**ON CHANGING YOUR MIND**

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I

If you have been schooled in contemporary Anglophone philosophy, I suspect that you may have unwittingly glossed the second-personal possessive pronoun in the title of this paper (‘On changing *your* mind’) as either a first-personal possessive pronoun (‘On changing *my* mind’) or an impersonal one (‘On changing *one’s* mind’). This is because recent Anglophone philosophical discussion of normative aspects of opinion-change typically has a strong individualistic flavor, tending to focus on how a person ought to revise their own beliefs in light of alterations in their epistemic context. If other people feature in such discussions, such as much-discussed cases involving peer disagreement, they tend to feature as incidental providers of input to those alterations.

This individualistic flavor extends even to those philosophical discussions that do take an overt interest in the interpersonal exchange of reasons, such as those that focus – as we shall here - on cases where one agent A performs a speech act addressed towards another agent B with the intention of changing B’s mind regarding a matter on which A thinks B is in error. A tacit assumption in some recent discussions of this speech act is to view A’s performance as an instance of ‘informing’ B of reasons for her error, by which I mean the act of placing information before another in a manner that increases the likelihood that the other becomes aware of that information and alter her opinion in light of this. When viewed as an instance of informing, the interpersonal exchange of reasons involves two separate activities performed in turn by different interlocutors: one party places the information for the consumption of another party, who in turn rationally evaluates its epistemic import. On this view, the interpersonal exchange of reasons is not conceived as a joint interaction; it is not something that both parties do together.

A striking aspect of the view just gestured at, of changing another’s mind as informing them of reasons for so doing, is the limited role it accords to the specifically linguistic dimension of the interaction. Informing - as described above - could just as well take the form of one party making available evidence, say a photograph, designed to lead another to a given conclusion. A photograph is evidence for something whether or not anyone presents it as such and does so independent of the attitudes of the producer of that photograph to that photograph. In contrast, a central feature of linguistic activity is that it is expressive, meaning here that the attitudes held by the performer of a speech act to that performance are essential to it being the kind of performance it is.[[1]](#footnote-1) In construing the act of changing another’s mind as informing them of reasons, this view removes the sense that the interpersonal exchange of reasons essentially involves distinctively expressive linguistic activity.

Two features of the individualist flavor of contemporary discussions of interpersonal exchange of reasons have been highlighted: that it views such an exchange as involving two separate activities performed in turn by different interlocutors, and that it accords no special place to expressive linguistic activity. These two features may be connected, and it is by taking seriously the distinctive character of expressive linguistic activity that one is able to elaborate an alternative to viewing the exchange as involving two separate activities. At least, that is the claim I hope to motivate in this essay.

II

Before turning to a defense of this claim in the main body of the essay, it will help to have a more detailed example of the individualist flavor of recent philosophical discussions of interpersonal exchange of reasons in view. One revealing case is Menachem Fisch and Yitzhak Benbaji’s recent book ‘The View from Within’.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This may come as a surprise, especially given Fisch and Benbaji’s overt emphasis throughout the book on the central role played by interpersonal activities in rational belief revision. The central activity described in the book is the speech act of criticizing, by which they mean “fashioning an argument” that “makes a case for there being a problem” that falls “within the domain of [another’s] responsibility”, and presenting the argument to this other as “a reasoned call aimed at motivating its addressees to acknowledge and respond to the problems it purports to expose” [202-205]. Indeed, in their description of the speech act, Fisch and Benbaji even note that criticizing “amounts to more than an attempt to stimulate someone to attend to a problem by merely pointing to it”, since this would miss out on the “inherent and defining element of rebuke” that introduces a normative dimension to the speech act [221]. Thus, through an extended focus on the role of the speech act of criticizing in belief revision, and especially through their thick conception of its interpersonal normative dimensions, The View from Within appears to proffer a rich account of the activity of changing another’s mind that takes seriously the deliberative interplay between the respective agents involved.

And yet, despite their intense focus on the dynamics of interpersonal deliberation in attempting to change the mind of another, Fisch & Benbaji are explicit that the “site of rational normative change is the arena of intrapersonal deliberation: the ultimate discourse of rationality is that of the self” [278]. As they stress:

“the important point is that to place the onus on criticisms as we do is to ultimately locate the transformative drama of rational deliberation in the realm of intrapersonal rather than interpersonal discourse. Indispensable as the public participation in the game of giving and asking for reasons is to rationality, it is in the process of self-scrutinizing that rationality proper resides. [227].

I can attempt to change your mind on a matter by rebuking you through argument for holding a given position. Presentation of the argument ends the interpersonal dimension of the interaction. Once my act of criticizing is complete and the argument (and rebuke) is presented, the drama transfers from interpersonal to intrapersonal realm, a person’s ‘I-part’, where rational deliberation concerning how best to change one’s own mind in light of the criticism presented takes place. “The outward critical scrutiny of one another’s reasoning will have its rational transformative effect only when accompanied by a parallel, resonating self-scrutinizing of one’s commitments and entitlements” [26].

