

one desire too many

Abstract: I defend the widely-held view that morally worthy action need not be motivated by a desire to promote rightness as such. Some have recently come to reject this view, arguing that desires for rightness as such are necessary for avoiding a certain kind of luck thought incompatible with morally worthy action. I show that those who defend desires for rightness as such on the basis of this argument misunderstand the relationship between moral worth and the kind of luck that their argument employs. Consequently, the argument provides no reason to doubt the popular view that a desire for rightness as such is no part of virtue. I conclude by suggesting that a family of worries about merely accidentally right action presuppose one side the recent debate about objectivism and perspectivism about moral rightness.

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1. Introduction

It is commonly alleged that desiring an act's moral rightness as such is defective in an important way. Acting on such desires is allegedly inconsistent with moral worth, the positive moral state a morally right act enjoys when its rightness is creditable to its agent. These desires are inconsistent with moral worth because they are thought to alienate the agent from moral ends that merit non-instrumental concern such as justice, equality, and welfare.² For example, when donating to Oxfam is right because it alleviates famine, one ought not to donate simply out of a desire for the donation's rightness as such. That's because the single-minded pursuit of rightness, while perhaps not intrinsically bad, nevertheless objectionably sidelines the end of promoting human welfare.

However, the view that desires for rightness as such are defective has recently been challenged. According to some, like Tom Hurka (2001, 2014), Paulina Sliwa (2015), Ron Aboodi (2017), and Zoe Johnson-King (2018), desires to promote rightness as such are of value. According to a particularly forceful line of argument for this position, acting with moral worth requires no desire beyond a desire for rightness as such. Because agents who act with moral worth are not alienated from the ends at which morality aims, this line of argument implies that acting from a desire for rightness as such is not objectionable. The argument rests on the claim that moral worth requires acting from such a desire because only then is the action's rightness isolated from a kind of luck with which moral worth is allegedly inconsistent. This position is striking, given the past fifty years of debate on desires for rightness as such. That a certain desire could be thought by some as inconsistent with moral worth and by others as a necessary condition for moral worth is a powerful testament to how poorly that desire is understood.

In this paper, I defend the popular view, arguing that moral worth does not require a desire for rightness as such. Those who advocate these desires on the basis of the aforementioned argument misunderstand the relationship between moral worth and the kind of luck on which their

¹ I'm grateful to Mark Schroeder, Ralph Wedgwood, N. G. Laskowski, Zoe Johnson-King, Max Khan Hayward, Jessica Isserow, David Faraci, and, especially, Steve Finlay for conversations that made this paper possible.

² See Williams (1981) and Smith (1994) for influential early arguments. Nomy Arpaly in Arpaly and Schroeder (2014) and Arpaly (2015) is especially clear on this point. See also Weatherston (2014).

argument relies. Consequently, their argument provides no reason to doubt the popular view that a desire for rightness as such is no part of virtue.

The paper is structured as follows. In sections two and three, I lay some groundwork and present the argument to be rebutted. According to the argument, moral worth requires satisfying two conditions: *knowledge* that the act is right and a *desire* for rightness as such. The knowledge condition is thought necessary for moral worth in order to control for a certain kind of luck. Sections three to five support the claim that this kind of luck is compatible with moral worth, so there's no need to control for it. Section six uncovers a controversial assumption behind how advocates of motivation by rightness interpret the cases thought to motivate their view. The assumption is that moral worth requires doing what's *objectively* morally right, which does not depend on our epistemic circumstances, as opposed to what's *subjectively* morally right, which does so depend. Competing accounts of moral worth do not depend on this assumption. As a result, every argument against the thought that morally worthy action is objectively right action is a further argument against the view that moral worth requires a desire for rightness as such. I conclude by diagnosing the view's apparent appeal and suggesting a way forward.

2. Stage Setting

Philosophers like Bernard Williams and Michael Smith are compelled by the thought that one ought to care about justice, equality, and welfare for their own sakes. Merely instrumental concern for these things alienates agents from, to use Smith's phrase, the ends at which morality properly aims. Clearly, justice, fairness, equality, and the like are closely connected to moral rightness. It may even be the case, though it is by no means obvious, that those ends are worth desiring only because of their connection to moral rightness. For example, it may be that equality merits concern only because its pursuit tends to make an act right. But even if equality's merit is derivative on its connection to rightness, that derivativeness doesn't diminish equality's fitness to be desired for its own sake -- or at least according to the position that I will defend.

There are several motivations for this view, but one is especially simple. On this view, an act is morally right because or in virtue of the fact that the moral reasons for the act are sufficiently strong. Proponents of this view sometimes say that rightness is a 'verdictive' concept, since it represents a verdict on the balance of reasons. On this view, acting from a desire for rightness as

such, independently from the features of the act that make it right, is a little like desiring to get the cheap plastic trophy without caring about whether you're the champion. The trophy is worth getting only because it represents the verdict that you're the champ. Therefore, desiring the cheap plastic trophy *as such* fetishizes the trophy; it displaces your desire from its fitting object, namely, the end of being the champ. Likewise for rightness. Rightness is worth caring about only in virtue of its connection to the ends at which morality properly aims like equality, welfare, and the care we owe to our friends, family, and fellow humans.

The kind of motivation that Williams and Smith reject, and which I deny is necessary for moral worth, goes by several names. Williams famously rejected having a preoccupation with doing what's right as having 'one thought too many'. Smith, for his part, distinguishes between desiring to do what's right, *de re*, and desiring to do what's right, *de dicto*. Following Quine, many assume that the *de re/de dicto* distinction in an attitude ascription's logical form tracks certain psychological differences. However, this distinction has recently and forcefully been called into doubt.³ I'm sympathetic to these doubts. So I'll discuss non-instrumental desires for an act's rightness, calling these 'desires for rightness as such', arguing that they are not necessary for acting with moral worth. But I intend to rebut not only those who defend or advocate non-instrumental *de dicto* desires for what's right but also those who defend the idea that a concern for rightness is not 'one thought too many', though we differ in our preferred jargon.

