that A will be performed over the normal course of events.

This clause also provides an interesting juncture for CP, since in general, we assume party members to have a certain level of buy-in to a party platform and are therefore likely to support and enact many of those tenets should they be elected.

If, then, a CP is not performed in order to guarantee something new to the base (i.e. fulfill clause 5), what does it do? I believe that these kinds of performances are designed to reinforce the view that what is promised as something rightful to desire. Put another way, a CP is uttered to assure the base that a particular policy position (no new taxes, a

wall, carbon credits, etc.) are things worth having provided by (or in some cases, prohibited by or prevented by) a government, and that they are worth incorporating into one's conception of what ought to be a standard of government practice. An example of this might be that when a politician promises something like an end to nuclear proliferation, and the party and its constituents sign on or endorse that promise, supporters of that politician may now feel that the end of nuclear proliferation is something to advocate for even if that politician loses. Those supporters may require from future candidates in that party that they support a similar process. In the real world, this type of preference shifting came quickly in the modern-day United States, where a candidate, Bernie Sanders, argued for single-payer healthcare.[21] This was an argument previously thought to be unwinnable in the United States, but despite Sanders' loss, the party has shifted its weight towards advocating for a single-payer style system, largely due to the preferences of its constituents.[22] [23] Since the constituents were moved by this ideal, the party had to shift its informal platform to better accommodate it as part of the party's vision for the future. Again, this may contribute to that irrational preference setting mentioned earlier, but it is worth noting where the effect starts.

Clause (6) reads:

6. The Speaker intends to do A

Intention is a difficult thing to pin down, especially in complex situations like running for office or running a government, so (6) may not be as revealing as some of the other clauses. Specifically, it states that the Speaker must intend *to do A*. Presidents have lots of

[21] Scott Horsely, *Bernie Sanders Revives Debate Over Single-Payer Health Care*
[22] Peter Sullivan, *Democrats March toward single-payer healthcare*
[23] Ryan Struyk and Gregory Krieg, *Majority of Democratic voters are all-in on single-payer*

authority over preventing new measures, i.e. they can veto new tax legislation making it very difficult for it to come to fruition, but other cases are much more difficult to parse out. If the Pope provides some guarantee that there will be no more cases of abuse in the church, is that really something he can *do*? Perhaps he can prevent any information from leaving the church, or he can bar children from entering churches, or he can excommunicate all current priests and bring in new ones, but that surely isn't what he means and isn't what the hearer is expecting.

Generally, I think that by running under a certain flag or party, politicians and bureaucrats intend to commit themselves to certain positions in order to gain themselves a consistent base of voters or supporters. Those who often dismiss party dogma, especially in a highly polarized political environment often fail to capture the support of the opposite party enough to offset the losses that they take in their own. As such, I think clause (7), or that the Speaker intends to obligate herself to A in uttering P, remains intact when it comes to CP. However, it may be argued that many CP fail to obligate the speaker to anything, given their high level of vagueness. In this case, an utterance does not fail to be a CP, as its perlocutionary effects are still produced.

For (8), it is clear that the speaker or politician surely intends their hearers to understand that they are committing themselves to some set of actions that will promote the realization of a specific goal,[24] but they are also interested in producing other perlocutionary effects, such as support, excitement, patriotic sentiments, hope and so on. The campaign promise is also a team-building exercise; it serves to engender a world view, typically against another, competing world view.

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[24] Thanks to Dr. de Marneffe for this phrasing

Clause (9) is interesting for our discussion of political promises. (9), which reads "the rules of the dialect are such that the utterance is correctly and sincerely formulated IFF 1-8 obtain", represents a requirement not only for individuals to be speaking the same language (i.e. it would be no use to for me to promise you something in French if you only spoke German), but that those individuals are also speaking the same "dialect". For the purposes of this discussion, and I believe it to be the intent of Searle, I think we may read dialect here as "using the same colloquial natural language", or as Searle goes on to elaborate, "[t]he meaning of a sentence is entirely determined by the meaning of its elements, both lexical and syntactical".[25] He goes on to note that clause (1) (in his words, "Normal input and output conditions obtain") can be seen as sufficient to cover the assumption that the speaker and hearer understand each other, but clause (8) and (9) help to get us over the hump if we think Searle is "asking too much" of his input and output conditions.[26]

CHAPTER 5

LANGUAGE GAMES: WHY NOT TRANSLATION?

In earlier examples, I used the concept of language games to show that some terms are tokens of political groups and that other groups would simply not "get" the full meaning of those terms. I likened this to someone who gets sucked into a group that believes in UFO's as existent (perhaps a mirage of expertise), and I insinuated that their

[25] Searle, *Speech Acts*, 61
[26] *Ibid.*

access to special in-group terms enabled them to be even more resistant to persuasion than they otherwise would be.

One response to this may be that I am missing a possibility—namely, translation. When someone employs a term like "Pro-Life" or "Undocumented Immigrant", are they really employing a term so resistant to description to the outgroup that they simply will not understand no matter what lengths one goes to in order to explain the term? To reiterate my position, yes, these tokens are specific units of a language game engaged in by specialized political groups.

