



MOTIVATIONAL INTERNALISM AND THE SECOND-ORDER DESIRE EXPLANATION

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ABSTRACT

Both motivational internalism and externalism need to explain why sometimes moral judgments tend to motivate us. In this paper, I argue that Dreier's second-order desire model cannot be a plausible externalist alternative to explain the connection between moral judgments and motivation. I explain that the relevant second-order desire is merely a constitutive requirement of rationality because that desire makes a set of desires more unified and coherent. As a rational agent with the relevant second-order desire is disposed towards coherence, she will have some motivation to act in accordance with her moral judgments. Dreier's second-order desire model thus collapses into a form of internalism and cannot be a plausible externalist option to explain the connection between moral judgments and motivation.

Keywords: *Motivational internalism; externalism; second-order desire; practical rationality*

1. Smith's Internalist Challenge

In metaethics, motivational internalism is roughly the view according to which there is a necessary connection between moral judgments and motivation (Blackburn 1998; Gibbard 1990, 2003; Smith 1994, 1996a, 1996b, 1997). Externalism, in contrast, maintains that this connection is at best a contingent one (Brink 1989, 45-49, 1997; Copp 1995, 1997;

Lillehammer 1997; Shafer-Landau 2003, 145-147; Sayre-McCord 1997; Svavarsdóttir 1999; Zangwill 2003, 2008). Yet, even if externalism were true, its defenders would still need to explain why at least our moral judgments usually tend to motivate us.

Michael Smith, in his ground-breaking work on this topic, criticizes externalism with the famous fetishism argument. The fetishism argument begins from an ordinary observation that is normally accepted by both internalists and externalists. Suppose that I am engaged in a discussion with a fundraiser for a local charity that aims to improve the situation of homeless people. Let us further imagine that, initially, I have no intention to donate any money to the charity because I think that some homeless people should seek employment instead of relying on charities' help. During the conversation, however, the fundraiser tries to persuade me that the majority of homeless people cannot work for different personal reasons. And, even if some of them could really work, they cannot always successfully secure jobs sufficiently quickly. The fundraiser further explains that her charity raises money not only to provide basic necessities for homeless people, but also to run political campaigns that hopefully can resolve the issues faced by the homeless. Now, if I am convinced by the fundraiser, I will begin to believe that it is morally right for me to give at least some money to the charity. Usually, we can also expect that I will thereby come to have some motivation to actually do so.

The previous case illustrates how, when you change your moral judgment about whether you should give some money to a local charity, your corresponding motivation to make the donation also tends to change accordingly. This phenomenon is so common that we can conclude that 'a change in motivation follows reliably in the wake of a change in moral judgment' (Smith 1994, 71). Both internalists and externalists then face the burden of having to explain why this is the case.

As internalists generally believe that there exists a necessary connection between moral judgments and motivation, it will be easier for them to explain the previous phenomenon. Internalists have already introduced different forms of internalism that can explain the reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation. For example, Smith puts forward a form of conditional internalism which suggests that practical rationality is a condition that must be satisfied in order for there to be a reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation. Here, we can see Smith's (1994, 61) own formulation of internalism:

The Practicality Requirement: [Necessarily], if an agent judges that it is right for her to ϕ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to ϕ in C or she is practically irrational.

Although externalists deny that there is that kind of an internal connection between moral judgments and motivation, they still need to explain why at least sometimes moral judgments tend to motivate us. As externalists claim that moral judgments at most motivate contingently, they would see to provide an explanation of why we generally tend to be motivated to act in accordance with our moral judgments from something else. At this point, Smith has assumed that the externalists would have to explain the connection between moral judgments and motivation by relying on a certain additional desire, namely the *de dicto* desire to do whatever is right (Smith 1994, 74; Smith 1997, 112).

