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Abstract: Bernard Williams has famously argued that there are only 'internal' reasons for action. Although Williams has produced several, slightly different versions of internalism over the years, one core idea has remained the same: the reasons a person has for acting must be essentially linked to, derived from, or in some other way connected to that person's 'motivational set'. I have two aims in this paper. First, after having cleared up some initial ambiguities, I try to show that we can interpret internalism in two ways. Second, I try to show that both these interpretations are inadequate. The first interpretation is incompatible with certain claims that supposedly provide the reasons why we should accept internalism in the first place. The second interpretation faces a different set of problems: given the essential link between reasons and motivation, this interpretation cannot cope with the phenomenon of accidie. It also forces anyone who subscribes to this view to accept (on pain of inconsistency) an implausible account of reasonable regret.

Abstract: Bernard Williams has famously argued that there are only ‘internal’ reasons for action. Although Williams has produced several, slightly different versions of internalism over the years, one core idea has remained the same: the reasons a person has for acting must be essentially linked to, derived from, or in some other way connected to, that person’s ‘subjective motivational set’. I have two aims in this paper. First, after having cleared up some initial ambiguities, I try to show that both these interpretations are inadequate. The first interpretation is incompatible with certain claims that supposedly provide the reasons why we should accept internalism in the first place. The second interpretation faces other problems: given the essential link between reasons and motivation, this interpretation cannot adequately deal with the phenomenon of accidie. Furthermore, those who subscribe to this interpretation of internalism are, on pain of inconsistency, forced to accept an implausible account of reasonable regret.

Internalism and Accidie

Introduction

In his 'Internal and External Reasons',¹ Bernard Williams distinguishes two interpretations of the claim 'A has a reason to ϕ ' and argues that all true reasons statements about an agent must be given an 'internal' interpretation. Perhaps the main reason why some commentators have sought to refute Williams is that internalism about reasons seems to leave us with a worrying prospect. As John McDowell puts it, if all reasons for action are internal in Williams' sense, then this will bear

on a familiar problem that arises about ethical reasons in particular, in view of the evident possibility of being left cold by them. The implication of Williams' scepticism is that ethical reasons are reasons only for those for whom they are internal reasons: only for those who have motivations to which ethical considerations speak, or can be made to speak.²

I agree with McDowell. Williams' internalism threatens to undermine what we might call the categorical, or universal, normativity of moral demands. This is nothing new, of course. So although the potential problem highlighted

¹Reprinted in Williams (1981).

²McDowell, in Altham and Harrison (eds.), p. 68.

by McDowell constitutes the backdrop against which this paper takes shape, I shall not be discussing this particular problem any further. Instead, I want to focus on matters more internal, so to speak, to internalism.

I will begin this paper by briefly outlining Williams's internalism. This task is unfortunately made somewhat difficult given that there is no standard formulation of the theory's most general form. Williams has returned to internalism three times since 'Internal and External Reasons', and on each of those occasions the formulation of internalism differs slightly from the original version.³ To begin with, I shall ignore this problem and proceed to point out a certain ambiguity in what I take to be the best formulation of internalism. Having disambiguated this formulation, another ambiguity presents itself. This time the ambiguity is manifested in two different 'modal' interpretations of internalism. I shall argue that the first interpretation is incompatible with certain claims that supposedly provide the reason for accepting internalism in the first place. This pushes us in the direction of the second interpretation. However, as I will try to show, this interpretation is unsatisfactory in at least two respects. First, it cannot cope with what I will call the problem of accidie, and second, it commits internalists to an implausible account of reasonable regret.

³In 'Internalism and the Obscurity of Blame' in Williams (1995), 'Replies' in Altham and Harrison (eds.), and 'Some Further Notes on Internal and External Reasons' in Millgram (ed.).

I. Williams' Internalism

Despite differences in Williams' formulations of internalism, one core idea remains constant:

Basically, and by definition, any model for the internal interpretation must display a relativity of the reason statement to the agent's *subjective motivational set*....⁴

This introduces us to a key component of Williams' internalism: the agent's subjective motivational set (S). Williams is quite happy to term all elements in an agent's S 'desires', but he is careful to remind us that 'desire' should here be interpreted in a strictly philosophical way so as to encompass such elements as 'dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent.'⁵ So whatever an agent has a reason to do, this reason must be anchored in, derived from, or in some other way related to, one or more of the elements of that agent's subjective motivational set. In other words, a reason statement about an agent is falsified by the absence of some suitable element in that agent's S. However, Williams says, '[w]e should not...think of S as statically given. The process of deliberation

⁴Williams (1981), p. 102.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 105.

can have all sorts of effects on S, and this is a fact which a theory of internal reasons should be very happy to accommodate.’⁶ Thus we encounter another key component of internalism: the idea of a ‘sound deliberative route’. Although this idea is somewhat indeterminate, in ‘Internal and External Reasons’ Williams says that sound deliberation goes beyond mere means-ends reasoning:

A clear example of practical reasoning is that leading to the conclusion that one has reason to ϕ because ϕ -ing would be the most convenient, economical, pleasant etc. way of satisfying some element in S, if not necessarily in a very clear or determinate way.⁷

Williams also builds into his conception of sound deliberation that every agent has a ‘general interest in being factually and rationally correctly informed.’⁸ Thus the internalist can (rightly) deny that desires based on false beliefs give rise to reasons. Consider the case he presents us with:

The agent believes that this stuff is gin, when it is in fact petrol. He wants a gin and tonic. Has he reason, or a reason, to mix this stuff with tonic and drink it? ...it is just very odd to say that he has a

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Ibid.*, p, 104.

