The Moral Philosophy of Bernard Williams

Edited by

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CHAPTER THREE

PRACTICAL NECESSITY AND THE CONSTITUTION OF CHARACTER

ROMAN ALTSHULER

Williams scrupulously avoids presenting anything like a system, that is, a framework in which all the important terms are rigorously defined and the relations between them clearly laid out. This is often a strength of his account: rather than getting bogged down in definitions, as often happens in contemporary thought, he aims to discuss directly what those definitions signify. And what they signify, in the messy context of our ethical lives, is often just fuzzy enough that to aim for precision would be unnecessarily obfuscatory. But at the same time Williams is clearly a systematic thinker, insofar as the same concerns and concepts inform much of his writing. And if anything is a nexus in much of his thought, it is the concept of character, along with the related notion of practical necessity. These are central to elements of his work as diverse as his attacks on morality systems, his attempt to cut the Gordian knot of free will, and his skepticism about the desirability of immortality. My first, and central task here will thus be to attempt to make sense of Williams's conception of character, before suggesting important ways in which Williams himself relies on the obscurity of the notion.

Practical Necessity and Deliberation

Before tracing Williams's understanding of character, it will help to begin with his account of practical necessity. In what follows, I will use the concept of practical necessity interchangeably with that of moral incapacity. The relation between the two is, essentially, that between a positive and a negative description of the same thing. It might be tempting to think that if practical necessity propels me into a course of action, my inability to follow another course is a moral incapacity, but this is not

exactly right. If, for example, it is necessary for me to help a child gorge on candy, it does not follow that I am morally incapacitated from doing something else, such as stuffing myself with the candy instead, though of course it follows that if I am necessitated to do one thing, I cannot also do another which is excluded by it. On the other hand, if a moral incapacity prevents me from allowing the child to walk down the road to diabetes, then it is practically necessary that I not do so. The relation between practical necessity and moral incapacity, in other words, is the relation between "I must" and "I must not," where the latter is taken to mean something more than it does in "since I must drive to the bank today, I must not walk there."

It is clear that Williams takes practical necessity to be central to an understanding of character. He notes, for example, that "if we can shed light on moral incapacity we can shed some light on the idea of 'character'" (Williams 1995a, 47). More informatively, "incapacities can not only set limits to character and provide conditions of it, but can also partly constitute its substance" (Williams 1981a, 130). That practical necessity should both set the limits of character and constitute it follows from the fact that it is an expression of "underlying dispositions" of the agent (Williams 1995a, 52), when those dispositions are applied to a concrete situation. In this sense, for example, it is one thing for a butler to have a disposition toward being honest, and another to find that, asked by the constable whether his master is home, he finds that he must answer in the affirmative. The latter is an expression of the disposition, but not one that is already implied by the butler's having the disposition in question, since not everyone disposed towards honesty will find themselves compelled to be honest about everything. So even in cases where practical necessity follows more or less straightforwardly from the agent's existing dispositions, the transition from the latter to the former is a mediated one.

The mediation is provided by deliberation (Williams 1985, 187–8; 1995a, 52). Williams's concern is, first and foremost, to distinguish practical necessities as involving a specifically moral character from what he calls psychological incapacities, though his use of "moral" here should not be confused with the idea that the incapacities in question are to be identified with utilitarian or Kantian motives. Quite the opposite; Williams suggests that we take "moral" in its broadest sense, and it is a centerpiece of his view that the motives and reasons designated as moral in the dominant ethical theories represent only a small subclass of morality. In the category of psychological incapacity, by contrast, we find such things as the inability to feast on the brains of living monkeys, or to answer e-mails from one's doctoral advisees. While he notes some other distinctions

between the two—for example, a psychological incapacity works such that if I attempted to perform the action, I would fail, while a moral incapacity means that I will not try (Williams 1995a, 49)—Williams aims to distinguish psychological from moral incapacities by situating them within an agent's deliberation. Psychological incapacities function much like physical incapacities, as inputs into deliberation. For example, I need not deliberate about whether to take an hour or five minutes to get to work because the latter is impossible, and similarly I need not deliberate whether to write a paper a month in advance of a deadline; I know that I will be unable to do so, and thus direct my deliberation toward things I can do.