It is also common for my opponents to describe themselves as defenders of a 'Kantian view' of moral motivation, according to which "morally worthy actions must be performed from the 'motive of duty,' or because they are right."⁴ I'll leave the question of how to characterize Kant's (as opposed to a Kantian) understanding of the motive of duty to Kant scholarship like Herman (1981), Baron (1984; 1995) and Markovits (2014). Moreover, I agree with the 'Kantian view' insofar as it is simply the view that morally worthy acts are done because they're right. However, I deny that doing something because it's right implies a desire for rightness as such. For example, according to Julia Markovits' non-Kantian view, acting with moral worth requires only that agents act for

³ See arguments in, for example, Fodor (1970), Bach (2010), and Manley and Hawthorne (2012).

⁴ Markovits (2010, p.201-2).

sufficient non-instrumental moral reasons.⁵ On many views, being a right act *just is* being an act for which there is sufficient moral reason. As a result, her agents can be intelligibly described as doing acts because they're right. But Markovits proposes her view as an alternative to Kantianism. Consequently, it is a mistake to conflate the view that moral worth requires doing an act because it is right with the view that moral worth requires a desire for rightness as such. The 'Kantian view', unless stipulatively defined, seems ambiguous between these importantly distinct views. So I will avoid this terminology.

I'll use different terminology instead. According to a view like Markovits's, there may be as many different morally worthy motives as there are sets of sufficient moral reasons. As a result, this view is *liberal* about the motives necessary for moral worth, for it allows a great diversity of morally worthy motives. By contrast, according to the view criticized here, only one motive ever suffices for moral worth: the desire for rightness as such. As a result, this view is *conservative* about the motives necessary for moral worth.

One last *caveat*: I aim only to rebut the claim that moral worth requires a desire for rightness as such. Officially, I take no stand on the stronger claim, suggested by Williams and Smith's work, that a desire for rightness as such is inconsistent with moral worth. Yet I am suspicious of this stronger claim because some, like Carbonell (2013) and Hurka (2014), argue that cases of *mixed motives* are possible, where a desire for rightness as such is an *additional source* of moral value, over and above the value provided by desiring an act's right-making features. There's good reason to suppose that they're right. For example, a desire for rightness as such is of value when our desires for the ends at which morality properly aims are too weak to cause us to act. But it seems to me that desires for rightness in such cases are only instrumentally valuable, because their value derives from providing a means by which agents can pursue the ends at which morality properly aims in situations where that's otherwise difficult. I suspect that those sympathetic to Smith and Williams should argue that acting *only* on a desire for rightness as such is inconsistent with moral worth for only then does the agent show an objectionable disregard for the features of their act that make it right, but I will not examine this question further.

⁵ I'm using 'sufficient' in a slightly technical sense. A set of reasons is sufficient relative to a set of countervailing reasons just when the first set is at least as weighty as the second. According to the popular view that I'm assuming, an act is right just when there is sufficient moral reason for it.

3. The Rightness Condition

According to conservatives, only acts motivated by a desire for rightness as such are *non-accidentally* right. Whether an act is only accidentally right matters to whether it has moral worth. Kant famously describes a shopkeeper who returns correct change because he knows that his business will succeed only if it has a reputation for honesty and he wants his business to succeed. Although the shopkeeper reliably does the right thing, his act lacks moral worth. Luck has a role in explaining why that's so: given the shopkeeper's selfish motives, it is a matter of luck that prudence and morality coincide on his action. If returning dishonest change were a more effective means to help his shop succeed, he would have returned dishonest change instead. Because it is a matter of luck that prudence and morality coincide in his case, the shopkeeper's action is only accidentally right. Because it is only accidentally right, the shopkeeper's act lacks moral worth.

I agree that no morally worthy action is accidentally right. The issue is what makes a right action not merely accidentally right. Conservatives argue that only a desire for rightness as such can motivate non-accidentally right action. As a result, these conservatives argue that we ought to care about rightness as such and that we need not care about the features that make the act right. I will rebut this argument by showing that some right actions are not accidentally right in the way that conservatives imagine is problematic.

To do so, I'll focus on Sliwa's (2015) argument for conservatism.⁶ When I give to Oxfam to alleviate famine, I've done what's right because I'm motivated by the very feature that makes the action right. However, Sliwa argues that, despite appearances, donating to Oxfam on this motive doesn't suffice for moral worth. That because donating to Oxfam with the sole aim of alleviating famine is only accidentally right, or so Sliwa claims. She writes,

Consider first an agent who does the right thing and is motivated by an individual *de re* desire for the relevant right-making reason. Jean's friend missed her bus to work and frets over being late to an important meeting; coming late would be a great embarrassment to her. Wanting to spare her friend a major embarrassment, Jean gives her a ride. Let's assume

⁶ My rebuttal to her argument also answers others who also advocate desires for rightness as such from concerns about accidentality, such as Johnson-King (2018). Johnson-King's view is weaker than Sliwa's for it does hold that moral worth requires knowledge that an act is right. However, the cases that I will use to argue against conservatism

that giving her friend the ride is the right thing to do in these circumstances and the fact that it spares her friend a major embarrassment makes it right. Thus, Jean is acting from a *de re* desire for a right-making reason. Does Jean's action have moral worth? A central feature of morally worthy actions is that they are not merely accidentally right. Given Jean's motivation, it's not a fluke that Jean spared her friend a major embarrassment. But it is a fluke that she did the right thing. (6)

The case illustrates an important contrast between motivation by right-making features and motivation by rightness as such. On a commonsense Rossian picture, which I will grant, our duty proper is determined by competition between conflicting *prima facie* or *pro tanto* duties. Though sparing my friend embarrassment contributes to my help's moral rightness, whether my help is morally right depends on competition between other factors, like whether by giving my friend a lift I fail to save my neighbor's life. In sum, whether a right-making feature is sufficient depends on competition with other, countervailing features. An act's moral rightness therefore differs from its right-making features by *always* being morally sufficient for the act.