Fisch and Benbaji’s account of the speech act of criticizing does not reduce the act to the *mere* informing another of alternative reasons via the presentation of argument. By stressing the performative dimension of the act, and especially by invoking the element of rebuke, it is clear that there are reasons for criticizing another even if the one criticizing knew that both parties were in the same epistemic state regarding the reasons in favor of the claim. More generally, by highlighting the addressive dimension of the act of criticizing, it is clear that the activity in question does not provide an argument designed to show what it is that any reasonable person would be justified in believing, but attempts to show why the addressed person should alter their mental state on this occasion in that particular manner.[[3]](#footnote-3) Nevertheless, even if the act is not one of *mere* informing, the division between interpersonal and intrapersonal deliberative dimensions ensures that it has the basic structure of informing nonetheless. The interpersonal exchange functions as a prelude for the main intrapersonal act, an act that can only be performed by the one criticized alone.

This interaction between interpersonal and intrapersonal deliberation is a core feature of the solution to the puzzle that the book sets out to solve, that of accounting for the possibility of rational normative revision. The puzzle stems from the fact that it is hard to make sense of the very possibility of subjecting ones deepest held normative commitments to rational scrutiny, given that it is impossible to argue normatively against the very norms to which one is committed. The solution, claim Fisch and Benbaji, is to recognize that intrapersonal normative self-criticism must operate in an interpersonal environment of trusted normative criticism. Whilst hard-hitting normative criticism put forward by a trusted other cannot convince or persuade via the peculiar force of the better reason, it can generate ambivalence in the one criticized. This “moment of inner discordance fraught with tortured dithering and painful indecision” [278] has the power to destabilize even one’s deeply-held normative commitments in a manner that is sufficient to motivate subsequent rational reconsideration of those commitments. Thus, whilst the ultimate arena of rational deliberation is the intrapersonal, this must take place in the interpersonal context of critical dialogue with trusted others so as to ensure that transformative normative self-criticism remains a constant possibility.

What is the connection between the role played by trusted others in motivating transformation by generating ambivalence and the speech act of criticizing described earlier? Through the structure of their presentation, Fisch and Benbaji appear to treat the latter as the primary way of achieving the former. This, however, seems implausible. If criticism by trusted others has “little to do with the logical force of its argument” [249], it is hard to understand why this must take the form of the presentation by the critic of an argument. Ambivalence that leads to the splitting of our I-part, and thus subjecting aspects of itself to self-scrutiny, can be brought about in many ways – e.g. the raised eyebrow of a therapist, the silence of a confidant, an inner experience of irony[[4]](#footnote-4) – none of which take the form of the interpersonal presentation of a reasoned argument.

The point here is not just that the act of criticizing seems not necessary for generating the kind of ambivalence needed to begin the intrapersonal transformative drama of normative revision, it does not even seem well suited to the task. According to Fisch and Benbaji:

“Unwittingly or not, all keen honest, direct and reasonably articulated normative criticism challenges its addressees with an explicit *argument* that of itself, in principle (if the norms in question are heartfelt), has no hope of being convincing, but which comes accompanied by a picture implied by its premises of (the relevant part of) the addressees I-part, which though true to some extent, differs significantly from his own” (258-259). “Its transformative power lies not in the persuasiveness of its reasoning but in the disturbing *picture* it paints of us…[250; italics in original].

All the work involved in generating ambivalence, then, is achieved by the trusted critic’s presentation of an alternative and disturbing picture of the relevant part of the I-self, a picture that is somehow attached via implication to the premises of the critic’s argument. I am deeply sympathetic to the idea that pictures of this kind can and do play a critical role in guiding our deliberations, and thus to the contention that the presentation of alternative pictures may engender ambivalence leading to profound changes in deep-seated normative commitments. However, there remain other, and far richer, ways of presenting such pictures to others than as an accompaniment to an explicitly formulated critical argument.

An illustrative example. Perhaps the most celebrated instance of a pervasive transformation of self-conception occasioned by the speech of a trusted normative critic in the Western philosophical tradition involves an encounter with an oracle. Here is an insightful, recent description of the inner dynamics of such an encounter by Jonathan Lear:

“An oracle begins with an outside source telling a person who he is in terms he at first finds alien and enigmatic. Then there is an unsettling process of familiarization: the person comes to understand what the oracle means as he comes to recognize that he is its embodiment. And, of course, the recognition of the meaning of the oracle represents more than an increase in propositional knowledge -- e.g. *that* I am the one who murdered his father and married his mother. It is the occasion for a more or less massive disruption of my sense of who I am; and a disorientation in a world that, until now, had been familiar.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Whilst not a friend, the oracle is indeed a trusted critic par excellence. The movement described, from encounter with an unsettling picture of oneself presented by another to familiarization with that picture leading to eventual change, has firm echoes with the description of the achievement of normative self-criticism in Fisch & Benbaji. There are, however, two important differences. First, a key to the oracle’s power and success is the ambiguity of their pronouncement, leaving the addressee the difficult hermeneutic task of trying to make best sense of the claim made. In contrast, Fisch and Benbaji’s trusted critique makes explicit and patently unambiguous claims, the working through of which will undoubtedly interfere with any engagement with the ambivalating picture thereby implied. Second, at least in the celebrated case of Socrates, the result of the ambivalence generated by the encounter involves an overt embrace of the realm of interpersonal dialogue in an attempt to work through the ambivalence, and this is not portrayed as a mere prelude to a subsequent process of inward scrutiny.

