Moral Obligation and Moral Motivation

DAVID COPP
University of California, Davis

'Internalism' in ethics is a cluster of views according to which there is an 'internal' connection between moral obligations and either motivations or reasons to act morally; 'externalism' says that such connections are contingent. So described, the dispute between internalism and externalism may seem a technical debate of minor interest. However, the issues that motivate it include deep problems about moral truth, realism, normativity, and objectivity. Indeed, I think that some philosophers view externalism as undermining the 'dignity' of morality. They might say that if morality needs an 'external sanction' – if the belief that one has an obligation is not sufficient motive or reason to do the right thing – then morality is debased in status. Even an arbitrary system of etiquette could attract an external sanction under appropriate conditions.

Although I believe that the more interesting internalist theses are false, there are important truths that internalism is attempting to capture. The most important of these is the fact that moral judgments are intrinsically 'normative' or 'choice-guiding,' that they are, very roughly, relevant to action or choice because of their content. Internalism tries to explain the

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normativity of moral judgment in terms of motivations or reasons, and I believe that this is its mistake. But internalism is correct that normativity is 'internal' to moral judgment. Externalist theories have denied this intrinsic normativity, or they have not done well at explaining it.

My goal in this paper is to introduce an account of moral judgment and moral conviction that is strictly speaking externalist even though it accommodates the internalists' insight about the normativity of moral judgment. I want to explain how the account does this, and also to explain how it accommodates other important and plausible intuitions that motivate internalism. I have presented this account in a recent book, but my discussion of internalism in the book was distributed over several chapters. I want to bring the key points together in this paper. Moreover, I want to show in more detail how my account can respond to certain internalist objections, paying special attention to some new arguments by Michael Smith. I begin with a few preliminary issues.

1. The Debate Between Internalism and Externalism

The term 'internalism' is used to name doctrines about motivation as well as doctrines about reasons. In general, an internalist doctrine claims there is a necessary connection between the state of having a moral obligation, or the state of believing or recognizing one has a moral obligation, and the state of being motivated — or the state of having reason — to fulfill that obligation. Each internalist thesis corresponds to a version of 'externalism,' which is simply its denial. Externalism as such would deny all internalist doctrines.

I will begin with internalist doctrines about motivation. Using terminology introduced by David Brink, we can distinguish among 'agent internalism,' 'belief internalism,' and 'hybrid internalism.' Agent internalism is the doctrine that it is a necessary truth that if a person has a moral obligation to do something, then the person has some motivation to do it (or she would have some motivation under relevant conditions). Belief internalism holds that it is a person's belief that she has a moral obligation which entails that she is relevantly motivated. Hybrid internalism holds that it is a person's belief, when the belief is true, which guarantees that she is relevantly motivated.

Internalism can allow for cases in which the person with the obligation — or with the belief or the true belief that she has an obligation — is not actually or 'occurrently' motivated. This explains the qualification in the above formulations: The person in question has some motivation to do the relevant thing, or would have some motivation under relevant conditions. Different internalists would specify the relevant conditions in different ways, but it is obviously important for an internalist to avoid trivializing her position. It is trivial that a person with a moral obligation necessarily would acquire the relevant moti-

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3 David O. Brink, Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989) 40. Brink speaks of "appraiser internalism," which appears to be the same as the view I call "belief internalism." W.K. Frankena recognized the distinctions in his classic essay, "Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy," in Kenneth E. Goodpaster, ed., Perspectives on Morality: Essays of William K. Frankena (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press 1976) 60. The doctrines Frankena labels (1), (7), and (8) are, respectively, agent, belief, and hybrid forms of internalism.

4 That is, according to belief internalism, it is a necessary truth that if a person believes she has a moral obligation to do something, then she has some motivation to do it (or would have some motivation under relevant conditions). According to hybrid internalism, it is a necessary truth that if a person believes truly that she has a moral obligation to do something, then she has some motivation to do it (or would have some motivation under relevant conditions).

5 For example, Michael Smith defends a version of belief internalism according to which, if a person is not actually motivated to do what she believes would be right, then she is "practically irrational." That is, her motivations are subject to a "disturbing influence" of some form of "practical unreason," such as weakness of will. Smith, The Moral Problem, 61.
vation under some circumstances, but we should count a position as internalist only if it makes a non-trivial claim about the connection between obligation and motivation. This means that the distinction between internalism and externalism is blurred at the edges, because of vagueness in the notion of the trivial, but the literature fortunately contains clear cases of both internalism and externalism.

As I said, 'internalism' is sometimes used to name a thesis about a necessary connection between obligation and reasons. We can distinguish versions of reasons-internalism that correspond to the versions of motivation-internalism; there is an agent version as well as a belief version and a hybrid version.

There are complications regarding the notion of a reason. If someone has a moral obligation to do something, it is trivial that he has a moral reason to do it. But reasons-internalism would normally be taken to imply, I think, that a moral obligation, or a belief that one has an obligation, guarantees a reason-without-qualification — a 'Reason' that would motivate anyone to act as it requires, if he were rational. Some philosophers combine reasons-internalism with an internalist doctrine about the connection between reasons and motivation, a doctrine to the effect that motivation is 'internal' to the state of having a reason or of believing or believing truly that one has a reason. I will largely ignore such doctrines and limit attention to internalist doctrines about obligation. Also, until later, I will focus on the belief version of motivation-internalism.

According to this doctrine, there is a necessary connection between a person's belief that he has an obligation and his being appropriately motivated. Consider, however, a putative counter-example, the case of Alice. Alice was raised to believe that the divine command theory is correct. That is, as Alice herself might say, she was raised to believe that our moral obligations are determined by the commands of God.

She was also raised to believe that God is a vengeful ruler and that He wills us to take an eye for an eye. On the principle of an eye for an eye, Alice believes that capital punishment is obligatory in cases of murder, and she believes she has an obligation to support capital punishment. But she is deeply compassionate, and she is quite out of sympathy with what she takes to be God's vengefulness. Because of her compassion she is not motivated in the least to support capital punishment. She is in fact active in opposing it, even though she believes she is morally forbidden to do so.

Externalists would be inclined to accept Alice's state of mind as both psychologically and logically possible, but a belief-internalist would have to reject the example. To be sure, any plausible version of belief internalism is a qualified doctrine to the effect that a believed moral obligation entails motivation under relevant conditions. But presumably we could fill in our description of the case so that Alice is clearly in what the internalist would count as relevant conditions. If we did this, then the internalist would have to claim either that Alice does not genuinely believe that she is morally obligated to support capital punishment, or that if she believes this, she is in fact motivated to some degree to support it. For example, Michael Smith would argue that Alice cannot actually believe she has a moral obligation to oppose capital punishment, that she does not make a moral judgment when she says she is 'morally obligated' to oppose capital punishment. His argument depends on the 'practicality requirement,' which I will discuss later on.