Yet, according to Smith (1994, 75; 1997, 113), the previous externalist explanation that relies on the *de dicto* desire to do whatever is right is counterintuitive. To see this, let us imagine that an agent judges that it is right to help her friends and family and also has a corresponding desire to help her friends and family. On the externalist account, the agent's desire to help her friends and family in this case derives from her non-derivate desire—the *de dicto* desire to do whatever is right. This means that the agent desires to help her friends and family because she desires to do whatever is right, and helping her friends and family just happens to be the right thing. However, the externalist account of how an agent should be motivated does not seem to fit our ordinary understanding of good people's psychology. We would normally expect that a morally good person cares non-derivatively about the well-being of her friends and family rather than the abstract property of moral rightness. Therefore, Smith (1994, 75) argues that if an agent were motivated by the *de dicto* desire to do whatever is right, she would have a moral fetish.

2. Dreier's Second-order Desire Model

Externalists have tried to avoid Smith's fetishism objection by attempting to explain the reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation in ways that do not rely on the *de dicto* desire to do whatever is right (Copp 1995, 1997; Cuneo 1999; Dreier 2000; Lillehammer 1997). In order to pursue this externalist strategy successfully, externalists will need to explain the recognized reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation in a way that is both compatible with externalism and able to avoid the fetishism objection. In this section, I focus on James Dreier's (2000) second-order desire model.

In order to explain what such a second-order desire is, Dreier begins from a maieutic end. A maieutic end is an end that is ‘achieved through the process of coming to have other ends’ (Schmitz 1994, 228; cf. Dreier 2000, 630). Suppose that you want to have a rewarding career, and, because of this, you want to pursue a career in medicine. Pursuing a career in medicine necessarily requires adopting other ends, such as the goal of relieving the patients’ suffering and the goal of saving their lives. Effectively, the end of having a rewarding career in this case is also an end to have other ends in professional life, all of which make the career you end up choosing rewarding. Here, the end of having a career in medicine is a maieutic end because it can only be pursued through having other ends.

The previous discussion suggests that having a maieutic end requires having some other ends. In this way, a maieutic end resembles a second-order desire the having of which also requires having first-order desires. Dreier thinks that we should be able to explain the reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation by assuming that a most ordinary agent has the second-order desire to desire to do what she judges to be right. This enables us to formulate the following view:

The Second-order Desire Model: Take an agent who has a second-order desire to desire to do what she judges to be right. If that agent judges that it is right for her to ϕ in circumstances C, then her relevant second-order desire will produce a first-order desire to ϕ in her, given that this desire is a desire she desires to have.

In response to Smith’s objection, Dreier provides three reasons why he thinks that Smith is wrong (Dreier 2000, 636–637). Dreier first argues that nobody in the debate should complain about the relevant second-order desire itself because we should expect that an ordinary moral agent will have that desire. Imagine an agent who is not sure about what the right-making features of an action are. Suppose that the agent is then asked: if someday you are able to figure out what the right-making features of the action are, would you hope to be motivated by those right-making features? As Dreier puts it, we would certainly expect the agent to say ‘yes’—to confirm that she would desire herself to be motivated by the right-making features of an action in the future. If the agent instead hoped that she would not be motivated by those right-making features in the future whatever they are, she would not seem to count as a good moral agent.

Secondly, Dreier also considers whether the relevant second-order desire would play too much of a role in the previous account of moral motivation,

which he believes to be the most important concern behind the internalist objections. If that were the case, internalists could argue that the relevant second-order desire is merely another kind of the *de dicto* desire to do whatever is right. Yet, according to Dreier, the relevant second-order desire plays only a limited role in the account—a role that is not objectionable. Once the second-order desire in question produces the relevant first-order desire in the wake of a change in one's moral judgments, the relevant second-order desire does not need to maintain the first-order desire after that. Consequently, the relevant second-order desire plays, according to Dreier, only a very limited causal role in explaining how an agent becomes motivated to act in accordance with her moral judgments.

