

III INTERNALISM

TWO KINDS OF INTERNALISM

A thesis about motivation (The Practicality Requirement)

If an agent judges that it is right for her to perform an action then she will be motivated to perform that action (in so far as she is practically rational)

A thesis about reasons for action (Rationalism)

If it is right for an agent to perform a certain action then she has a reason to perform that action

Smith suggests that the second thesis entails the first. But the argument requires the truth of the following platitude:

Platitude: An agent has a reason to perform an act if and only if she would be motivated to perform that act if practically rational.

(It's never quite clear what Smith means by a platitude; but it's something like an *a priori* truth that everyone accepts, at least implicitly.) But then if the agent believes that she has a reason to perform an act, she will believe that she would be motivated to perform it if fully rational; so if she believes that it is right for her to perform a certain action, and accepts the thesis of Rationalism, she will believe that she has a reason to perform the action

Note what this argument shows though.. It doesn't show that The Practicality Requirement follows from Rationalism. It shows the weaker thing that The Practicality Requirement is true of someone who believes both Rationalism, and the Platitude. We'll return to this issue later. For now let's examine Smith's arguments for the two internalist theses.

THE PRACTICALITY REQUIREMENT

Smith weakens the crude internalism claim that judging right will invariably give rise to a motivation, by adding a rationality caveat. In this he follows Christine Korsgaard. Korsgaard introduced the caveat because it often happens that states like depression or distraction can remove our motivations; but here it is plausible that we are acting irrationally. Smith wants to do much more work with the irrationality caveat, as we shall see.

Smith actually states the Practicality Requirement as

If an agent judges that it is right for her to in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to in circumstances C, or she is practically irrational.

However, this formulation is vulnerable to an objection. It seems overwhelmingly likely that none of us is fully rational; but then this condition will be immediately satisfied, since everybody will meet the second disjunct of the consequent. That is why I have restated it in a way that is not vulnerable to this objection.

Smith argues for the truth of the Practicality Requirement by saying that someone who is not motivated to do what they judge right (when fully rational) cannot really have made a moral judgement at all. There are two ways that one might argue for this. You might claim that, as an empirical thesis, someone who was not motivated would be unable to apply the moral predicates correctly. We will briefly look at some evidence against this claim later. Or you might argue that, as a conceptual claim, someone who was not motivated would not count as having made a moral

judgement. Smith compares the case with colour judgements. In order to judge that something is red, do you need to have the experience of red? Perhaps you do. (Is this really plausible?) Perhaps the same is true for moral judgements. Perhaps you wouldn't judge someone as having made a moral judgement if they weren't motivated to go along with it, at least when fully rational. It is hard to get clear real world examples here. It's an interesting fact that most people, even those we would judge as evil, do seem to want to justify their behaviour in moral terms. Witness the case of Himmler who saw himself caught in the 'old tragic conflict between will and obligation'. There are sadists and socio-paths who seem to be able to apply moral terminology without being motivated to do good in the least. But perhaps by 'good' they just mean 'judged good by other people in the community' (what Hare calls the *inverted comma* sense of good); and beside, they are not obviously rational. But fiction provides better examples. Consider Satan in *Paradise Lost*: "So farewell hope, and with hope farewell fear/ Farewell remorse: all good to me is lost;/ Evil be thou my good". Satan chooses the bad exactly because it's bad. And he is not obviously practically irrational. So isn't Satan a counter-example to the Practicality Requirement? Isn't it just that he lacks the desire to be good? Smith has an argument designed to show that this characterization cannot be right.

SMITH'S ARGUMENT AGAINST EXTERNALISM

The argument is based on the idea that externalism cannot give a convincing account of how agents change their motivations for moral reasons. He asks us to consider a case in which a good and strong willed person is persuaded to change his values, and, as a result, the actions that he performs. For example: suppose that, for some years, Harry has been giving a certain amount of time and money to World Vision, an organization which enables him to take what he considers a properly charitable attitude towards less fortunate people in the third world. Suppose now that, as a result of a conversation with some friends, he becomes persuaded that charity is not the morally right attitude to take towards those in the third world; he becomes convinced that this is really an issue of justice rather than charity. Suppose that, as a result, he decides to move his support to Oxfam, an organization which, he feels, promotes justice rather than charity.

How are we to account for this switch in Harry's motivation? Smith argues as follows. The internalist can see Harry as moved by his new belief about the greater value of promoting justice. This will be enough to give rise to the new motivation. In contrast the externalist will not think that this belief on its own will move him; Harry will also need some suitable desire. In particular, if Harry's change of motivation is to be explained by his new conviction that justice is right, the externalist will be forced to say that Harry is moved by a desire to do what is right; and this means that his desire to promote justice will be a merely derivative desire. The result, claims Smith, is that the externalist will be forced to think that the good person is moved by a 'self-consciously moral motive'; and this amounts to a *reductio* of the position, since to be moved by such a motive is not to be a good person at all, but to be in the sway of a 'fetish or moral vice'. The good person 'will care non-derivatively about honesty, the weal and woe of their children, the well-being of their fellows, people getting what they deserve, justice, equality, and the like'.