⁸Williams (1995), p. 37.

reason to drink this stuff, and natural to say that he has no reason to drink it, although he thinks he has.⁹

For Williams, then, it is not only odd to say that this person has a reason to drink the stuff before him, it is false. And the reason why it is natural (and correct) to say that the agent has no reason to drink the stuff before him is that this desire is prompted by a false belief: the belief that the stuff before him is gin. However, and this will turn out to be very important, if the agent does drink the stuff we could then correctly cite the reason why he did it. This brings out the *explanatory* dimension of reasons: the reason why he drank the stuff was that he believed it to be gin and he wanted a gin and tonic.

However, the sense in which it is natural to say that he has no reason to drink the stuff is the *normative* sense. And it is this sense of 'reason' Williams' paper is mainly about. Crucially, however, Williams claims that there is an important relation between these two dimensions:

It must be a mistake simply to separate explanatory and normative reasons. If it is true that A has a reason to ϕ , then it must be possible that he should ϕ for that reason; and if he does act for that reason, then that reason will be the explanation of his acting. ... This is a basic connection. When the reason is an explanation of his action, then of course it will be, in some form in his [subjective

⁹Williams (1981), p. 102.

motivational set (S)], because certainly - and nobody denies this - what he actually does has to be explained by his S.¹⁰

Let us call this the *interrelation of explanatory and normative reasons* principle (IENR for short). In 'Internalism and the Obscurity of Blame', Williams claims that IENR is one of the fundamental motivations behind the internalist account.¹¹

I am not convinced that anyone who accepts IENR is thereby committed to (or at least pushed in the direction of) internalism. Parfit suggests that Williams may have the following argument in mind:

(A) Normative reasons must be able to be motivating reasons. It must be possible that we should act *for these reasons*.

(B) Motivating reasons must be internal, since our acts must be in part explained by our desires, or other motivating states.

Therefore

(C) Normative reasons must be internal.

Although Parfit acknowledges that Williams may not have intended this argument, he says, correctly in my mind, that this argument is suggested by Williams' remarks in Williams (1981), pp. 102 and 106-7, and in Williams (1995), p. 39.¹² Regardless of whether Williams intended this argument or

¹⁰Williams (1995), pp 38-9.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹² See Parfit, p. 112.

not, it should be rejected because it is invalid. What follows from (A) and (B) is not (C), but

(C*): Normative reasons must *be able to be* internal.

I can see no obvious reason why externalists could not accept (C*). The distinctive externalist claim, as I understand it, is not that true reasons statements are in some way or other ‘potentially evidence transcendent’ (which may be taken to be distinctive of certain kinds of *realism(s)*); rather, externalists reject the claim that true reasons statements are *made true* by various features of our motivational sets. I shall not pursue this point further here, although I shall return to a related issue in a later section.

This brings my summary of Williams’ internalism to an end. All that remains for me to do is to state, in its most general form, the theory itself. As I said earlier, since Williams has produced various versions of this general form over the years, one should perhaps be careful in stating *the* general form of internalism. However, given the information we have assembled throughout this summary, I believe the version of internalism that best captures these elements is the one Williams puts forward in ‘Internalism and the Obscurity of Blame’. Internalism about (practical) reasons (hereafter IR) says:

IR: A has reason to ϕ if and only if A could reach the conclusion to ϕ by a sound deliberative route from the motivations A already has.¹³

However, before we can proceed to critically investigate whether this internalist account of reasons is plausible, there is an important ambiguity in (IR) that we need to attend to first.

II. Disambiguating Internalism

We should begin by noting that although IR provides us with what Williams takes to be the necessary and sufficient conditions for its being true that someone has a reason to do something, Williams sometimes writes as if thinks that IR reveals more than this. At one point he asks ‘What are we *saying* when we say someone has a reason to do something?’¹⁴ Similarly, he says ‘A has reason to ϕ ’ *means* more than ‘A is presently disposed to ϕ ’¹⁵; and ‘I think the *sense* of a statement of the form ‘A has reason to ϕ ’ is given by the

¹³See Williams (1995) , p. 35.

¹⁴*Ibid.* My italics.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 36. My italics.

internalist model.¹⁶ These quotes suggest that Williams is, perhaps implicitly, trying to explain the *meaning* of reasons statements.¹⁷

If we take IR to be an analysis of the meaning of ‘A has reason to ϕ ’, the analysis is hampered by the fact that the analysis is grammatically flawed. Since ‘ ϕ ’ stands for some verb of action, the wording of the analysis does not sit well with our ordinary use of English. In English the verb ‘conclude’ always takes on a noun clause and not an infinitive clause as in Williams’ sentence. Thus we say ‘he could conclude *that ...*’ Since English grammar (or everyday usage of English) does not permit Williams’ formulation, it is hard to understand exactly what the formula is supposed to mean. And this is of course an unwelcome result if IR is supposed to reveal the meaning of ‘A has reason to ϕ ’.¹⁸ No problem, we might think, let’s just get rid of the problematic phrase ‘reach the conclusion to’ and replace it with an unproblematic one. Here, however, problems arise. What do we put in its place? Here are a few suggestions:

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 40. My italics.

¹⁷I have benefited greatly from Parfit’s discussion of this topic. See Parfit. In that paper Parfit claims that Williams, in the end, actually rejects what Parfit calls ‘Analytical Internalism’ - see p. 110n21.

¹⁸Even if Williams is not trying to analyse the *meaning* of reasons statements, we still need to know what it means to say of someone that he or she ‘could reach the conclusion to ϕ ’.