I believe this is because political groups appropriate these terms for their own uses, and through their speech, insert them into their repertoire of performative acts and make them unique. As in the UFO example above, we may be able to discern what "cigar-shaped" might mean, via English language cues. We can probably assume that what is being described is some sort of elongated "UFO", but without giving some buy-in to the UFO language game, the appropriate image may never be fully formed in our minds, or as Austin might say, the perlocutionary effect is not appropriately produced.

My argument then is to extend this contextualizing to language groups, whether it be plumbers, UFO enthusiasts, or Republicans, and to note that while the terms they employ may look normal and accessible to those outside of the group, they are "technical terms" or "terms of art" in some sense and require group participation to fully understand. To understand fully what "Deep Groove" might mean for record collectors, you would have to engage in some record collecting yourself, not simply to know the definition, but to understand the value. We can attempt to translate the phrase, and we may get at things like "the grooves are deeper" or "a certain record label" or "a particular quality", and

while we may be close, we would miss the definition of a singular "deep" groove on the label, and the association with that groove being an earlier, higher quality pressing of a record. To get the value of this phrase, we may need to hear several versions of the same recording to realize that this is indeed the most desirable version of this recording. Further, one might need to be a specialized record collector, not only someone in possession of many records but with knowledge of the ways in which music is recorded.

"Deep Groove" functions much like jargon, however, since it is unclear that it is a common term among many other professions or "in-groups" (perhaps, downhill skiers). What makes political speech tokens particularly context dependent is that political groups may have associations and uses for terms that are divergent and irreconcilable.

Take "Pro-life" for example—the definition between groups is largely the same, namely the forgoing of any abortions with the intent to protect the lives of all the unborn (surely there are edge cases, but this seems to be a useful standard). While both the left and the right in the US and perhaps elsewhere may assent to this description of the term, they may value (or again, in Austinian terms, have the effect produced in them) the term wildly differently. The right may see Pro-Life as a term that represents morality, hope, and even perhaps religious reverence. The left may see the term as representative as patriarchal, murderous, and immoral. These effects are immediate and unconscious, and they make translation impossible.

This would seem to conflict with Searle's position in a few ways. After all, he imagines a chess game taking place in two different countries with different conventions, i.e. the rook being the tallest piece instead of the king, and the squares being numbered instead of black and white, and that these chess games could be translated from one

country to another since the underlying game of chess remains unchanged. Further, in reference to languages, "[d]ifferent human languages, to the extent that they are inter-translatable, can be regarded as different conventional realizations of the same underlying rules." This is important, for without this, as Searle notes, we would not be able to describe promises without reference to a language. Put more clearly, we would not be satisfied with a theory of illocutionary effects or even promises that says "I promise…" creates an obligation whereas "Je promets…" does not. Importantly, Searle emphasizes that this works only when languages are inter-translatable, most languages might have a word for "I" or a reference to oneself, but some languages may not have a word for "e-mail", or mail sent over the internet. Similarly, simply because we can translate *apercevoir* as "to see", the sense may be quite different depending on the context, one that a non-native speaker will simply not realize.

I believe that this shows that not only do these special terms of art appear in every day parlance, I think that they have unique values or senses for in-group speakers and that this formulation is compatible with the rigorous speech act conditions that Searle lays out.

CHAPTER 6

REVIEW

Thus far, I have argued that CP are fundamentally different from a philosophically

robust form of SP in Searle's method, and that language games help explain the rise of

this in-group resistance to the definition of terms. Throughout this work, I have

mentioned the various touchstones of my initial arguments, but I will now return to those

propositions to reinforce their foundations and recall their arguments.

I.   That CP and SP differ in the "best interest" condition, of the condition that a

      promise must be in the best interest of the promisee in order for that promise

      to obtain, which in turn, produces the effect of threatening those who do not

      want the promise to come about.

This proposition is in direct response to Searle's clause 4, which states that the hearer

of the promise must prefer its completion to its non-completion. Again, this is an intuitive

supposition by Searle, I cannot promise to hurt you or otherwise do something that you

would not like, for that would be a threat. We might imagine that there would be some

outliers in group situations, if I promise you, wearing a blue shirt, that I will only charge

those wearing red shirts extra to enter the amusement park, I may have promised you

something but in some way harmed hearers who are wearing red shirts. CP functions in

just the opposite way, i.e. we can find very few examples where there are none threatened

by a guarantee. I believe that this is for two reasons, one, that CP are often uttered to all

or most of a constituency, and that constituency will likely be one in which some do not

want whatever CP it is to come about. Even in the most uniting of circumstances, such as

just after the attacks of 9/11 and America's decision to go to war with Iraq, support for

the war was never unanimous.[27] This forms the basis of the second reason, that CP that

do not threaten may not be CP at all. They may not employ political speech, or they may

not be a guarantee of anything. We might imagine a promise by a politician to step down

after killing a pedestrian by driving drunk to reach unanimous support, but this kind of

thing sounds more like a standard promise than anything else.

