

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 sketching a way forward that maintains the best insights of both proponents and opponents of motivation by rightness as such.

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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.¹ For example, when donating to Oxfam is right because it alleviates famine, one ought not to donate simply out of a desire to promote the donation's rightness as such. That's because the single-minded pursuit of rightness 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 (fc), 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. According to the argument, 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 disagreement is striking. 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 testament enough to how poorly that desire is understood.

In this paper, I defend the orthodox view, arguing that motivation by a non-instrumental desire for rightness as such does not contribute to an act's moral worth. Those who advocate these desires on the basis of the aforementioned argument misunderstand the relationship between moral worth

¹ 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 Weatherson (2014).

and the kind of luck on which their argument relies. Consequently, the 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 the argument. 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 that thought that morally worthy action is objectively right action is an 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, at least according to the position that I will defend.

The motivation for this view is simple. On this view, an act is right because or in virtue of the fact that the reasons for the act are sufficiently strong. It is sometimes said 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. 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 and family.

The kind of motivation that Williams and Smith reject 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.² I'm sympathetic to these arguments. So I'll discuss non-instrumental desires for an act's rightness, calling these 'desires for rightness as such', arguing that they are no part of virtue. But I intend to rebut those who describe themselves as as defending or advocating non-instrumental *de dicto* desires for what's right, though we differ in our preferred jargon.

It is 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."³ I'll leave the question of how to characterize Kant's understanding the motive of duty to Kant scholarship like Herman (1981), Baron (1984; 1995) and Markovits (2014). However, while I agree with defenders of the 'Kantian view' that morally worthy acts are done because they're right, I deny that doing something because it's right implies a desire for rightness as such. For example, according to Julia Markovits' competing view, moral worth requires only that agents act for sufficient non-instrumental moral reasons.⁴ On many view, being a right act *just is* being an act for which there is sufficient moral reason. As a result, her agents can be intelligible described as doing acts because they're right. But Markovits proposes her view as

² See arguments in, for example, Fodor (1970), Bach (2010), and Manley and Hawthorne (2012).

³ Markovits (2010, p.201-2).

⁴ 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 I'm assuming, an act is right just when there is sufficient moral reason for it.

an alternative to Kantianism. Consequently, it is a mistake to conflate Kantianism about moral worth, whatever it is, with the view that moral worth requires a desire for rightness as such.

Given this unclarity, I'll use different set of terminology. 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. However, I am suspicious of it 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 is of value when our desires for the ends at which morality properly aims are too weak to cause us to act. But desires for rightness as such are valuable in these cases only because they provide a means by which agents can pursue the ends at which morality properly aims in situations where that's otherwise difficult. I suspect that the claim that Smith and Williams should instead defend is 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.

In sum, it seems plain that wanting to do what's right is virtuous. But, according to Smith and Williams, that's false on at least one reading of that claim, according to which the desire for rightness as such is virtuous or valuable. Philosophers, whom I will call *conservatives*, have recently contested Smith and Williams' view by arguing that moral worth, a central kind of virtuous action, requires a desire for rightness as such. This paper defends something like Smith and Williams' view by rebutting this argument, diagnosing where it goes wrong, and suggesting a way forward.

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 his business will succeed only if it has a reputation for honesty. Although the shopkeeper reliably does the right thing, his act lacks moral worth. 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. If, as these heterodox philosophers argue, only a desire for rightness as such can motivate non-accidentally right action, then we ought to care about rightness as such, not the features that make the act right. I agree that no morally worthy action is accidentally right. The issue is what makes a right action not merely accidentally right.

I'll focus on Sliwa's (2015) argument for conservatism about morally worthy motives according to which only actions motivated by a desire for rightness as such are non-accidentally right.⁵ 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 with the sole aim of alleviating famine is only accidentally right. 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 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)

⁵ My rebuttal to her argument also answers others who also advocate desires for rightness as such from concerns about accidentality, such as Johnson-King (fc).

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. 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.

As suggested by the case of the shopkeeper, 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.⁶

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

⁶ In Sliwa's terminology, a morally worthy act's rightness must be "counterfactually robust." (2015, p.9)

could not easily be wrong, which defeats 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.⁷ This view is conversative 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.⁸ 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 a right act has moral worth just if and because its agent knows what's right and desires 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 kinds of accomplishments that resemble moral worth by also being incompatible with luck do not depend on conditions parallel to the Rightness Condition. This suggests that there's a problem with the condition.

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 great football and hold that a particular play is masterful just when and because it is motivated by a desire to make a great play

⁷ Johnson-King (forthcoming, p.16).

⁸ In Johnson-King's words, if the agent has "no idea" that the act is right, then the agent does not act with 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 belief directly, for lacking a belief that one's act is right implies that one has no idea that one's act is right, given the dialectical context with Arpaly and Markovits on p.12. Only then does showing the inconsistency of morally worthy action and having no idea show the inconsistency of morally worthy action and failing to believe that an act is right. Rebutting Markovits and Arpaly requires the latter claim.

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. For example, were I ever to make a great play in some football match, it could only ever be by accident. But that's not true of all footballers. 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, his ability to judge with pinpoint accuracy the speed, position, and trajectory of the ball and 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." 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.

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. So, *a fortiori*, they don't require that the agent know that they're right.

This isn't an idiosyncratic feature of athletic accomplishments. Consider music. A 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, 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. 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, much less knows it. 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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.

