

Enoch Yim

“For in many things we all stumble. If anyone does not stumble in word, this one is a perfect man, able to bridle the whole body as well. Now if we put bridles into the mouths of horses that they would obey us, we direct their whole body as well.” (James 3:2-3, *RV*)

It is interesting to observe that the warning against stumbling in word follows after establishing that works are *necessary* part of faith. (James 2:14-26) Throughout the Scripture, it is made clear that man cannot attain salvation through work. Particularly, Romans 5:1 reminds us that we are “justified out of faith.” Given that faith and work alone exhaust the routes one can take in his attempt to reach justification or salvation, and since work is ruled out as a viable option, perhaps we can reconstruct the logic of the Bible in the following format:

- (1) One can be justified only through either faith or work. <premise 1>
- (2) Work cannot lead one to justification. <premise 2>
- (3) If one has faith, he will also do works. <premise 3>
- (4) Only faith leads one to justification. <1 & 2>
- (5) If one will not do works, he has no faith. <3>

∴ If one will not do works, he cannot be justified. <4 & 5>

This reconstruction shows that works are *not* what get one saved, but rather are the *evidence* that one has faith, the ticket to justification. In other words, if one has faith, it will show in his works. The correct way of understanding this logic is that one should not expect that he has faith *because* he has done some works. Unbeknownst to oneself, the source of his works may be his own will or motivation without faith, in which case the works do not implicate that the person is justified. Just as any other type of evidence works, *works* as evidence or indication do not warrant faith with certainty. The more one observes the presence of works, the more one has the inductive reason to *suspect* that the subject has faith. However, there is always the margin of error, and the attempt to read certainty or warrant out of induction is a logically invalid move.

Yet, the absence of works (or the presence of transgressions) is an important statistical clue. The generalization that all ravens are black is defeated with merely one instance of a white raven. That all ravens observed so far have been black never warrants that all ravens are black, but just one sight of a white raven is statically significant enough to *logically ascertain* the falsity of the claim that all ravens are black. Likewise, merely one instance of transgression is significant enough to disprove one’s claim of faith. Perhaps, it is in this way we should understand James 2:10, for otherwise we ought to allow that faith comes in degrees, which is debatable.

Enough of Chapter 2. The main reason why I brought this issue up is because the writing on restraining one’s speech comes *after* clarifying the evidential or statistical significance of works. What is speech? Place a chimpanzee in front of a type machine, and let it click on the keyboard

indefinitely. At least one out of the infinite times, the chimpanzee would reproduce the entire draft of *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky. Yet, is this reproduction meaningful as a literature piece? By all means, no. Even though we can read the text, understand the plots, and enjoy the story, we would not attribute any meaning to the production of the text by the chimpanzee. It is purely an accident that something that *mimics* Dostoevsky's work happened to have emerged after the chimpanzee clicked on the keyboard. But the chimpanzee itself did not write the text, for *writing* (rather than merely scribbling) requires more than accidents.

Similarly, let us say that, out of a random impulse, I uttered the perfect sentence, "The table is next to the bookshelf." In this case, I did not *speak* the sentence. Rather, I merely made a sound, which happens to be identical with a token of the type sentence. There may be many things my impulsive utterance lacks in failing to have achieved the status of speech. Different theories and models of language would hypothesize different things the utterance should be lacking. But, as a starter, we may hypothesize that my utterance lacks my intention, or thought.

The question of whether language or thought is prior to the other one is that of asking whether it was the chicken or the egg first. Does language express our thoughts? Or are our thoughts modeled on language? I am not seeking to explore these issues. What I would like to point out is that one can hardly call something *speakable* without treating as *thinkable* as well as that what is thinkable cannot be unspeakable. Here "speakable" is not limited to what can be verbally spoken. In the broadest sense, melodies and paintings are also forms of speech. That which could be thought must be presentable in a certain format, no matter how primitive the format may be. On this view, speaking is understood as what Sellars calls, "thinking-out-loud" (and thinking would be understood as "speaking-in-loud").

One important function of thinking (or cognition in general) according to the Kantian tradition is making judgments. Day by day, we make judgments about our surroundings to survive and cope. When I see and walk on a pavement in the parking lot of Walmart, I am making the judgment that there is a hard ground on which I can stroll to the store. When I think that microwaving the leftover food would heat it up, I am judging that doing so would prepare me a meal. The constant flux of perceptions and thoughts is a stream of our judgments. Since speaking (or language in general) is a form of thinking, in speaking something I am making a judgment.

To judge that the table is next to the bookshelf or that microwaving the leftover food would heat it up is to *accept* (as truth) that the reality is such that the table is *indeed* next to the bookshelf or that microwaving the leftover food would *indeed* heat it up. That is, making a judgment is the same as making one's own mind about something. If so, speaking that something is so and so is making one's mind about that thing. That is, in speaking, I make a conclusion.

Of course, making judgments or statements about how things are is not the only act of speech. In speaking, we ask questions, make promises, express hopes, give orders, etc. What is important, however, is the point that these speech acts are the manifestation of what we think *just as the outward works are the manifestation of what we believe*. Thus, just as we are being justified by our works or the lack thereof, we are also being justified by what we speak (or what we do not

speak). The practice of making judgments or statements is one speech act through which we can understand this parallel between the work-faith and the speech-thought pair.

The author of James further writes that “the wisdom from above is first pure ... full of mercy and good fruit, impartial ...” (James 3:17) If there is a flaw in our wisdom or an error in judgment, it does not *descend from above*, but is innate to our own thoughts. (James 3:15) From the Pauline ministry, we can gather that sin is nothing other than being independent from God, for the law of the flesh has its own governing system that runs on finite resources. When Adam and Eve ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, God remarked that “man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil[.]” (Genesis 3:22) That is, in eating of the forbidden tree, they have attained the status that is equal to that of God. Of course, Adam and Eve failed to have eaten of the tree of (eternal) life, and men are obviously mortal and fallible. So, we are not like God in the divine aspect. Rather, the part in man that has become like God is his ability to make judgments (knowing good and evil). What we see, hear, and think started to reflect our own point of view. That is, man has gained his own cognitive agency (the ability to think, feel, and make judgments) on his own—apart from the perspectives of God. Thus, man has broken out of the accordance with the infallible cognition (epistemic saint). In virtue of being out of contact with this infinite entity, we have become subject to the law of flesh (scarcity), which leads to death.

To refuse to restrain what we speak, i.e., to present or accept what we believe as reflecting reality, is to affirm the part of us that is subject to the law of flesh—to reassure our independence from God. In contrast, restraining what we say, i.e., remaining humble and not being confident in ourselves, is the work that would naturally follow from having the right faith. Without this work, we cannot assure that we have faith, the only justificatory road to salvation, the law of life, i.e., the infallible cognitive process, or the governing system of operation that runs on infinity itself. Thus, what James is telling us is *not* that one should try to speak less. Rather, if one has faith (which is given by grace), it will manifest in the fact that the person stays humble in silence. That is, it is not that one speaks something first and that what he has spoken might be offensive so that he now committed a transgression. The speaking in itself is already a transgression, i.e., the speaking from one’s own perspective rather than from God within him. It is said that we are the temple of God. Only God should be speaking in the temple. Any other noise in the temple is the work of the law of flesh (human economy, politics, engineering, etc.) that makes it a house of merchandise rather than a house of worship. (John 2:13-25)

“Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” —Ludwig Wittgenstein