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4

How Not to Argue for Motivational Internalism¹

Danielle Bromwich

4.1 Introduction

Meta-ethics is fraught with seemingly intractable disagreements. Yet, those working on problems in moral motivation seem to have reached broad agreement on at least one issue, and that is how *not* to argue for motivational internalism. This might seem like progress, but in what follows I urge you not to celebrate it as such.

Motivational internalism is the thesis that, roughly speaking, necessarily, if I sincerely judge that "I morally ought to ϕ ", then I will be motivated to ϕ . The moral judgement in question can be either a non-cognitive or a cognitive judgement. But, either way, this rough characterization of the thesis is generally thought to be implausible because the conceptual connection between moral judgement and motivation is a non-defeasible one. Non-defeasible motivational internalism cannot accommodate the litany of everyday examples of agents who seem capable of making sincere first-person moral judgements while remaining unmoved by such judgements, nor can it accommodate a cognitivist theory of moral judgements given the widely accepted Humean theory of motivation. The Humean theory of motivation tells us that no cognitive judgement could motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. In light of these problems, it is generally agreed that arguing for a non-defeasible version of the thesis is how *not* to argue for motivational internalism, which leaves defeasible motivational internalism as the favoured formulation.

My goal in this chapter is to cast doubt on this agreement. My focus is on *cognitivist* motivational internalism, and so in the first section I explain what is so attractive about this seemingly problematic thesis, before outlining various features and formulations in the second section. When

the problems with cognitivist motivational internalism are laid bare, the motivation for defending a defeasible conceptual connection between cognitive moral judgement and motivation becomes vividly apparent. I outline these motivations and Michael Smith's particular defence of this thesis in Section 4.3, before problematizing this formulation. The upshot of this critical analysis is not entirely negative, however, because in the final section I argue that the problems with both the defeasible formulation and current non-defeasible formulations are instructive in helping us to see how cognitivist motivational internalism should be argued for, in addition to seeing that defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism is how *not* to defend this important meta-ethical thesis.

4.2 Why cognitivist motivational internalism?

Roughly speaking, cognitivist motivational internalism is the thesis that necessarily, if I believe that "I morally ought to φ ", then I will be motivated to φ . This thesis has its roots in commonsense morality: we are pre-theoretically disposed to think that first-person moral judgements are both truth-apt beliefs about an objective moral state of affairs and the kinds of states that motivate those who sincerely make them.

The following example illustrates our pre-theoretical commitment to the cognitivist and motivational aspects of morality. Suppose that while out shopping I notice an affluent-looking woman stumble and spill the contents of her purse. Several passers-by stop to assist her, but she tersely shoos them away, informing them that she is quite capable of looking after herself. Several people who have stopped to help look slightly taken aback, but I notice one of them pocketing the phone that fell out of her purse. I look around for other witnesses, but I appear to be the only one who has noticed this. What, if anything, should I do?

Suppose that I tell you what I witnessed. I try to shrug off the incident by noting that such a rude woman deserves to be taught a lesson, adding that, by the looks of it, it is not as if she cannot afford another phone anyway. Then I confess that I do not want to do anything about it because I hate causing a scene. Suppose you look at me with disdain and say that, regardless of how rude or indeed wealthy the woman is, the passer-by should not have stolen her phone. What I ought to do, you say, is report the thief.

Intuitively we think that, if I am genuinely engaged in figuring out what I *ought* to do, as opposed to figuring out what I *want* to do, I will be attentive to morally salient reasons for action. The following three assumptions make this intuition straightforwardly intelligible: (i) there

is a correct answer to the question: "What should I do?"; (ii) there is a correct answer because there are moral facts about the matter; and (iii) we can get the answer right because we have epistemic access to these facts. The practice of thinking and even arguing about moral matters seems to require that moral judgements be truth-apt beliefs about an objective state of affairs.