Practical necessities, on the other hand, express the conclusion of a deliberation. This follows from the point above, namely, that dispositions do not, for the most part, express themselves in action directly, but require some activity on the part of the agent. This activity, in Williams's view, is a process of deliberation that focuses the underlying dispositions of character on the specific case at hand, and may yield on their basis a conclusion of the form "I must do this" or "I cannot do that." I say that it may yield such a conclusion because, of course, most deliberative contexts do not. Often, in deliberation, I reach a conclusion simply about what I should do, or what I will do, or, most naturally, what to do. Practical necessities are only a subset of such conclusions, which is why Williams urges us to consider them as expressing intentions, which most philosophers now take to be the conclusions of deliberation (Williams 1981b, 18).[1] Williams grants that, as with psychological incapacities, the recognition of a moral incapacity may sometimes act as an "excluder," that is, as an input into deliberation that serves to cut off certain upshots of that deliberation in advance. But in such cases, another deliberation is presupposed, this time not on the basis of the practical necessity but "upstream" from it. The point of the distinction is, then, to impart on practical necessity a certain mark of agency that simple psychological incapacities lack.

At the same time, however, Williams stresses that the conclusion of a practical necessity involves a genuine discovery on the part of the agent. In most cases, of course, successfully making up one's mind involves nothing like a discovery, but where the conclusion is a practical necessity, agents do discover something about themselves: that they are unable to do (or to avoid doing) a certain thing. What makes this possible is, once again, the fact that deliberation focuses underlying dispositions, and these dispositions may well be ones agents did not already know they had or, at the least, did not know would be manifested in this particular way.

Because practical necessity involves a discovery, it is not simply "up to me" in the way something like a choice between rice pudding and Crème Brûlée might be. Thus, while Williams aimed to distinguish moral from psychological incapacities in order to stress their agential aspect, he wants also to align them with physical inabilities. There are, of course, important differences between, say, an inability to kill an animal because one is repulsed by the thought of doing harm, and the inability to kill it because one lacks the necessary equipment. Gary Watson calls these, respectively, performance conditions and enabling conditions (Watson 2004, 92). As Watson notes, the latter are a subset of the former, yet both do play a predictive role. Williams is willing to grant that there is an important difference. Physical inabilities determine that a certain type of action will not be done, at least not unless the world undergoes a change. Moral incapacities, on the other hand, mean that a certain action will not be done intentionally: if I judge that I cannot defraud my friend, I may still do so by accidentally signing a letter which has that consequence.

The distinction between the moral and physical incapacities here is already thin. On the view of action I find most plausible (though not one Williams endorses), the analogy is even stronger, because even in ingeniously concocted thought experiments where the exact same bodily movement may be performed either intentionally or unintentionally with the same consequences, and it is such that the agent would be unable, morally, to do it, I doubt there is much sense to the claim that the agent might perform the same action unintentionally. An intentional movement and an unintentional one can only be the same action if we think actions just are bodily movements. But we need not go into the metaphysics of action to reach Williams's conclusion. That I cannot fly by flapping my arms is as good a reason as any to predict that I will not do so. But that I cannot defraud my friend to curry favor with my supervisor seems similarly reliable, though only to a more limited circle of epistemically privileged acquaintances. Practical necessity, thus, combines the features of an exercise of agency with those of the necessity involved in prediction.