(i) 'conclude that A has reason to'

If this is what the phrase 'reach the conclusion to' meant, IR, although not perhaps implausible with regards to the necessary and sufficient conditions for someone's having a reason, would be useless from the point of meaning analysis. The analysans cannot make use of a term appearing in the analysandum. This should be fairly obvious; we cannot use the idea of a reason to explicate the idea of a reason. Nor can the phrase be substituted for

(ii) 'conclude that A ought to (should)'

Williams actually suggests this reading at one point.¹⁹ If this is what IR means, IR is almost certainly false. It would be too restrictive. A could very well have a reason to do something without it being the case that A could (rationally, or correctly) conclude that he ought to do that thing. In one sense of 'could' it is arguably true that for any reason A has, that reason could be his strongest reason, and that, consequently, A could correctly conclude that he ought to act in a certain way. But this would be an odd condition to impose on an agent's having a reason. Why should it be a necessary condition for the obtaining of a reason that that reason could be an agent's strongest reason? Here is yet another suggestion:

¹⁹ Williams (1995), p. 35.

(iii) 'decide to'

Although this suggestion might initially seem plausible, it should be rejected on the same grounds as (ii). A cannot (rationally) *decide* to go for a walk *and* stay at home at the same time. The problem with (ii) and (iii) is that they cannot adequately account for the existence of reasons that pull in different directions so to speak (except of course in that limited sense of 'could' I mentioned earlier). But this, of course, is something an adequate theory of reasons must be able to do. Furthermore, anyone who accepts (ii) or (iii) will be unable to account for, or make sense, of 'outweighed' or 'defeated' reasons. The final, and, I believe, most plausible suggestion is:

(iv) 'be motivated to'

I suspect that this is essentially what Williams takes IR to mean; although, as we shall see, IR can be interpreted in a way that does not make any reference to the agent's motivations. The current proposal (suitably reformulated), then, runs as follows:

IR*: A has reason to ϕ if and only if A could be motivated to ϕ after having deliberated soundly on, and from, the motivations A already has.

III. Two Further Distinctions

The first thing we should note about IR* is that it too is ambiguous. What does it mean to say of someone that he or she could be motivated to ϕ ? As far as I can see, there are two ways of interpreting this claim. On the one hand it can be read as a psychological claim about what A *would, given his actual circumstances*, be motivated to do if he deliberated correctly. I think this interpretation is the most natural one. According to this interpretation, there are two individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for its being true that A has a reason to ϕ , namely:

- (1) There exists a sound deliberative route from A's S to his ϕ -ing.
- (2) If A were aware of (1) he *would* be motivated to ϕ .

Again, we should remember that we are allowed to discount those elements in S that are the product of false belief.²⁰ So from now on, whichever formulation of internalism I am discussing, I will be assuming that this proviso (regarding false beliefs) is in place.

Before I continue, let me clarify a couple of things. It is important to keep in mind that A could well be motivated to ϕ without having acquired that motivation *through* deliberation. A's motivation to ϕ could simply be one of the 'original' elements of his S - a 'basic' desire. However, insofar as it is not, then on the current proposal it is indeed necessary that he would become

²⁰Williams (1981), pp 104-5.

So which approach does Williams favour? Is he an actualist or a possibilist? Answering this question would require a level of exegetical exposition which would go beyond the scope of this paper. Since it is not crucial for the rest of my argument, I shall not try to establish whether Williams is an actualist or a possibilist. Let us look at possibilism first.

IV. Possibilism

We should note right away that POS suffers from roughly the same defect as IR: what does it mean to say of some act that there is sound deliberative route to it? This question can be answered by appealing to what Williams calls ‘the sub-Humean model’. According to this model

A has reason to ϕ iff *A* has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his ϕ -ing.²¹

Neither POS nor the sub-Humean model makes any reference to the agent’s motivation. The fact that the sub-Humean model includes the word ‘desire’ should not distract us from this point. Whether or not we think that there is a necessary connection between desiring something and being motivated to pursue that thing, we can remain neutral on this point by simply substituting

²¹Williams (1981), p. 101.

'motive' for 'desire'. By doing this, we simply acknowledge that the agent has some motive or goal which would be achieved by, say, ϕ -ing. Whether or not this actually motivates the agent is, on the current proposal, irrelevant. So how does this relate to possibilism? The possibilist wants to say that although IR* is true, it is potentially misleading. According to possibilism, IR* should be understood as saying the same thing as the sub-Humean model. So the possibilist will insist (with the (sub) Humean) that we separate 'motives' (i.e. the elements of a person's S) from 'motivations'. Since an agent can have a motive that would be served by ϕ -ing without being motivated (for various reasons) to ϕ , the possibilist insists that it is the existence of a motive, rather than the agent's being motivated, that grounds reasons statements. In other words, 'there is a sound deliberative route from A's S to A's ϕ -ing' should be understood as equivalent to 'A has some motive which would be satisfied by his ϕ -ing'.

Now consider the following objection to possibilism: A has with great enthusiasm and excitement witnessed the pomp and circumstance of various military parades on television. He too wants to parade around with medals, in uniform, in front of the Queen. Call the content of this desire ' ϕ '. Now, suppose further that a necessary condition for anyone to parade in front of the Queen is that he completes a certain amount of military training which in turn involves going through boot camp (call this condition ' ψ '). Let us represent this as ' $\phi \rightarrow \psi$ '. On the current proposal, the truth of this conditional, together with A's desire to ϕ , reveals that A has reason to ψ . Boot

camp, however, is not an enjoyable experience. Let us assume that upon receiving the information that he has reason to ψ this causes A to lose his desire to ϕ . Assuming that A has a reason to ψ only because of the relation between ψ -ing and his desire to ϕ , then since A no longer desires to ϕ he has no reason to ψ . In other words, A's recognition that he had a reason to ψ contributed to making it the case that he has no reason to ψ .

This little story, I think, highlights two ways in which possibilism conflicts with some central tenets of internalism. First, possibilism seems incompatible with the IENR principle; and, second, it also seems incompatible with Williams' idea of the 'elasticity' of agents' motivational sets. Recall that according to IENR, if it is true that A has a reason to ϕ , then it must be possible that A should ϕ for that reason. But in the example I have just described this would not be possible. Since it was A's recognition of the fact that [his going through boot camp is a necessary means for his parading in front of the Queen] that caused him to lose the desire to parade in front of the Queen, the (supposed) reason A had to go to boot camp could never have been the explanation of why A went to boot camp.