Dreier's own illustration of this second point is the following (Dreier 2000, 636-637). Let us imagine that David judges that it is right to stop using chimps in medical research. In this case, the relevant second-order desire in him would generate a first-order desire to stop doing so in the way described above. After this point, David's first-order desire can play a motivating role by itself, and it can even produce other first-order desires. For example, that first-order desire to end using chimps in medical research can generate a new first-order desire to use other substitutes or a first-order desire to stop other researchers who continue to use chimps in their medical research. That said, all of David's first-order desires in this case are *de re* desires that are not derivative of any other first-order desires and so they cannot be accused of being fetishistic.

The third and last point Dreier makes can be seen as a further development of his second claim. Dreier claims that the resulting first-order desires are not conditional on rightness. To see why this would be the case, Dreier (2000, 637) invites us to compare the following two formulas that both try to describe David's relevant first-order desire in the previous example:

1. David desires that David does x
2. David desires that David does x so long as x is right

According to Dreier, the first formula describes David's first-order desire in the previous case correctly, whereas the second formula appears to misunderstand David's first-order desires. Arguably, if David comes to have the first-order desire to end using chimps in medical research, this first-order desire will thereafter exist and function without being influenced by the judgment that it is wrong to use chimps in medical research. This view coheres with Dreier's second point according to which the relevant second-order desire plays only a limited causal role in an agent's process of acquiring motivation.

3. The Second-Order Desire Model Collapses into A Form of Internalism

In the previous section, I examined whether the second-order desire model, as a version of externalism, is able to explain the reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation in a non-fetishistic way. At least for the purpose of this paper and on the basis of Dreier's responses, I am willing to grant that perhaps it can. Rather, what I want to challenge next is whether this account is compatible with externalism itself. In the rest of this section, I will, however, try to argue that the relevant second-order desire required by Dreier's model is a constitutive requirement of rationality itself. This means that the fundamental problem of the second-order desire model is that it collapses into a form of internalism and so the response cannot be available to externalists.

Let us then begin from what practical rationality is generally thought to consist.¹ According to Michael Smith himself, in order to be fully rational, an agent has to meet four requirements: she should have no false beliefs, she should have all the relevant true beliefs, she should have a systematically justifiable set of desires and she should not suffer from any physical or psychological disturbances (Smith 1994, 156-161; 1995, 112-116; 1996a, 160; 2002, 311-315).

To see why the relevant second-order desire to have the first-order desires that match one's moral judgments would be required by the previous

¹ Here, it is worthwhile to consider an objection to Smith's concept of practical rationality, which was first stated by Alex Miller (2003, 221), and echoed by Roskies (2003, 53) and Strandberg (2013, 29-31). On Miller's view, Smith tends to think that, when the additional condition—being practically rational—has not been met, something blocks the normal way in which moral judgments give rise to motivation. This entails that, when the relevant condition has been met, the cases in which moral judgments fail to motivate cannot exist. This entailment thereby leads to the concern that Smith formulates his view merely by precluding all the situations where the counterexamples could be put forward. All that is left of internalism is thus the claim that internalism is true except when internalism is not true. Actually, it seems that the condition in which there is no connection between moral judgments and motivation has been given an insubstantial characterization. Because of this, the resulting forms of conditional internalism become trivial.

Yet, Smith's conditional internalism will not be trivially true simply because it formulates the condition which it then uses to deal with counterexamples. In this section, I will discuss that in order to count as fully rational, an agent has to satisfy four requirements. This description of the requirements for being fully rational provides an informative, substantial characterization of the condition. In Section 4.2, I will provide an independent, substantial explanation of the condition in which moral judgments must lead to motivation. Since moral agents in the counterexamples fail to satisfy the proposed internalist condition, it is understandable that they remain unmotivated by their relevant moral judgments.

constitutive requirements of rationality, we need to focus on the third requirement of rationality—that of having a systematically justifiable set of desires. By this third requirement, Smith means that a rational agent must have coherent and unified sets of desires. This is to say that a rational agent's desires do not first of all tend to conflict with each other—they do not pull the agent towards different directions at the same time. Additionally, the desires in the set support each other: they are in harmony with each other.