Character and Will

There is more to character than practical necessity. The former notion is usually left intentionally vague, and it is significant that, when drawing on the role of character in his arguments, Williams generally leaves the philosophical work to be done not by character as such, but by one of its constituent parts.[2] But on a preliminary sketch, "an individual person has a set of desires, concerns or, as I shall often call them, projects, which help

to constitute a character" (Williams 1981c, 5). And although Williams does not say so explicitly, it is implied that character, at least in its constituents, is identical with what he calls an agent's "subjective motivational set," which "can contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent" (Williams 1981d, 105). It seems, in other words, as if character contains all the elements agents draw on in bringing about their actions or, at least, their intentional actions. This is, in fact, required by the coincidence of character with the subjective motivational set, coupled with Williams's argument that only reasons that can be reached by a sound deliberative route from that motivational set can be reasons for the agent, and thus serve to motivate that agent's actions (Williams 1981d). On this conception, character must fully determine, or at least constrain, agency.[3]

Character thus serves to ground a certain kind of stability over time, and in this way, as well as in the remarks that tie moral incapacities (as expressions of character) to physical incapacities, Williams comes closest to a feature frequently cited in mainstream discussions of character: its role in prediction (Goldie 2004; Kupperman 2001). This stability is due both to the fact that deliberation is shaped by character, and to the limits practical necessity sets to action. We can call the former soft limits, since they limit by providing the sources and guidance for deliberation. But the latter limits are also hard limits: they provide boundaries it is impossible for agents to cross. At least, they cannot cross those boundaries at will, because to do so they would have to alter their incapacities, and "nothing one can lose at will is an incapacity. Moral incapacity is explained through the will… but it is not subject to the will" (Williams 1995a, 53–54). As constituents of character, practical necessities and the projects or other dispositions that give rise to them serve to guide deliberation and thus work through the will, but are not themselves subject to the will.

But there is an aspect of Williams's account here that is commonly overlooked, and this is the claim that moral incapacity is explained through the will. This, presumably, is because moral incapacities require deliberation, as noted above. Agency is not the upshot of a passive working of character; insofar as actions are driven and limited by practical necessities, themselves the upshots of deliberation, they bear the mark of agency. The point merits repeating because it leads to an important aspect of Williams's view of character: that the constituents of character can themselves be the products of the will. As Taylor puts it, "what Williams means to indicate by character is something that, to some extent, we have chosen" (Taylor 1995, 276). The "to some extent" is important, since some

aspects of character clearly cannot be something that "we have chosen": desires and patterns of emotional reaction, for example, do not typically seem to be the products of choice, although they may stand in some rational relations to, and thus be partially constituted by, other aspects of mental life which are up to us in a more direct sense (Smith 2005; Moran 2001). Some aspects of character, however, do seem to be something chosen: projects and, as indicated, practical necessities, presuppose deliberation "upstream" from them. So the undeniable fact that our behavior is often predictable does not indicate that it is not up to us: the features that make prediction possible are themselves upshots of our will.

Just how this move works is a tricky question. Taylor, for example, presents a purported counterexample of a practical incapacity (a revolutionary who, after deliberation, decides to kill someone who has betrayed his group, but finds he cannot pull the trigger), noting that deliberation does not seem to enter into the action; all the deliberation supports the trigger pulling. But Williams suggests that "the idea of a possible deliberation by the agent in such terms gives us the best picture of what the incapacity is" (Williams 1995a, 51; italics mine). So non-deliberative practical necessity is possible, since "it is not unequivocally true that the incapacity comes about through the deliberation: if the deliberation is sound and convincing, it is so because it is the best expression of the dispositions that were there already" (Williams 1995a, 52). So although Williams distinguishes practical necessity from psychological incapacity by an appeal to its being the upshot of deliberation, the deliberation need not be actual. It may be merely potential, in the sense that when examined third personally, the necessity requires a potential deliberation, a link to dispositions of character from which it would have been reached had deliberation occurred.[4] Nevertheless, even in such cases the mark of agency is there: what distinguishes practical necessity from a merely psychological one is just that deliberation is at least potentially presupposed as a bridge between disposition and practical conclusion; the dispositions must be fit to rationally motivate the conclusion for this agent, and thus operate differently from incapacities that make actions psychologically impossible.