In general, the internalist must insist that the concept or nature of moral obligation rules out the logical possibility of Alice's having the psychology attributed to her in the example.

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6 Such a view seems to be held by Smith, as we will see. Smith, The Moral Problem, 62. In this connection, Smith cites Christine Korsgaard, "Skepticism about Practical Reason," Journal of Philosophy 83 (1986) 5-25.


8 Smith, The Moral Problem, 66-71. Smith is replying to an argument by David Brink.

9 Disagreements of this kind between externalists and internalists led W.D. Falk to conclude in effect that externalists and internalists have different concepts of moral obligation. But if this were so, then externalists and internalists would not really be disagreeing; they would be making claims about different kinds of obligation. I think on the contrary that they have a genuine disagreement. See W.D. Falk, "Ought' and Motivation," Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society N.S. 48 (1947-48) 137, 124-5.
An internalist would typically hold that her doctrine is entailed by a proper analysis of the concept of moral obligation. But because this concept is itself the subject of controversy, an internalist cannot defend her doctrine simply by deriving it from a proposed analysis of the concept. Some internalists do offer explicit independent arguments for their doctrines, as we will see, but the arguments do not appear to be the source of their belief in internalism, for they are not typically inclined to abandon internalism when an argument is found to be unsound. Moreover, to defend belief internalism in the face of Alice’s, the internalist needs to argue that Alice cannot have the concept of moral obligation, or that her words do not express the moral judgment they seem to express. Accordingly, belief-internalism needs to be backed up by an account of what is involved in having a concept, as well as by an account of the semantics of moral judgment.

In fact, I believe, the disagreement between internalists and externalists is driven by differences about large metaethical issues rather than by a difference restricted to an analytic question about the shared concept of moral obligation. W.K. Frankena said, “Each [internalist and externalist] theory has strengths and weaknesses, and deciding between them involves determining their relative total values as accounts of morality. But such a determination ... calls for a very broad inquiry ... about the nature and function of morality, of moral discourse, and of moral theory.” We must realize that “neither kind of moral philosophy can be decisively refuted by the other, and ... we must give up the quest for certainty in the sense of no longer hoping for such refutations.” On Frankena’s account, the issues raised by the debate between internalism and externalism ramify throughout metaethical theory. A position in the debate cannot adequately be defended without defending a metaethical theory that addresses issues about moral truth, realism, normativity, and objectivity, among others.

To see this, consider the idea that claims of moral obligation are normative. Some internalists have held that the most plausible explanation of this would construe moral judgment, insofar as it is normative, as an expression of an attitude rather than an expression of belief in a proposition. Now, since the view that moral claims express propositions is usually called ‘cognitivism’ or ‘descriptivism,’ these internalists are noncognitivists. They are arguing that noncognitivism is supported by the normativity of moral judgment. The debate between internalism and externalism is linked in this way to debates about moral truth and moral realism, since moral realism and the idea that there are moral truths presuppose cognitivism.

Now consider the idea that claims of moral obligation are ‘categorical’ in at least this sense: A conceptually competent person who sincerely made a moral claim to the effect that he is obligated to do something would not (appropriately) retract his claim merely on realizing that he lacks any motivation to do it. If this is correct, then no simple form of belief internalism can be true, for, on a simple form of belief internalism, a person would not actually believe he has an obligation if he were not motivated appropriately. That is, if a person realizes he is not motivated in a certain way, what he realizes entails that he lacks the belief that he is obligated to act in that way, and, because of this, it would be appropriate for him to cease to express the belief. The debate between internalism and externalism is linked in this way to the idea that claims of obligation are categorical. Belief internalists must hedge their claims about the connection between obligation and motivation or else explain away the appearance that claims of obligation are categorical.

10 Smith says that “our concept of rightness” supports a “conceptual connection between moral judgment and the will” and a “conceptual connection between the moral facts ... and our reasons for action.” Smith, The Moral Problem, 61, 66-67. 37-8. Brink views the versions of internalism as doctrines about the concept of moral obligation. Brink, Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics, 40.
11 Frankena, “Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy,” 73
12 Ibid., 69
14 I have not worried about formulating internalism to be compatible with noncognitivism because I am going to be assuming a cognitivist view.
If we accept internalism and cognitivism and also think that claims of moral obligation are categorical in the sense I explained, we are on the way to accepting the premises of J.L. Mackie’s ‘argument from queerness,’ which Mackie thought established that no moral proposition is true. So it can seem that only an externalist position can vindicate moral judgment as cognitive, categorical, and sometimes correct.

Given the issues at stake, it seems clear that the debate about internalism will not be settled on the basis of finely honed arguments that might be viewed as prior to, or as setting constraints on, the larger debate about the nature of morality. Frankena said the debate “cannot be resolved, as so many seem to think, by ... small-scale logical or semi-logical arguments....” It also will not be resolved by putative counterexamples. Rather, we must consider the issue on a “macroscopic rather than a microscopic plane.” This is what I propose to do in this paper, admittedly in a sketchy way. I will propose an externalist theory of moral judgment and moral conviction and then attempt to show how the theory can handle certain internalist objections.

2. The Standard-Based Theory of Normative Judgment

I do not aim to provide either a decisive argument for externalism or a decisive argument against internalism. Rather, in this and the next section, I will offer a partial account of the content of propositions about moral obligation as well as an account of moral conviction. I want to show that these accounts, although externalist, nevertheless preserve many of the intuitions that motivate internalism. If I am correct, my argument undermines internalism to the extent that its appeal is due to the thought that only an internalist theory can preserve the intuitions.

I will simplify matters in several ways. First, I will restrict attention to claims in which an agent is said to have a moral obligation. Frankena calls such claims, “judgments of moral obligation.” I will ignore the many other kinds of moral claims. Second, I will ignore any differences there might be among judgments about moral obligations, judgments about moral duties, and judgments to the effect that an agent ought morally to do something. I will refer to all of these as ‘judgments of moral obligation.’

I will also assume that cognitivism or descriptivism is true, that moral claims express propositions. When we make a moral claim, we utter a declarative sentence and thereby assert something; it is reasonable to assume that what we assert is either true or false, that we express a proposition just as we do in non-moral cases. I need to assume that cognitivism is correct so that I can proceed efficiently to the issues I wish to address.

I propose the following as a partial account of the content or truth conditions of the propositions expressed by judgments of moral obligation:

A proposition to the effect that an agent has a moral obligation to do something entails (nontrivially) that there is a justified moral standard that calls for the agent to do that thing.