    As discussed earlier in this paper, political speech and the promises that go along with

them form a body of collective knowledge and values. In some ways, politics functions

like religion in that it gives its followers (or constituents) reasons to value and support

things that would not otherwise be supported by a more self-centered egoism. In fact, in

the case of politics, value systems may be constructed such that certain individual

supporters may never reap the benefits of a particular policy. Returning to Rule 4 of

Searle's analysis, his "sincerity condition", Searle mentions that in promising, in

believing that someone desires something, we promise them that we will perform it

because we also believe it is in their best interest. If I promised my child a bike, and they

desperately wanted a bike but lacked any balance or body control, I may be promising

something that they desire but I would be failing the sincerity condition because I have

the foresight to see that they will likely cause themselves injury. This same sincerity

condition must be absent from politics, since politicians will often make promises that

line up with a base's *values* but not their interest. This is a descriptive approach. Surely,

we may think that it would be better if politicians only made promises that met Searle's

sincerity condition, but I think it would be insufficient to leave these kinds of promises

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[27] According to Gallup's data, support for America's war in Iraq was as high as 90%, but never complete.
https://news.gallup.com/poll/8038/seventytwo-percent-americans-support-war-against-iraq.aspx

out, since they do happen with regularity, and they are treated in the same fashion in political discourse.

II.   That CP serve to reinforce world views in a way that is non-trivially different from SP.

Fundamentally, what politicians guarantee to citizens is what lays out the framework of the political conversation. When President Obama promised affordable healthcare for all, he contributed to the shift of his party's renewed focus (and, by extension, it's supporters) to making healthcare accessible and taking on the problem of coverage gaps by the government instead of the free market. In response, the opposition party rejected this notion, feeling that the quality of healthcare and eventually, its accessibility, would suffer in the long run. For Obama's party, healthcare for all in one form or another became a symbol of a thriving and just nation, and for the opposition, it became a symbol of socialism and the stripping away of personal freedoms. The push and pull rages on today, but it is largely not about the data, policy line items or even outcomes. What the conversation about healthcare has become, much like other objects that have been given rise to by CP's, is a symbol of what divides ideological viewpoints on the issue.

Symbols are important conversational markers, just like in any other cultural or religious movement, and they become cheap, digestible focal points for citizens who do not have the time or bandwidth to consume every modicum of policy debate. We ought not expect them to, either, as the job of any representative government system is to enable persons to spend less time working to understand deeply nuanced policy issues. These symbols enable citizens to quickly answer problems in a conversational way,

which further sharpens their world view. Take for example a border wall with Mexico, a promise of President Trump's, that has quickly become a symbol of what is necessary to address the immigration issue.. These conversational responses to problems come down quite readily to this:

1. Illegal immigration is bad for several reasons: it violates the law, it encourages immigrants to engage in a dangerous journey, it creates a 2nd class of citizens, and so on. As such, a wall will discourage their arrival and answer these problems.

2. A wall is bad for several reasons: we, like Europe, are dealing with our own migrant crisis due to instability within our neighboring countries. Unlike Europe, however, we have much more space, a more powerful unified economy, and an inherent disposition to help others and be a "melting pot". Therefore, to deny asylum seekers and people seeking to better their lives in the United States because they are coming from Latin and South American countries would be racist. Building a wall along the border would be a monument to that racism.

Obviously, these are not thorough political or philosophical arguments, but they are likely the distilled versions of arguments we may hear from supporters of either party. Importantly though, these positions arise from CP, for if President Trump had never promised a wall, we might not have it as a symbol for constituents to develop as part of their world view. In fact, in the past there was bipartisan support for some border barricades so that there are some walls and fences along the US-Mexico border. Now that the issue has become symbolic, it may never be fully resolved.

CHAPTER 7

CAMPIAGN PROMISES AND THEIR EFFECTS

Now that we have some groundwork for the differences between CP and "standard" promises, it will be useful to consider the effects that they produce. First, consider the following set of promises:

1. Read My Lips: No New Taxes

2. I promise this will never happen again (as spoken by a Church leader)

3. We will have affordable healthcare for all

These all feel very similar to "standard" promises, and for reasons we will see in comparing these kinds of utterances to Searle's Formulation, they are slightly different. Importantly, though, they are speech acts. They get us to believe that a certain politician holds a certain position, but also that the party or political group holds that position as well (we might be loath to call the Catholic church a political entity, but I think there are many good reasons to think that it is, the least of which being that it has agency over a sovereign nation). Further, if we are subscribers to that party's view, it legitimizes our belief in certain things. It may also encourage us to engage in actions ourselves.