The Will and Authority

I have been arguing that Williams presents a unique view of character, one worth taking seriously. On this view, character determines our agency by structuring deliberation and setting limits to intentional action in ways that can ground prediction, much as physical inabilities or causal chains

can. But at the same time, at least some features of character are the upshots of choice and arrived at via deliberation. Even if no actual deliberation occurred, some of our practical necessities (and perhaps other features of character) are so related to other dispositions of character that their occurrence in the agent presupposes a potential deliberation, and thus allows us to see them as products of the agent's will. So practical necessities are states with a dual feature, being both constituents of character and products of will. On a more interesting reading, however, these features of our moral psychology are not simply products of the will. They are, rather, constituents of the will just as they are constituents of character. It is not simply that, working from character, the will via deliberation creates new dispositions. Rather, the dispositions can play a role within the working of the will because they are themselves constitutive of agency.

This is the point at which character enters into Williams's well-known attacks on moral theories. Against utilitarianism, he argues that agents can only attain happiness through the pursuit of projects and commitments. If those commitments conflict with the requirements to maximize happiness, utilitarians cannot simply maintain that here agents must be prepared to shrug off those commitments, since a theory committed to maximizing happiness cannot demand that agents abjure necessary paths to it (Smart and Williams 1973). Against the Kantian view, on the other hand, Williams argues that impartial morality requires that, where moral principles come into conflict with the deliverances of the agent's character, the moral principles "must be required to win; and that cannot necessarily be a reasonable demand on the agent" (Williams 1981c, 210). But this is not, by itself, a serious criticism of Kantian morality in the way Williams intends. If, for example, I am committed to causing others to suffer for my own gratuitous pleasure, it is hardly a criticism of any moral theory that it holds that the prohibitions on my actions are not ones I care about, or ones it is reasonable to expect me to abide by. That human beings may be psychologically predisposed not to follow moral precepts is not an objection to a moral theory; to provide such an objection, one must argue that the features of character that clash with moral principles have an authority that overrides those principles, not merely that the agent's psychology makes her unwilling to follow them. The argument works well enough against utilitarianism, or at least versions of it that ground authority in desire satisfaction or happiness; that a requirement to maximize the overall good would conflict with agents' ability to pursue their own good at least looks like a plausible difficulty to raise, especially if we recognize that those whose good makes up the overall good are

themselves agents, for it is a conflict between like and like. But that is not, or not clearly, what happens when personal desires or commitments come into conflict with a morality that is grounded in reason. For the argument to be plausible here, the desires too must have some rational authority. Where, then, does that authority originate?

One suggestion is that the authority originates from character's relation to a person's reasons to live. Williams distinguishes between the sorts of desires that are conditional on being alive and others, categorical desires, which do give us a reason to go on living, because having those desires involves caring about seeing them satisfied by something that can occur only if I am alive (Williams 1973; 1981c). I may, for example, want to finish grading papers so that I will not have to provide an unconvincing excuse to my students tomorrow, but this desire is equally well satisfied by my dying before class, and thus does not by itself give me a reason to prefer one way or the other of fulfilling it. This is a conditional desire. If, on the other hand, I want to see my plans for world domination come to fruition, this is a categorical desire: it gives me a reason to live insofar as the desire is incompatible with my dying before it is satisfied. Provided that some categorical desires or projects are deep enough that I cannot retain a reason to go on living if they are lost, on Williams's view, they have the authority to trump at least some conflicting moral demands. This argument, however, proves too much because it seems to allow that absurd commitments on my part can trump extremely strong obligations to others that I happen to be indifferent to. It would mean, for example, that my passion for book collecting can license me to steal your first edition of The Sun Also Rises, provided I do not care that its absence will drive you to suicide. But it also proves too little, because as countless moral philosophers from Plato to the present have argued, it is a central feature of morality that it can sometimes legitimately require the agent to die rather than violate its demands. If so, then it seems morality should equally have the authority to trump the agent's reasons for preferring to go on living, all the more so if we recognize that agents may be able, in the wake of such a tragic dilemma, to acquire new projects.