We can then consider in more detail how we should understand what it is for a set of desires to be coherent and unified. For example, if I feel cold, I may come to have a desire to turn up the heating and to put on more clothes. I might also come to have a desire not to open the window as doing so would bring even more cold air into the room. I might even have a higher-order desire to desire to take measures to keep the room warm. In addition, if there are other people in the room, I might continue to desire that those people also both desire and do as I do. My desires in this case are what Smith calls a systematically justifiable set of desires. It is evident that my desires aim at the same direction and they support one another rather than contradict with each other. Because of this, having such a set of coherent and unified desires should be thought of as rational—the desires in the set will finally lead to achieving what you most care about.

Of course, sometimes there will unavoidably be situations in which you will have different first-order desires that are not very coherent or unified, and sometimes those desires may even contradict each other. For example, you may have a set of desires concerning which methods of transport you would like to use for travelling. This set can include a desire to take a bus to work, a train when travelling to other cities nearby, and a desire to fly when you go abroad. At least initially, could the previous set of desires be made more coherent and unified?

At this point, Smith argues that a fully rational agent's disposition towards coherence and unity will under some circumstances change her desires (Smith 1994, 159-161; 1997, 94). The rational disposition towards coherence and unity can, for example, produce general desires that will support the more specific desires and also these new general desires will in some cases destroy some of the previous first-order desires that do not fit them. Smith would then ask you to consider whether the previous specific desires would be more systematically justifiable if a more general desire which could justify and explain those specific desires were added to your psychological make-up. For example, you could add a general desire—a desire to choose the most affordable and convenient means to go where you want to go—to your set of desires. This general desire could

justify the previous set of desires by explaining why you would not want to travel to a faraway country by bus given that it is obvious that traveling by plane to another country is often more convenient and more economical. With the new added general desire, the relevant set of desires will be more systematically justifiable and thus more unified and also rationally preferable.

Analogously, we can argue that the second-order desire to desire to do what you judge to be right would be required by rationality, exactly in the same way as the general desire to travel in the most economical and convenient way is required in the case above. Consider, for example, an agent who has various moral desires, desires to treat her friends well, to keep her promises, to not cause physical harm to anyone and so on. These first-order desires are all distinct from one another because they are all related to different kinds of behaviour. However, a second-order desire to desire to do what one judges to be right would in this case justify and explain why the agent has the previous desires to do all the different things that she judges to be right. It could then be argued that the desiderative set also becomes more rationally preferable as a consequence of having that second-order desire.²

If, as I have just argued, the relevant second-order desire discussed by Dreier is required by the fundamental constitutive requirements of rationality—coherence and unity, having a second-order desire to do what one judges to be right (that will produce a first-order desire) is a matter of fulfilling a constitutive requirement of rationality. This means that a rational agent, who satisfies the constitutive requirements of rationality, would have the second-order desire to desire to do what she judges to be right. Assuming that the agent must also have the desires that she desires to have (given her constitutive disposition towards coherence), Dreier's second-order desire model thus entails that a rational agent will necessarily have at least some motivation to act in accordance with her moral judgments. If the agent did not, she would be less coherent and less rational as well.

² Someone might worry that the argument in this section does not show that rationality requires an agent to have the relevant second-order desire. Rather, the argument only shows that rationality requires an agent to have the relevant second-order desire if she has already had various moral desires. This worry seems to treat various moral desires as a premise of my argument. But that is not the reason why I employ various moral desires in my example. Those various moral desires are employed merely to show that the relevant second-order desire can make an agent's various moral desires more rationally preferable when she conducts moral deliberation. It would be too demanding to assume that an agent cannot have different moral desires when conducting moral deliberation.

