

Lecture 1. Minds that speak decide about how to judge and what to think P.Pettit

1. Agency

Let an agent be a system that reliably acts to realize certain effects—its purposes—according to reliably generated representations of its environment—at least ‘normally’. The sunflower acts for a purpose in tracking the sun but is not yet an agent in this sense. Agency emerges when a system pursues such a purpose in varying contexts (e.g. bird, robot), and has to register the relevant features of any context and adjust its action accordingly. The registering-adjusting state it thereby enters is a representation of the environment. Most agents pursue many different purposes, fixed or variable, according to representations based on many inputs, engaging many features, over many domains.

When an agent acts reliably for a purpose, according to reliably formed representations, it intendedly realizes that purpose (and intentionally realizes any effects that it foresees). But it may never act in that way in order to shape its own purposes or representations: say, to form a representation (e.g., as to whether p or not p) that it needs to make a choice. It may update its representations in a wholly sub-personal way, unlike Rodin’s *Le Penseur*.

2. Speech

Suppose an agent produces a sound (or..), S, such that a given audience responds as follows: they act as if p. Let us say, then, that S indicates for them that p (McDowell). Vervet example. S may be produced non-intentionally and the indicator relationship be natural or conventional. Suppose the agent registers the indicator role of S and produces S intendedly, acting with the purpose/desire of getting an audience to respond as if it is the case that p. If the audience registers that this is so, it will assume a double purpose in the speaker: a primary intention: to get them to act as if p, i.e. to form the representation/belief that p; & a secondary intention: to get them to do this as a result of registering the primary intention. Communication materializes insofar as they are aware in common that all this holds (Grice).

Let basic speech be the communicative exchange of purportedly informative indicators—perhaps, we know not how, in a compositionally shaped, pragmatically sensitive form. Any speech will raise an issue as to whether the speaker is truthful and competent/careful. Mutually reliant creatures like us will generally seek to be truthful and careful, whether for tit-for-tat, reputational, reasons or, as a default, out of a suitably evolved disposition. If I am to be able to rely on you, or get you to rely on me, I must generally prove reliable myself; otherwise you will have reason later to be pessimistic, even punitive.

3. Speech and agency

The thesis here is that the advent of speech must have a transformative impact on agency, and in order to explore that thesis, we conduct a thought-experiment/construct a genealogy. Imagine agents otherwise similar to us, who operate without speech, like higher primates; and suppose that by whatever miracle, they come to speak. How will speech affect them?

Let the speech be basic, and involve just communication about the external environment that benefits each members of the community by expanding their informational base. I tell you where the fish are running, you tell me where the fruit is ripening, so that while we each have to pay the cost of giving up our own information, still we benefit overall. The advent of such speech need not presuppose a psychological transformation in the parties, but, so the argument goes, it would inevitably catalyze such a transformation. To begin...

4. Judgment and belief (and desire)

- i) Imagine I *judge* that p: I say *sincerely* and *carefully* that p (or just say it 'in my heart'). If my spoken judgment is to enable you to learn about the environment, as I represent it to be, then I must *generally* believe what I judge—be reliably disposed to act (for my goals) as if p.
- ii) It will be manifest that this sort of judgment-belief congruence (however conceived) holds; if it did not manifestly hold, why would anyone trust the words of another? Moore's paradox. Thus, if I judge that p, it will manifestly be the case that I believe that p—generally (casino e.g.). By judging that p, I will clearly form or confirm the belief; I will (~)ensure that I believe that p. (If I form a belief, it will be a consequence of the judgment but may not be a causal one. Both may be causal consequences of my carefully attending to the data in advance of judgment. Or the belief may be a 'backward' consequence, as motor-cortical activity is of a hand motion)
- iii) Suppose I desire/decide/intend to judge whether or not p, data permitting, and I succeed. Foreseeing that by intendedly judging whether p I will ensure the presence of a matched belief, I will intentionally/knowingly ensure (form or confirm) a belief as to whether p.
- iv) But when I want to judge on an issue, I will want to have a matched belief—usually (see 5). Foreseeing *and* desiring that by judging whether p I will ensure the presence of such a belief, I can make the judgment in order to ensure the belief; I can intend both, data permitting.
- v) So, I can decide about what to believe on p-like issues (but not decide to believe, say, that p.) And if I can decide about what to believe on such issues, perhaps I can also do it with desires. Basic desires will generate different instrumental desires as I decide about what to believe. And if basic desires : desiderata :: beliefs : data, then making a judgment about desiderata may mean determining not just what to believe about them but what consequently to desire.

5. Judgment and credence

But the beliefs ensured by judgment are scalar credences according to many decision theories, while judgments are on-off, stabilizing as on-off opinions; 'belief' ambiguously covers both. What ensures harmony between them, assuming this difference? How to 'binarize' credences?

When I make a judgment that p, I need not be certain that p/ have a credence ~1 in it; I need only be certain enough, given the perceived *stakes*, to be ready to act as if p. I will be ready to act as if p (and so as if I were certain that p, or had a credence ~1 in 'p'), so long as not much is at stake (for me or you): non-p scenarios are unlikely or unworrying.

What normally holds when I judge that p, then, is that I have any in a range of (<1) credences that, given the stakes, rationalizes what a credence of ~1 would rationalize on its own. So, even if beliefs *in rebus* (credences) are scalar, their counterparts *in verbis* (opinions) may be on-off; they will consist in stakes-bound equivalence classes of credences.

But if credences have behavioral priority, still judgments have a crucial role in our lives. They enable us, as minds that speak, to ensure we have credences that we may need. Data permitting, I can 'make up my mind' on any issue, not just have it made up for me. Plus...

Judgments *tune* us to fine-grained distinctions, enabling us to form quite novel credences, tho' they may also mistune and mislead, as in Burgean examples of misunderstood words. They enable us to *mimic* credence, as in precaution, hope, and trust; in these cases we freeze judgments for practical reasons—but, ironically, may raise the chance of their being true. They enable speakers to *mask* credence in deception—and self-deception and self-ignorance. Hobbes: 'By speech man is not made better but only given greater possibilities'.