If the key to normative self-criticism is an encounter with a disconcerting picture of oneself, and especially if one concedes that there are other ways of presenting such a picture than as an implication of an explicit argument made by a trusted critic, then there is room to question whether such a critical encounter needs to take place through discursive means. Fisch and Benbaji themselves appear to raise this question, by repeatedly pointing to an analogy between the disorienting response to such criticism and the disorienting response to watching or listening to ourselves perform via some form of trusted playback device [248]. In both cases, it is claimed, a discrepancy between one’s self image and the image of oneself presented by a source deemed reliable (either a playback device or a critic) leads to disorientation and self-estrangement, one that potentially has the power to self-correct – i.e. to better achieve one’s goals (in the case of a playback device) or to ‘put ourselves right’ (in the case of the critic) [251]. One disanalogy between the two is that the output of a playback device has the epistemic standing of what above was called ‘evidence’, in that – unlike the distinctive expressive character of the speech act of criticizing - the attitude of the performer plays no essential role in it having the kind of epistemic standing it has. Arguably, it is this feature of the output of the playback device that is largely responsible for its potentially disorienting effect, for it presents the agent with an outsider view of her own performances that are very different from the agential perspective through which one typically knows them.[[6]](#footnote-6) Thus, by repeatedly pushing the analogy with a playback device, Fisch and Benbaji themselves motivate the suggestion that we should not treat the linguistic expressive dimension of the speech act of criticism as central to the process of normative self-criticism.

This presentation of Fisch and Benbaji’s understanding of the speech act of criticizing is intended as an illustration of the individualist flavor of recent philosophical discussion of the interpersonal dynamics involved in ‘changing your mind’. Despite their focus on the role played by criticizing in changing the mind of another, they tacitly adhere to a picture of ‘giving and asking for reasons’ as separate from, and as a prelude to, the main act, viz. the intrapersonal activity of self-scrutiny. This, of course, is not to criticize Fisch and Benbaji per se, for it remains to be seen whether such a tacit individualistic orientation is mistaken.

My goal here is less ambitious than proving the individualist orientation to changing another’s mind to be mistaken. Given the relative invisibility of an alternative to such an orientation (even to theorists – such as Fisch and Benbaji - who explicitly concentrate on the interpersonal dynamics of belief revision), my aim here is to use reflections on the character of expressive linguistic activity in order to place such an alternative on the table of available options. Following the lead of Fisch and Benbaji, the discussion to follow also focuses on the speech act of criticizing. In the course of the discussion, I distinguish between an illocutionary and perlocutionary interpretation of the speech act, and sketch what I take to be an attractive - and genuinely social - understanding of both.

III

The act of informing, as I have described it, is an exchange involving two separate activities performed in turn by different interlocutors, with one performance provoking the subsequent performance in the successful case. If one views the speech act of criticizing from an instrumental point of view, from the point of view of what a successful criticizer intends to achieve by so performing, it is hard to view criticizing as having anything but this core structure of informing, in addition to any additional features it may have. In the successful case, the criticizer intends to change the mind of the one criticized, and the one criticized changes her mind in response. Both intending and changing are individual acts, in the sense that neither necessarily implicates the activity of anyone else in their performance. To bring a non-individualist alternative into view, it is thus crucial to cease thinking about the activity of criticizing in these instrumental terms, and to concentrate on the structure of the transaction between the two participants.

To capture the structure of the transaction, I propose to adapt an idea of Jennifer Hornsby, put forward in the course of her attempt to make sense of Austin’s celebrated distinction between what is done *in* uttering some words (the ‘*il*locutionary’) and what is done *by* uttering them (the ‘*per*locutionary’). According to Hornsby:

The line between illocutionary and perlocutionary comes between those acts on the one hand which need invoke only reciprocity to have their proper consequences, and those acts on the other hand which invoke either more than reciprocity or something quite else.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Reciprocity is a condition that obtains between a given Speaker (viz. one who performs a speech act) and a given targeted Hearer (viz. the one to whom that speech act is addressed) when the Hearer recognizes the Speaker’s act as the kind of speech act it is intended by the Speaker to be. Hornsby’s suggestion is that illocutionary acts are those for which it is possible that nothing more needs to be done by the Speaker to successfully perform the act once the reciprocity condition obtains.