Another suggestion might be that the authority stems from identification. As Williams tells us, "a moral incapacity in the sense under discussion is one with which the agent is identified" (Williams 1995a, 54). A similar sentiment is at play in the insistence that acting on a moral incapacity cannot excuse one from blame because "the incapacities we are considering here are ones that help to constitute character, and if one acknowledges responsibility for anything, one must acknowledge responsibility for decisions and action which are expressions of character"

because "to be an expression of character is perhaps the most substantial way in which an action can be one's own" (Williams 1981a, 130). Character is thus paradigmatic of what one takes responsibility for. But as it stands, this claim seems mistaken. As we've seen, Williams presents character as constituted by many features we would not normally think agents are responsible for, principally desires; only the features of character that are also constitutive of willing, in the sense suggested above, can allow for responsibility. But even disregarding the question of how we are to make this separation within character, it is not clear how authority is to be grounded.

The demands of character are not ironclad. As Williams notes, to say that agents have a moral incapacity is to imply that they will not do a thing even if provided with an incentive to deviate. But they may yield under torture. This, by itself, does not undermine the claim that the incapacities lack authority, or that they are not incapacities. In a comparison with psychological incapacities, Watson adduces the example of agoraphobics who are able to leave their house when it catches on fire; this shows, on his view, that in extreme cases incapacities can be overcome, but not that they do not function as incapacities under normal circumstances. It does not, in other words, show that incapacities are in fact only tendencies to give more weight than normal to certain reasons (Watson 2004). A more serious issue stems from the fact that agents can change their character and thus their identifications, what Williams describes as the "endurance" of a moral incapacity (Williams 1995a, 54). Agents may come to see an incapacity as a burden, and may work to overcome it. If this happens, it shows that they have already ceased identification with the relevant dispositions, which have consequently become mere psychological incapacities. Again, this shows that not all our desires, commitments, or incapacities are constitutive of character. A practical necessity that presupposed deliberation might, after a change in the agent's character, cease to be of the right form to follow from deliberation, lose the mark of agency, and thereby drop out of the fold of character.

The Constitution of Will and Character

If states of character exhibit endurance, that is, cease their role in constituting character over time, this should cast doubt on their authority to counteract moral principles. The problem is one of why certain necessities or projects may stop being features of character. One reason is this: our characters are not piecemeal, and different aspects of them, even deeply entrenched ones, may come into conflict with others, as when I find

New Wave cinema enchantingly beautiful but also painfully boring, or am in love with someone who deeply repulses me. The problem with this kind of ambivalence, as Harry Frankfurt calls it, is that in this state an agent does not really have a will; his identity is indeterminate and when he acts, he finds himself at cross-purposes (Frankfurt 1992). In such a case, agents may seek to shore up one of the opposing features of character in order to drive out the other. But agents may also simply acquire new traits of character. After all, it cannot simply be the case that agents start out life with a fixed character and can, from then on, undergo change in character only through the addition of new constituents of character via deliberation from the old ones. But now there is a problem. Suppose I have an experience of practical necessity associated with a certain action that clashes with a moral obligation. For example, I simply cannot refuse a request from my beloved, even when honoring it requires embezzling from the orphanage entrusted to my care. On Williams's view, it seems, if my complaisance vis-à-vis my beloved is a genuinely moral incapacity, it may outweigh my obligation to the orphanage. But a year later my character undergoes a change; I come to see my beloved as unduly demanding and my eyes are opened to the change every penny makes in the lives of my orphans. The old necessity is now, for me, a mere psychological incapacity, and I am striving to overcome it on the basis of dispositions of character that coincide with obligation. A year ago, one practical disposition had authority; now, the opposite does, on this view.

This is not a happy picture of authority. By the agent's own light, what had authority can cease to have it and in fact can run counter to authority. Once again, the picture seems to reduce genuine authority to the psychological feeling of authority. But agents who recognize that they can come to be fundamentally opposed to what once held authority for them ought also to doubt what they now take to have authority. And this is why, even from a purely psychological standpoint, an internalist model of practical reason, according to which agency and will are entirely subordinate to character, must fail. The problem, however, is not with Williams's model of agency as such, according to which character and will are co-constitutive sources of agency. The problem with the model is the primacy given to character, such that agents are identified with all the features of their character even though only some are constituents of will. This model subordinates dispositions bearing the mark of agency, such as volitional necessities, to those which lack such a mark, and thus grounds agency in aspects of the agent that are as external to agency as height or hair color.