Of course the possibilist could say that certain reasons (like some dispositions perhaps) are 'finkish' - i.e. that it was true of A that he *did* have reason to go through boot camp up until the point just before he recognised that he had reason to do so. But his recognition of this fact made it the case that he (now) has no reason to go through boot camp.²² But I cannot see how

²²Hugh Mellor suggested this possibilist response to me.

this will help the possibilist. Finkish reasons, if there are any, would have to be defined, at least in part, *by their failure to meet the (IENR) criterion*: finkish reasons are such that they could never figure in a correct explanation of A's acting *for that reason*. And if that (supposed) reason could never have explained A's action, it follows according to IENR that it was never a reason in the first place.

The possibilist might dig in his heels and respond by saying that what is important here is not whether or not A *would* act for that reason; rather, what is important is whether it is possible that he could act for that reason. In other words, the possibilist could maintain that there are finkish reasons, and, more importantly, that finkish reasons do not provide a counterexample to IENR - *it is possible* that A should go through boot camp because he recognises that he has reason to do so; the counterfactual isn't impossible, it just wouldn't happen because of the contingent make up of A's motivational set.²³ The idea is this. Had A retained his desire to parade in front of the Queen after he found out what this would require of him, the reason to go through boot camp would have been sustained, so to speak, after deliberation. And surely, the thought goes, this *is possible*. And if this is possible it is also possible that A should have gone through boot camp because he recognised that he had reason to do so. Thus he *could* have acted for that reason; and therefore the existence of this reason does not violate IENR.

²³This was pointed out to me by John Broome.

In one sense this is correct; it is possible that A should be motivated to go through boot camp - there is a possible world in which A would be motivated to go through boot camp. However, I think internalists are committed to holding that what is possible and impossible in the present context must be determined by, or controlled by (to use Williams' terminology), A's *actual S*. The elements in A's actual S (including his dispositions) limit the range of reasons that apply *to him*. Of course, it is logically possible that A's S could have been different (i.e. it could have been such that A retained his desire to parade in front of the Queen), but since there are no restrictions on what sort of S A could have had (except certain logical restrictions), there are no restrictions on what could be a reason for A. But if there are no restrictions on what could count as a reason for A, IENR becomes more or less vacuous - nothing, except certain logically impossible actions, would be ruled out by it. This is of course an unwelcome conclusion for the possibilist (and internalist in general) as he wants to say that IENR is not vacuous - that it is an important principle with real cutting power which provides a 'fundamental motivation behind the internalist account of reasons'. To avoid this conclusion, then, possibilists (and internalists more generally) must stress the necessity of grounding the possible reasons an agent could have in that agent's actual S. I am going to call this the 'actualist constraint':

A/CON: What is possible and impossible *with respect to the obtaining of reasons* for A is determined by A's *actual S*.

A/CON says that 'possible' must be restricted in such a way that it does not apply to the agent's S itself. The agent's actual S must be fixed. The internalist must insist that we think of the relevant possibilities in terms of A's actual S, not in terms of an S that A could have had.

Consider next the following case. Suppose that A has, in his actual S, a disposition to refrain from doing that which he believes involves getting sweaty and dirty, and that he believes (plausibly enough) that going through boot camp entails that he will get sweaty and dirty. In this case, the combination of A's disposition and his belief will prevent him from going through boot camp. So now we have a disposition in A's actual S which would (along with the relevant belief) prevent him from acting on the supposed reason he has to go through boot camp. Importantly, however, this does not mean that A could not retain his desire to parade in front of the queen after deliberating about the necessary means to satisfy that desire. Whether he does or does not retain his desire to parade in front of the queen is a contingent psychological matter which is presumably going to be determined by other features in his S and (perhaps) various other features that make up his over all psychology.

Possibilism also seems incompatible with the idea that agents' motivational sets are 'elastic'. This thought has so far only been referred to in passing. A more explicit elucidation of this idea is contained in the following passage:

As a result of [sound deliberation] an agent can come to see that he has reason to do something which he did not see he had reason to do at all. In this way, the deliberative process can add new actions for which there are internal reasons, just as it can also add new internal reasons for given actions. *The deliberative process can also subtract elements from S.* Reflections may lead the agent to see that some belief is false, and hence to realise that he has in fact no reason to do something he thought he had reason to do. More subtly, he may think he has reason to promote some development because he has not exercised his imagination enough about what it would be like if it came about. *In his unaided deliberative reason, or encouraged by the persuasions of others, he may come to have some more concrete sense of what would be involved, and lose his desire for it,* just as, positively, the imagination can create new possibilities and new desires.... *We should not, then, think of S as statically given. The process of deliberation can have all sorts of effect on S,* and this is a fact which a theory of internal reason should be very happy to accommodate.²⁴

As we have seen, the possibilist holds that post-deliberative motivation is irrelevant with respect to the obtaining or non-obtaining of reasons. But this seems hard, if not impossible, to square with Williams' very plausible idea that an agent's S is elastic (in the above mentioned sense). The idea should be

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp 104-5. My italics.

fairly clear: if post-deliberative motivation is irrelevant to the obtaining or non-obtaining of reasons (for a particular agent), then since all reasons are supposed to be anchored in the agent's S (and given that there are no such things as finkish reasons) it is hard to see how possibilism can accommodate the idea that deliberation can add or subtract elements to one's S (as it so obviously can).