Sliwa argues that this difference between right-making features and rightness as such affects the moral value of the motives to which they give rise. According to her, unless Jean *knows* that helping her friend is right, her act is risky. The fact that helping the friend saves her embarrassment may not, in fact, succeed in making the action right. Though saving a friend embarrassment contributes to the act's rightness, it is an unreliable motivational basis for doing what's morally right. Thus, just as Kant's shopkeeper fails to act with moral worth because his act is only accidentally morally right, Jean fails to act with moral worth because her motivating reasons are only accidentally *sufficient* moral reasons.

Morally worthy action is incompatible with merely luckily right action. According to Sliwa, Jean's action is only luckily right because her motivating reasons could easily fail to be sufficient moral reasons. Given that Jean's action is only accidentally morally right, Sliwa concludes that it lacks moral worth. According to her view, an actually right act lacks moral worth because of (what I'll call) *sufficiency luck* when its motivating reasons could easily fail to be sufficient moral reasons.⁷

⁷ In Sliwa's terminology, a morally worthy act's rightness must be "counterfactually robust." (2015, p.9)

Sliwa offers the *Rightness Condition* as an analysis of the motives that are necessary and sufficient for moral worth. According to it, an agent acts with moral worth just in case she knows that the act is right and desires rightness as such. Knowledge that an act is right defeats sufficiency luck because knowledge is *safe* and when a belief is safe, it is true in nearby worlds. If an agent knows that an act is right, then it is not wrong in nearby worlds. So an act motivated by knowledge that it's right could not easily be wrong, which answers worries about sufficiency luck. And only a desire for what's right motivates an action on the basis of what insulates it from sufficiency luck. So it appears that only satisfying the Rightness Condition is an adequate bulwark against sufficiency luck.

Johnson-King also defends a form of conservatism about morally worthy motives according to which moral worth requires deliberately doing what's right as such.⁸ Johnson-King's view is conservative for it denies moral worth to deliberately doing what's compassionate, loving, or caring in the absence of a desire for rightness as such. Her argument for this view, however, does not rely on the claim that moral worth requires knowledge that the act is right; rather, it relies on the weaker claim that moral worth requires the *belief* that the act is right.⁹ I aim to rebut this form of conservatism as well, showing that morally worthy action does not require the belief that the act is right. As a result, the examples that follow involve agents who not only lack knowledge, but also the relevant beliefs. Doing so rebuts both Sliwa and Johnson-King's versions of conservatism. Nevertheless, I'll continue to use Sliwa's Rightness Condition as my main foil.

4. Footballing Wisdom, Musical Wisdom, and Practical Wisdom

As an antidote to sufficiency luck, Sliwa prescribes the Rightness Condition, according to which an act has moral worth just when and because its agent knows that it's right and they desire rightness as such. This section focuses on rebutting Sliwa's argument for desiring rightness as such from the claim that only knowledge eliminates sufficiency luck. I'll do this by showing that other mastery, which, like moral worth, are incompatible with luck, do not depend on conditions

⁸ Johnson-King (2018, p.16).

⁹ In Johnson-King's words, if the agent has 'no idea' that an act is right, then their acting that way lacks moral worth. She uses this phrase to express the thought that Huck Finn 'has no belief that his act is right "anywhere in his head".' I'll discuss the attitude of belief rather than that of having an idea for the discussion of Arpaly and Markovits on p.12 of Johnson-King (2018) shows that having no belief that an act is right implies having no idea that it is right. Because my arguments show that moral worth does not imply the belief that an act is right, they also show that moral worth does not imply any logically stronger attitude, such as knowledge or 'having an idea'.

parallel to the Rightness Condition. Doing so suggests that the condition is false. I'll build on this suggestion in subsequent sections.

Sliwa's analysis of moral worth is implausible when generalized to other kinds of mastery. We can construct a principle parallel to the Rightness Condition for masterful footballing, rather than morally worthy action, and hold that a particular play is masterful just when and because it is motivated by a desire to make a great play and knowledge that the play is great. Just as some acts are morally right, some strikes or plays in football are great. And just as we can distinguish acts that are only accidentally right from those that are non-accidentally right, we can distinguish football plays that are only accidentally great from those that are non-accidentally great -- that is, from masterful plays. For example, I am not a talented footballer. Were I ever to make a great play in a football match, it would be entirely by accident. But that's not true of everyone. Imagine a fictional footballer named Renaldo. Renaldo is a legend in his own time but he is extremely humble. Renaldo is legendary for his prescient vision on the pitch and his ability to judge -- with pinpoint accuracy -- the speed, position, and trajectory of the ball and all the players, which lets him realize plays unimaginable to us footballing mortals. Owing to both peerless natural talent and the tutelage of his pleasant, attacking-football oriented Coach Hourinmo, every time Renaldo touches the ball, magic happens.