A number of ideas need to be explained.

To begin, let me emphasize that I am proposing only a necessary condition for the truth of a proposition of moral obligation. It may seem that this will pose a problem for my argument, but the other conditions that are necessary for the truth of such propositions are irrelevant.

15 Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong (Harmondsworth, Penguin 1977) 38-42

16 Frankena, “Obligation and Motivation in Recent Moral Philosophy,” 69

17 Ibid., 49

18 In the following two sections, I present ideas that are developed more fully in my Morality, Normativity, and Society (New York: Oxford University Press 1996).
to what I will be attempting to show. Compare, for example, the proposition that Jimmy Carter's attempt to rescue the hostages was morally obligatory and the proposition that Richard Nixon's recognition of China discharged a moral duty. These are obviously distinct propositions with different truth conditions. Yet the difference between them is not relevant to anything I will be arguing.

Let me now explain the substance of my proposal, beginning with the notion of a standard. Rules, norms, and imperatives are examples of standards. Allan Gibbard's notion of a norm appears to be the same as my notion of a standard. Gibbard says that a norm is "a possible rule or prescription, expressible by an imperative." This formulation would be adequate to explain what I mean by a standard. To say that a standard 'calls for' an action is to say that the standard is conformed to just in case the action is performed. For example, the imperative 'Shut the door,' calls for the door to be shut.

We need the notion of a standard in semantic theory in order to give an account of what is expressed by imperatival sentences — although we obviously do not need to call what is expressed a 'standard.' Frege said, "We should not wish to deny sense to a command, but this sense is not such that the question of truth could arise for it. Therefore I shall not call the sense of a command a thought." Frege appears to be claiming that although imperatival sentences express something, or have 'sense,' they do not express propositions, for, he says, the question of truth does not arise with respect to whatever it is that is expressed by an imperatival sentence. In my terminology, such sentences express 'standards.' Just as propositions are expressed by typical declarative sentences, standards are expressed by typical imperatival sentences.

In order for a standard to qualify as justified, it is not necessary that anyone have presented any argument about it, or have proven any-

thing about it. For a standard to be justified is for it to possess a status, the status of being morally 'binding.' The idea is that unless a standard has this status, corresponding propositions of obligation are not true.

The status at issue is not possessed by standards that are arbitrary, contrived or unwarranted; we do not believe that corresponding moral propositions are true. For example, we do not think that the standards accepted by Nietzsche that call for us to strive to become overmen have the status they would need in order for it to be true that we are obligated to strive to become overmen. We do not believe that we have any obligation to strive to become overmen. On the other hand, we believe that we have an obligation to oppose slavery, and we can formulate a relevant standard calling on us to oppose slavery. We would agree that this standard is justified or morally binding.

In my recent book, I provide a substantive theory of the status possessed by justified standards. Here I need to be less ambitious. Fortunately, many different accounts of the justification of moral standards are familiar from the literature; they are not usually described as theories of the justification of moral standards, but they can usefully be viewed as such in the framework I am proposing.

It is possible of course to take our understanding of the status of being justified to be derivative from our understanding of moral truth. We might insist that if a proposition of moral obligation is true, then there is a related justified moral standard, and we might say no more about what the status of being justified consists in. We would have to give some account of the conditions under which a proposition of moral obligation would be true. But, again, we could finesse this issue by simply asserting that such a proposition is true just in case the relevant action has the property of being morally obligatory. We could leave it at that, although to do so would not be philosophically illuminating.

More useful for my purposes are theories in the Kantian, Aristotelian, or rational choice theoretic schools, including contemporary Hobbesian accounts, to the extent that such theories can be viewed as providing accounts of the conditions under which a moral standard


23 See my Morality, Normativity, and Society.
would be justified. A Kantian might say that a moral standard is justified just in case a person acting on it could "at the same time will that it should become a universal law."24 Or, a Kantian might say, a moral standard is justified just in case any fully rational agent with only purely rational incentives would intend to comply with it.25 An Aristotelian might say that a moral standard is justified just in case any person living a life that would be fulfilling for a human would, by that very fact, have intentions that would lead him to conform with the standard.26 A contemporary Hobbesian, such as David Gauthier, might say that a moral standard is justified just in case an agent maximizing the satisfaction of his preferences would be rational to dispose himself to comply with it.27

For my own part, I would defend a theory according to which a moral standard is justified in relation to a society just in case, if the society were to choose a moral code for currency in it, the society would be rationally required to select a moral code that contains or implies the standard. Obviously I cannot defend this approach here.

These are extremely abbreviated and crude versions of the theories in question, but the details do not matter for present purposes. Each of these theories gives a different account of the status possessed by a moral standard that is morally binding. But if we can understand the nature of the debate among these theories, and understand it as relevant to the issue of which moral propositions are true, and on what basis they are true, then the notion of the justification of a moral standard should not be mysterious.

Any theory of the conditions under which moral standards are justified would raise deep philosophical questions about the nature of morality. But my proposed necessary condition for the truth of a judg-


25 Ibid., Ak 449

26 This is at least vaguely Aristotelian, I hope.


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It is actually a schema for an account since it needs to be completed by a theory of justification for moral standards. I provide a full account in *Morality, Normativity, and Society*.

Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, 32, 40, respectively.

Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons* (Oxford: Blackwell 1993) 4. Dancy adds that "moral considerations are ones whose practical relevance cannot be escaped by saying 'I don't care about that sort of thing.'" But if moral claims are categorical in the sense I explained before, then something stronger is true, namely, the practical relevance of a proposition of moral obligation cannot be escaped by saying "I am not at all motivated by that sort of thing." This undermines internalism rather than supporting it.
in virtue of the fact that it entails (nontrivially) that a relevant moral standard is justified. Moreover, if we extended the account in a natural way, it would say that moral properties are intrinsically normative. Leaving aside irrelevant details, an action has the property of being obligatory if and only if it is called for by a justified moral standard, a standard according to which it is to-be-done. The wrongness of an action is ‘relevant’ to choice because it entails that the action is precluded by a justified moral standard. A natural extension of the account would entail, in addition, that if a person has a moral obligation to do something, she has a moral reason to do it. For, I would argue, a person has a moral reason to do something just in case a justified moral standard calls for her to do it.

All of this is fully compatible with externalism. As for motivation, the account leaves open the possibility that a person may be morally obligated to do something and yet fail to be motivated to any degree to do it. It also leaves open the possibility that a person may believe she is morally obligated to do something and yet fail to be motivated to any degree to do it. To have such a belief is simply to accept a proposition which entails that a justified standard calls for some action, and nothing about the believer’s motivations is entailed by her accepting such a proposition. Turning now to internalism about reasons, a person may have a moral obligation, and therefore have a moral reason to act accordingly, without having a reason-without-qualification, a reason that would motivate any rational agent. And she may not have a reason of ‘self-interest,’ or, to use a terminology I prefer, a ‘self-grounded reason,’ a reason grounded in her own nature. Finally, the account leaves it open that a person who believes she has a moral obligation may not have a reason, or a self-grounded reason, to act accordingly.