To reconcile possibilism with IENR and the elasticity of agents' motivational sets the possibilist might offer an altogether different analysis of why it is not the case that A has reason to go through boot camp. He might argue along the following lines. Although A's desire to parade in front of the Queen was not formed on the basis of a false belief, his desire to parade in front of the Queen was formed on the basis of incomplete information. As Williams suggests: had A been better informed, 'he may [have] come to have some more concrete sense of what would be involved, and [as a result] lose his desire for it...'.²⁵ In other words, had A known the relevant facts (such as $\phi \rightarrow \psi$) he might not have desired to ϕ in the first place. Hence he would not, on that basis, have had a reason to (ψ). The principle appealed to here might be stated as:

POS*: A has to reason to ϕ if and only if, *taking all relevant facts into consideration*, there is a sound deliberative route from A's S to ϕ -
ing.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

I don't think this will help the possibilist. The first and most obvious question for the possibilist is 'how do we specify the 'relevant facts'?' Clearly we want to rule out facts that are irrelevant to a particular deliberative situation. If we are investigating, say, whether A has a reason to go to the cinema tonight, it would be very odd indeed if the fact that [Ulan Bator is the capital of Mongolia] should play a role in determining whether A has this reason or not. So by what criteria could the possibilist sort the irrelevant facts from the relevant ones? It seems to me that the only way to do this would be to say that the relevant facts are those facts, the awareness of which, would 'impact', or make a difference to, what A would (actually) be motivated to do. But this, of course, is nothing short of actualism. In the end, then, I think that in light of these considerations the internalist will do better (for the time being anyway) by rejecting possibilism in favour of actualism.

V. Actualism and the Problem of Accidie

According to actualism we should ask 'would A, given his current, actual, psychological make up, after sound deliberation, be motivated to ϕ ?' If the answer is no, then, even though ϕ -ing would satisfy some motive A has, it is not true of A that he has a reason to ϕ . The problem with this approach is that it seems vulnerable to the phenomenon of accidie. Now accidie is not new to the philosophical scene, but as far as I am aware it has mainly been presented as a threat to another kind of internalism. This kind of internalism, which we

might call 'moral judgement/motivation internalism', is a theory about the supposedly necessary connection between *moral judgements* and motivation.²⁶

Here, however, we are concerned with the implications of accidie for the connection between *reasons* and motivation. Jonathan Dancy characterises accidie as follows:

People who suffer from accidie are those who just don't care for a while about things which would normally seem to them to be perfectly good reasons for action; this is so whether the reasons are moral reasons or more ordinary ones. Depression can be a cause of accidie. The depressive is not deprived of the relevant beliefs by his depression; they just leave him indifferent. He knows that if he doesn't act now he will lose the opportunity he has been working for for two years, but he can't see that this matters.²⁷

So if we allow that accidie is possible, what follows if the actualist interpretation of IR* is true? Well if A is suffering from accidie, then he is not motivated to do anything. And if this is the case there is *nothing* A (or anyone else - deliberating 'on the behalf' of A) could arrive at through sound deliberation - there is no motivation to deliberate *from*. Hence A has no reason to do anything. This, however, sounds implausible. As a response to

²⁶See Darwall.

²⁷Dancy, p. 5.

this problem, the actualist might suggest that what A has reason to do is determined (or at least controlled), in part, by A's pre-accidious S. But this merely puts off the problem. Actualism, as characterised above, makes essential reference to what the agent *would, as a matter of fact* be motivated to do after having deliberated. So although there might be a sound deliberative route from the A's pre-accidious S to, say, ϕ -ing, the problem is that, *as a matter of fact, A is not motivated* to ϕ . What would the actualist say about a case like this? Does A have a reason to ϕ ?

Actualists, it seems to me, have to deny this. Since, according to actualism, it is a necessary condition of A's having a reason to ϕ that A *would* (after deliberation) be motivated to ϕ it cannot be the case that A has a reason to ϕ . And, since an appeal to A's pre-accidious S will not do the trick, some other strategy must be employed.

Another way for the actualist to get around this problem would be to amend the formula by adding the proviso that the agent in question not be accidious. A somewhat clumsy formulation of this idea would be:

ACT*:
A has reason to ϕ if and only if A would, *insofar as A is not accidious,*

be motivated to ϕ after having deliberated soundly on, and
from, the
motivations A already has.

Some actualists might be inclined to say that the necessity of the proviso is precluded by the very idea of 'a sound deliberative route'. This would be a mistake however. As I (or rather, Dancy) described accidie, it is an affliction (for lack of a better word) associated with *motivation*, not deliberation. So the possibility remains: if an agent is accidious, he could, although perfectly capable of engaging in sound deliberation (unless, of course, this ability has also been affected by his accidious affliction), find himself in the position of not being motivated to do that which he would be motivated to do were he not accidious. Actualists cannot therefore claim that the inclusion of the proviso is redundant.

But even with the proviso, the problem with this particular actualist strategy is that it violates A/CON. In his reply to McDowell's suggestion that an agent has reason to do whatever an Aristotelian *phronimos* would do²⁸

Williams says:

...in considering what A has reason to do, one thing that A should take into account, if he is grown up and has some sense, are the ways in which he relevantly fails to be a *phronimos*. Aristotle's *phronimos*...was, for instance, supposed to display temperance, a moderate equilibrium of the passions which did not even require the emergency semi-virtue of self-control. But if I know that I fall short of temperance and am unreliable with respect even to some

²⁸See McDowell.

kinds of self-control, I shall have good reason not to do some things that a temperate person could properly and safely do.²⁹

This passage reinforces the idea that Williams wants to reject all attempts to ground an agent's reasons in some, 'non-actual' (counterfactual), idealised version of himself. One of Williams' central tenets is that deliberation *must* proceed from the *actual* motivations of the agent.