Now that we can see *how* campaign promises work, and *why* they might be held to the same normative standards that "standard" promises are held to, it will now be useful to turn to how they ought to be evaluated from a deontic point of view. Put straightforwardly, a promise represents the most standard of obligations, such that if I promise to do something, I am obligating myself to perform that action and rendering

alternatives impermissible. However, if we interpret obligation as a two-way street (i.e. $\mathbf{O}p \leftrightarrow \neg \mathbf{P} \neg p$) some authors have argued that we can responsibly (or even be morally justified in) breaking our promises in pursuit of some other goal that is interpreted as overriding in some way morally. This, I believe applies to CP as well. In general, a politician's promises obligates them to carry something out on behalf of their constituents[28], and we would be right to criticize them morally if they outright failed to do so (*viz.* if a politician ran on making sidewalks more accessible, and then made no effort to do so once in office) but perhaps not when the promise is overridden in some way (i.e. in Bush Sr.'s case). Still, there is some additional responsibility conferred on the politician in *the making* of the promise. As we saw in the UFO case, information givers, such as the heads of organizations, can begin to wield immense power over their respective language-games, so much so that they can influence the actions of individuals just with the information they provide. Similarly, in promising, politicians perform a *perlocutionary act*, or one that produces "certain consequential effects on the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience."[29] Not only should we be evaluating what they say, in terms of its truth or falsity, whether or not they are successful in holding to their promises, but as thoughtful constituents and as responsible journalists, we should be evaluating the effects of their speech acts on the public. Merely in promising *X*, have they done something wrong? Have they incited riots, or sowed further divisions?

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[28] We might wonder, if given the framework that promises must be in some way in the interest of a party's values or constituents, if a politician can promise something impermissible. Given the history of civilized nations, there is no doubt that some impermissible promises have been made, and it would be remiss of me to not acknowledge this possibility. However, I think what is impermissible for a politician to promise would depend largely on your normative view of morality.

[29] Austin, *How to do Things with Words* 101

To this end, it will be worthwhile to start with the work of Mcgowan, Haslanger and others in the area of "oppressive speech". In her work *Oppressive Speech*, Mcgowan notes that we can see that certain utterances cause certain behaviors, but this is not always the best path to criticize these acts, "since these (alleged) causal effects are the result of persuasion and hence 'mentally-mediated', the speech causing them is highly protected by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution."[30] If we want to be able to criticize these kinds of utterances in a robust moral and perhaps legal way, we must be able to interpret them as actions and not merely speech. In her piece, Mcgowan gives an example of an employer making an utterance along the lines of "this establishment no longer serves non-white customers." She notes that one of the results of this utterance is that new permissibility facts are enacted which contribute to the ongoing oppression of non-whites in the community.[31] Put another way, the utterance mentioned contributes to the fact that it is permissible to prevent non-whites to enter or partake in a certain establishment. Similarly, under the Austinian model, employers are institutionally supported in enacting rules (much like the pastor or priest would be the one to conduct marriages, or the parent to "baptize" an infant with a name) which would further oppression.

In this case, Mcgowan is detailing an act that results from a special relationship, *viz.* employer to employees, that gives the speech its "act" status. To see this special relationship, it is useful to consider another approach. Perhaps in Mcgowan's case, instead of the employer making the initial utterance, it is a customer. The customer makes

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[30] Mcgowan, *Oppressive Speech* §1
[31] Oppression for Mcgowan has specific conditions. See §2 of *Oppressive Speech*

a complaint to the management that the establishment is too crowded, and that some people should not be allowed entrance. This may *cause* management to enact new rules, but it is not the act of oppression itself.

What, then, is the "special relationship" that political candidates have to their speech acts? Some are not in "power" when the performer promises, and some are. What is power as it pertains to the political world? I believe there are at least three ways we can understand the "act" component of a campaign promise.

First, a campaign promise serves the function of endorsing a world view. When the elected head of the UFO convention refers to a certain image of a flash of light as a "cigar-shaped UFO", she gives further credence to that term's use in the language game of UFOs, much like the referee in an American Football game referring to a player crossing into the endzone with the ball in hand as a "touchdown". I believe this is a process that can be considered something akin to "upkeep" or maintenance of the game. In uttering "touchdown", the referee has contributed to the continued existence of the game.[32] Similarly, a political candidate is in the unique position of being part of that party's rules makers.

The party platform, however, is a changeable object. Unlike chess, whose general rules seem to be relatively fixed throughout the history of the game, a party platform ebbs and flows based on what its members determine to be the relevant terms of discussion. This can take one of two (or perhaps more) forms. In the first, a party consensus grows

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[32] We could imagine that if the rules authority of a particular game were to continually refer to different events in different ways, the game would lack stability and existence. For example, if every time a ball was kicked through the uprights in American football it was referred to differently, perhaps "smekledorf- 1 point" on one occasion, and "liliput-10 points" on another, it would be unclear if a game was being played anymore. Compare this to the often-untenable games made up by children.

around certain terms or positions being more valuable than others. For example, perhaps it is peacetime and military dominance has already been exerted around a nation's neighbors. The right wing of that country may now decide that what is more important is to campaign on and advocate for stronger border enforcement. Another reason for this consensus-changing to take place may be that terms previously used are modified or appropriated for other purposes. Perhaps this same right-wing party, now in a time of relative stability, determines that "national security" no longer applies to having a powerful military fighting force, but a well-funded and armed police force to ensure that domestic violence and crime is minimized. This changing of terms occurs in other games as well, such as when the National Football League re-evaluates what it considers to be a "catch", or when other sports grapple with what to consider a "performance enhancing drug".