Properly speaking, to be sure, the standard-based account is neutral between internalism and externalism. When combined with some theories of justification, it does not imply any internalist doctrine. Yet when combined with certain other theories of justification, it does imply internalist doctrines; in fact, any internalist doctrine is presumably entailed by some theory of justification when it is combined with the standard-based account. David Gauthier, for example, aims to show that “all the duties” of morality “are also truly endorsed in each individual’s reason.”

His account of morality entails a version of reasons-internalism, and it is compatible with my standard-based approach. Nevertheless, in using the standard-based account to explain the normativity of moral judgment, I did not use any internalist ideas. The explanation was externalist: it presupposed nothing about motivations or Reasons.

I have not spelled out my theory of the justification of moral standards, and I have given only a necessary condition of the truth of claims of obligation. It might therefore be objected that for all I have said, internalism may enter the explanation of normativity through my theory of justification, or through some hidden necessary condition for the truth of a claim of moral obligation. Of course I cannot prove that this is not so. However, one could see by inspection that my society-centered account of the justification of moral standards is externalist: it does not entail any internalist doctrine — except for doctrines that are not seriously in dispute, such as the doctrine that anyone with a moral obligation has a corresponding moral reason.

My central claim is that the normativity of a proposition of moral obligation is explained by the fact that it entails nontrivially, and in virtue of its content, that some relevant moral standard is justified. As I said, a standard to the effect that something is to be done calls for an action, which gives sense to the idea that such a standard ‘directs’ the choice of action. In summary, the standard-based account explains that moral propositions are intrinsically normative, that they are apt to direct choice in virtue of their content. It is a version of cognitivism. And, combined with an appropriate theory of justification, it implies that moral claims are categorical in the sense I explained before.

31 Gauthier, Morals by Agreement, 1
32 Both Earl Conee and Michael Smith urged this objection.
33 Of course, some standards are concerned with things other than actions, such as states of character or the structure of institutions.
3. Moral Belief and Conviction

The noncognitivist theories of Allan Gibbard and R.M. Hare are similar to the standard-based theory in that they also use the idea of a standard.34 But Gibbard and Hare see the normativity of moral judgment as arising from assert to a standard rather than from the way that standards enter the semantics of moral claims. Gibbard says the acceptance of 'norms' involves an element of endorsement, and he says this is "the special element that makes normative thought and language normative."35 Hare says that sincerely asserting to a command addressed to oneself involves doing or resolving to do what one has been told to do." Theories of this kind say that the normativity of judgments of moral obligation is explained by the fact that a person making such a judgment expresses her endorsement of a standard.

We often take people's behavior as evidence of their moral beliefs. Noncognitivists such as Gibbard and Hare explain this by viewing moral 'belief' as essentially a matter of endorsing a norm rather than a matter of accepting a proposition. For to endorse a norm is presumably at least in part a matter of being disposed to act appropriately. Of course, I reject noncognitivism and internalism. But it does seem plausible that a person who believes sincerely that she has a moral obligation would normally be motivated to act accordingly.

The standard-based theory can accept this despite insisting, as against noncognitivism, that moral belief is literally belief. The standard-based view distinguishes between the proposition a person expresses in making a claim of moral obligation and the 'corresponding' standard, the standard the justification of which is entailed by that proposition.

Of course, it makes no sense to suppose someone believes a standard, but a person who sincerely makes a moral claim does normally subscribe to the relevant standard. In typical cases, then, where a person making a claim of moral obligation is sincere, she both believes the proposition she expresses and subscribes to the corresponding standard. In such cases, I will say, her claim expresses a 'moral conviction,' a combination of belief and subscription to the corresponding standard.

The idea of 'subscription' to a standard is similar to Gibbard's idea of norm acceptance and to Hare's idea of assert to a command. The important point for present purposes is that a person who 'subscribes' to a standard to which she can conform intends to conform to it, or makes it a policy to conform to it. More specifically, a person 'subscribes morally' to a standard only if

1. she intends to conform to it herself, or makes it a policy to conform, assuming it is a standard to which she can conform, and
2. she intends to support conformity to it, or makes it a policy to support conformity.

The remaining details that would be required in a full account do not matter for present purposes.

I am saying, then, that in typical cases where a person is sincere in making a claim of moral obligation, she has a 'moral conviction,' which implies that she subscribes to the corresponding standard. She is therefore motivated to conform to the standard, for she intends to conform. A person with the conviction that she has a moral obligation to do something is, therefore, motivated to some degree to do it.

Given the way in which we acquire moral attitudes and beliefs, and given the psychological dissonance that would be experienced by a person who did not subscribe to standards that correspond to her moral beliefs — that she is committed to viewing as justified — it is to be expected that people typically subscribe to such standards. Moral beliefs typically are full convictions. Parents who teach children about morality presumably do aim to create appropriate beliefs, for we reason about moral issues, and the moral propositions we believe are the vehicles for our reasoning. Yet it is at least equally important in teaching about morality to bring it about that children subscribe to appropriate standards, the standards corresponding to the beliefs we want them to have.

34 Gibbard, Wise Choices, Apt Feelings. Hare, The Language of Morals. Gibbard calls standards 'norms,' and Hare calls them 'imperatives.' Hare uses the term 'standards' in a different way, to speak of the moral imperatives that have currency in a society or that are subscribed to by a person (Hare, The Language of Morals, 7).


36 Hare, The Language of Morals, 19-20
We want people to live their lives in accord with certain standards, and to have certain policies governing their behavior, which is to say that we want them to subscribe to the relevant standards. We want them to believe that these standards are justified or warranted, which is to say that we want them to have corresponding moral beliefs. And ideally we want them to subscribe to the standards because they believe them to be justified. So it is to be expected that moral education and the social mechanisms that support and reinforce moral education would aim to instill moral belief as well as subscription to corresponding standards.

There is, nevertheless, a real possibility of a person believing that he has a moral obligation without subscribing to the corresponding standard, or vice versa. The best examples of this, I think, are cases in which a person has a metaethical belief that is in tension with his underlying moral attitudes.

Consider again the case of Alice. Alice was raised to believe the divine command theory and to view God as a vengeful ruler who wills us to support capital punishment. Alice still believes all of this, but she is a kind and compassionate person. Her compassion leads her to fail to support capital punishment, and she does not in fact intend to support it or make a policy to support it. She therefore does not subscribe to a standard calling on her to support capital punishment even though she believes this behavior is morally obligatory.