However, despite the unquestioned greatness of his footballing, Renaldo does not believe that his plays are great. Because he is humble, he simply does not conceive of them in those terms. Indeed, Renaldo's stratospheric standards for great footballing lead him to believe that his plays are *not* great. In post-game interviews, when asked about how he manages to produce great football night in and night out, Renaldo replies, "I do not think about great football. Thoughts about great football are nowhere in my head. I just try to put the ball in the net or to help my teammates do so." But Renaldo's great footballing is no accident; it is the product of training and talent and hard work. When blazing a free kick fifty metres out from the net into its top corner, he'll deny that the play was great and insist it was merely the best play available to him. When volleying a pass from his box to an attacking player most of the way up the pitch, he'll simply respond that he likes making those kinds of plays in those situations because those plays tend to result in goals.

This case makes trouble for the generalized version of Sliwa's principle. Renaldo does not believe that his football plays are great -- he is too humble for that. But it would be a mistake to deny, on that basis, that Renaldo's plays are masterful. Given Renaldo's training and talent, whether he plays masterfully does not depend on whether he believes that his plays are great. The same is true of morally worthy actions. They don't require that the agent believe that they're right.

This isn't an idiosyncratic feature of athletic mastery. Consider a music tip often given to budding songwriters is "Don't write the song; let the song write itself." The tip recommends a certain way of engaging in songwriting: don't go about self-consciously searching for a beautiful melody. Rather, just attend to the melodies that come naturally to you in a quiet moment, figure them out, and then, with some training and talent, eventually one of those melodies will form the basis of a beautiful song. As a result, what explains a songwriter's focus when developing a particular melody need not be the belief that it's beautiful; that belief need not be anywhere in her head. The songwriter may simply find the melody intriguing. To be sure, successful songwriters are ones that are intrigued by what's beautiful. But here we should read 'what's beautiful' with *de re* and not *de dicto* scope. It would thus be a mistake to insist that the songwriter intrigued by a beautiful melody believes that the melody is beautiful. Likewise, it would be a mistake to claim that this songwriter desires to write beautiful songs as such. But it's no accident when a practiced and gifted songwriter creates a beautiful melody, even when beauty is not the songwriter's focus or aim, much less their overriding motivation for creating the melody.¹⁰

Indeed, we should not be surprised that knowledge that an act has some quality is generally unnecessary for the act to have that quality non-accidentally, even moral rightness, *contra* Sliwa. The case presented by Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is central to discussions of moral worth.¹¹

¹⁰ I can imagine a rebuttal to these two cases from someone convinced by the positions in Star (2008, 2011, 2015). Much like the chicken-sexer knows that a particular chick is male without introspective access to his grounds for that belief, proponents of this rebuttal could assert that Renaldo and the songwriter *in fact* have the relevant knowledge, though they lack introspective access to it. Although this conjecture is consistent with my description of the cases, it is not entailed by those descriptions. So there's nothing wrong with stipulating that the footballer and songwriter lack the introspectively opaque beliefs that constitute the relevant knowledge. It's also important to stress the degree to which this rebuttal is tethered to the reasons as evidence thesis, the thesis that for some consideration to be reason to act in some way is for that consideration to be evidence that one ought to act in that way, which is advanced in Kearns and Star (2008, 2009). For example, Star explicitly states that *his* argument for externalism about moral knowledge depends on reasons as evidence in (2011, pp.84-7). Engaging with this argument takes me too far astray, so I'll merely note that the reasons as evidence thesis is contentious and that any argument that relies on reasons as evidence as a premise is at least as controversial.

¹¹ See, *inter alia*, Bennett (1974) and Arpaly (2000, 2002).

According to Twain's novel, Huck, a boy living in the Antebellum American south, lets an escaped slave he befriends, Jim, evade capture despite believing that slaves are property and that letting a slave go free is wrong because it is tantamount to theft. Importantly, this moment comes at a climax in the book, after Huck and Jim share several adventures as travellers on the Mississippi that bond them as friends. It is commonly thought that Huck's behaviour towards Jim is morally worthy. Accordingly, the case is commonly thought to show that believing that an act is right is not necessary for acting with moral worth. However, Sliwa's Rightness Condition implies that such beliefs are necessary. Consequently, the Huck Finn case is a challenge to views like Sliwa's.

Sliwa acknowledges the need to rebut the case, beginning by favourably quoting the claim in Arpaly (2003, 78) that "Huckleberry Finn [. . .] is not a bad boy who has accidentally done something good, but a good boy." Her rebuttal depends on distinguishing good character from moral worth. Sliwa is happy to grant that Huck Finn has good character. But that judgment is consistent with the fact that some of his acts lack moral worth. Common judgments about the Huck Finn case are consistent with the Rightness Condition, Sliwa claims. The former concern a property of character and the latter concerns a property of actions.

But we cannot treat character and action wholly independently for action is normally the product of character.¹² As we've just seen with music and football, a person's character, or more broadly, their dispositions, bear on whether their acts have certain qualities only accidentally. A footballer's training and talent bear on whether their footballing is only accidentally great. A musician's 'ear' bears on whether their songs are only accidentally beautiful. Consequently, judgements about Huck Finn's character are not wholly independent from judgments about the moral worth of his actions. The analogy with sporting and musical mastery gives us reason to suspect that when a moral agent has the right upbringing or, like Twain's Huckleberry Finn, goes through a morally enlightening experience, their right actions are non-accidentally right -- even if they, like Finn, lack the belief that they act rightly. It's not dumb luck that Huck's appreciation of Jim's humanity

¹² I acknowledge that it's possible to act out of character -- see Hurka (2006). What's important for me is that, normally, how we act depends on our character so the two are not wholly independent. Indeed, it's hard to make sense of the notion of character if it has absolutely no bearing on how we normally act. Here I intend 'character' in a broader sense than is normal in, for example, virtue ethics. As a result, my use is compatible with the situationist critique of character as it is used by some virtue ethicists -- see, for example, Harman (1999) for an influential articulation of this critique.

moves him to let Jim go free. That's because Huck Finn's morally right action manifests his good character by being caused by it. For that reason, the act is non-accidentally right.

