

Lecture 6. Minds that speak assume responsibility for what they do

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When I hold you responsible for X-ing, I assume that you share relevant judgments of value, and can conform: if you fail, I say *you could have done otherwise*, in a 'trans-modal' sense.

First, then, I ascribe the capacity to make judgments of value of a kind we share, and if I criticize you, I assume you will understand that I am charging you with a failure.

Second, I ascribe the capacity to control for acting as your value judgments require; so that a failure is down to you: it occurred because of how you exercised your *freewill*.

If you acquiesce in those ascriptions, then you *assume responsibility*: you make no excuse.

1. The capacity to make value judgments

A value-judgment, say that it is desirable to X,

1. involves a presumptively well-grounded recommendation or prescription to do X;
2. is liable to clash with desire, so that altho' you judge X desirable, you may not desire it;
3. has priority over desire insofar as it would count as a failure to act on a clashing desire.

Is there any reason why minds that speak should come to master value concepts/judgments? Would speaking enable them to develop an evaluative perspective on themselves and others? Yes, to the extent that they avow various desires, and renounce misleading-mind excuses.

Suppose you avow a desire for X-ing, given its desiderata, and invite others to rely on you. There is a manifest possibility that you may not be moved by that desire at a relevant time; this, because of impulses or the like that disrupt you without changing your mind. If you do not act on the avowed desire, then you fail as a commissive agent; you fail to act despite the fact that the desiderata are unaltered, and you do not change your mind.

This possibility gives the avowal of a desire the profile of a judgment of desirability. The avowal will approximate the role of such a judgment, satisfying conditions 1-3, and this being manifest, it ought to give you access to concepts and judgments of desirability. You may make such avowals or judgments actively or virtually; in the latter case, manifestly, a) the desiderata lead others to ascribe the desire; b) you can disavow it; c) you don't.

You may avow a desire in one identity, however, but not in others; this contrasts with belief. You will have different concerns when you think as an individual, a friend or a group member; or from a god's-eye viewpoint; or out of a wish to be able to resist any other's complaints... And so, you may make different, relatively uni- or multi-lateral judgments of desirability.

2. The capacity to control for enacting value judgments

The form of the argument for this capacity in minds that speak goes as follows; inevitably, i). they will be subject to shared, routine norms and judge conformity generally desirable; ii). they will virtually pledge to conform to such norms, and so to enact the value judgments; iii). they must be able, absent un-foreclosed excuse, to control for fulfilling such a pledge. C: they must be able to control for enacting shared, routine value judgments

i). They will be subject to shared, routine norms and judge conformity generally desirable.

Norms like truth-telling, fidelity, non-violence, non-theft will appear in every (*sub-*)society: people must conform reliably if they are to be able to rely or secure reliance with others. These norms will be routine (feasible) and shared: matters of manifest, mutual expectation. Absent rejection, people will each virtually avow a desire generally to conform; presumptively, their silence conveys an acquiescence in being taken to have made up their minds in favor.

So, by section 1, they will each judge general conformity to be (multilaterally) *desirable*. This judgment is likely, like the avowal of the desire, to be manifest to all in the (sub-) group.

ii). They will virtually pledge to conform to such norms, and so to enact the value judgments. Each will be expected for reliance reasons to conform to the norms/enact the value judgments. This expectation will be manifest among members of the group or sub-group involved. Thus, anyone's silence will manifestly convey that they acquiesce in that expectation: that is, in being taken to have made up their mind to act as the norms and values require. They could have said 'Nay', and didn't; they pledged in a virtual manner to act in that way.

But commitment must be voluntary: i.e., not chosen from among (apparent) alternatives that were comparatively so much worse that anyone might be excused for avoiding them. Would the silence of our protagonists have been voluntary rather than forced? Yes, assuming that the relevant sub-group, if not the full group, is relatively un-dominating. (The argument requires only that all or many individuals belong to some sub-groups such that within those networks their silence can speak for them voluntarily.)

iii). They must be able, absent un-foreclosed excuse, to control for fulfilling such a pledge You will be disposed to pledge to X only if X-ing and/or pledging to X has attractive features; pledging to X will have the crucial attractor of being a way to prove yourself reliable. But this clearly means that we others have a manifest means of getting you to X; we can cite desiderata that made X-ing or pledging attractive: crucially, that otherwise you are unfaithful. Aware that we can activate that responsiveness, we can *exhort* you: 'You (should) *can* X'.

In such exhortation, we communicate a belief that you are fit to be exhorted/exhortable: that you are in control in the sense of being responsive to the desiderative features. The hortative stance is one in which you show up in a distinctive, second-personal way, and the belief it embodies is vindicated insofar as you do reliably prove yourself responsive.

What if you fail, not exercising the capacity ascribed hortatively in 'You *can* X'? We might despair of you, concluding that despite lacking excuse, you could not have X-ed. More likely, we will not give up on you in that way; we will postulate a contingent failure. Viewing you hortatively, then, we will say 'You *could* have done otherwise'; and we may do this, of course, even if no one exhorted you *ex ante*—not even yourself.

This *could* ascribes a capacity, like the hortative *can*, that is not merely modal. Endorsing the hortative stance *ex post* means viewing you with resentment or indignation. The proactive attitude of *ex ante* exhortation is matched by Strawson's reactive attitudes.

Conclusion.

Minds that speak will share some value judgments and virtually pledge to enact them. And so, as with any pledge, they will take one another generally to control for keeping it: to have a trans-modal capacity, ascribed hortatively, akin to *freewill* in a common sense. Libertarians think this capacity explains why we can exhort you *ex ante*, resent you *ex post*. The reverse is true: it is our seeing you as suited for exhortation, resentment, etc that explains why we ascribe the trans-modal capacity; having such freewill is just being exhortable.

Upshot Minds that speak will have the two capacities, related to value judgment and freewill, that enable them to ascribe responsibility to one another, and assume it themselves.