The case of Huckleberry Finn may illustrate the same possibility. Huck believes he is obligated to turn Jim over to the authorities because Jim is an escaped slave, but Huck does not turn him in. Of course, his failure to turn Jim in is not sufficient to show he lacks a policy of turning in escaped slaves, for we sometimes do fail to conform to our own personal policies, but we can certainly imagine that Huck does not have a policy of turning in slaves, or the intention to turn them in. Hence, there is an elaboration of Huck's case in which, although he believes he is obligated to turn escaped slaves over to the authorities, he does not subscribe to the corresponding standard.

Finally, consider the case of Bill. Bill is a naive nihilist who is convinced that no moral standard is justified and therefore that no (basic, simple) moral proposition is true. Yet he was raised with moral values and he still has those values. He subscribes to a variety of standards, including, for example, a prohibition of capital punishment. He would admit he is morally opposed to capital punishment, yet he would deny that capital punishment is wrong or that he is morally obligated to oppose it, and he would deny that he believes these things. Now one can, of course, be self-deceptive about what one believes, but I stipulate in this case that Bill is correct. He does not believe capital punishment is wrong. He is committed by his nihilism to believing it is false that capital punishment is wrong, so it would be inconsistent for him to believe that capital punishment is wrong. He certainly is not committed to this inconsistency simply in virtue of his moral opposition to capital punishment—in virtue of his subscription to a standard that prohibits capital punishment.

Mackie remarks that "first and second order views ... are completely independent.... A man could hold strong moral views ... while believing that they were simply attitudes and policies with regard to conduct that he and other people held." It is not obvious how best to interpret this remark. In my terminology, Mackie may be pointing out the possibility of having moral beliefs while believing (falsely) that there is 'simply' the fact that we subscribe to certain standards. Alternatively, he may be pointing out the possibility of subscribing to moral standards while at the same time believing (again falsely) that there are no moral truths and no moral beliefs, strictly speaking, and that there is 'simply' the fact that we happen to subscribe to certain standards. It seems to me that it is a virtue of my account that it enables us to see these possible positions as at least coherent.

The examples of Alice, Huck, and Bill support my idea that moral convictions are not simply beliefs. Of course, I have made this true by stipulating that 'moral conviction' consists of belief plus subscription, but I believe that this stipulation is not artificial. There is the complex state of believing a moral proposition and subscribing to the corresponding standard, and it is this state that we typically are interested in when we attempt to determine the nature of a person's moral convictions. For it is this state, not the more simple state of believing a moral proposition, that entails motivation. A person with the conviction that he has a moral obligation to do something is motivated to some degree to do it. A person who merely believes this may not be

37 Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong, 16
motivated to do it. For, as the examples suggest, although moral belief is normally accompanied by subscription to the corresponding standard, it need not be.

Externalist positions usually suppose that our motivation for meeting our obligations is a desire to act morally, and they construe this desire as external to moral belief. I agree, of course, that moral belief does not itself guarantee any motivation to meet our believed obligations. But moral conviction is the more complex state that combines belief with subscription, and moral conviction does guarantee motivation to meet the obligations of which we are ‘convinced.’ We therefore can be internalists about moral convictions even if we are externalists about moral beliefs, and we do not need to accept the crude moral psychology of standard forms of externalism. Perhaps people do have the desire to act morally, but moral motivation in typical cases is explained by the subscription to a standard that is constitutive of moral conviction.

4. Internalist Objections

Following Frankena, I recommended that we take a ‘macroscopic’ perspective on the debate between internalism and externalism. Ideally, we would evaluate my proposal as a whole, comparing its overall advantages and disadvantages with those of its competitors. I cannot hope to do this in an essay, of course. Nevertheless, one may object to my proposal on account of its externalism without comparing it to fully developed internalist competitors. To do this fruitfully, one would need to argue directly for an internalist doctrine. Many internalists rely more on appeals to intuition than on developed arguments, but Michael Smith presents arguments for two internalist doctrines, each of which is incompatible with my view.

Smith’s defense of the two doctrines is part of a larger argument intended to show that judgments of moral obligation are propositions about what we would want if we were fully rational. I am going to restrict attention, however, to his arguments for the two internalist doctrines.

The first is the doctrine he calls “rationalism”: “If it is [morally obligatory] for agents to [do A] in circumstances C, then there is a reason for those agents to [do A] in C.” Recalling the distinctions we made before, we can see that rationalism is an agent version of reasons-internalism; it claims there are reasons for an agent to do what she has a moral obligation to do.

Smith calls his second doctrine the “practicality requirement”: “If an agent judges that it is [morally obligatory] for her to [do A] in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to [do A] in C or she is practically irrational.” The practicality requirement is a belief version of motivation-internalism. It is a doctrine about the motivations an agent will have if she believes that she has a moral obligation – provided that she is not afflicted by any form of ‘practical’ irrationality, such as weakness of will or depression.

I shall begin with the practicality requirement, for it is the key to Smith’s internalism. It is a premise in his main argument for rationalism, and it is a premise he uses in replying to certain objections to internalism. It is also a premise in the argument he

38 Smith. The Moral Problem, 184
would use to show that Alice cannot genuinely believe she has a moral obligation.

Smith’s argument for the practicality requirement begins with what he calls the “striking fact” that “a change in motivation follows reliably in the wake of a change in moral judgment, at least in the good and strong-willed person.” Suppose you manage to convince Carol that her most fundamental values are wrong, and, as a result, she comes to have quite different moral beliefs from those she had before. She comes to believe that she has an obligation to oppose capital punishment where, before, she believed she had an obligation to support capital punishment. If she is a “good and strong-willed person,” Smith says, she will now be motivated to oppose capital punishment even though, before, she was motivated to support capital punishment. This example illustrates a connection between change of moral belief and change of motivation that Smith believes is quite reliable. He argues that the reliability of this connection must be explained in one of two ways. First, it might be explained in terms of the “content of moral judgment” by citing the practicality requirement. Or second, it might be explained in terms of “the motivational dispositions possessed by the good and strong-willed person.” Smith argues that any explanation of the second kind would badly misconstrue the nature of the good person. Hence, the practicality requirement gives the only viable explanation of the reliable connection. We must accept the practicality requirement or else reject the reliable connection.