As an example, consider the all-too-familiar finale of many a US-based TV drama in which an officer slaps handcuffs on the accused suspect and “Mirandizes” them. Through uttering the sentence: ‘You have the right to remain silent…”, the officer has performed a locutionary act – crudely, the production of a sequence of sounds that are significant in the sense that they can be said to say something meaningful in a given language. Further, through the performance of such a locutionary act, the officer has also performed other kinds of speech acts as well. For example, through uttering the sentence, she could also be said to perform both the acts of warning the suspect and alarming him as well. Warning is an example of an *il*locutionary act: *in* making the utterance, the officer warns the suspect of the dangers of speaking under these circumstances. Alarming is an example of a *per*locutionary act: *by* making the utterance, the officer also makes the accused have an anxious or fearful perception of the situation. According to Hornsby’s suggestion, all that is needed for the act of warning to have been successful (and thus for the suspect to have been warned) is the suspect’s recognition of the officer’s intention to warn him. In contrast, the suspect’s recognition of officer’s intention to alarm him does not suffice for the act of alarming to have been successful.

Hornsby’s suggestion needs to be formulated with care, given that she concedes both that reciprocity is not necessary for performing an illocutionary act (e.g. cases in which I can be said to have warned you even though you have not recognized this intention) and that there can be some perlocutionary acts for which the obtaining of reciprocity suffices for successful performance (e.g. cases in which your recognition that I intend to alarm you alone is enough for my intention to alarm you to be successful). As I understand it, her suggestion is that we should treat the obtaining of reciprocity as a condition internal to the very idea of illocutionary acts, such that if we did not have a conception of acts with such an internal condition, we could not have the idea of illocutionary acts at all.[[8]](#footnote-8) Cases where this condition obtains are thus explanatorily basic, such that we could not make sense of illocutionary activity in any instance if we could not make sense of the possibility of there being acts of that do satisfy this condition. Cases involving illocutionary acts where the reciprocity condition does not obtain are explanatorily non-basic and can only be made sense of against the background of cases where the condition obtains. In contrast, obtaining reciprocity is not a condition internal to the very idea of perlocutionary acts, such that perlocutionary cases where reciprocity alone suffices are only accidental to the act as a perlocutionary act.

There are various ways to understand Hornsby’s idea, but the one I favor is to view illocutionary acts as self-conscious interpersonal transactions.[[9]](#footnote-9) If reciprocity between speaker and hearer is a condition internal to the very idea of illocutionary acts, then illocutionary activity involves performances by (at least) two people: the act is addressed by one person to another who is called upon to recognize the act in return. Further, an illocutionary act has a structure that serves to place those persons in a particular relation to one another: the act is done from one (agent) towards the other (patient), and it is precisely this structure that is recognized by both parties through their performances. In our example, even if the accused occupies the patient role in such a transactional structure, she is still active - her recognition of the warning is a practical activity in which she actively recognizes her patient status in the transaction. Further still, the two performances of address and response have the unity of being a single act, such that the act itself can be described in two ways, one from the perspective of the agent (e.g. the officer is warning the accused) and one from the perspective of the patient (e.g. the accused is being warned by the officer). In much the same ways as A selling something to B and B buying something from A are two different ways of characterizing one transaction and not a conjunction of two independent acts, so too A addressing B and B being addressed by A are two different ways of characterizing one interpersonal transaction and not a conjunction of two independent acts.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The idea that two performances have the unity of a single act in the way just described is what I intend to capture by the term ‘interpersonal transaction’. What does it mean to characterize such interpersonal transactions as ‘self-conscious’?

In the case of actions that can be performed by one individual, such as the act of typing, we indicate the self-conscious character of such acts by noting that the actor thinks of *herself* as the act’s agent. The term *herself* has been italicised to highlight the fact that a self-conscious act is not merely one in which the agent thinks of herself as the person performing the act but that she thinks of herself in a distinctive first-personal manner.[[11]](#footnote-11) Suppose a colleague thinks that she is typing. The first-personal manner comes out in that she is thinking about the object (the typer) in such a way that it is not accidental that the ‘she’ in ‘she thinks’ and the ‘she’ in ‘she is typing’ refer to the same person. It is possible to imagine a strange scenario in which my colleague, perhaps as the result of some cognitive impairment, is alienated from her act of typing, such that she thinks that someone (perhaps picked out demonstratively as ‘that person’) is typing without thinking that she *herself* is that person. In this alienated scenario, when my colleague thinks that that person is typing, it is not in virtue of this manner of thinking about the hailer that the one thinking and the one typing are identical, even if she is that person. This alienated scenario is indeed strange; only in rare circumstances can my colleague be said to know by observation that she is typing. More typically, one has knowledge of one’s own act of typing by acting and not by observing, and this distinctive way of knowing grounds first-personal reference. In the typical (non-alienated) scenario, my colleague thinks that she *herself* is typing.

In the case of interpersonal transactions, such as the activity of warning/being warned, the self-conscious character is best indicated by using a pairing of first-person and second-person singular terms – I and You.[[12]](#footnote-12) In our example, the illocutionary act requires implicit recognition by the officer that she *herself* is warning the accused *herself* (a judgment that she could make explicit by saying ‘I *myself* am warning you *yourself*’) and implicit recognition by the accused that he *himself* is being warned by the officer *herself* (a judgment that she could make explicit by saying ‘I *myself* am being warned by you *yourself*’). It is not just that both parties are aware of another person as well as themselves, but that they act towards that other person and thus each think of *themselves* in relation to that other person. In acting towards one another, both the one warning and the one warned think of themselves *and* each other as standing in this relationship: ‘I *myself* am warning/being warned by you *yourself’*.

