

JUSTIFICATION AND EXCUSES. Sometimes we have to defend our conduct in the face of accusations: 176

(15-1) What SB did was bad/stupid/wrong/immoral/awful.

We have to respond. There are several options:

(15-2) Justification: What I did was good/clever/right/moral/awesome.

(15-3) Excuse: *I* didn't do that: I wasn't myself, I don't remember myself doing that.

(15-4) Excuse: I didn't *do* that: it was a slip, an accident. I was *doing* something quite different, but this thing just happened somehow.

Remark 1. The pragmatic device we use to differentiate among these options is 'focus'.

As Austin notes, there is no sharp line between the two types of excuses. There is a clearer line between justification and excuse. The latter case, for example, is a prime candidate to feature in an apology, but not the former one. 177

ACTIONS, FREEDOM, RESPONSIBILITY. Excuses are necessary to study in order to understand what actions are. This understanding is a prerequisite for any moral theory. What an action is, in any case, is far from clear. For example, is sneezing an action? It should seem not. But then why do we apologise and make excuses for *it*? On the face of it, you can only apologise for your *action*. 178

This may be the tip of the iceberg. We can study excuses by classifying which verbs go well with them, and which don't: 179

- (15-5) a. I sneezed, but only because of my allergies.
b. ?? I proved this theorem, but only because I was told to.

The practice of excuses can also illuminate for us the machinery of action. They unmask what usually is hidden behind habit and ease. Further, Austin says, by examining excuses we can dispose of the problem of freedom. As I understand it, the idea is this: 180/193

(15-6) 'X acted freely in ϕ -ing' means that: it is not felicitous to say that X has an excuse for ϕ -ing, perhaps with the result that he was *not* ϕ -ing, after all. 180

It is somewhat different with responsibility. Compare: 181

- (15-7) Context: I've shot your dog.
a. I didn't mean to shoot it, I was pushed.
b. It's not that I shot *your dog* freely.
c. ?? I'm not responsible for shooting your dog.

Remark 2. In these examples, we are dealing with the issue of 'moral luck'.

NORMAL AND ABNORMAL. ... 189-193

BOILING LUNATICS. In this story of some legal significance, we are given many inchoate examples of excuses. It's not clear, however, what the excuses are for, exactly. Several different actions can, on the face of it, be attributed to Finney: 195ff

- (15-8) a. Finney opened the cold tap.
b. Finney opened the hot tap.
c. Finney was putting a clean bath (for Watkins).
d. Finney was scalding Watkins.

Finney's defence is to use excuses and thereby to deny that some of these actions can be attributed to him (or anyone else). Hence the talk of 'intention', 'attention', 'accident', 'inadvertence'.