Now, suppose that you convince me that I ought to report the incident. I form the moral judgement: "I morally ought to report the thief." However, after weighing the reasons and making the moral judgement, suppose I say, "Well, with that problem off my mind, I'm off home!" Surprised, you would probably ask me, "Aren't you going to report the thief first?" Now, suppose that I reply, "Look, I believe that I morally ought to report the thief, I just don't see why that gives me any motive for doing so." This, it is fair to assume, would puzzle you. After all, you have convinced me that I morally ought to report the thief and we tend to think that the test of whether someone really judges an action to be morally right or to be done is whether that person is motivated to do it. So what could I mean when I say, "I believe that I *morally ought* to report it, but you haven't given me any *motive* for doing so"? The moral judgement is, by itself, the motive.

Our pre-theoretical moral intuitions suggest a commitment to cognitivist motivational internalism. However, this thesis is in tension with a dominantly held philosophical psychology known as the Humean theory of motivation. The Humean theory of motivation tells us that beliefs cannot motivate action alone; it tells us that beliefs cannot motivate action without the assistance of a "conceptually independent desire" (Sayre McCord, 1997: 56) that is "neither entailed by the presence of, nor partially constitutive of, any belief" (Van Roojen, 1995: 37–38).² So, while cognitivist motivational internalism tells us that moral cognition entails motivation, the Humean theory of motivation tells us that moral cognition could not entail motivation because beliefs are motivationally inert.

Our pre-theoretical moral commitments – to cognitivism and practicality – are in tension with this widely held and intuitive philosophical psychology. So, we seem to be committed to the following inconsistent set of propositions:

1. Moral judgements are beliefs about an objective state of affairs.
2. Moral judgements are motivationally efficacious.
3. No belief is motivationally efficacious unless accompanied by a conceptually independent desire that is neither entailed by the presence of, nor partially constitutive of, any belief.

Michael Smith (1994) – who famously formulates a weaker version of this puzzle called “The Moral Problem”³ – refers to this as the central organizing problem in meta-ethics. The problem is that, while the first proposition tells us that a moral judgement is a belief, and the second tells us that a moral judgement is necessarily motivationally efficacious, the third proposition tells us that the motivation must come in the form of a desire. The propositions taken together entail a necessary connection between belief and desire that the third proposition denies.

The tension with the Humean theory of motivation is not the only problem. Cognitivist motivational internalism also seems to fly in the face of ordinary moral experience. There are both everyday and scientifically informed examples of agents who seem to be adept at making first-person (cognitive) moral judgements but who are completely unmoved by the judgements in question.⁴ Consider, for instance, the psychopath who knows that torture is wrong but does not care. It is plausible to assume that psychopathy is a condition that renders one capable of being left motivationally cold by one’s sincere first-person moral judgements. The problem, as David Brink points out, is that

the amoralist certainly seems conceivable ... We can imagine someone who regards what we take to be moral demands as moral demands – and not simply conventional moral demands – and yet remains unmoved. (Brink, 1989: 48)

Apathy is just as problematic as amoralism. Consider, for example, the widow who remembers the promise she made to her dying husband: she promised that she would celebrate his life with a raucous wake. However, in her grief, she is completely unmoved by her moral judgement that “I morally ought to keep the promise I made my dying husband.”

Lust, anger, grief, clinical depression and other mental illnesses seem to be the kinds of emotions or conditions that are capable of rendering us motivationally unresponsive to our sincere first-person moral judgements. Michael Stocker claims that:

Through spiritual or physical tiredness, through accidie, through weakness of body, through illness, through general apathy, through despair, through inability to concentrate, through a feeling of uselessness or futility, and so on, one may feel less and less motivated to seek what is good. One’s lessened desire need not signal, much less be the product of, the fact that, or one’s belief that, there is less good to be obtained or produced... Indeed, a frequent added defect of being in

such "depressions" is that one sees all the good to be won or saved and one lacks the will, interest, desire or strength. (Stocker, 1979: 744)

Stocker goes on to claim that an adequate moral psychology must acknowledge that our moods and interests sometimes enable us to be "attracted to the (believed) bad" and yet not "attracted to the (believed) good" (Stocker, 1979: 741). However, it does not appear as if cognitivist motivational internalism is a plausible moral psychology, given that it cannot accommodate these kinds of motivational failures.