Another way we might understand this is that when a politician promises something like a border wall, they contribute to that policy's value in the eyes of certain people, mainly those within the party of the politician. If I subscribe to party x's views and philosophies, and this statement is added to the platform, I may now view "maintaining borders" as more politically important than rendering aid to those crossing the border.

Finally, we may see these kinds of speech acts as endorsing or encouraging certain types of action by individuals. One example may be the rise of the Arizona Minutemen, a civilian militia that patrolled the border in the early 2000's.

CHAPTER 8

POTENTIAL OBJECTIONS

Over the course of this paper, I have argued that Campaign Promises are either a unique speech act or a mode of a certain kind of speech-act (viz. *promises*). But what of the speech act-denier, or the speech-act minimalist? What could they argue for instead to better explain the phenomena I am trying to capture here?

Let us start with the speech-act denier, who might argue like Cohen did in "*Do Illocutionary Forces Exist?*" that "wherever explicitly performative expressions are used, the illocutionary force, if such a thing exists at all, cannot be distinguished from the meaning".[33] This may prove a difficult course to take, especially in the cases of baptisms and coronations and other events so well documented by Austin and others, but we can imagine the philosopher who is interested in promises merely for their moral content and the obligations that they seem to generate. They understand promises in the way symbolized earlier, so that

1. I promise to meet you for lunch

Becomes

A. $\mathbf{O}L \leftrightarrow \ulcorner\mathbf{P}\ulcorner L$

Or I am obligated now to meet you for lunch if *and only if* it is not permissible for me to not meet you for lunch.[34] This formulation is necessary for our understanding of promises in the moral sense since it represents where debates in morality frequently arise. Some

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[33] Cohen, *Do Illocutionary Forces Exist* 122 Phil Quarterly
[34] This explains things like overridingness, and why we are apt to forgive in the face of countervailing reasons. I.e. my father was dying so I went to see him, I was permitted to do something else, therefore I am no longer obligated to keep my promise.

theorists may argue that there is nothing that we can add to the right side of this conditional (i.e. no moral reasons to do anything else) that would enable us to escape our obligations, and others may provide a framework for how other actions may become permissible. Campaign promises behave somewhat differently when analyzed through this lens. To see this, I believe a clause of Searle's argument is necessary to reproduce here:

4. The hearer would prefer that A is performed to its not being performed, and the Speaker believes that the hearer will benefit from A.

I believe that the speech-act denier would also hold something similar, namely 4*:

4*. A promise must be something that the promisee would desire, otherwise an obligation would fail to generate.

Without something like 4*, a moral or language theory would fail to correctly differentiate between promises and threats, which would seem to be problematic. Armed with 4*, however, the speech-act denier may have all the tools they need to sort out political promises. They might note that the real problem lies not in vagueness or ambiguity, but rather the conflict between individual and collective rationality. It may very well be the case that the average citizen would desire the result of a promise like "I promise that no citizen will have to pay to ride on public transit". Upon getting into office, the utterer of this promise may realize that the only way to uphold this promise would be to eliminate public transit entirely. What are we to say about this case, from the perspective of the strict moralist? Is it that the politician promised wrongly, or that those citizens who are upset that the promise can no longer be upheld are somehow being irrational in not recognizing these reasons that may override?

I believe some in ethics would hold the latter, that some agents are just failing to recognize all the reasons in the situation, much like if I had broken a promise to meet for lunch because my daughter was in immediate need of my aid to prevent her death.[35] Surely, they would argue, I had more reason to try to save my daughter than to meet for lunch, and for anyone to hold me accountable for the lunch meeting would be either irrational or immoral. Some theorists, strict deontologists perhaps, may account for the feelings of those in the latter case by saying any promise broken is, in fact, immoral.[36] Neither of these theories are truly equipped to answer the former question, even with the adaption of 4*, *viz*. has someone done something wrong or objectionable merely *in the promising*? Without some inefficient and ultimately ad-hoc approach[37], the speech-act-denier moralist does not have access to the tools that Mcgowan does in describing oppressive speech, and further does not possess them for the purposes of CP.

If this explains why the speech-act-denier is ill-equipped to respond to and account for CP, what about someone who may hold that speech-acts exist, but campaign promises are simply not distinct enough from standard promises to justify the existence of a "new" speech act? As my analysis of Searle has shown, not only do political promises differ in his more analytic approach, I think political promises fulfill a ritualistic

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[35] For a view like this, see Portmore's *Commonsense Consequentialism*.

[36] I believe we can imagine a Kantian holding this view, namely that any promise not kept is failing to uphold the Categorical Imperative.

