

Contextual Reason and Rationality  
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In *Internal and External Reasons*, Bernard Williams proposes a speculative argument for the idea that internal reasons are the only kind of normative reason, and that his counterfactual internal interpretation is the only truth condition for both kinds of reason-statements, H and S (H: “A has a reason to  $\phi$ ” and S: “There is a reason for A to  $\phi$ ”). He takes for granted, however, that internal and external reasons are the only possible kinds of normative reasons at work: his argument is therefore question-begging against externalism—yet this is only the lesser problem faced by reason internalism. The main problems for Williams’s argument are his semantical reduction of S to H (which entails his question-begging argument) and his ad hoc interpretation of H in terms of his stipulative account of internal reasons. The most serious problem for both reason internalism and reason externalism, however, is represented by certain moral counterintuitive examples on both sides, which could be considered as the central problem in the debate. In this thesis, after showing Williams’s argument to be question-begging, I first explain his failure to unify two irreducible questions (on the nature of normative reasons and on the nature of rationality) as well as to reduce the truth conditions of S to H. Then, through conceptual analysis, I show that Williams’s internalist interpretation of H is false, and that the commonsensical interpretation of H is one that I call contextual interpretation in terms of contextual reasons. Internal reasons are just one usage of H, and contextual reasons are the real rival to external reasons in the debate on normative reason. Secondly, I argue that the two distinct notions of rationality—relative (instrumental) rationality and absolute rationality—require two distinct truth conditions, and the central problem deals only with the absolute one. I hope to show that reason contextualism, defined in terms of contextual reasons (i.e., neither internal nor external reasons) provides us with the best explication of these two distinct notions of rationality, and that the contextual interpretation accommodates all the counterexamples associated with the central problem.

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