It is in something like this mode that we should be suspicious of the passive form in which Williams notes that moral incapacity is "one with which the agent is identified." One criticism of this passive usage is worked out in detail by van den Beld (1997), who urges a model of practical necessity on which it is active. Noting that one of Williams's favorite examples, Luther, says not simply "Here I stand, I can do no other," but also adds "God help me," van den Beld argues that agents do need help abiding by their necessities; and these are, then, not literal necessities but principles which the agents actively endorse. I think, however, that we need more than van den Beld's argument here: it is not the model of practical necessity, as such, that we should revise. It is the model of the primacy of character over will. As I have been arguing, Williams assigns double duty to the view that constituents of character are the upshots of deliberation: it supports both his insistence that incapacities of character differ fundamentally from mere psychological incapacity and the claim that character is the paradigmatic object of responsibility attribution. But if this account is to work, then it cannot then make the will, which gives features of character the mark of agency, entirely subordinate to an authority that stems from psychological dispositions that are themselves not agential. If the upshots of character are to have authority to speak for the agent, this must be because character is co-constitutive with will, rather than primary to it. And this, I have been suggesting, is the model we should derive from Williams. The version of it that he himself supports, however, one on which the will imparts agency to character and yet derives its own authority from character, is unstable. The will can derive authority from character only if it, in turn, imparts that authority.

If the will is partially constitutive of character, then character must be subject to the sort of necessity internal to the will, and not merely vice versa. Agents must identify with their character as a consequence of the activity of their will; and the authority of the will, in order to be genuine authority, must come not from something that is at its root external to the will, but something within the will itself. In recent metaethics, the view best able to support such a picture is constitutivism. The basic claim of this theory is that the will is subject to normative principles that derive their authority from the fact that they are principles constitutive of agency itself.[5] To take just one example of such a theory as illustration, David Velleman argues that in deciding how to act, we necessarily seek actions that are intelligible in light of our self-understanding and that, consequently, only something that is governed by such a norm of intelligibility can count as an action (Velleman 2000). In other words,

constitutivism holds that one cannot act without being subject to certain norms in just the way that one cannot count as playing chess unless one moves the pieces in ways prescribed by the rules. And this means that in acting we are necessarily subject to norms that are internal to agency itself, making it possible for the will to be subject to an authority that is not contingent, but necessary.

My aim here is not to defend this view, though I hope to have shown that Williams's argument should lead us to something like it. But the Williamsian picture I have been outlining also contributes something typically missing from constitutivist accounts. Constitutivists, who generally draw their inspiration from Kant's Groundwork, often focus their accounts of agency exclusively on willing as characterized by practical reason and, as Williams notes, "once one thinks about what is involved in having a character, one can see that the Kantians' omission of character is both a condition of their ultimate insistence on the demands of impartial morality, and also a reason for finding inadequate their account of the individual" (Williams 1981c, 210). By focusing exclusively on norms of practical rationality, constitutivism tends to over-intellectualize human agents who, after all, have not only a will but also a character. My suggestion is that while Williams cannot fully substantiate the critique of Kantian morality without the sort of account of authority constitutivism offers, his view is a helpful corrective to constitutivism insofar as it insists on taking character seriously as a constituent of the will. The will does not operate independently of character and in disregard of it. Rather, it constitutes features of character and is in turn constituted by them. In this way, through the exercise of the will, agents can give rise, partially and in steps, to the genuine necessities of character without thereby thinking that any satisfactory account of agency can leave character behind.[6]

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the Modern period who would who would have us put science to work resolving moral problems (*e.g.*, Masters, 1993). This approach has rhetorical advantages, to the extent that the skeptic can then be made to look overly romantic or Luddite. But as Williams explained in his *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (1972/2003), the fact that a method has some level of precision does not always mean that our reasoning for preferring that method will itself be precise, or even rational.