In sum, ensuring that an act non-accidentally instantiates some normative property -- be it moral rightness, footballing greatness, or musical beauty -- does *not*, in general, require a desire for that property as such or knowledge that the particular act has that property. This should make us suspicious of the Rightness Condition. I'll now show where I think Sliwa's argument goes wrong, namely, by assuming that the sufficiency luck that attends an act's motives makes that act only accidentally right. Consequently, it is unsurprising that our judgments about the moral worth of Huck Finn's actions follow a general pattern manifest across a wide range of human pursuits like music and sport.

5. Sufficiency Luck Ignores Agency

We should be suspicious about the relevance of sufficiency luck. Other kinds of behaviour are susceptible to sufficiency luck. But that susceptibility does not justify restricting the reasons for those behaviours in the way that the Rightness Condition restricts moral reasons for action. For example, just as an act has sufficiency luck when its motivating reasons are only contingently sufficient for the act's rightness, we might say that a belief has sufficiency luck when the reasons for which the agent has the belief are only contingently sufficient for that belief's propositional justification. Many reasons for belief are only contingently sufficient for propositional justification. For example, that it appears that I have hands is sufficiently strong evidence to justify my belief that I have hands. But this sufficiency is only contingent: that it appears that I have hands is not sufficient for justifiedly believing that I do when I suspect that I'm an envatted brain or the victim of demonic deception. If Sliwa's concerns about sufficiency luck were general, then any belief that I have hands that is based on perceptual evidence would be only luckily right -- it's lucky that I wasn't a brain in a vat. Knowledge, like moral worth, is incompatible with luck. Consequently, we cannot know that we have hands on perceptual evidence given sufficiency luck. But that's an overly sceptical conclusion.

Sliwa's Rightness Condition is the product of a similarly excessive scepticism. Sliwa is sceptical that an agent like Jean could consistently and deliberately act rightly without a desire for rightness as such. I'll now argue that this scepticism is excessive for it results from falsely assuming that

sufficiency luck is incompatible with moral worth. But just as sufficiency luck is compatible with at least perceptual knowledge, it is also compatible with moral worth.

Sufficiency luck exploits how sufficiency is often an only contingent property of normative reasons. It may not be a matter of circumstance whether a set of facts is right-making,¹³ but it is often contingent whether a set of right-making reasons is morally sufficient. That's because sufficiency isn't an intrinsic feature of most right-making reasons; it also depends on the weight or strength of countervailing reasons. Given that a motivating reason's moral sufficiency is normally only contingent, it is often possible for the agent's actually right action to be wrong in nearby worlds, holding their motivating reasons constant across modal space. Sliwa argues that knowledge that an act is right eliminates the act's sufficiency luck because knowledge is *safe*. When one knows that one's act is right, there are no nearby worlds where bad luck makes one's act wrong, for, *a fortiori*, there are no nearby worlds where one's act is wrong. As a result, because moral worth requires something like safety, moral worth requires something like knowledge that an act is right and motivation based on that knowledge.

However, this argument depends on a subtle shift from reasons to actions. Moral worth is a property of an agent's *action* only when they could not have easily acted wrongly. Sufficiency luck is a property of a *moral reasons* when they could easily be insufficient. Consequently, the argument must connect reasons to action. In particular, it must show that sufficiency luck and moral worth are incompatible by showing that having merely contingently sufficient motivating reasons entails that the agent could easily have acted wrongly -- that is, that they act wrongly in nearby worlds. But this implication holds only if the agent's motivating reasons don't change in nearby worlds. That is, for a set of moral reasons' sufficiency luck to undermine an actually right act's moral worth, Sliwa must assume that the agent would act for those reasons in nearby worlds. Only then does it follow that the agent acts wrongly in nearby worlds, so they could easily have actually acted wrongly. Only then would the agent's act lack moral worth.

Let me make this point concrete. The moral reason for Jean to give her a friend a lift is that it would save the friend from embarrassment. Because giving the lift is actually right, the moral

¹³ Although Dancy (2004) argues that, for example, an act's benevolence contributes to its being right is contingent. Facts can change their moral valance so that benevolence can be a wrong-making feature in some circumstances.

reason for doing so is actually sufficient. But the reason isn't necessarily sufficient -- it can be defeated by weightier countervailing reasons. For example, suppose that, in a nearby world, Jean's car is broken and that giving the lift requires Jean to steal a car. In that circumstance, that it would save her friend embarrassment is not a sufficient reason for Jean to give the friend a lift. Jean has a much stronger reason not to give the lift since doing so requires stealing a car.

Jean's motive of saving her friend embarrassment is therefore subject to sufficiency luck. But sufficiency luck implies that Jean's lift lacks moral worth only if it implies that the rightness of Jean's acts is modally fragile. That is, sufficiency luck is relevant to moral worth only if it implies Jean acts wrongly in nearby worlds. In this example, it depends on whether Jean would steal the car to give her friend the lift. If Jean would, then that *does* seem to undermine the moral worth of her actual actions. However, if she wouldn't, then whether her actually morally sufficient motives are defeated in nearby worlds is irrelevant. And it seems fair to assume that she wouldn't. In short, defeating considerations undermine the actual moral worth of an agent's actions only if they also lead the agent astray in nearby worlds. Perhaps Sliwa might protest that broken-car worlds are not nearby. But, as I'll argue in the following section, the same point holds for more subtle departures from actuality -- I've merely assumed a less subtle departure here to highlight the important point.