An opponent of actualism could thus claim (with some justification) that the introduction of the proviso in ACT* seems not only arbitrary, but self-defeating *from the actualist point of view*. After all, the inclusion of the proviso just amounts to an idealisation of the agent's S: were A not suffering from accidie A would have reason to.... But if we are in the business of analysing the agent's S counterfactually, why stop at ruling out accidie? Why not follow McDowell's lead and claim that (counterfactually), had the agent had a 'proper' upbringing he would have been a *phronimos*, and that therefore what the agent has reason to do is what the *phronimos* would be motivated to do? On what non-arbitrary grounds can the internalist dismiss accidie without dismissing other seemingly relevant facts about, say, an agent's (perhaps traumatic) experiences as a child?

The actualist may respond to this challenge by pointing out that ACT* is, for all practical purposes, equivalent to

²⁹Williams (1995b), p. 190.

ACT** A has a reason to ϕ if and only if A would, *insofar as A has any motivations at all*, be motivated to ϕ after having deliberated soundly on, and from, the motivations A already has.

However, if this is so, the actualist can claim to have provided a principled reason for why we should accept actualism and reject McDowell's suggestion: the principled reason is that ACT** merely requires the agent to have some motivations (i.e. it merely requires that the agent's motivational system be functioning) while McDowell's proposal requires that the agent have particular motivations - i.e. the motivations he would have had if he had been given a proper upbringing.³⁰

I don't think this proposal will help the actualist. It may be correct to say that a person who is suffering from a *terminal* form of accidie really has no reason to do anything because this person has simply ceased to be an agent. But accidie, as Dancy characterises it, is a temporary affliction.³¹ The question under considerations is whether an agent who temporarily fails to be motivated by what would normally motivate him still has a reason to do the thing in question. Suppose that at time $t_1...t_4$ and $t_6...t_n$ A is such that he

³⁰I thank an anonymous referee for *Philosophical Studies* for suggesting this response on the actualist's behalf.

³¹ We can see how questions about vagueness might creep in here, but I shall not be addressing this concern.

would be strongly motivated to ϕ if the opportunity presented itself.³² The opportunity to ϕ presents itself at t_5 when A is accidious. Does A have a reason (at t_5) to ϕ at t_5 ? It seems that even with (A**) in place, the actualist will have to deny this. Even if we concede the possibility that an agent can be accidious whilst retaining some of his motivations (it is certainly possible to read Dancy's characterisation of accidie in this way), the actualist will not be able to recover the common sense conviction that those considerations that don't motivate him (but which would normally motivate him, were he not accidious) still retain their normative force. To illustrate this, consider the following example.

A is fanatical about football. He lives for the game and he is especially passionate about his local Sunday league team. Unfortunately, he is not a very good footballer and he has never actually been selected to play for the team. It's the last game of the season and the team bus is getting ready to leave for the away game against their deadliest rivals. Disaster strikes: the team's star striker has broken his leg and the team is one man short. In desperation the team captain phones A and tells him to hurry down to the club house (where the bus is just about to leave) and to bring his football boots with him. This is the chance A has been waiting for for three years. Unfortunately, for some reason or other, A is accidious. At the moment, A is

³² In what follows, whenever I speak about motivation, or an agent's being motivated, I shall take 'after having deliberated soundly on, and from, his existing motivations' as read.

only motivated to stay home and watch game shows on TV. A is not weak willed - it is not as if he recognises (or believes) that the best thing for him to do is to get on the bus, but that he is more motivated to stay home and watch TV - rather, his team captain's pleas just leave him cold. Does A have a reason to get on the team bus?

According to ACT** he does not. His motivational set is functioning alright: he is highly motivated to stay home and watch TV, but he is not in the least motivated to get on the team bus, and therefore he has no reason to get on the bus. But this sounds extraordinary! Suppose A's acciduous affliction lasted only for one minute. Had the team captain called before or after this time, A would have jumped at the chance to play for the team and rushed down to club house to catch the bus. Had the team captain made the call at any time between $t_1...t_4$ and $t_6...t_n$ A would have had a reason at any of those times to get on the bus. However, at t_5 , he did not have a reason to get on the bus at t_5 . Why not simply say that for any time between t_1 and t_n , had A received the call at that time he would have had a reason to get on the bus, it's just that he wouldn't have been motivated to do so at t_5 ?

For those who are not persuaded by these considerations, consider next the following case. Suppose A has been informed that he has been selected to play for his team later this afternoon, and that the bus is leaving at t_5 . Consequently, A is, at time $t_1...t_4$, highly motivated to get on the team bus at t_5 . However, at some time before t_5 , A's evil brother, B, slips him a pill which causes him to be such that at t_5 he has no interest whatsoever in getting on the bus. It seems abundantly clear to me that B has harmed A in some

fairly obvious respect, but it is hard to see how actualists could agree with this. Since, according to actualism, A has (at t_5) no reason to get on the bus at t_5 , how can it be that B's having prevented A from getting on the bus at t_5 constitutes a harm to A? Actualist may respond to this challenge by simply denying that A has been harmed (which seems utterly implausible); or they can admit that B has harmed A but reject the principle the argument above implicitly relies on: (roughly) A's being prevented from ϕ -ing constitutes a harm to A only if there is a reason for A to ϕ . I think this response is equally implausible. Surely there is an intimate connection between harms and reasons for action; in fact, the connection might even be *analytic*. I shall not pursue this point further, but leave it intuitive.

Finally, we might want to ask whether actualism can even make sense of the idea that accidie is an *affliction* - i.e. something which an agent is *suffering* from? Can actualists show that accidie is something we all have good reason to try to avoid? I suppose the actualist will say that we have reason to avoid accidie if and only if we would be appropriately motivated to avoid accidie. Fair enough. But what could possibly motivate us to avoid accidie if not the idea that accidie is a bad thing *precisely because it prevents us from being motivated to do that which we have (perhaps very good) reason to do?*

VI. Actualism and reasonable regret.

If the actualist is right about A's not having a reason to get on the bus at t_5 , it is hard to see how A could later reasonably regret not having done something

he had no reason to do at the time.³³ It seems plausible, however, to say that A could reasonably regret not having gotten on the bus (at least in cases where he could have gotten out of his acciduous state by sheer will power). Intuitively, the following principle concerning reasonable regret seems roughly correct:

R A's regretting (at t) not having ϕ -ed at some earlier time, t_n , is reasonable only if there was a reason for A (at t_n) to ϕ at t_n .