[9] As Gracia points out, only a very narrow view of philosophy and its relationship to culture would hold that "the data necessary for philosophy were already available to Plato and even to Thales. Indeed, they are available to every thinking human being" (1992, p. 317).

[10] The skeptic can say that it was predictable that, as more ethicists competed for an audience off-campus, one group of them would advise another group on the challenges of getting "requesting physicians . . . to pay attention to their recommendations" (LaPuma & Toulmin, 1989, p. 1110), scold them because "wherever the action is in medical ethics, the action is mostly talk" (Kass, 1990, p. 6), and offer cautions about how an academic background might reduce one's usefulness as an ethicist in the clinic (Caplan, 1992). These are not the grumblings of skeptics who sneer at the idea that they would address real-world problems. These are what will sound to the skeptic like partisan moves from ethicists who have decided that their work on those problems won't be slowed by doubts about justification or questions about something like moral luck.

[11] At various times, some philosophers of history have suggested that we eventually give up on the idea that we can learn from the past (Bird, 1972). But the real concern seems to be the one that historians share with ethicists: how do we know which details count when we try to determine what constitutes an event worth learning from?

[12] One of the best in this regard would be Phillipa Foot (2002), who in several places (especially her paper, "Moral Dilemmas Revisited") responded directly to Williams's skepticism.

[13] Seay (2002) makes this case in more detail than I will here, arguing that, those who reject moral theories will, in effect, have to replace them with something that closely resembles a moral theory if they are to be able to test one judgment against another.

Chapter Three

[1] In saying that most philosophers take intentions to be the conclusions of deliberation, I am not suggesting that this is an especially simple picture. First, there is general agreement that it is possible to form intentions without deliberation. Second, the intention that concludes deliberation may be of at least two types: it may be a prior intention or an intention in action. Finally, the claim is

not meant to simply rule out the Aristotelian view that deliberation concludes in *action*. Several theorists have attempted to reconcile this latter view with the claim that what concludes an action is an intention by suggesting that all intentions are intentions in action, such that to say that that deliberation concludes in an intention just is to say that it concludes in action. In any case, if an action *concludes* the deliberation, rather than simply interrupting it like a spasm, the action must be an intentional one, and thus its post-deliberative inception is also the inception of an intention.

[2] Thus, for example, it is primarily (categorical) desires that are presented as giving us a reason to live (Williams 1973; 1981c), projects or commitments that make (or should make) the prospect of immortality unappealing (Williams 1973), projects again that come into conflict with Kantian or utilitarian morality (Smart and Williams 1973; Williams 1973), and practical necessities that provide the core from which the deontological "ought" is drawn (Williams 1985).

[3] It is not clear whether "determine" is the right word here. It does seem as if nothing but character can enter into the motivation of intentional action, on Williams's view. However, the extent to which character determines action will depend on what we make of the "sound deliberative route" idea. If, for example, the deliberative path from character to action is itself structured by the motives that enter into character (that "dispositions of evaluation" and "patterns of emotional reaction" are constituents of character is, certainly, suggestive of that idea), then we have the familiar idea that character does fully determine agency, at least insofar as anything does (Strawson 1994). If, on the other hand, deliberation can operate more or less unhindered, this opens up the possibility that it may give rise to new motivations and thus lead outside the subjective motivational set (Korsgaard 1986). Since Williams clearly means to foreclose the latter possibility, or is at least deeply skeptical about it (Williams 1995b), it follows that, at the least, agency can deviate very little from the drafts laid out by character. If agents can act out of character intentionally, this can only be in the sense that their actions follow from motives that are more superficial than others, and less integrated with the other projects and dispositions within the subjective motivational set.

[4] The claim that practical necessity, while requiring deliberation, can occur even in the absence of actual deliberation mirrors the view that intentions can be formed spontaneously without thereby being arational. See note [1], above.

[5] Constitutivism has received significant attention in recent years. For two worked out versions of the view, see Korsgaard (2009) and Velleman (2000). Restatements and defenses of versions of constitutivism can be found in Tubert (2010), Ferrero (2009), and Katsafanas (2011), among others.