

PHIL 260; Spring 2007
 The Normativity of Ethics
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 Handout #3: Moral Motivation and Externalism

Doubts about the plausibility of moral motivation by rationalized desire tend also to support externalism about moral motivation.

- Unprincipled Amoralism undermines strong internalism about moral motivation.
- Principled Amoralism undermines both strong and weak internalism about moral motivation.

As long as anti-rationalist beliefs are possible – they need not be true -- internalism about moral motivation must be false.

A CONCEPTUAL OBSTACLE TO EXTERNALISM

But consider this worry about the coherence of the externalist position.

1. If I am under a moral requirement to φ , there is a moral reason for me to φ .
2. If there is a moral reason for me to φ , there is a reason for me to φ .
3. If there is a reason for me to φ , it would be pro tanto irrational for me to fail to φ .
4. Hence, if I am under a moral requirement to φ , it would be pro tanto irrational for me to fail to φ .

This argument would show weak internalism to be a conceptual truth.

But this argument is not compelling. Sometimes when we say that I have a reason to φ , we mean

- (a) There is a behavioral norm that enjoins φ -ing and applies to me.

In this sense of reason, moral norms do imply reasons. There are as many kinds of reasons as there are norms, including moral reasons, legal reasons, reasons of etiquette. But we often have something more in mind in ascribing reasons.

- (b) There is a behavioral norm that enjoins φ -ing, it applies to me, and it would be pro tanto irrational for me not to φ .

If there is reason, in this sense, to act on a norm, then practical reason endorses this norm. But not all reasons for action in the first sense are reasons for action in the second sense (cf. Foot, "Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives"). For instance, it is arguable that failure to conform to requirements or reasons of etiquette or law need not be pro tanto irrational. It is clear that moral requirements are moral reasons and that moral reasons are (a)-reasons. It is not clear that they are (b)-reasons. So the sense of reason for action in which (3) is true need not be the same sense of reason for action in which (2) is true. If so, it's arguable that it is only by failing to distin-

guish these two senses of reason for action that the rational authority of morality could fail to seem an open question.

SMITH'S ANTI-EXTERNALISM

- Smith rejects the possibility of principled amorality. He thinks that putative amorality should always be interpreted as making moral judgments that employ moral language in "inverted commas" – they are expressing indifference not to the moral standards they accept but to the moral standards that others around them accept.
- Smith thinks that externalists who appeal to the possibility of amorality are begging the question.
- Smith defends internalism by appeal to an analogy between colors and morals: motivation is essential to moral judgment in the way that qualitative sensory experience is essential to color judgment.
- Smith rejects what he takes to be the externalist explanation of the way in which the motivation of the "good and strong-willed person" normally tracks changes in her moral beliefs. He believes that this requires a *de dicto*, rather than a *de re*, concern to do the morally correct thing. This commitment, Smith thinks, is implausible and commits the externalist to "one thought too many" (74-75).
 - The externalist denies that an agent's motives must track changes in her moral beliefs.
 - However, even the externalist should claim that the motives of the "good and strong-willed person" reliably track changes in her moral beliefs.
 - Smith thinks that the concerns of such a person must all be derived from her moral concerns.
 - This, he thinks, is inconsistent with intrinsic concern for one's associates; the externalist must ascribe to the good and strong-willed person "one thought too many" about whom to save. Externalism leads to an over-moralized self.

EXTERNALIST REJOINDERS

- Inverted commas readings reject a literal reading of the putative amorality's claims. On the one hand, people's self-reports should not always be taken at face value (e.g. Huck Finn, maybe). But why should we always reject a literal reading? What if the putative amorality persists in describing his judgments as moral judgments even after being offered an inverted commas interpretation?
- Is appeal to principled amorality question-begging?
 - The claim is not that the internalist does not have a consistent position; it is that the position is implausible. Internalism makes a very strong generalization about the connection between moral judgment and motivation, and externalism challenges that, not as incoherent, but as implausible. Specifically, it is implausible, because it asserts that something is impossible, which seems to be both possible and actual.
 - In appealing to principled amorality as a reason for rejecting (weak) internalism, the externalist is reasoning much as Smith himself does in appealing to unprincipled amorality as a reason for rejecting strong internalism. The strong internalist could preserve consistency by insisting

that the apathetic and depressed are using moral language in inverted commas.

- In cases in which the amoralism, whether principled or unprincipled, is **acquired**, there will be continuity in discrimination and belief across the change in motivational effect. Since we interpreted the earlier judgments as bona fide moral judgments, we should treat the later judgments, which are continuous with the earlier judgments, as bona fide moral judgments.
 - The charge of question-begging may suggest that the internalist and the externalist just make different conceptual claims about morality and the question then becomes which, if either, conceptual claim to accept, and this may seem like a stalemate. But this is not a fair description of the debate. Whereas the internalist assumes quite a bit about the concept of morality – that it excludes the possibility of holding beliefs about morality and beliefs about practical reason according to which they could diverge in their demands – the externalist assumes much less about the concept of morality – in particular, the externalist can recognize a wide variety of possible views about the nature and content of morality and its relation to practical reason. If we have general doubts about the limits of conceptual analysis and wish to be able to entertain very diverse conceptions of philosophical concepts, then we should for that reason prefer externalism to internalism.
- The color analogy.
 - Does the color analogy beg the question in favor of internalism? Why should we find an analogy between moral and color judgments especially apt unless we already accepted internalism?
 - The internalist strategy assumes a sort of dispositional conception of colors. (Okay.)
 - Even so, there are disanalogies.
 - The sort of sensory experience that might be required for color judgment is not the sort of conative state that is required by the internalist for moral judgment.
 - In a dispositional analysis of color, color judgments are true in virtue of the object being such as to elicit a certain sort of visual experience in a standard observer. But it won't imply that anyone making a color judgment, as such, must have this visual experience. So, it's not clear that the moral analog of this could deliver the desired internalist connection between moral judgment and actual motivation.
 - Also, it is not clear that the capacity for visual experience is a condition for making color judgments. Can't the blind make color judgments, perhaps by inheriting meaning/reference from linguistic participation with the sighted community?
 - Distinguish cases of congenital/acquired blindness.
 - The externalist explanation of the good and strong willed person.
 - Where is the incompatibility between intrinsic concern for associates and moralized concern?

- If friendship is a virtue, then won't moralized concerns include concerns for friends?
- Perhaps the externalist will think that expressions of friendship should be regulated by beliefs about the permissibility of those expressions. Is that a problem? Don't we think that acting on concerns for friends should be regulated by our beliefs about what's permissible? It's okay to favor one's spouse in a rescue situation when that is permissible, but not when it's not (e.g. when you are an EMT). It's okay to favor friends, but not by poisoning their rivals.
- Cf. the solution to the related worry about the incompatibility some see between Kant's insistence that virtuous agents act from the motive of duty and the expression of natural sentiments of benevolence and special concern. The good will does not require contramoral sentiments; it requires only that they be regulated by a sense of duty such that the agent would not have had the special concern or would not have acted on it had she believed the action in question was impermissible.