Actualists will no doubt reject R. In what follows I shall not be arguing that R is correct, or that it is reasonable for A to regret not having gotten on the bus; rather, I want to focus on what actualists have to say about reasonable regret.

³³'Reasonable' is quite an elusive term. According to some authors, it is reasonable for A to ϕ if and only if ϕ -ing is what A has *most* reason to do. Others think that it is reasonable for A to ϕ if and only if A *believes* he has most reason to ϕ . Others still have argued that it is reasonable for A to ϕ if and only if A is *warranted* in believing that he has most reason to ϕ . By 'reasonable' I mean nothing more than 'is supported by a reason'. Thus, 'A's regret is reasonable' should be read as 'A's regret is supported by a reason'. This is mere stipulation on my part and it is done merely for the sake of ease of exposition.

Since actualists believe that what an agent has a reason to do is completely determined by what he is or would be motivated to do, actualists must, I think, hold that the correct principle governing reasons for regret is

R* A's regretting (at t) not having ϕ -ed at some earlier time, t_n , is reasonable (if and) only if A is, or would be, motivated (at t) to regret not having ϕ -ed at t_n .

However, it may be objected that actualism about reasons does not carry with it a commitment to any particular theory of reasons for *feeling*. As one referee puts it:

After all, regretting something is not straightforwardly a voluntary action that I perform. I might come to regret ϕ -ing after reflecting on my action and its consequences just like I might come to believe that p after reflecting on my evidence for and against p. So, why not think that regret is like belief in that reasons for regret – like reasons for belief – are not a kind of reason for action?

Although the idea of a reason for belief raises difficult issues in its own right³⁴, let us assume that reasons for belief are indeed provided by evidence

³⁴ It is, after all, a controversial issue whether or not reasons for belief are provided solely, or even primarily, by evidence – pragmatists of various

kinds, for instance, deny this. Williams himself can plausibly be seen as at least a moderate pragmatist. When he says: ‘...any rational deliberative agent has in his S a general interest in being factually and rationally correctly informed’ (1995: 37) he may be saying that a rational agent has this general interest simply *because* such an agent will have other motivational elements in his S that would be best served or furthered by his being factually and rationally correctly informed. This interpretation is supported by the claim Williams goes on to make next: ‘There could be a case of somebody who had an overwhelming need to be deceived; and if his relations to reality were so poorly negotiated that he actually needed to believe what was false, then perhaps he would have reason to acquire false beliefs – in that particular respect.’ (*ibid.*)

Furthermore, and quite independently of any issues relating to pragmatism, it is not entirely implausible to suggest that all normative reasons are reasons for action. For instance, having a reason to believe *p* can plausibly be seen simply as having a reason to *bring yourself to believe* that *p*; where bringing yourself to believe that *p* is an action (albeit a mental one) that you may or may not perform.

for the *truth* of a given proposition, and that ‘evidence’ should here be understood in a broadly externalist fashion: reasons for belief are provided by considerations external to one’s S.³⁵

But on what grounds can the actualist claim that reasons for regret are more like reasons for belief than reasons for action? Of course the actualist can *say* that reasons for regret are grounded in considerations external to one’s S, but in the present context, this will seem like little more than hand waiving. Unless actualists can show *why* it is that reasons for regret are grounded in external considerations, the presumption must surely be that Williams-style internalists in general must think of reasons for regret as being like reasons for action in that their grounds are provided by elements internal to our subjective motivational sets. Williams’ claim that an agent’s S ‘can contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, [and] patterns of emotional reaction’³⁶ certainly adds weight in favour of the presumption. Nonetheless, I am willing to concede that if actualists can tell us a plausible story about why we should think that reasons for regret are like reasons for belief, the argument I shall present next will not count against actualism.

Assuming, then, that actualists are indeed committed to something like R*, the first thing to note about R* is that there’s something odd about the

³⁵ Unless of course the belief in question is about my S, in which case the consideration in virtue of which I have a reason to form a particular belief about my S will not be external to my S.

³⁶ Williams (1981), p. 105.

idea of being motivated to regret something. We rarely, if ever, come to be *motivated* to regret something. Regret is a propositional attitude – usually, if not always, directed at some proposition about a *past* action of ours³⁷ – which we normally *spontaneously* acquire after having judged or accepted that a previous action of ours had some undesirable property or properties.

I say ‘normally’ because there may be cases of non-spontaneous, or ‘instrumental’ regret. If A were offered a large sum of money for regretting having ϕ -ed, A might find himself motivated to regret ϕ -ing (even if he never actually ϕ -ed!).³⁸ However, even if A manages to bring himself to regret having ϕ -ed (through hypnosis or psychotherapy perhaps), the resulting regret – if it deserves to be called that – can hardly be called spontaneous. In the case just described, A is motivated to regret having ϕ -ed because he is motivated to get his hands on the large sum of money and he recognises that a necessary means to get the money is to become motivated to regret having

³⁷ There are of course also cases where we say things like ‘I regret *having to do this*, but...’, referring by this to some *future* action of ours.

³⁸ If this is correct, R must be false. Some philosophers would deny that A really has a reason to regret having ϕ -ed in the case I have just described (even though he is highly motivated to do so). These philosophers think that, in the case I have just described, A’s being (appropriately) motivated to regret having ϕ -ed gives him a reason *to try to get himself to regret having ϕ -ed*. This, they argue, is different from having a reason to regret having ϕ -ed. I shall not pursue this line of thinking.