In sum, Sliwa must assume that the agent's actual motivating reasons are their motivating reasons in nearby worlds for her argument to succeed. But we shouldn't do so: fixing an agent's motivating reasons excludes the agent's agency from Sliwa's picture of moral worth. After all, good agents are sensitive to changes in their environment. When their environment changes, their motives change. Rather, if sufficiency luck is to bear on the moral worth of an agent's intentional action, we need to consider the agent's entire motivational state, including her desires and perspective on her situation, and check whether her actions and motives at nearby worlds are right in those worlds. It may be that her actual motivating reasons are insufficient in those nearby worlds. But, her *actual* motivating reasons needn't be her *counterfactual* motivating reasons.

An example makes vivid the error behind assuming that the agent's actual motivating reasons are their motivating reasons in nearby worlds. When a footballer makes a masterful play, sometimes the play is great partly because it's risky; it would have gone badly wrong had the player played even slightly differently. This kind of situation is analogous to Jean's case: just as the features that

actually make her act right could easily fail to make it right in nearby worlds, the features that actually make a play great -- the spin of the ball, the position of the players, the timing of the shot, etc. -- could easily have been different. If we hold the player's actual bodily movements fixed and evaluate nearby possibilities where the state of play is slightly different, the play fails to be great in many of those nearby worlds. For example, if the ball had landed one centimetre to the left and the player had kicked the ball just as they did actually, then the shot would have gone wide of the net. But the fact that the ball could have easily landed differently doesn't undermine the actual play's greatness when the player would have played the ball appropriately had it landed differently. It doesn't make sense to hold the players' actual bodily movements fixed when evaluating the play's mastery. What matters is how the players acted and would have acted were the state of play different. We should evaluate whether Jean acts with moral worth by just the same standard. It doesn't matter that her actual motives could have led her astray in other situations just as long as her counterfactual motives are the right ones to have, relative to those worlds. To be sure, much more needs to be said to identify *which* counterfactual motives those are, and which counterfactual worlds matter, in order to mount a satisfactory analysis of moral worth. But the point is that such an account appears to be a viable alternative to Sliwa's. As such, satisfying the Rightness Condition is not necessary for moral worth.

In sum, Sliwa's argument mistakenly presupposes that the merely contingent implication from an act's right-making features to its moral rightness undermines the moral worth of motivation by those features. The concern behind this presupposition is that agents who act on only contingently sufficient moral reasons could easily act wrongly on the basis of those very reasons. But this concern is mistaken. Not every such agent could easily act wrongly. In particular, it's no accident when a good agent acts rightly. That's because good agents track shifts in the balance of their moral reasons; that is, roughly, that they are disposed cease intending an action when the moral reasons for it cease to be sufficient.¹⁴

¹⁴ One might worry that tracking moral reasons in this way requires a desire for rightness as such or something like it. For my money, this is where the heart of the debate lies. But this very question arises in a nearby debate about judgment internalism, the view that moral judgments intrinsically motivate. In Smith (1994), Michael Smith is also concerned to explain why the intentions of good and strong-willed persons track changes in their beliefs about what's right. Smith contrasts two alternative explanations of the phenomenon. One is judgment internalism, the view that moral judgments are intrinsically motivating, at least in rational persons. Another is that good and strong-willed persons have a desire for rightness as such. Smith rejects the second explanation because it attributes to good and strong-willed agents a desire that alienates them from the ends at which morality properly aims. Rather, Smith concludes, judgment internalism is true.

6. Tracking Subjective Moral Reasons

We have good grounds for resisting Sliwa's argument for conservatism. It is sound only if motivation by merely contingently sufficient moral reasons entails that the agent risks acting wrongly, which would undermine the moral worth of her action. But that entailment doesn't hold because some agents are the moral analogues of talented footballers. Talented footballers track, in a manner that falls short of belief, the merely contingent great-making features of their plays; because they do, it's not dumb luck when they play masterfully. Likewise, some good moral agents track the merely contingent moral sufficiency of their motives without the corresponding beliefs; because they do, it's not dumb luck when they act rightly.

This discussion foregrounds the question of what it takes to track one's moral reasons and to be a good person. My claims so far allow for the possibility that tracking one's moral reasons is very difficult, requiring them to adjudicate between extremely subtle differences in the balance of reasons or to know the unforeseeable consequences of their actions. This would make acting with moral worth correspondingly demanding. I can see how concerns subtle differences between the strength of one's moral reasons could push someone like Sliwa towards conservatism. However, as I'll now argue, such concern applies only to a controversial kind of rightness. Tracking other kinds of rightness isn't as demanding.

Recall the case of Jean, which Sliwa uses to motivate her view. Sliwa claims, "given Jean's motivation, it's not a fluke that Jean spared her friend a major embarrassment. But it is a fluke that she did the right thing." (6) The second sentence is ambiguous in an important way. It is often assumed that there are two kinds of moral rightness, *subjective* and *objective*. What's subjectively right depends on our information, whereas what's objectively right does not. When the evidence appears to indicate that A is the antidote but, in fact, appearances are misleading and B is the

Some judgment externalists, those who reject judgment internalism, have responded to Smith's argument by identifying other ways for an agent's intention to do what's right to track their belief that the act is right, which don't involve a desire for rightness as such. Responding to Sliwa's argument puts us in precisely the same camp as the judgment externalists. We want to explain how an agent's intentions to do what's right could covary non-accidentally with their perspective on what's right without appealing to a desire for rightness as such. This lets us take a page from the externalist's book to answer the worry. In particular, we can take a page from Brink (1997), Copp (1997), and Dreier (2000), and appeal to a second-order desire to desire to do what's right. I haven't the space to develop this proposal in any detail here, though I take some steps towards this account in the conclusion and in Howard (2018), Howard (forthcoming), and Howard (manuscript). Suffice to say that it's not clear that tracking moral reasons' sufficiency requires a desire for rightness as such.

antidote, administering A is *subjectively* right but administering B is *objectively* right. Moreover, because reasons and rightness are intimately connected, it is often assumed that there are *subjective* moral reasons, which bear on the first kind of rightness, and *objective* moral reasons, which bear on the second.