According to Hornsby’s suggestion, reciprocity between speaker and hearer is a condition internal to the very idea of illocutionary acts. On the understanding proffered here, what explains her suggestion is the fact that illocutionary acts are self-conscious interpersonal transactions, in which self-conscious awareness of the act’s structure by both agent and patient is part of the very idea of the act itself.

Let us apply these reflections to the speech act of criticizing discussed in the preceding section. Fisch and Benbaji’s contend that the act of criticizing is what JL Austin called a ‘performative utterance’ [205], presumably intending to invoke the Austinian distinction between constative and performative utterances.[[13]](#footnote-13) Austin, however, (in)famously replaces (or embellishes or develops) this binary performative / constative distinction with a ternary distinction between locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary speech-acts, thereby raising the question of the placement of criticizing within this ternary distinction. Taxonomy in these kinds of matters is a notoriously vexed matter, but speech act theorists typically include criticizing (conceived in a similar vein to the act described by Fisch and Benbaji) amongst their examples of illocutionary activity, as something done *with* words.[[14]](#footnote-14)

If criticizing is taken to be an illocutionary activity, the understanding of Hornsby’s idea of reciprocity sketched above extends to the act of criticizing too. That is, criticizing is best viewed as a self-conscious interpersonal transaction between the one criticizing and the one criticized, with both parties thinking of themselves and each other as standing in this relationship: ‘I *myself* am criticizing / being criticized by you *yourself*’. In the central case, therefore, all that is needed for my act of criticizing to have been successful (and thus for you to have been criticized) is your reciprocal recognition of my intention to criticize you. It is true that the act of intending to criticize and the act of judging that one has been criticized are individual acts, in the sense that action by another individual is not implicated by the very idea of these acts. But one should not thereby conclude that the activity of criticizing involves two such individual acts linked by cause and effect, for this is to ignore the self-conscious interpersonal structure of the transaction between the two participants. In the successful case, your implicit self-conscious awareness of the transactional structure may, together with other reasons, ground your explicit practical judgment (that you *yourself* have been criticized by me *myself*), and the ground provided by participation in the transactional structure is distinctive since it is internal to the relationship forged by our interpersonal transaction.

The overall aim of this brief characterization of illocutionary acts, including the speech act of criticizing, is to provide an alternative to thinking about changing the mind of another as involving two separate activities performed in turn by different interlocutors. The structure of illocutionary acts outlined, as self-conscious interpersonal transactions, provides that alternative, since it is claimed that the two performances of address and response have the unity of being a single act describable from two different perspectives.

IV

Let us consider a friendly objection to the thrust of the discussion thus far. The objection is friendly in that it accepts the account described in the preceding section, i.e. of illocutionary activity as having the structure of self-conscious interpersonal transactions. The objection concerns its relevance. Our topic is supposed to be that of ‘changing your mind’, and yet I may successfully perform the act of criticizing you (as described above) without changing your mind. If so, the relevant speech act seems not to be that of criticizing but something more like the speech act of convincing. Convincing, however, is best conceived as a perlocutionary, and not an illocutionary, act: your recognition of my intent to convince you does not suffice for the act to have been successful (in explanatorily central cases). If so, runs the objection, the discussion of illocutionary acts in the previous section may well be correct but remains largely beside the point. Moreover, unlike illocutions, perlocutions do appear to involve two different activities, and this is precisely why the reciprocity condition fails to hold. To take our earlier example, a successful act of alarming requires the suspect to feel alarmed in response, and this surely is something that is not best treated as exemplifying ‘one act of thinking; an act of thinking for two’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Thus, an implication of the objection is that our preceding discussion fails to offer a genuinely social alternative to an understanding of changing another’s mind.

The remainder of this section is an extended attempt to respond to this objection, by focusing on the act that the friendly critic highlights as central: the speech act of convincing. To emphasize at the outset, our concern is limited to arriving at an understanding of the act of convincing as it features in the objection, and not to an understanding of the broader category of the perlocutionary per se. At best, the discussion of convincing afforded here should be treated as a partial characterization of some part of the perlocutionary domain; it should not be treated as an attempted characterization of the domain as a whole.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Political theorists distinguish between three forms of social influence over others: influence by means of rational persuasion, by means of authority and by means of coercion.[[17]](#footnote-17) Although their focus is on influence over practice, the same tripartite division seems capable of extension to include influence over beliefs as well.[[18]](#footnote-18) Our interest here is on the speech act of convincing as it is positioned within the broad framework of influence by means of rational persuasion. How should we understand this positioning?