[37] Take the following scenario: imagine a professor is nominated for a national award that will make her life significantly better (perhaps there is some financial component). This professor, in an attempt to secure this award, makes the promise that she will end her practice of requiring work outside the classroom for a whole semester. Now we can imagine a number of consequences of this action that might be negative, such as students harassing other students in order to get them to vote a certain way or preventing students from voting at the "polls" who they don't trust and so on. We can also imagine those consequences never materializing. In both cases, I believe that most ethical theories are ineffectual at capturing the risk of this utterance.

function that standard promises simply don't explain. To "run" for office is to make some of these specialized kinds of promises, on purpose or otherwise. This is because to campaign for political office is to offer some sort of vision for which electors or voters can approve or disapprove; for example, an adherence to the status quo or a divergence from it. For an individual to campaign without offering anything explicitly or implicitly would be little different for voters than writing in "Bugs Bunny" on their ballot in protest. A primitive society may have no use for political promises but may engage in standard promising all the time.

CHAPTER 9

PROMISING TO TRY

Another objection to my view of political or campaign promises as uniquely interesting kinds of speech acts may hold a view similar to this one: "…a person can do nothing more than to try (or, more precisely, a person can do nothing more than to try his or her best). And so it seems that the phrase I promise should always be read as elliptical for I promise to try: to promise anything more would be irresponsible."[38] They might note that reasonable people should always take political promises as "promises to try", since on the evidentialist view of promises (namely, that we would be irresponsible to promise things that we didn't think we had good evidence that that thing would come to fruition) a majority of political promises are not the kinds of things that we have good evidence for. As I have noted in previous descriptions, political promises are often the kinds of things that individuals lack influence to fully bring about, since most

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[38] *Promising to Try,* Jason D'Cruz and Justin Kalef

governments have some delineation of power. As such, politicians must realize that they lack the "sufficient evidence" that they can guarantee something will come about, such as new roads, lower tax rates, and so on. If we did not give them the out to "promise to try", as these theorists might argue, we would have to consider them all irresponsible. They might say that my machinery is not necessary, because if any negative effects arise from these kinds of promises, it is *because* they are irresponsible.

I think there are two questions to unpack here, first, are politicians "promising to try", and is irresponsibility enough to explain the effects I have described. I believe that in some cases, there are assumed "promises to try", especially in less polarized or smaller political environments (town councils, school boards, etc.) where there might be some incentive to appear bi-partisan. "We hope to work together to find a solution" is often a phrase bandied about in these scenarios, and I believe we can subsume this kind of utterance under the heading of a promise to try. However, in larger, more partisan environments, a "promise to try" is just not enough to sway the minds of voters. I tend to agree with Berislav Marušić's position on certain promises to try, as he describes in the wartime lover case.[39] In this case, a soldier goes off to war, and their lover is left behind. They are then faced with a dilemma whether to promise to remain faithful in the absence of the significant other, since they know that most are not successful in keeping this kind of promise, but a promise to try is somehow not "felicitous" enough (in the words of Austin) to be appropriate for the situation. D'Cruz and Kalef respond by asking the following questions:

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[39] Berislav Marušić, "Promising against the Evidence," Ethics 123 (2013): 292–317

But what if the lover promises to try her utmost and really means it? Is she really

insufficiently committed, and if so, what more can one ask? Why should the

departing lover who is offered a promise to try be dissatisfied? What is the source

of his discontent, and is it fair to insist on anything more?

While they fail specifically to address the intuition that a "promise to try" in this situation

is somehow insufficient in favor of describing why it would be irresponsible to make this

kind of promise, the insinuation here is clear: everyone should feel satisfied with a

promise to try in the scenario (everything being held equal).[40]

I don't think a promise to try in this scenario is satisfying simply because statistics are not

always the best indicator of success in individual cases. They may serve as a reason in

part of the greater moral calculus, but to state that something is difficult or unlikely on

the basis of other couples who have experienced the same thing only serves as a reason

for the promisor to *want* to give that kind of commitment, and the promisee to *desire* it.

The move that D'Cruz and Kalef make seems to rob the promisor of agency in a way that

does not happen in other cases they mention. I agree, for example, that it would make

sense for the Olympic athlete to retreat to a promise to try, since they do not have control

over their competition. Yet a promise to remain faithful is much unlike this, we would

not let a spouse off the hook if they were to point out that "the competition was more

attractive". As actuaries we might find a lover's promise to a wartime soldier

irresponsible, as philosophers we ought to respect the agency of individuals.

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[40] Importantly, CP is not always responsive to this concept. While it is certainly evident that Bush Sr. resisted allowing new taxes as best he could, he ultimately approved new taxes and was held accountable for doing so.