⁹ 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, our footballer and the songwriter *in fact* have the relevant knowledge to satisfy analogues to the *Rightness Condition*, though they're not introspectively aware of the grounds for that knowledge or even the relevant beliefs themselves. 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 beliefs that constitute the relevant knowledge. It's also important to stress the degree to which those positions are 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). Star states that *his* argument for externalism about moral knowledge depends on the reasons as evidence view, for example, explicitly in (2011, pp.84-7). Engaging with those arguments would take me too far astray here, but I'll merely note that the reasons as evidence thesis is contentious, so any argument that relies on reasons as evidence as a premise is at least as controversial.

¹⁰ See, *inter alia*, Bennett (1974) and Arpaly (2000, 2002).

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.¹¹ 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 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.

¹¹ 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 no bearing on how we normally act.

It goes wrong by assuming that sufficiency luck and moral worth are inconsistent. 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.

This case merely suggests that Sliwa is mistaken to worry about sufficiency luck. It isn't a direct argument against her view. Accordingly, there's room for rebuttal. For example, Sliwa could insist that she's concerned only with beliefs and acts that could *easily* go wrong. The belief that I have hands, based on perceptual evidence, could not easily go wrong. So arguments involving *it* don't commit her to the sceptical conclusion that perceptual evidence is insufficient for the belief that I have hands. But this response abandons Sliwa's broader project. The Rightness Condition states that a desire for rightness as such is necessary for acting with moral worth in *every* case, not merely in cases where we could easily do what's wrong. Rather, it's precisely because we often could not easily believe or act wrongly that her view is overly sceptical and that the Rightness Condition is overly demanding. I'll now argue that its excess scepticism results from falsely assuming that sufficiency luck is incompatible 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,¹² 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. Sliwa argues that only 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.

Sliwa's argument depends on a subtle shift from reasons to actions. Moral worth is a property of *right actions* when they could not easily be wrong. Sufficiency luck is a property of a *moral reasons* when they could easily be insufficient. But 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's action is wrong in nearby worlds, so their actually right action could easily be wrong. Thus, the agent's act would lack moral worth.

But why assume that the agent's actual motivating reasons are their motivating reasons in nearby worlds? There's a strong reason not to: fixing an agent's motivating reasons excludes their 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 whole 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 great play, sometimes the play

¹² Dancy (2004) argues for this claim.

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 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. What matters is how the players 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 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. 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 mistakenly assumes 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. She is concerned about sufficiency luck because she believes 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.¹³

¹³ One might worry that tracking moral reasons in this way requires a desire for rightness as such. 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.

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

6. Tracking Subjective Moral Reasons

We can pinpoint the assumption that pushes Sliwa's view towards a desire for rightness as such and its problems. Recall the case of Jean that she uses to motivate her view: "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 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. Perhaps your subjective moral reasons, and, hence, what's subjectively right for you, are a function of your evidence or what you're in a position to know or what you believe.¹⁴ I'll take no stand on this vexed issue. But because what's subjectively right depends on our information, there is a certain sense in which it is rarely a fluke when we do what's subjectively right. That's because our information partly determines both whether the act is right *and* whether it's a fluke that the act is right. In particular, it's no fluke that Jean did what was subjectively right. We can draw this conclusion 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.¹⁵ The dilemma is that either Jean has sufficient reason to believe that helping her friend is right or she doesn't.

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 but I haven't the space to develop this proposal in any detail. Suffice to say that it's far from straightforward that tracking the sufficiency of moral reasons requires a desire for rightness as such.

¹⁴ Williamson (2000) defends the first condition; Gibbons (2013) and Lord (2017) defend the second; Schroeder (2007) defends the third.

¹⁵ 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 .

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. Jean had good evidence that the act was right and that she couldn't easily go wrong by helping her friend in that case. Of course, if Jean were insensitive to her evidence about what's right, then it would indeed be a fluke that she acted rightly. But we needn't assume that. 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, 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 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. 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. 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. 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.

By presupposing that moral worth requires objective not subjective rightness, conservatives about moral worth must take sides in the debate between *perspectivists* about obligation, according to whom an agent's epistemic circumstances affect their obligations, and *objectivists* about obligation, according to whom an agent's epistemic circumstances do not affect their obligations.¹⁶ The requirements of moral worth look very different from the differing standpoints of subjective and objective rightness. From the standpoint of objective rightness, something like the Rightness

¹⁶ 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).

Condition makes 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.¹⁷

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 strong reason to believe that it's right. What's subjectively right is, of its essence, detectable. 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 compelling at first 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 right when 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. Recall the principle used above: 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

¹⁷ 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).

initially supposed. It's much easier to track the sufficiency of one's subjective moral reasons than 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 that they cannot be perspectivists about the kind of rightness that moral worth involves. But this is a significant drawback. It means that *every* argument for perspectivism about rightness is an argument against conservatism. By contrast, liberal views like that of Markovits are, at least in principle, consistent with both formulations involving subjective moral reasons and those involving objective moral reasons. To be sure, as I've suggested, such views are much easier to satisfy if moral worth involves only subjective rightness. But these views are compatible with the possibility that moral worth involves only objective rightness. That's a significant advantage.

7. Conclusion

I've examined a compelling but ultimately unsuccessful argument for the claim that acting with moral worth requires desiring rightness as such. According to the argument, acting with moral worth requires knowledge that an act is right 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 is often 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:¹⁸ 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. Conservatives simply give this form the wrong content.

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 good motives. But Smith and Williams seem concerned with the second component, that is, with the agent's aim or 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 requires being motivated by knowledge or belief that the act is right towards the ends that merit proper moral concern. I am

¹⁸ 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.

uncertain of this view's prospects or its precise details, but it should not be ignored as a possibility in discussions about moral worth, going forward.

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