A brief but instructive attempt to answer this question is made by Bryan Garsten, in the course of an extended defense of the orator’s craft:

An orator does not coerce; he merely puts words into the air. In the brief moments of conscious and unconscious reflection that occur when we listen to a sales pitch or a campaign speech, an active process of evaluation and assimilation occurs in our mind. We cannot make use of the energy of food simply by coming into contact with it; our bodies must actively digest it. An analogous process of digestion must occur before our mind internalizes the suggestions of any given speaker. Unlike actual digestion, however, mental digestion is a process over which we can exercise some control. … When someone sits back and decides, “All right, you have persuaded me”, he is not merely describing something that has happened to him. In spite of the grammar, he is describing something he has done.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Garsten here is interested, inter alia, in the difference between influence by means of rational persuasion and influence by means of coercion. His suggestion is that, unlike rational persuasion, coercion is an attempt to influence the belief of others in a manner that bypasses engagement with their own active processes of reasoned deliberation.[[20]](#footnote-20)

One striking feature of Garsten’s presentation is the analogy drawn between physical and mental digestion, according to which both require an active processing of the material received by the recipient in order for it to be in an appropriate form for full internalization by the recipient. This digestive analogy is striking since it reveals in full what we earlier dubbed the individualist flavor of thinking in this area. First, there is a temporal division in both cases between the act of providing fodder and the act of digesting it. Second, unlike the act of providing the fodder which may be jointly undertaken, the act of digesting is a solitary activity that can only be done by the recipient alone. Third, the act of providing fodder is a kind of hors d’oeuvres for the main course, in the sense that it is the solitary activity of digestion that is of primary functional importance.

Whilst the active-passive distinction may serve to distinguish influence by means of persuasion from influence by means of coercion, it does not help distinguish it from influence by means of authority. This is because both persuasion and authority are attempts at social influence that deliberately engage, as oppose to bypass or overwhelm, the capacity of the one influenced for rational deliberation on the matter.[[21]](#footnote-21) As a result, successful instances of influence by means of authority and persuasion both involve self-conscious activity by the one influenced. In order to distinguish influence by means of rational persuasion from influence by means of authority, we thus need to turn elsewhere.

One plausible suggestion points to the interplay between the normative standing of the performance of the one influencing and of the one influenced. In cases of influence by means of authority, once the authority of the influencer is recognized, the only legitimate form of contestation involves opting out of the authoritative relationship itself. To take a familiar example, once the Private recognizes that the Officer has appropriately commanded a particular performance, she now has a reason to so perform. For her not to so perform does not revise the authoritative standing of the Officer’s command; the command stands and need not alter, although the Private now renders herself insubordinate by not following through.

Things are different in cases of influence by means of rational persuasion, which involves a distinctive beholdeness of the normative standing of the one putting forward a claim to the response of the one to whom the claim is addressed (and vice versa). This beholdeness stems from what many have taken to be the defining characteristic of any exercise of reasoning, viz. a commitment to its remaining open to criticism.[[22]](#footnote-22) If an attempt at social influence is by means of rational persuasion, then this attempt must involve openness to potential challenge, such that the manner in which one puts forward a given claim will display a sensitivity to subsequent responses to such a claim. What is ruled out by this requirement is sheer indifference by the one attempting to influence to reasoned challenges in response. Indifference is sheer when it is rooted in a principled unwillingness to engage with subsequent rejoinders, where the principle itself stems from a conception of the activity in question as not permitting such rejoinders. In a case of sheer indifference, the appropriate response to a challenge is for the one attempting to influence to treat the challenger dismissively as insubordinate. If the normative standing of the one attempting to influence is unaffected despite sheer indifference towards a subsequent rejoinder by one addressed, then the act in question is closer to an attempted influence by means of authority than by means of rational persuasion.

I have just suggested that a defining characteristic of any exercise of reasoning is its openness to criticism, and have also proposed that influence by means of authority does not display such openness. This appears to contradict an earlier claim that influence by means of authority deliberately engages the capacity of the one influenced for rational deliberation on the matter. This appearance of contradiction dissipates upon recognition that influence by means of authority involves reasoned disengagement from such openness to criticism. To see this, consider Joseph Raz’s still dominant service conception of authority, whereby an authority figure operates as a kind of representative of the subject, whose role is to provide a service for the subject in helping them to better conform to reason.[[23]](#footnote-23) Adapting the account from the practical sphere to our case of belief revision, a core idea is that, in a successful exercise of authority, the one attempting to influence belief by means of authority generates reasons for others to believe something preemptively. Preemption here means not just treating someone else’s believing p as a prima facie reason for believing p, but as one that replaces other reasons for believing p.[[24]](#footnote-24) Even at this level of abstraction, we can recognize in Raz’s service conception an understanding of being influenced by authority as a form of reasoned disengagement from such openness to criticism: whilst pre-emption here involves a closure of both sides to ongoing criticism, it is a condition that emerges from a rational understanding by both parties of the authority as a representative. Social influence by means of authority thus does involve engagement with the capacity for rational reflection, the result of which is influence that - unlike influence by means of persuasion - is not characterized by ongoing and continued openness to criticism.