The second question to answer is whether or not the concept of an irresponsible promise is enough to explain the effects that I have described. Is it the case that we can criticize politicians merely for being irresponsible when their speech-acts result in the production of some negative effect? While irresponsibility may be able to account for riots, protests and the like, I do not think responsibility alone is what accounts for the Mcgowan-esque legitimizing of beliefs. When I speed down a road, I am being irresponsible in that I could hurt someone or myself. This irresponsibility though, cannot be said to be the source of others speeding. Likewise, if I promise to end global warming, I am irresponsible in that I may be saying something to secure your vote, but that irresponsibility can't account for you to come to the realization that global warming is bad or that others who don't agree with my promise are somehow confused about what is important.

CHAPTER 10

BREAKING PROMISES

Very early in this paper I noted that promises, campaign or otherwise, may sometimes be broken. When I first deployed the notion, I thought it went without much argumentation that promises are broken and that is generally thought to be the fault of the promisor. I have been privileged to work with great advisors on this topic and have explored the relevant research to realize that the breaking of a promise is a complex issue, and one can not *necessarily* be said to have broken a promise simply by noting that the thing promised has not come to fruition. Since "breaking" seems to imply some

fundamental moral failure, it will be useful to step back, suggest possible promise

misfires, and decide which have "broken" and which have merely missed their mark.

Promises of Vagueness

1. I promise to do my best (as the Olympic athlete says to her young child in the

   D'Cruz piece)

2. I promise to drive safely (as said by the student heading off to college)

3. I promise this property is the best value for your money (as said by the real estate

   agent to a prospective home buyer)

All these promises rest on some element of vagueness, as "best", "safe" and "value"

are all terms of rather imprecise meaning. An Olympic athlete, for example, may not be

able to accurately assess what her "best" is on any particular day, let alone demonstrate to

someone else that her best was given.[41] The real estate agent example, appears to be a

fairly common utterance but may not rise to the level of "promise" given the strict

philosophical definition I have appropriated from Searle (although may still entail legal

obligation). Still, we can imagine a home buyer lamenting that their real estate agent had

promised them something more than the lemon they ended up in.

These kinds of promises, however, due to their impreciseness, are very hard to

"break". Even when the outcome does not strictly come about, i.e. the college-bound

student gets in an accident or the athlete fails to beat even their personal best in a 40-yard

dash, there is a sense in which their promise was kept and the negative outcome that

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[41] A 40-yard dash runner may have a personal best time that they are always aspiring to beat. However, even failing to reach this personal best may not represent a failure to do one's best, as there may be imperceptible factors that limit one's ability, such as shoe wear, track condition, weather and so on.

resulted was otherwise unavoidable. We may give some wiggle room to these kinds of

promises, even when it is clear that the promisor is not or has not done *everything* to

ensure that it comes to be. The real estate agent may have done a standard home

inspection, but maybe they didn't do research of past pest issues to find that the home is

near the epicenter of a stubborn scorpion infestation. The new home owner may

recognize that the home is still valuable but presents new challenges that they wished

they would have known about.

To break one of these kinds of promises, then, requires one to fail to bring about a

promised outcome in what Austin refers to as aggravation, such as deliberately or on

purpose.[42] The student who hits a pedestrian while texting and driving is not only failing

to keep their promise to drive safely, they are engaging in behavior that is *unsafe*. The

athlete who fails to train before a big race and decides not to participate the day of the

race is deliberately not doing their best.

Still, there is a wide gulf between these assessments, and rarely do our practical

experiences line up in such a way that we can say a promise of this type is fulfilled or

broken. This represents a problem for moral assessments in applied ethics, since we may

not be able to criticize those who skirt the boundaries of failing to uphold a promise.

However, with speech-act theory we are better equipped to explain that there can be

negative effects produced from these kinds of promises, even if the question of moral

blameworthiness is unclear.

Overridden Promises

1. I promise to meet you at Charlie's (uttered a day before Charlie's burns down)

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[42] Austin, *A Plea for Excuses*, 177

2. I promise to take you to the movies (uttered a minute before a life-threatening injury inflicts the promisee)

3. I promise to be nicer to Beth (uttered a week before Beth and the promisee stop being friends)

Some promises must fail to come to fruition. In Charlie's case, there are factors beyond the promisor's control which prevent the promisor from carrying out what was previously guaranteed. Even for those theorists who might think there is no way to justify the moral wrongness of a promise going unfilled, they would likely have to admit that in those cases in which empirical facts stand in the way they must make an exception. Here, a promise is cancelled out rather than strictly "broken". In (2), we have a case where what I have most reason to do, rationally and morally, is not to fulfill my promise. It would be worse for you if you were to attend a movie instead of the hospital, and I think many would see me as culpable for your death if I failed to do so (and you died as a result). Still, imagining the extreme promise-theorist[43], they might argue that in some way the world is worse off for being one in which a promise was broken. This would appear to be an aesthetic argument more than a moral one, and we can be confident in (2) being an example of overriding moral duty in most theories. The final promise is one that might be said to have misfired, i.e. the promisee's desires have changed before the promise was to be fulfilled. Beth's former friend might not want anyone to be nice to Beth now, just as the person who asked their spouse to bring home dinner might no longer want what is provided since there was a surprise work outing. Importantly, in these cases, it is the

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[43] The promise-theorist referred to here is not any author, rather is addressing some extreme positions I have taken in other work.

promisee's preferences that have changed, and not the promisor's. We likely would not be as sympathetic to the promisor if they found it harder to be nicer to Beth than they expected.

