1. THE DECLARATIVE FALLACY

My thesis is simple: systematic theorists should not only stop neglecting interrogatives and imperatives, but should begin to give them equal weight with declaratives. A study of the grammar, semantics, and pragmatics of all three types of sentence is needed for every single serious program in philosophy that involves giving important attention to language.¹

Part of the background of my thesis is that in our culture when a logician, or nearly any trained philosopher, says 'sentence,' what is meant is a declarative sentence,² a sentence capable of having, as they say, a truth-value, or maybe truth-conditions, a sentence that can be used to 'say' something, a sentence expressing a proposition, a sentence that can play a role in inference as either premiss or conclusion, a sentence that might occur in someone's (say Quine's) 'canonical language.' This is what is to be rejected. This is the Declarative Fallacy. Instead, one should recognize that from the beginning there are not only declarative sentences, but, at least, both interrogatives and imperatives. The grammarians are right and those teachers of elementary logic that seem to have miseducated most of us are wrong: give all sentences equal time, and do not take declaratives as a paradigm of what can happen between full stops.

I wish eagerly (but parenthetically) to grant that there are or may be other sorts of sentences besides the declaratives, interrogatives, and imperatives, say the optatives, or the performatives, and indeed further on I will ask you to think a moment about the precatives, but it is no part of my thesis that I've got the goods on what sorts of sentence are enough; so if you just promise to take my remarks as nonexclusive, we can make some honest headway and all will be well.
1.1. *Declaratives Are Not Enough*

Here is an example of the Declarative Fallacy. Frege says, rightly or wrongly, that only in the context of a sentence words have meaning — the famous context principle. There is, I think, small doubt that Frege himself, and no doubt that the tradition that followed him, has in mind only declarative sentences, leaving out the interrogatives and imperatives altogether, and if so, then the context principle is bad philosophy. For one thing, to the extent that it is true it is seriously misleading, for the role that words play in interrogatives and imperatives is at least as important as the role they play in declaratives. Thus, the word *six* can obviously be just as meaningful in an interrogative or in an imperative as it is in a declarative. And conversely, if you want a contextual explanation of the meaning of *six*, the declarative contexts are not enough: you had better know as well how it functions in interrogatives and imperatives. Declarative context has no pride of place.

You may respond that once you know all about *six* as it functions in declaratives, then what it comes to in the context of interrogatives and imperatives is determined and therefore secondary. The point is doubly wrong. In the first place, it is a cheap philosophical shot, for symmetrically, if I know all there is to know about *six* as it functions in imperatives, or in interrogatives, then it is to an equal extent determined what *six* comes to in declaratives. If for instance I know everything that anyone can *ask* using *six*, then I know everything that anyone can *say* using *six*. And in the second place, some words, and *six* is one of them, play distinctive roles in interrogatives, as in

*Which six speech acts are most important?*

Here the *six* is arguably part of the interrogative form rather than part of a declarative matrix suggesting possible answers, as it might be in

*Which speech acts require the presence of six persons?*

For a second thing, there are certain words or modes of combination whose significance is principally to be gathered from their roles in interrogatives, say the question words themselves. Take *what* as in

*What is an illocutionary force?*