How exactly does the practicality requirement explain the reliable connection? The requirement postulates a connection between moral belief and motivation in a rational person, but Smith’s reliable connection is between moral belief and motivation in a good and strong-willed person. Smith must therefore be assuming that no good and strong-willed person could suffer from any form of practical irrationality. Since weakness of will is his chief example of practical irrationality, I assume that he intends the term ‘strong-willed person’ to pick out exactly the people who lack any form of practical irrationality. On this assumption, it follows immediately from the practicality requirement that a

strong-willed person who newly comes to believe that he has a certain obligation also comes to have a corresponding new motivation (unless, of course, he coincidentally had the relevant motivation all along). On my assumption, therefore, the practicality requirement at least begins to explain Smith’s reliable connection.5

Externalists who deny the practicality requirement obviously must explain the connection in some other way. As we saw, Smith argues that they must explain it in terms of something in the nature of the good and strong-willed person. In particular, he argues, they must explain it on the supposition that a good person invariably desires to do whatever she is obligated to do. The problem, Smith believes, is that this desire is vicious, so a good person does not have the desire.

As Smith sees things, the good person cares directly for such things as honesty, justice, and the well-being of her friends. To be sure, anything she takes to be morally obligatory is such that she desires to do it, but this is not to say that she has the desire to do anything that is morally obligatory. Smith calls this the “de dicto desire.” If the good person’s desire to be honest were explained by the de dicto desire, it would not be a direct desire to be honest; it would be a derived desire explained by this de dicto desire together with her belief that she is obligated to be honest. The desire to do-whatever-one-is-obligated-to-do is “a fetish or moral vice,” Smith thinks.4 Since the externalist explanation of the reliable connection depends on the idea that the good and strong-willed person is characterized by this desire, it must be rejected.

I will argue that Smith’s key claims about the de dicto desire are incorrect. The desire is not vicious, a good person could be motivated by it. Moreover, the reliable connection does not exist in people who are merely good without being strong-willed. Because of this, the externalist can appeal to the de dicto desire to explain the reliable connection in

44 Ibid., 71. In this and the following paragraphs, I summarize and reconstruct Smith’s argument in The Moral Problem, 71-6.

45 If my assumption is incorrect, and being ‘strong-willed’ is compatible with some
forms of practical irrationality, then the practicality requirement does not explain the
reliable connection. A strong-willed and good person might fail to experience
a change of motivation consequent on a change of moral belief, for he might be
depressed or be suffering from some other form of ‘irrationality.’

46 Ibid., 75
people who are both good and strong-willed while denying that the de dicto desire is essential to being a good person. Finally, there are externalist explanations of the reliable connection that do not make reference to the de dicto desire.

Let me begin with the last point. Externalists can explain Smith’s reliable connection in terms of the nature of the strong-willed person. For Smith, a weak-willed person is one who at least sometimes fails to desire to do what he believes to be morally obligatory. Presumably, then, the strong-willed person does not fail to desire to do what he believes to be obligatory. Therefore, when a good and strong-willed person undergoes a change in his beliefs about his obligations, he undergoes a corresponding change in his motivations (unless, of course, he coincidentally had the relevant motivations all along). This explanation of the reliability of Smith’s connection can be accepted by an externalist. It does not require the externalist to think that what Smith calls “weakness of will” is irrational, or a kind of weakness, properly so-called. It relies merely on the idea that strength of will excludes (what Smith calls) weakness of will.

The second point is related. It is that there is not a reliable connection between change of moral belief and change of motivation in people who are good but not strong-willed. Suppose a demagogue convinces Carol that she is in fact obligated to support capital punishment. A while ago, you persuaded her that she ought to oppose it, and you managed to link her fundamentally compassionate nature to her opposition to capital punishment. This link is cemented so firmly, let us suppose, that the demagogue is unable to overcome Carol’s revulsion to the death penalty. He successfully convinces her that she is obligated to support it, but she continues to oppose it. Now Carol may well be a good person, it seems to me, despite the fact that she is ‘weak-willed’; her belief about capital punishment has changed without an accompanying change in motivation, yet (I assume) her fundamental motivations or values are appropriate. Indeed, her goodness seems to depend on her not having the desire to do-what-she-is-obligated-to-do, for if she had this desire, her wavering beliefs about her obligations would bring about wavering motivations. The example shows that a good person may experience a change of moral belief without undergoing a corresponding change of motivation. This means that Smith’s reliable connection is not found in good persons without restriction. It is found only in good persons who are strong-willed. To explain this, an externalist must therefore make use of the idea that strength of will excludes weakness of will.

Smith might deny that Carol is a good person, for he claims that “it is constitutive of being a morally good person that you have direct concern for what you think is right.” That is, if Carol is a good person, then, for anything she believes she is morally obligated to do, she has a direct concern to do it. But the example is meant to challenge this idea. If I am correct, Carol is a good person in the example even though she both believes that she is obligated to support the death penalty and is not concerned to support it. The way I see things, goodness is fundamentally a matter of one’s motivations rather than of one’s beliefs or the connection between one’s beliefs and one’s motivations. A good person subscribes to appropriate moral standards. Smith might reply that Carol is not good in the relevant sense, for she is not principled. This is not clear, however, for if she subscribes to a moral standard that prohibits capital punishment, then it is not merely her feelings that move her to oppose capital punishment, it is her attitude to a principle. If so, I think we would intuitively count her as principled. In any event, Smith’s argument is unpersuasive if we take him to be talking about the ‘principled’ person rather than the ‘good’ person. As we saw, he argues that the good person cares directly for such things as honesty, justice, and the well-being of her friends. Whatever we think of these claims about the good person, they are certainly less plausible if read as claims about the ‘principled’ person. A principled person acts on rules or

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47 Otherwise, weakness of will would not be a form of practical irrationality that could ‘break the connection’ between the judgment that one has an obligation and motivation to act accordingly. Ibid., 120

48 Note that “this is read de re and not de dicto.” Ibid., 76

49 Smith suggested this reply in correspondence.
principles, I would suppose, rather than from certain direct concerns. I will therefore continue to investigate the idea of the good person.

Let me now turn to Smith's claim that the de dicto desire is "a fetish or moral vice."30 If he is correct, then no (entirely) good person has this desire, not even a good person who is also strong-willed. The key point in his reasoning is the claim that it is characteristic of a good person that she has a set of direct concerns. This may well be correct, but it does not follow that no good person can have the de dicto desire. To see this, consider the case of Dena. Dena lacks the de dicto desire. She has a range of direct concerns for such things as justice, honesty, and the well-being of her friends, and, for anything she thinks she is morally obligated to do, she is motivated to do it. She is a good person. But now suppose that Dena acquires the de dicto desire. Smith must now say she is no longer a good person, but he is surely wrong about this. Nor is Dena less good than she used to be. She still cares directly for the things she used to care for. The only change is that she has come to have the desire to do-whatever-she-is-obligated-to-do. There is no reason to think that this desire is vicious in her, for she still cares for all the right things in all the right ways and only cares additionally for doing-the-obligatory-thing.