This consequence furthermore means that Dreier's second-order desire model actually entails a form of conditional internalism the acceptance of which creates a commitment to a necessary connection between moral judgments and motivation. As a result, it seems that what Dreier proposes on the basis of the relevant second-order desires cannot be an entirely new externalist solution to the problem of moral motivation. Rather, the second-order desire model has actually collapsed into a form of internalism.

4. Responses to Objections

I have argued that the second-order desire model collapses into a form of conditional internalism. Before concluding, I shall consider two objections which the externalists might put forward to my argument. The first objection claims that the second-order desire model does not collapse into a form of internalism. The second objection further claims that, even if the second-order desire model collapses into another proposal, that proposal cannot be a form of internalism. In response, in the rest of this section, I will argue that both potential objections are implausible.

4.1 A Response to Sayre-McCord's Objection

The externalists may refuse to accept my argument that the second-order desire model collapses into a form of internalism. They could, for example, challenge the claim that a more general back-ground desire can make a given set of desires more coherent, unified and therefore also more rational (Sayre-McCord 1997, 75). If, arguably, a more general desire cannot make a given set of desires more coherent and unified, then an agent who comes to have such desires cannot be thought of as more rational. Furthermore, it could also be claimed that the relevant second-order desire of Dreier's model cannot contribute to making an ordinary moral agent more rational either. If this were right, we would have no reason to believe that the second-order desire model collapses into a form of internalism as I have suggested.

To illustrate this concern, we can consider Geoffrey Sayre-McCord's case of choosing an ice cream (Sayre-McCord 1997, 75). If we suppose that Smith's view is true, then, if I have a desire for coffee ice cream, my set of desires could be argued to exhibit more coherence and unity if a more general unconditional desire for ice cream were added to my current desiderative profile. My set of desires could be claimed to be more coherent and unified because the newly added general desire would be able to explain why I desire to enjoy coffee ice cream.

In this situation, eating coffee ice cream will satisfy both my desire for coffee ice cream and my general unconditional desire for ice cream. Sayre-McCord then objects that it is not plausible to think that satisfying the previous two desires would make me any more rational than how rational I am with merely my original desire (Sayre-McCord 1997, 76). So, he thinks that adding more desires, including more general desires, to a desiderative profile cannot itself enhance an agent's rationality as Smith suggests.

It seems that the crucial dispute between Sayre-McCord and Smith is over whether adding a more general desire to an agent's desiderative profile can make the agent more rational. I think that Sayre-McCord is right in claiming that merely satisfying more desires cannot itself make an agent more rational. Yet, the number of satisfied desires is not what Smith's view of rationality is based on. The key point of his view is that sometimes adding a more general desire to an existing set of desires can make the set more coherent and unified. This is the real reason why Smith would think that adding a more general desire can in the previous case make my desire set more rationally preferable.

In the previous case, it is supposed that I initially have a desire to have coffee ice cream. Usually, my desire to have coffee ice cream will move me to get it when it is available. Despite this, if I only had this one desire, I would presumably often ask myself: why do I choose to have coffee ice cream rather than other flavours or even other kinds of dessert (Smith 1997, 94)? The desire to have coffee ice cream itself does not seem to be able to answer this question. Yet, if a general, unconditional desire to eat what I enjoy eating, for example, were added to my desire set, this more general desire would be able to explain my specific desire to have coffee ice cream. The desire to eat coffee ice cream would no longer appear to be arbitrary, but rather it would be well-supported by the more general desire. In this way, my desire set has turned out to be more coherent, unified and thus more rationally preferable.

4.2 A Response to Bromwich's Objection

The externalists may continue to reject my argument by presenting Bromwich's (2010, 344; 2011, 75) challenge which claims that Smith's conditional internalism fails to capture the necessary connection between moral judgments and motivation. According to Bromwich, once practical rationality is inserted between moral judgments and motivation, it becomes unclear whether the motivation is still internal or built in to those moral judgments. Factors external to moral judgments—such as practical rationality—are now necessary for moral judgments to cause motivation.

