

REASON AND MOTIVATION: THE WRONG DISTINCTION?*

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Some distinctions carve philosophical issues at their joints and clarify the source of disagreements. Others do not. The distinction between internalism and externalism about reasons, as in Williams 1981, runs together two different distinctions. Taken at face value, his distinction does not carve at the joints¹, and cuts across a different, possibly intended, distinction, which may.

Consider the view that 'there is reason for A to ϕ ' entails some claim about A 's actual or hypothetical motivation to ϕ (see Williams 1981: 101ff). The hypothetical motivation may be conditional on A 's knowledge of the truth, or on her rationality. The precise content of the motivation statement does not matter for present purposes, so we can let ' R ' stand for 'there is reason for A to ϕ ' and ' M ' stand for some favored schematic statement about A 's actual or hypothetical motivation to ϕ . ' M ' might say, for example, that if A knew the relevant facts and was rational, she would be motivated to ϕ .

The view that R entails M schematically expresses what Williams (1981) calls 'the internal interpretation' of claims about reasons. On this view, there could not be reasons to act in the absence of some such truths about motivation. ' R entails M ' is logically equivalent to 'not- M entails not- R ', of course. And its denial is 'possibly (R and not- M)', or what Williams calls 'the external interpretation'. As Williams says, 'The whole point of external reason statements is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations' (1981: 107). A could have a reason to ϕ , even though the relevant claims about her motivation to do so, actual or hypothetical, were false.

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¹ But see the qualification in my final paragraph.

Here we have, then, one clear distinction, between the internalist view that R entails M and the externalist view that possibly (R and not- M). This is the logical distinction I whose joint-carving character I want to bring under scrutiny. Notice that this distinction cuts across a different distinction.

Those who endorse the view that R entails M may do so for quite different reasons. Their underlying views about the relations between reasons and motivation may be very different. For example, someone could hold that M is true in virtue of R , a modification of the broadly Platonic view that you cannot truly know the good without loving it. Someone else could hold that not- R is true in virtue of not- M , a broadly Humean view that having A reason to act consists of no more than some facts about actual or hypothetical motivation, so that the reason claim is false in virtue of the falsity of the relevant claims about motivation. Though both agree that R entails M , they do so for opposite reasons. One takes reasons to be metaphysically basic, the other takes motivations to be. One view accounts for motivation in terms of reasons, while the other accounts for lack of reasons in terms of lack of motivation. The directions of metaphysical dependence recognized are opposite, even though both views agree that R entails M and hence not- M entails not- R . The entailment and its contraposition are logically equivalent. But the view that a motivation claim is true in virtue of a reason claim is certainly not equivalent to the view that the reason claim is false in virtue of the falsity of the relevant claim about motivation.²

Williams' internalism/externalism distinction as stated puts the broadly Platonic and the broadly Humean positions about reason and motivation in the same internalist category. That is a symptom suggestive of failure to carve at the joints. To separate these positions, we need a distinction that is not one between an entailment and its denial, but rather is about the *direction* of constitutive or explanatory dependence. What matters is

² There are also other possible ways to be an internalist, but these are sufficient to make my point. Darwall 1992 distinguishes four significantly different doctrines that all count as internalist. But he does not diagnose this situation in the way I do, as the symptom of a failure to distinguish logical and metaphysical issues that cut across one another.

why someone holds that *R* entails *M*: what constitutive claims underwrite this claim. But this issue is not perspicuously raised by Williams' distinction between the view that *R* entails *M* and its denial.

It may be objected that Williams intended the broadly Humean view to count as internalist but did not intend anything like the broadly Platonic position to count as internalist. If this latter view were to count as internalist, it might be argued, then there would be no significant difference between internalism and externalism, since internalism would allow anything the externalist could want.

But this objection is grist for my mill. My point is that the distinction Williams actually draws does not pin down these underlying metaphysical issues. (What he may have intended is a further question, though 'internalism' has often been interpreted in broadly Humean terms.) The underlying metaphysical distinction cuts across the distinction he actually offers us, which is misleading and confusing as an account of the deep structure of this territory.

A similar point can be made concerning the claim that *M* entails *R*. It can be endorsed for very different reasons. Someone could hold this because he believes that *R* is true in virtue of *M*--again, a broadly Humean view. Or, by contrast, someone could hold this because he believes that not-*M* is true in virtue of not-*R*--a strong version of a thesis of charity in interpretation. Again, while agreeing on the claim that *M* entails *R*, these views would recognize opposite directions of metaphysical dependence: in one case motivation is metaphysically basic, in the other case the lack of a reason is.

These four possibilities (i.e., endorsing '*R* entails *M*' for Platonic or for Humean reasons, and endorsing '*M* entails *R*' for Humean reasons or reasons of charity) show how the issue about the entailment relations between *R* and *M* fails to carve at the relevant joints. The underlying issue cuts across the issue about entailment, and should not be run together with it. People who disagree about whether *R* entails *M*, can agree that truths about motivation are more basic than truths about reason. People who disagree about the latter can agree about the former.