Smith's worry is presumably about what would happen to Dena if she were to acquire a new belief about what she is obligated to do. He must think that it would be in some way vicious for her to derive her desire to do the new thing from her newly acquired belief together with the de dicto desire. Suppose then that this is how Dena acquires a desire to do a new thing. Is this vicious? Dena initially cares only in a derivative way about the new thing. Yet this is not enough to show that she is a less good person than she used to be, for she still cares directly about (almost) everything that she used to care about, and if she continues to care about the new thing, she may well come to care about it directly and not merely because she believes it is obligatory. Nor does it seem that Dena would have been a better person if she had been able immediately to acquire a direct and non-derivative desire to do the new thing. I suppose she might have been a better person in that case, but it seems to me that this is a contingent matter.

For all I have said, Smith may be correct that a person whose moral motivations were entirely derivative from the de dicto desire would not be a good person. This, however, is no objection to the externalist's attempt to use the de dicto desire to explain Smith's reliable connection. For even if some good persons lack the de dicto desire, as is illustrated by the example of Carol, and even if any good person must have some direct concerns, it may well be that any good and strong-willed person would have the de dicto desire in addition to her direct concerns.

I conclude, therefore, that Smith's attempt to support the practicality requirement fails. An externalist can explain the reliability of the connection between change of moral belief and change of motivation in a good and strong-willed person on the basis that such people are reliably motivated to do whatever they believe to be obligatory. Such people are, after all, strong-willed.

The combination of my standard-based theory with my account of moral conviction has a number of advantages over standard externalist accounts that invoke the de dicto desire to explain moral motivation. First, my account can provide a more plausible account of the psychology of the good person than the account that relies on the de dicto desire. We may have the desire-to-do-whatever-is-obligatory, but we also normally subscribe to a 'second-order' standard, a standard that calls on us to subscribe to moral standards that correspond to the moral propositions we accept. As a matter of subscribing to this standard, we have an intention or a policy that, with respect to the things we believe would be right, we form the intention or make it a policy to do those things. That is, we subscribe to a standard calling on us to convert moral beliefs into moral convictions.

Second, subscription to this second-order standard can help provide an externalist explanation of Smith's reliable connection. For it explains why, normally, a good person who comes to have a new moral belief comes to subscribe to the corresponding moral standard. And the fact that he comes to subscribe to this standard explains how he comes to be motivated to do what he believes to be obligatory.

Given that my account makes room for a distinction between moral belief and moral conviction, it suggests the possibility that Smith has misdescribed our intuition about the reliable connection. Perhaps our
intuition is in fact best understood as an intuition to the effect that a
change of moral conviction results in a change of motivation rather than
as an intuition about change of moral belief, strictly so-called. It is no
mystery that a new conviction that one has a moral obligation entails a
new motivation to act appropriately, for a moral conviction combines
a moral belief with subscription to a corresponding moral standard,
and subscription to a standard entails appropriate motivation.

Finally, my account can explain why the practicality requirement
might seem plausible. For if an agent has the moral conviction that it is
obligatory for him to do A in circumstances C, he is motivated to do A
in C. Something very much like the practicality requirement is there-
to true according to the account I provided earlier in this paper. But
it is not true that an agent who believes he is morally obligated to do
something is necessarily motivated to do it unless he is practically irra-
tional. Recall the case of Alice. Alice believes she is morally obligated
to support capital punishment on the basis of God’s commands but
she is compassionate in a way that means she is not motivated to sup-
port capital punishment. Her lack of this motivation is due to her com-
passion, not to any irrationality that I can see.51

Let me now turn to Smith’s rationalism, his doctrine that if it is
morally obligatory for agents to do A in circumstances C, then there is
a reason for them to do A in C. It is trivial, of course, that if an agent has
a moral obligation to do something, she has a moral reason to do it. I
explained before that this is implied by the standard-based theory. But
according to rationalism an agent’s having a moral obligation to do
something entails that there is a reason for her to do it, a reason such
that anyone “would be motivated to act in that way if she were ra-
tional.” A person is “practically irrational if she is not motivated to act
accordingly.”52 Earlier, for simplicity, I referred to Reasons as ‘reasons-
without-qualification.’ Smith claims it is a conceptual truth that the
existence of a moral obligation implies the existence of a reason-with-
out-qualification. This is not a trivial claim.

By way of analogy, consider etiquette. Etiquette requires setting the
table with the fork on the left side of a place setting. It follows that
there is a reason of etiquette to set the table in this way. But this does
not mean that there is a Reason to set the table in this way—a reason
such that anyone would be motivated to set the table in this way if he
were rational. There is a substantive question whether we are rationally
required to act as we are required by etiquette to act, and most
would think that the answer to the question is negative. Similarly, there
is at least a tradition in philosophy of thinking that there is a substan-
tive question whether we are rationally required to act as we are mor-
ally obligated to act. Rationalism gives an answer to this question that
needs independent defense.

Smith’s argument for rationalism begins with the premise that we
‘expect’ rational agents to do what they are morally required to do.53
That is, he says, we believe that rational agents will do what they are
morally required to do.54 “Being rational, as such, must therefore suf-
fice to ground our [belief] that rational agents will do what they are
morally required to do.” But if this belief is well-grounded for all ra-
tional agents solely on the ground that they are rational, there must be
Reasons for rational agents to do what they are morally obligated to do.
Hence, he concludes, it must be the case that if it is morally obliga-
tory for agents to do something, then there is a Reason for them to do it.55

Smith does not explain what he means by ‘rational agent,’ but it
follows from the definition of a ‘Reason’ that, necessarily, if there is a
Reason to do something, a rational agent is motivated to do it. To sim-
plify the discussion, I will assume that any Reason is a Reason ‘all things
considered,’ and that any rational agent does whatever there is a Reason

51 Smith would view Alice as weak-willed, and he regards weakness of will as a
form of irrationality (61). But if a person who fails to be motivated to do what he
thinks is obligatory is held to be irrational on that basis alone, then the practicality
requirement is tautological. I submit that despite the fact that Alice is what Smith
would call ‘weak-willed,’ she may be rational in every respect.

52 Ibid., 62. Here Smith cites Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason.”

53 Ibid., 85-6. In the following, I summarize and reconstruct Smith’s argument.

54 Ibid., 89, 85-6

55 Ibid., 85
to do. It will be useful to distinguish between agents who are invariably moved by Reasons, and agents who may sometimes fail to be moved by Reasons yet have the capacity to be moved by them. I will write that the former are Rational while the latter are merely c-rational.