Standard Promises

1. I promise to take the trash out.

2. I promise to meet you at Charlie's at 8.

3. I promise I will pay you back.

These kinds of promises are the ones most susceptible to breaking, although given sufficient moral or rational reasons, we may see any of these promises make the list of those overridden. Promises like 1-3 leave little space for misfire or "misadventure" that arise from promises of vagueness discussed earlier. Either the trash was taken out, or there was good reason that the promise was overridden. However, we can imagine some edge cases, perhaps you took the trash out, but forgot a bag, or you met your promisee at Charlie's, but fifteen minutes late. To evaluate these kinds of promises morally reveals a straightforward demonstration of the creation of specific obligations and how we hold individuals accountable for failing to meet those obligations. Even in those situations where an obligation is not strictly failed, i.e. paying someone back, but weeks later than expected, we still may feel some disappointment in the promisee for making a promise came to fruition in a less than ideal way. These kinds of perlocutionary effects are the kinds outlined by authors of Speech-Act theory, such as Mcgowan, Austin, Searle, Haslanger and others. In this way, one is availed of the "filling" in of the descriptions of our feelings of these kinds of promises.

Campaign Promises

1. Read My Lips: No New Taxes

2. With your support, we can fix our ailing public transportation system.

3. Make America Great Again!

As we have already explored, these kinds of promises are resistant to the kinds of language we typically associate with promises. Due to their peculiar formation, we might think that they are especially resistant to breaking, and that parties to these promises who have good reason to think that any concerted effort toward their fulfillment was sufficient for their success, much like in the promises of vagueness discussed earlier. Admittedly, promises like (1) appear to have a very specific outcome in mind, but even these more specific promises seem resistant to becoming overridden promises. This, I believe, is a result of the fact that these kinds of speech act are uniquely powerful in the production of perlocutionary effects, such that the kinds of belief they engender are resistant to reasons.

This point deserves further analysis. For a moment, let's imagine a supporter of Bush Sr. who votes for him largely on the basis of (1). This individual's driving political beliefs are that government should be small and that taxes are not only a way of increasing the size of government, but of taking money from those who are entitled to it and giving it to those who are not (admittedly, not the soundest belief system). Perhaps they rely on some government services, they drive on roads, rely on the police and military for protection and so on but do not feel that they derive any direct service from the government (again, a quasi-misguided belief) so that any additional taxation beyond what is already in place is superfluous. The promise that Bush has made enables this agent to feel so justified in this view of politics and government that the elimination of

new taxes becomes their overriding belief, so much so that they may discount the value of other services when presented with their elimination. More specifically, we can imagine some rudimentary deliberation process carried out by Bush that went something like this:

> I have promised no new taxes, and I believe that additional taxes are harmful to the growth of our economy and thereby the wealth of our nation, but if I continue to resist new taxes, important priorities to myself and the party will falter, like the military. Since my reasons to support those other things outweighs the reason to keep my promise, I will break my promise and raise taxes.

Obviously, Bush's real deliberative process involved a myriad of other factors, but we can see that this promise was overridden because it no longer seemed valuable, just like a promise to keep a diet would be discarded if the diet was revealed to be causing real lasting damage to an individual. We might wonder if Bush thought that his supporters would follow a similar deliberative scheme and arrive at the same conclusion. I believe that due to the perlocutionary effects of a campaign promise, the deliberative process of promisees is corrupted. For example:

> Bush promised no new taxes and now is entertaining the idea because he says government services will suffer if we do not raise government revenues. Bush says that even the military will suffer. Well, I am a big supporter of the military, but maybe we don't need such a big military budget anymore now that the Cold War is over. Besides, *he promised*.

I think this kind of updating of preferences happens all the time with regards to politics, in most cases because those preferences don't manifest themselves in a direct way in our

everyday lives. Men sometimes have strong opinions on abortion, and the rich often have strong opinions on the structure of welfare, for example. Whatever the process, these beliefs are entrenched in ways that are similar to what other philosophers have identified. Importantly, however, I believe they have missed the connection between the perlocutionary effect of a speech act contributing to or even enabling a continued resistance to countervailing reasons.

CHAPTER 11

CLOSING REMARKS

Throughout this thesis, I have argued for the existence of a specific speech act that behaves in many ways like one we are very familiar with but is in many ways different from a typical act of promising. I have demonstrated that political groups often function in the same way that language games do, and we ought to observe the differences between groups when trying to bridge the gap in discourse. I have shown how Campaign Promises might do more work for us in terms of explaining the effects of certain political speech acts than other moral or political theories *on their own*. Finally, I have discussed what it means to "break" a promise in ordinary language and moral philosophy and hope that those mechanisms provide a framework for continued discussion on the issue.

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