If the act of convincing someone is viewed as an instance of influence by means of rational persuasion, then it is best not conceived in the individualistic terms suggested by Garsten’s digestive analogy. Placing food before someone may anticipate and look forward to a response from that person, but is not open to that response in manner just described. The act of attempting to convince someone is not a matter of placing doxastic fodder in front of them (or ‘merely putting words into the air’), but is better understood as inviting an exchange. I have taken the phrase ‘inviting an exchange’ from a discussion of Stanley Cavell focused on understanding the relationship between illocutionary and a subsection of perlocutionary activity that he terms ‘passionate utterances’. In performing such a perlocution as opposed to an illocution, Cavell remarks, “I am not invoking a procedure but inviting an exchange”.[[25]](#footnote-25)

To invoke a procedure is to call upon an extant convention for successfully performing the activity, one that includes certain people doing certain performances in certain circumstances with specified effects. Whilst there may be some degree of ambiguity in terms of the conventions themselves, and whilst there may be some degree of plausible disagreement concerning whether the conventional procedures have been met on a given occasion, the scope for such ambiguity and disagreement must be relatively limited for the convention to be in effect at all. As a result, neither party need expend much effort or ingenuity in performing and understanding the illocutionary transaction. To invite an exchange, in contrast, requires both parties to ‘get creative’ so as to successfully perform a given act, since there exists no extant convention for successful performance. In our example, ingenuity and nuance is required in figuring out both how to convince another on a given occasion. As Cavell himself notes: “I do not, except in special circumstances, wonder how I might make a promise or a gift, or apologize, or render a verdict. But to persuade you may well take considerable thought.”[[26]](#footnote-26) The same applies to the corresponding act of being persuaded.

One difference between invoking a procedure and inviting an exchange that Cavell highlights concerns the divergent roles played by refusal of the procedure invoked and the exchange invited:

“[R]efusing to recognize a challenge or an offer of marriage or game of charades is the end of the matter; just as, in happy illocutionary acts, accepting the bet or bequest is the end of the matter (and the beginning of another). But in the realm of the perlocutionary, refusal may become part of the performance.”[[27]](#footnote-27)

To use our earlier example of an illocutionary act, provided the Officer acts in the conventionally-specified manner, and this is reciprocally recognized by the Accused, then the act of warning succeeds. Of course, it remains possible for the one warned to recognize the warning but to reject the conventionally-specified effects, but in such a case the rejection takes the form of opting out of the invoked procedure itself and not changing the procedure itself. In contrast, in the case of an invitation to an exchange, rejection of the invitation is itself a positive contribution to shaping the distinctive character of the interpersonal interaction. As Cavell notes, “[y]ou may contest my invitation to exchange, […] , for example, deny that I have that standing with you, … or dismiss the demand for the kind of response I seek, or ask to postpone it, or worse. I may or may not have further means of response.”[[28]](#footnote-28) In this manner, exchanges lack the more clearly temporally cabined structure of illocutionary transaction. The latter begins and ends with the self-conscious interpersonal transaction between agent and patient described above, whilst the former need not begin with a specific locutionary act and, of its very character, it remains open-ended and subject to review.

With this in hand, let us finally return to the friendly criticism with which we began this section. It now appears that our friendly critic is correct to highlight the centrality of convincing in discussing the topic of ‘changing your mind’, and is also correct that such perlocutionary activity does not have the transactional structure characteristic of the illocutionary. This need not, however, mandate a return to an individualist picture of ‘changing your mind’, provided that an alternate social understanding of the speech act of convincing is available. The alternative on offer here involves viewing the act of convincing as inviting an exchange, as opposed to either placing argumentative fodder before another or invoking a mutually recognized conventional procedure. Convincing is thus an instance of social influence by means of rational persuasion, one whose defining characteristic involves a constant openness to potential challenge. In inviting an exchange, I call for a response from you and not a reaction, a response that is itself addressed back to me, inviting me to respond in turn.

V

The ambitions of this essay are relatively modest. Its aim is not to defend a social understanding of the activity of ‘changing your mind’ but to provide a path towards thinking that such an understanding is possible.

The entry-point to this path has been provided by taking seriously the expressive character of linguistic activity through which changing your mind takes place. As noted at the outset, talk of the ‘expressive character’ of linguistic activity points to the essential role played by the attitudes of the performers of speech acts in constituting the performance as the kind of act that it is. Jonathan Lear captures this expressive dimension well in referring to the ability to perform such an act as the ability to ‘pretend’, in an older sense of the term meaning to intentionally put oneself forward, to make a claim.[[29]](#footnote-29) Pretending in this sense is a social activity: it necessarily involves an intentional act of self-presentation by one party directed towards another party, and it is the attitudes of both parties that play an essential role in constituting the performance as the kind of act that it is.

In the essay, we have focused on two such expressive activities: the illocutionary act of criticizing and the perlocutionary act of convincing. Both can be thought of as social acts of pretense, although the manner in which the attitudes of the relevant parties interact so as to constitute the kind of act in question differ. Criticizing and being criticized was portrayed as a self-conscious interpersonal transaction, best thought of as a single act describable from two different perspectives. Convincing and being convinced was portrayed as the offering and accepting an invitation to an exchange, best thought of as an instance of influence by means of rational persuasion in which both parties display a beholdeness to the subsequent response of the other. Despite this difference in structure, the sketch here has suggested that neither pair of criticizing / being criticized nor convincing / being convinced are best thought of as a two independent activities, similar in structure to the pair of feeding / eating.