This distinction between kinds of rightness matters to the debate between liberals and conservatives about moral worth. As I'll now argue, it is a fluke that Jean did the right thing *only* in the sense of objective rightness. That's because, in contrast with objective rightness, what is subjectively right depends on our information. The precise nature of that dependence is controversial. There is general agreement that your subjective moral reasons, and, hence, what's subjectively right for you, depend on your epistemic perspective. But there is disagreement about what features of an agent constitute their perspective. Philosophers defend views according to which that perspective is, variously, a function of your evidence, of what you're in a position to know, of what you believe, of your know-how, etc.¹⁵ I'll take no stand on what constitutes an agent's perspective in the sense relevant to subjective rightness and reasons. But because what's subjectively right depends on our perspective, there is a certain sense in which it is rarely a fluke when we do what's subjectively right. That's because our perspective partly determines both whether the act is right *and* whether it's a fluke that the act is right.

In particular, we can draw the conclusion that it's no fluke that Jean did what was subjectively right from a principle and a dilemma. The principle is that if Jean has a decisive subjective reason to help her friend, then she has sufficient reason to believe that helping her friend is right.¹⁶ The dilemma is that either Jean has sufficient reason to believe that helping her friend is right or she doesn't.

If Jean *does* have sufficient reason to believe that helping her friend is right, then it is not a fluke that she did what's subjectively right. That's because in all or nearly all cases, evidence that an act is morally right also provides a moral reason to act that way.¹⁷ Jean has good evidence that the act was

¹⁵ Williamson (2000) defends the first condition; Gibbons (2013) defends the second; Schroeder (2007) defends the third; Lord (2018) defends the fourth.

¹⁶ The principle closely related to Kiesewetter (2016)'s "Principle of Decisive Reasons," according to which if A has decisive reason to ϕ , then A has sufficient reason to believe that she herself has decisive reason to ϕ .

¹⁷ It is widely assumed that there is a strong connection between evidence that an act is right and moral reasons to act that way. Indeed, some, such as Kearns and Star (2009), argue that a reason for action is moral just when and because

right given by the fact that the lift would spare the friend embarrassment. That piece of evidence also gives Jean a moral reason to give the lift. Of course, if Jean were indifferent to saving her friend embarrassment, yet gave her a lift for some other reason, like to be able to use the carpool lane, then it would indeed be a fluke that her act is right. In this case, Jean would be like Kant's shopkeeper, whose honest dealings with his customers are a fluke because of the coincidence that prudence and morality both recommend giving honest change. But we needn't assume that what Jean does is unaffected by her moral evidence and the moral reasons for acting provided by said evidence. Rather, as Sliwa tells us, Jean is the kind of person who is willing to go out of her way to save her friend from embarrassment. Assuming that Jean is a good person, she will not be insensitive to her evidence about what's right and the moral reasons it provides. And, given that her act is subjectively right, her evidence indicates that the act is right. So it's no fluke that she does it.

However, if, on the other horn of the dilemma, Jean didn't have sufficient reason to believe that helping her friend was right, then she didn't have decisive reason to help her friend, given perspectivism. If she didn't have decisive reason to help her friend, then it wasn't subjectively right for her to do so. So, *a fortiori*, it wasn't a fluke that it was subjectively right for her to do so. In particular, if Jean didn't act rightly, then the case offers no pressure to abandon more liberal views of moral worth, like that of Markovits (2010), to which the Rightness Condition offers an alternative, since these views require that an agent act rightly to act with moral worth.

Consequently, the *only* sense in which it could be said that it's a fluke that Jean acted rightly is in the objective sense of 'right'. To be sure, the dilemma I've just presented depends on a principle, which encodes a particular way of thinking about subjective rightness. But verifying *something* like that principle is characteristic of, and essential to, subjective rightness. I conjecture that we can run the same dilemma using whatever principle is in fact correct, if it isn't the one I've used. So Sliwa's argument for the Rightness Condition presupposes that acting with moral worth implies doing what's *objectively* right, rather than what's *subjectively* right.

it's evidence of moral rightness. But we can assume a much weaker connection than the one that Kearns and Star defend. I've included the hedge 'nearly all' to avoid a challenge to the stronger thesis from moral testimony, which appears to provide moral evidence but may not provide moral reasons. For more, see Hills (2009) and Howard (2018).

By presupposing that moral worth requires objective not subjective rightness, conservatives about moral worth adopt controversial commitments in the debate between *perspectivists* about moral rightness, according to whom an agent's epistemic circumstances affect their obligations, and *objectivists* about moral rightness, according to whom an agent's epistemic circumstances do not affect their obligations.¹⁸ The requirements of moral worth look very different from the differing standpoints of subjective and objective rightness. From the standpoint of objective rightness, adopting something like the Rightness Condition makes more sense. The truths that constitute objective rightness are like any other mind-independent truths, such as mathematical or meteorological truths. Proper engagement with those truths means properly conforming one's inner life to external reality. Since knowledge is the gold-standard of belief, it's natural to suppose that moral worth, the gold-standard of action, requires knowledge. Without knowledge, our moral acts look reckless and morally worthy acts are surely not reckless.¹⁹

But from the standpoint of subjective rightness, the Rightness Condition looks, at best, a little like overkill and, at worst, a lot like a form of moral fetishism. If an act is subjectively right, then you have conclusive evidence that it's right. In most or all cases, evidence that an act is right also gives moral reasons to perform the act. Those are the only moral reasons you need to track in order to do what's subjectively right. As a result, what's subjectively right is, of its essence, detectable and within the agent's ken. Insofar as we desire the ends at which morality properly aims -- fairness, justice, equality, and the like -- we can't easily go subjectively wrong when we're good people. That's because it's much easier to look for something that, by its nature, shifts to ensure that it can be found. Because subjective moral truths are looking to be found, so to speak, tracking them is much easier than tracking mathematical or meteorological truths.