Note what is at issue here. Smith is not primarily complaining that, on the externalist's account, the good person must be seen as motivated by a desire as well as a belief. It is the *content* of the desire that he thinks is worrying. If the externalist is to make the good person's actions counterfactually dependent on what he or she thinks is morally right, then the crucial desire must be a desire to do good. This is what is unattractive, since, firstly it requires self-conscious moralizing; and, secondly, it requires us to treat all other desires as merely derived or instrumental. In contrast the internalist does not have to see the good person as involved in such moralizing; the internalist can give an account of the counterfactual dependence without invoking a moralized motivation.

The first thing to say about this argument is that it is hard to see how the problem it raises for the externalist is not also a problem for the internalist. Let us see how, according to Smith, the externalist will describe Harry's motivation. It will have the form

Harry believes that it is right to promote justice rather than charity
Harry is committed to doing what is right
Therefore Harry is motivated to promote justice
Harry believes that giving to Oxfam promotes justice
Therefore Harry is motivated to give to Oxfam

Harry's motivation to give to Oxfam is derived from his commitment to do what is right, his belief that it is right to promote justice, and his belief that justice is served by giving to Oxfam. However, on the internalist account things do not look substantially different. We have:

Harry believes that it is right to promote justice rather than charity
Therefore Harry is motivated to promote justice
Harry believes that giving to Oxfam promotes justice
Therefore Harry is motivated to give to Oxfam

Here again justice is not something that motivates Harry directly, but only in virtue of his belief that this is the right value to have. If the externalist picture of Harry sees him as over moralized, then so does the internalist.

Perhaps both accounts, as crudely sketched here, do indeed paint a picture of good people which represents them as over moralized in their attitudes. This doesn't show up very well in Harry's case: it is not unreasonable to think that a good person's decisions about the charities they support, or the political parties they vote for, will be derived from self-consciously moral concerns (although even here there is surely *some* room for loyalty). The real problem arises in some of the other cases mentioned above: concern for family and friends, involvement in projects, or whatever. The difficulty, of course, is to explain how the good person can have an underived concern for such things, and still explain the counterfactual dependency of their concerns on their beliefs about what is right.

Perhaps we can get an answer by treating their attitude to what is right as acting, in these cases, as a constraint. A good person has desires and concerns that do not derive from their beliefs about what is right. However, these desires are still counterfactually sensitive to their beliefs about what is right, since such a person will be prepared to revise them if they come to believe that they are wrong. But if this is correct, such an account is open both to the externalist and the internalist. For the former the revision will be forced by a combination of a belief about what is right, and a desire to do it; for the latter it will come just from the belief.

EMPIRICAL WORK

There is some reason for thinking that it's not true that as a matter of fact people cannot learn to apply moral predicates without being motivated. The evidence (which is far from overwhelming) comes from a set of experiments conducted by Gertrud Nunner-Winkler and others. She has some evidence that moral development comes in two stages. Firstly there is a stage of acquiring competence with moral concepts. Secondly comes a stage in which moral motivation is developed. As Nunner-Winkler puts it:

Moral learning involves a two-stage process: the first step is the early and universal acquisition of moral knowledge; the second step is a differential process of building up moral motivation. ... Children do not complete this second step in a uniform manner:

some will complete it quickly others will take [a] long time; some end up with a deep-seated encompassing moral motivation, others with a more superficial and narrowly circumscribed commitment to the moral domain ...

Evidence for this process is two-fold. In the first place, children who appear to have a good grasp of moral concepts, who can reliably apply them, who justify the legitimacy of moral obligations by citing further moral considerations rather than just the threat of sanctions, nevertheless frequently ascribe what the experimenters term 'amoral emotions'. That is, young children frequently expect a wrongdoer to feel 'great' 'funny' or 'good' even whilst recognizing that what they have done is wrong, since they have achieved their end. They do not seem to expect people to be motivated to behave morally. Secondly, children who ascribe amoral emotions are more likely to themselves behave in ways that they recognize to be wrong: they are more likely to cheat, and to push and grab to get what they want. They appear to be deficient in moral motivations themselves.

A further set of empirical considerations come from various pathologies, in particular from anti-social personality disorder (people who used to be termed 'psychopaths') and from autism. Both seem to have similar problems in empathizing with others, and so have similar problems in forming specific moral judgements. But whereas autistic people are often highly motivated to do the right thing (even if they don't know what this is), psychopaths are typically not. This suggests that there must be some factor other than moral understanding at stake.

RATIONALISM

Smith gives an argument in favour of the thesis of Rationalism. But I don't want to discuss this in any detail yet. Instead I will say something about Foot's challenge to the thesis. Foot examines Kant's claim that morality is not a hypothetical imperative, but a categorical one. That is: we might say that you should do a law degree if you want to be a lawyer; but if you don't want to be a lawyer there is no force to the 'should'. In contrast we say that you should not kill; but there is no corresponding conditional here. The requirement is binding irrespective of your wants. Many, following Kant, had seen this as the hallmark of morality. Foot pointed out that etiquette is, however, categorical in this sense. So then what is special about morality? Why should we think that it is any more binding than etiquette? Smith's answer will be that morality is binding on us by the force of rationality.