ϕ -ed. Although spontaneous regret is never motivated in this way, this does not mean that spontaneous (non-instrumental) regret cannot be reasonable or unreasonable. If, for instance, I were to spontaneously regret having ϕ -ed even though I recognise that I was warranted in believing that ϕ -ing was the best thing I could have done given the circumstances at the time, my regret would be unreasonable.³⁹ Or, to take another example, even though I am not in the least *motivated* at present to regret having abandoned my French studies in school, whenever I think about it I *do* regret having done so. I believe my regret is reasonable. On the actualist account, however, an agent can have a reason to ϕ only if ϕ is capable of being the ‘object’ of A’s motivation. Since spontaneous regret can never be motivated – i.e. spontaneous regret can never be the object of someone’s motivation – spontaneous regret can never be reasonable according to actualism. This, I believe, is deeply counterintuitive.

³⁹ There is a sense in which my regretting having acted in particular way could still be reasonable even though I am warranted in believing that what I did was the best thing I could have done at the time. My regret could be directed ‘at the world’ so to speak, and not at my own action. Roughly, my regret in such a case should be seen as an expression of my belief that it was *unfortunate* that I had to do what I did. This is not a criticism of my own action; rather it is a criticism of the circumstances in which my act was performed: ‘It regret having slapped him, but he was hysterical...’.

The actualist may respond by saying that regret (spontaneous or otherwise) simply *is* a motivational state. A's regretting having ϕ -ed simply *is* A's being motivated in a particular way (to, e.g., hide the fact that he ϕ -ed, apologise for having ϕ -ed, ensure that he won't ϕ again etc). But if this is so, actualists can easily accommodate the claim that spontaneous regret can be reasonable. Actualists can claim that if A's spontaneous regret is, or would be, sustained after having deliberated soundly on all relevant facts, A's regret is reasonable.

This cannot be right, however. It is a mistake to equate regret with being motivated in a certain way. As I said earlier, (spontaneous) regret is a propositional attitude (if not obviously so) whereas motivation is not. When we say 'I regret having ϕ -ed', what we are saying is equivalent to the 'propositional' 'I regret that I ϕ -ed'. There is no such equivalence for 'I am motivated to ϕ '. Hence regret cannot consist simply in being motivated in a certain way. It is no doubt true that A's regretting having ϕ -ed can *produce* in him the motivation to do certain things, but this is of no use to the actualist since such a motivation is a *consequence* of A's regret.

But perhaps this is all the actualists needs. Suppose that an agent's spontaneously regretting having ϕ -ed entails his being motivated in certain ways. If regret is always accompanied by motivation, does this not imply that if an agent regrets having ϕ -ed, then he has a reason to regret having ϕ -ed? I don't think that it does. What the agent regrets is one thing, and what he is motivated to do is another. A's regretting having been rude to B may

produce in A the motivation to apologise to B, but this cannot, on the actualist account, show that A's regret is reasonable. At best it can show that A has a reason to apologise to B.

Furthermore, in normal cases in which A's motivation to apologise is produced by (or in some other way consequential upon) A's judging that he has good reason to apologise *because* he was rude to B, A's resulting motivation cannot, according to internalism, make it true of A that he has a reason to apologise. Here it is important to remember Williams' very plausible claim that motivations based on false beliefs cannot ground true reasons statements. If A believes that he has a reason to apologise to B *in virtue of* his having been rude to B, then A's belief must, according to internalism, be *false*. In effect, A believes he has an *external* reason to apologise – i.e. a reason which is provided by certain properties of his past action (namely that it was rude) and not by facts about his own motivations – but since there are no such reasons (according to internalism), A's resulting motivation to apologise rests on a false belief, and hence A's being motivated to apologise cannot make it true of him that he actually has such a reason. Again, this is very counterintuitive. In the end, I think we should reject the actualist account of reasonable regret; and since this account seems to be implied by the actualist account of reasons *simpliciter*, I think the preceding argument provides us with yet another reason to reject actualism.

Conclusion

As I said in the beginning of this paper, since Williams has never produced a 'definitive' version of his internalism, it is somewhat difficult to ascertain what he takes it and its implications to be. In this paper I have tried to identify an interpretation of internalism that is as faithful to Williams' core ideas as possible. This might of course not be the one Williams actually has in mind. But whatever formulation one takes to be the best representation of his ideas, it seems clear to me that that formulation must preserve Williams idea that

Basically, and by definition, any model for the internal interpretation must display a relativity of the reason statement to the agent's *subjective motivational set*....⁴⁰

Given this essential link to the agent's motivational set, I think that internalists who take seriously what Williams says about the interrelation between explanatory and normative reasons is forced to accept something like actualism. However, as I have tried to show, the phenomenon of accidie presents a serious, and perhaps even insurmountable, problem for this interpretation of Williams' internalism (even apart from the fact that actualists seem committed to an implausible account of reasonable regret). The problem is quite simple: if reasons are essentially tied to motivation, then, according to internalism, if one has no motivation to do anything, one has no

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, p. 102.

reason to do anything. I think common sense and externalism can tell us a much more plausible story here: it is not true that the person suffering from accidie has no reason to do anything; on the contrary, this person has a very good reason to see a psychiatrist!

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Response to referee's comments (inserted on p. 28)

However, it may be objected that actualism about reasons does not carry with it a commitment to any particular theory of reasons for *feeling*. As one referee puts it:

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Nonetheless, I am willing to concede that if actualists can tell us a plausible story about why we should think that reasons for regret are like reasons for belief, the argument I shall present next will not count against actualism.

Assuming, then, that actualists are indeed committed to something like R*, the first thing to note about R* is that there's something odd about the idea of being motivated to regret something.

³ Williams (1981), p. 105.