The case of Jean is initially compelling because what's objectively right depends on competition between the reasons for and against an action. It makes sense to suppose that the outcomes of that competition are sometimes only narrowly decided. But narrowly decided outcomes are, by their nature, difficult to discern. So it may be difficult to discern what's objectively right when

¹⁸ For arguments supporting perspectivism, see Kiesewetter (2011, 2016, 2018), McHugh and Way (2017), Way and Whiting (2017), Lord (2018), and Littlejohn (fc). For arguments supporting objectivism, see Thomson (1990, 2007) and Graham (2010).

¹⁹ There's an interesting question of whether moral worth requires knowledge, or whether lesser states like justified belief will do. I won't address that question here. For more, see Sverdlik (2001).

competition between objective moral reasons is close. We must discern well for it not to be a fluke that we act well. And when we discern well, we know.

But shifts in the balance of sufficient *subjective* moral reasons are not, at least normally, too subtle to be reliably detected for if you have decisive subjective reason to do something, then you also have sufficient reason to believe it. Therefore, if competition between subjective moral reasons favours a certain outcome, then you have sufficient reason to believe that the competition favours that outcome. Normally, shifts in the balance of sufficient moral reasons are detectable. The margin for error in cases like Jean's is, therefore, *much* wider than might be initially supposed. It's much easier for one's intentions to track the sufficiency of one's subjective moral reasons than of one's objective moral reasons. In that sense it's no fluke that Jean does what's right.

Nothing I've said so far should be controversial to conservatives. I've merely shown how cases like Jean's motivate conservatism only if perspectivism is false. But this is a significant drawback. It means that *every* argument for perspectivism about rightness is an argument against the motivating for conservatism. By contrast, liberal views like that of Markovits are, at least in principle, consistent with both subjective and objective conceptions of rightness. That's a significant advantage.

7. Conclusion

I've examined a compelling but ultimately unsuccessful argument for conservatism about moral worth. According to the argument, acting with moral worth requires knowledge that an act is right and to control for sufficiency luck. I've argued that moral worth does not require such knowledge because moral worth is compatible with sufficiency luck.

Despite rejecting the Rightness Condition and suggesting that other forms of conservatism are equally unacceptable, I think that the Condition contains an important kernel of truth, which points to where progress can be made and which explains why a single motive could, puzzlingly, be thought by some as inconsistent with moral worth and by others as required by moral worth. According to Markovits, simplifying somewhat, an act has moral worth just when its motivating reasons are sufficient moral reasons. This implies that since moral reasons are facts, then motivating

reasons must be too. As a result, to get a sense of the quality of an agent's motives, it suffices to identify the facts that move them to act intentionally.

But that can't be right. For example, you can't tell whether someone is a Cubs fan just from the fact that the reason why they're going to Wrigley Field is that the Cubs are playing. After all, they could be going to Wrigley Field to see the Cubs win *or* to see them lose. Likewise, the fact that someone is hurt often provides sufficient moral grounds to help them. But that fact can move a selfish person to help only for the praise that their help will garner, so that their help will lack moral worth. In short, just as being motivated to go to Wrigley Field by the fact that the Cubs are playing doesn't suffice to make you a Cubs fan, being motivated to do what's right by a right-making reason doesn't suffice to act with moral worth. Markovits covers cases like this with an injunction against instrumental reasons. But I think the cases point to something deeper.

Rather, possessing a good motive involves *two* components:²⁰ it involves being moved by the right *facts* and desiring the right *goals*. Although, the Cubs fan and the Cubs hater both go to Wrigley because the Cubs are playing, only the fan goes to see the Cubs win. Likewise, the virtuous person and the selfish person's goals differ when they help someone because they're hurt. Only the selfish person helps in order to garner praise. The virtuous person helps, we might suppose, to alleviate the victim's pain. The Rightness Condition's two conditions correspond to these two components of good motives, namely, facts and goals. Because its two components state conditions on the facts and goals behind morally worthy action, it has the right form to capture the concept of moral worth.

Supposing that motives are composed of *two* entities, facts and goals, it's worth asking whether doing something because it's right concerns the first or second component -- that is, does it involve being moved by the fact that an act is right *or* being moved by the goal of doing what's right. I conjecture that this question is at the heart of the debate between Sliwa/Johnson-King and Smith/Williams. Sliwa and Johnson-King argue that moral worthy action requires, at a minimum, the belief that the act is right. This corresponds to the first component of some good motives. But Smith and Williams seem concerned with the second component, that is, with the agent's aim or

²⁰ Characterizing motivating reasons in terms of *two* components is an old point, familiar from Davidson (1963) and, ultimately, the motivational psychology associated with David Hume.

goal in action. For Smith and Williams, only if the agent's ultimate aim in acting is the promotion of rightness itself is the agent objectionably alienated from the ends that merit proper moral concern, like "honesty, the weal and woe of [one's] children and friends, the well-being of [one's] fellows, people getting what they deserve, justice, equality, and the like" (Smith 1994, p.75). As such, there is, in principle, a middle view that reconciles Smith and Williams' arguments with those of Sliwa and Johnson-King. According to this view, roughly, moral worth sometimes requires being motivated by the knowledge that an act is right while desiring that the act promote ends that merit proper moral concern, like honesty or justice. I think the argument's I've proposed here show the promise of thinking of moral worth along these lines.²¹

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²¹ I begin developing this view in the articles cited below, especially in Howard (forthcoming).

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