None of this is to deny that changing your mind can be thought of as an individual act. As the two non-social readings of this phrase indicated at the outset of this essay (‘On changing my/one’s mind’), there is nothing in the very idea of belief revision that implicates the activity of more than one person, and nothing we have sketched here undermines the potential occurrence of the transformative drama of intrapersonal normative revision. Rather, what is at issue here is whether the transformative drama of interpersonal criticism is best construed as a prelude to such an intrapersonal drama, or whether it can constitute a central drama on its own. Fisch and Benbaji take the first of these paths. For them, the ‘game of giving and asking for reasons’ is separate from, and secondary to, the process of self-scrutinizing. In contrast, the sketches of the speech acts of criticizing and convincing provided in the previous sections of this essay is an attempt to at least bring the second of these paths more clearly into view.

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1. Cf. Richard Moran (2005, 2006, 2013). This essay is part of an extended attempt to think through the implications of Moran’s account of the expressive dimension of language use. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Fisch and Benbaji (2011) – to which all page numbers [in square brackets] refer. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Fisch and Benbaji are thus not focused on activities within the shared Rawlsian perspective of ‘public reason’. See Gaus (1996) for a helpful exposition of this perspective. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Cf. Lear (2011) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Lear (2011: 15-16). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A much-discussed Sartrean theme – e.g. his (1956:261–262). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Hornsby (1994:195) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I owe this formulation to a conversation with Adrian Haddock. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. I develop this account more fully in Wanderer (forthcoming). It is indebted to Rödl (2007: Chapter 6). For a similar account, see Lauer (forthcoming). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Compare: Dewey (2008, 8: 140). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. In what follows, I am drawing primarily on Rödl (2007). The use of italics in the text is an informal adoption of related formalisations by Geach (1957) and Castañeda (1969). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. It is tempting to use the first-person plural in capturing its self-conscious character: ‘we ourselves are performing a given illocutionary act together’. Whilst such a formulation may work for some social actions (such as collective actions - ‘we ourselves are sailing a boat together’), it fails to capture the self-conscious recognition of the agent-patient structure of the transaction. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Austin (1962) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. E.g. Austin (1962: 102); Vanderveken (1990: 168). I return to this placing in the next section. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Rödl (2007: 197) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Convincing is one of Austin’s first examples of perlocutionary acts in ‘How To Do Things With Words’: “We can similarly distinguish the locutionary act ‘he said that…’ from the illocutionary act ‘he argued that …’ and the perlocutionary act ‘he convinced me that….’” (Austin 1962: 102). This is introduced by Austin separately from the list of what have become more familiar examples (such as ‘alarming’ noted above), and differs from the familiar examples in important ways – notably in lacking the purported passivity of the response often taken as characteristic of the domain of perlocutionary affects. For current purposes, we can ignore the question of the relationship between convincing and other, more familiar perlocutionary acts. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. For example, Arendt (1954); Friedman (1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. This point is explored in McMyler (2011) and Zagzebski (2012). (This is not to imply that such an extension is uncontentious – see Friedman (1990)). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Garsten (2006:7) [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. To stress: Garsten’s goal here is not to characterize the whole category of coercion per se, but the specific case of mental manipulation (what he dubs ‘indoctrination or brainwashing’). Thus, whilst there may be cases of coercion in both the practical and theoretical sphere that do engage with an agent’s capacity for rational deliberation, we are interested in what some have called ‘compelled coercion’, where the coercion achieves it influence by overwhelming or by bypassing the agent’s capacity for rational deliberation. Cf. McMyler (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See previous footnote. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For an important statement of this suggestion, see O’Neill (1989: Chapter 1). My thinking here is also indebted to Laden (2012), though I reject a central feature of his understanding, one that extrudes the activities of judging and asserting from the space of reasoning. Laden takes these to be precluded by the Kantian-inspired contention that no act of reasoning can be immune to criticism, which he interprets as excluding any activity, such as arriving at a judgment about what to do or believe, that attempts to bring reasoning to an end (e.g. 2012, p. 27). Yet, as Laden himself concedes, most consider the Kantian-inspired contention to be satisfied by the never-ending possibility of revision rather than absence of judgment. Privileging acts such as asserting and judging over and above other examples of reasoning may be mistaken, but extruding such activities from the space of reasoning entirely makes the space barely recognizable as reasoning at all. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Initially set out in Raz (1986) [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Cf. Zagzebski (2012) for this extension of Raz’s conception from the practical to the theoretical sphere. For concerns about this extension, see Wanderer (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cavell (2006: 181) [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Cavell (2006: 183) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Cavell (2006: 183) [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cavell (2006:182) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Lear (2011: 10). Compare Moran (2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)