The main argument is now complete. But three further points of clarification may be useful.

First, the logical point here is perfectly general, with other applications.³ We should distinguish issues about entailment relations from issues of about metaphysical or explanatory or constitutive dependence. For example, on the one hand we can ask:

Does p entail q , or not?

On the other hand, we can ask questions about explanatory (in the constitutive sense of 'explanatory') dependence:

Does p make q true, or rather does not- q make not- p true? Is the fact that q constituted by the fact that p , or rather is the fact that not- p constituted by the fact that not- q ? Is p 's being true what it is for q to be true, or rather is not- q 's being true what it is for not- p to be true? Is q true in virtue of p , or rather is not- p true in virtue of not- q ?

While ' p entails q ' contraposes into the equivalent ' $\text{not-}q$ entails not- p ', claims of explanatory or constitutive dependence do not contrapose. For a Humean, claims about reasons can be false in virtue of the falsity of claims about motivation. But it certainly does not follow that claims about motivation are true in virtue of claims about reasons.

Second, returning to reasons and motivation: the underlying issues about constitutive or explanatory dependence should not be oversimplified. There is a tendency to assume that the issue is simply: do reasons depend constitutively on motivation in

³ See Hurley 1998: 211 for an application to issues about experience and intentions.

some way? More generally, are reasons some metaphysical function of motivations⁴? But a different issue is: are motivations some metaphysical function of reasons? Since these two issues are logically independent of one another, they give rise to four generic positions, according to whether either alone, both, or neither, are endorsed. Reasons may be regarded *a la* Hume as a function of motivation. Motivation may be regarded *a la* Plato as a function of reasons. To my mind, more attractive than either of these positions but still often overlooked in this context is the claim that reasons and motivations are constitutively interdependent.⁵ There is also a tendency to assume that constitutive dependence must be one-way. But it need not be; there may be mutual dependence, or interdependence. Interdependence of reasons and motivations is associated with Davidson's views.⁶ Finally, reason and motivation may be mutually independent. This seems to be Parfit's view.

The underlying space of metaphysical issues is in these ways richer still. The internalist/externalist distinction does not map onto it.

Third, it may be suggested that what is needed to carve these issues at the relevant joints are not the independent metaphysical distinctions I have indicated, but rather a revision of the internalism/externalism distinction to incorporate a specification of procedural rationality. But this move does not meet my objection, since the revised

⁴ This generic formulation leaves open various specifications of metaphysical dependence, including forms of dependence that run via true beliefs, rational inference, etc.

⁵ Perhaps it is overlooked because it makes the claim that reasons and motivations are coupled or interdependent, and claims with this structure may be unfamiliar to many philosophers. But there is nothing mysterious about them. Large areas of mathematics and science involve claims about coupled systems, in which the parameters of one system are the variables of the other system and vice versa. This is a generic structure that can be considered as a source of models for various areas in philosophy, including the relations between reason and motivation.

⁶ A version of it is developed in Hurley (1989).

version of the internalism/externalism distinction still cuts across the underlying metaphysical issues.

Derek Parfit (in *Rediscovering Reasons*, work in progress, and in 1997: 101-102) recognizes that internalists and externalists may seem to be agreeing that R entails M . But he distinguishes:

- (1) A has reason to ϕ entails that if A knew the relevant facts and were fully *substantively* rational, A would be motivated to ϕ

from:

- (2) A has reason to ϕ entails that if A knew the relevant facts, and deliberated in a way that was *procedurally* rational, A would be motivated to ϕ .

Parfit understands reasons to be provided by facts, while the rationality of our desires and acts depends on our beliefs. Externalists can accept (1), but this appears to be trivially true. It is rather (2) that provides a revised version of what internalists assert and externalists deny (see also and compare Hooker 1987).

However, this revision does not meet my point. A correspondingly revised version of the metaphysical distinction I have drawn opens up again within (2).

We can abbreviate (2) as: R entails that, at all close worlds, (if PR then M). This is equivalent to: 'at some close worlds (PR and not- M), entails not- R '. Someone could hold this because he believes that (if PR then M) will be true, at the actual world and nearby ones, in virtue of R , or because he believes that not- R is true in virtue of (PR and not- M) being true at some nearby worlds. While agreeing on (2), people could disagree about whether facts about reason are metaphysically basic, or facts about procedural rationality and motivation instead. Again, (2) does not differentiate between these two positions.

Parfit's distinction, like Williams', cuts across the underlying issues about constitutive or explanatory dependence. The deep issue is whether reasons or motivations are metaphysically more basic, and this arises whether or not we specify that motivations are structured by procedural rationality.

All this said, it could be held that there are different joints to carve and that a logical distinction akin to Williams' is independently useful and of interest, *provided it is clearly recognized that the 'deeper' metaphysical issues cut across it and are not settled by it*. I have not tried to rule out an argument for such a position. But I have emphasized the need to satisfy the proviso.

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