Arguably, it is not an agent's moral judgments that produce motivation, but rather it is an agent's disposition towards coherence required by practical rationality that produces motivation to act accordingly (Bromwich 2011, 75; Svavarsdóttir 1999, 165). As a result, the necessary connection that is supposed to exist between moral judgments and motivation actually exists between an agent's disposition towards coherence and her motivation. If Bromwich's objection were right, then Smith's conditional internalism would not be regarded as an internalist view, and this furthermore means that even if the second-order desire model does collapse, it does not collapse into a form of internalism.

In order to see why Bromwich's challenge is implausible to accept, let us first consider why Smith thinks that moral judgments produce motivation essentially. Smith begins by analysing the concepts employed in moral judgments (in a similar way as we could try to analyse other concepts). Take the concept of 'a bachelor' for illustration. When I think that Mark is a bachelor, what I am thinking of is that Mark is a male and unmarried. This is because the concept of bachelorhood can be reductively analysed in terms of being male and unmarriedness. Similarly, Smith claims that moral concepts can be reductively understood to be about reasons for actions (Smith 1994, 62). When an action is judged to be right or wrong, a part of this thought is always that there are at least some reasons either to perform or refrain from doing the action.

The content of an agent's moral judgments, that is, the content of the thought that there are reasons for actions can be investigated further. Smith's (1994, 151-152) proposal is that, when an agent believes that there are reasons for her to carry out a certain action, she essentially believes that her fully rational version would want her to do that action in the actual situation she is in. So, for example, an agent's judgment that it is right to help innocent people is a judgment about what she has reasons to do. And, the content of this judgment, according to Smith, is that her fully rational version would want the agent to help the innocent in the situation she is in.

At this point, based on the content of her moral judgments, the agent has two options: either she will desire to help those innocent people to get rid of the plight or she will lack that desire. As I have discussed in Section 3, because practical rationality can be thought to consist at least in part of a disposition to have coherent mental states, a practically rational agent is disposed towards coherence. It is then plausible to suggest that a desire to help innocent people coheres better with the belief according to which the agent's fully rational version would want her to help the innocent. This means that, when an agent is practically rational, she will desire to act in accordance with her moral judgments, or so Smith argues.

The above discussion shows that an agent's disposition towards coherence plays an important role in Smith's explanation of how moral judgments produce motivation. But it would be implausible to thus claim that there actually exists a necessary connection between an agent's disposition towards coherence and her motivation as Bromwich does. Bromwich's challenge claims that it is an agent's disposition towards coherence that produces motivation. In contrast, Smith's own explanation suggests that it is an agent's moral judgment that produces corresponding motivation. On Smith's view, an agent's disposition towards coherence does not cause motivation, but rather it causes her motivation to cohere with the content of her moral judgment. The problem with Bromwich's challenge is that it mistakes the causal role that a moral judgment plays for the causal role that an agent's disposition towards coherence plays within Smith's conditional internalism. Given that Bromwich's challenge is based on a misunderstanding of Smith's view, we should still believe that there exists a reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation within Smith's internalist framework.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that Dreier's second-order desire model collapsed into a form of internalism and thus cannot be available as an externalist option. We normally assume that a rational agent who has made a genuine moral judgment about what the right thing to do is has at least some motivation to perform that action, otherwise, she would be thought of as less coherent. I explained how rationality can be used to account for previous intuitions. It turns out that rationality itself requires that a rational agent has a second-order desire to desire what she judges to be right so that this desire makes the agent's set of desires more unified and coherent. Furthermore, because a rational agent who has the relevant second-order desire is disposed towards coherence, she will have some motivation to act in accordance with her moral judgments. As a consequence, Dreier's second-order desire model collapses into a form of internalism that is conditional on rationality. This also means that Dreier's second-order desire model cannot be used as an externalist alternative to explain the reliable connection between moral judgments and motivation.

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