The key premise in Smith’s argument is the proposition that we reasonably believe ‘rational agents’ will do what they are morally required to do. Of course, we realize that agents who are merely c-rational can fail to act morally even if there are Reasons to act morally. Smith’s premise must therefore be that we are reasonable to believe that Rational agents will act morally. Smith offers two arguments to support this premise. His main argument relies on the practicality requirement, so it can be ignored here. His second argument is concerned with the appropriateness of attitudes of approval and disapproval.

This second argument depends on the doctrine that our moral disapproval of people’s wrongful behavior presupposes the ‘legitimacy of our expectation’ that they will act rightly; that is, Smith says he means, our moral disapproval presupposes the justifiability of the belief that agents will do what they are morally required to do. But moral disapproval would be appropriate in any case where a Rational agent did not do what she is morally required to do, and this presupposes the justifiability of the belief that any Rational agent will do what she is morally required to do. That is, “Being rational suffices to ground the expectation that people will do what they are morally required to do.”

Assuming that the preconditions of moral disapproval are satisfied, then, we can reasonably believe Rational people will do what they are obligated to do simply because they are Rational.

But Smith is surely wrong to think that the legitimacy of disapproval presupposes the reasonableness of believing that people will act rightly. To be sure, it is not entirely clear what Smith means. However, first, the legitimacy of disapproving of a person, or of his action, does not presuppose that we reasonably believed, or would have been reasonable to believe, that the agent himself would act rightly. Even if we know quite well that someone will do something wrong, this does not mean it will be inappropriate for us to disapprove. Suppose there is someone we know to be an inveterate liar who will lie if he has anything to gain. This does not make it inappropriate for us to disapprove of him and of his lying. There need be nothing morally questionable in disapproving of the behavior of amoralists or of people who for some other reason do not acknowledge their obligations. Nor, second, does the legitimacy of disapproving of a person or his action presuppose that we believe that people in general will act rightly. Suppose the bad people kill all but one of the good people, so that from then on people in general do not act rightly. This would not make it inappropriate for the one remaining good person to disapprove of the bad people.

One might propose that it is legitimate to disapprove of people only if they have the ability to know what they are morally obligated to do. Since it would be legitimate to disapprove of Rational agents if they acted wrongly, and the only thing they are guaranteed to have in common is their Rationality, it must be possible for them to know what they are morally obligated to do solely by the exercise of their common reason. It must therefore be the case that moral knowledge is a priori. Unfortunately, even if we accept this reasoning for the sake of argument, it does not help Smith’s argument, for it does not show that moral knowledge is knowledge of Reasons. It does not show that there is a Reason to do whatever is morally obligatory.

56 For this argument, see Smith, The Moral Problem, 86-7.
57 Ibid., 87-91.
58 Ibid., 89. As Smith notes, “to say we expect someone to do something can mean either that we believe they will, or that we believe that they should.” Smith says that he intends the former interpretation throughout. (Ibid., 85-6. Smith emphasized this in personal correspondence as well.) The former is the relevant interpretation, for the proposition he is trying to support is that we believe rational agents will do what they are morally required to do.
59 Ibid., 89. See 85.
60 Ibid., 90.
61 Ibid., 90.
It might be objected that if there are not Reasons to do what we are obligated to do - if moral reasons are not Reasons - then a Rational agent could not do what she is obligated to do. This result may seem in conflict with the maxim that 'ought' implies 'can.' But the inference is mistaken; even if moral reasons are not Reasons, it does not follow that a Rational agent cannot do what she is obligated to do. To see this, suppose that Earl is Rational. It is a necessary truth that as long as Earl is Rational, he acts on Reasons. But it does not follow that Earl cannot act rightly unless there is a Reason for him to act rightly. For one thing, it is not a necessary truth that Earl is Rational. He can act rightly even if there are no Reasons to act rightly because he can cease to be Rational. Therefore, the idea that moral reasons are not Reasons does not entail that Rational agents lack any moral obligations.

In short, I do not see how to generate a successful argument for rationalism from Smith’s remarks.

The standard-based theory supports a doctrine that is superficially very similar to rationalism, for, as I said before, it implies that if an agent has a moral obligation to do something, he has a moral reason to do it. It follows that if there is a moral obligation to do something, there is a reason (of some kind) to do it. But rationalism is the stronger thesis that if an agent has a moral obligation to do something, then there is a Reason or a reason-without-qualification for him to do it. The existence of a reason-without-qualification to fulfill our moral obligations does not follow from the existence of a reason of some kind to fulfill our moral obligations. We are not already committed to rationalism simply because we recognize that moral obligations entail moral reasons.

One might think that the only true or genuine reasons are reasons-without-qualification. This would mean that so-called ‘moral reasons’ are not reasons unless they are reasons-without-qualification. Of course, I have no objection to the policy of reserving the word ‘reason’ for reasons-without-qualification, but we ordinarily do not do this. A rational person responds appropriately to reasons of all kinds, taking their true measure from the point of view of reason; she is not necessarily motivated by reasons of every kind. An irrational person is a person who fails to respond to reasons in this appropriate way. So to establish that there is a reason of a certain kind to do something is not yet to establish that a rational person would be motivated to do the thing, or that it would be irrational to fail to be motivated to do it. It is not yet to establish that there is a reason-without-qualification to do it.

Christine Korsgaard has proposed an “internalism requirement” to the effect that reasons must be capable of motivating us insofar as we are rational. But Korsgaard’s proposal does not undercut my view. On my view, there is a moral reason to do something just in case a justified moral standard calls on us to do it. A rational person is capable of subscribing to such a standard, and if he subscribes, he is motivated to conform to the standard. Hence, moral reasons are capable of motivating us even if they are not Reasons.

It would obviously be beyond my capacity to consider every internalist argument against the kind of externalism I have proposed. I have merely attempted to show that the standard-based account of moral judgment and the associated account of moral conviction stand up well against Michael Smith’s arguments. Moreover, the accounts go some way toward explaining why many philosophers are convinced that internalism is correct, for they imply the truth of doctrines that are very similar to the internalist doctrines we have considered. They imply that moral propositions are intrinsically normative. They imply that moral considerations are sources of moral reasons. They account for the fact that good persons are not generally motivated by the desire-to-do-what-is-obligatory. And they imply that moral conviction is partially constituted by moral motivation. In all of these respects, my account is congenial to internalism even though, strictly speaking, it is externalist.

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62 Korsgaard, “Skepticism about Practical Reason.” In some places she speaks of “reason-claims” or of “rational considerations,” rather than of reasons, and she speaks of their “success” in motivating us rather than of their being capable of motivating us. See pp. 11, 15, 23. For a superficially similar view, see Williams, “Internal and External Reasons.”