So, cognitivist motivational internalism is "a sort of Holy Grail of meta-ethics" (Noggle, 1997: 88) in that

[i]t offers us all we ever wanted from morality. The internalist claim gives morality the psychological 'oomph' it needs to motivate action by itself, rather than having to hitch [a] motivational ride on pre-or non-moral motives. The realist thesis makes morality what it seems to be: a discourse about facts – moral facts – which we can discover, about which we can disagree, and of which we can often convince each other. (Noggle, 1997: 88)

However, while it is an important and intuitive ethical thesis, it is also a deeply problematic thesis, given its direct tension with the widely accepted Humean theory of motivation and failure to accommodate phenomena from our ordinary moral experience.

4.3 Cognitivist motivational internalism: features and formulations

The label "internalism" is used liberally in ethics. Stephen Darwall remarks that "the range of positions labelled internalist is bewilderingly large, and only infrequently are important distinctions kept clear" (Darwall, 1992: 155), and Rachel Cohen points out that "[r]ecent writers define the term 'internalism' and its partner, 'externalism' in ... a variety of overlapping yet incompatible ways" (Cohen, 1993: 266). Now, while it is not necessary to provide a comprehensive taxonomy of ethical internalism, it is necessary to get clear on what cognitivism motivational internalism is and the variety of ways in which it can be formulated. This is a task best guided by David Brink's sage advice:

Though it is unlikely that any interpretation of internalism ... will be faithful to everything every party to debates about moral motivation

has claimed, our interpretations should be guided at least in part by what central figures in the debate have claimed. (Brink, 1997: 8)

With this in mind, I take there to be five features and three formulations of the thesis.

The first two features of cognitivist motivational internalism concern the cognitive moral judgement itself. First, cognitivist motivational internalism is a thesis about the motivational efficacy of *first-person* cognitive moral judgements. As Antti Kauppinen astutely points out, getting to "I morally ought to φ "

from 'It is morally wrong not to φ ' may not seem like a long leap (the former is plausibly entailed by the latter), but insofar as these are distinct psychological states, there is a possibility of failure here, which internalism need not deny. (Kauppinen, 2008: 1 fn. 1)

Second, the first-person cognitive moral judgement is not just any judgement, but rather it is a sincere one (cf. Hare, 1952).

The next three features of the thesis concern the connection between cognitive moral judgement and moral motivation. Third, the connection between sincere first-person cognitive moral judgement and motivation is a necessary one. It is "not merely a contingent matter that people have motives to do what they think or sincerely say they should" (Darwall, 1992: 155). However, as Christian Miller points out, this necessary connection is compatible with "the source of the agent's motivation being something other than her moral judgment" (Miller, 2008a: 234).⁵ The necessary connection does little, then, to differentiate (cognitivist) motivational internalism from its contrast thesis, motivational externalism. After all, as Nick Zangwill points out,

"Motivational Externalism" is the view that moral judgements have no motivational efficacy in themselves, and that when they motivate us, the source of motivation lies outside the moral judgement in a separate desire. (Zangwill, 2003: 143)

The fourth mark does clearly distinguish the theses. Fourth, when the cognitivist motivational internalist claims that the connection between sincere first-person moral belief and motivation is a necessary one, she is usually claiming that there is a necessary *conceptual* connection between moral judgement and motivation. This means that motivation is internal to or built in to moral belief.⁶ Let's call this fourth

distinguishing mark the internalist intuition.⁷ Finally, cognitivist motivational internalism is a thesis about the motivational efficacy of moral judgements, but it is not a thesis about the strength of that motivation. The point is that moral beliefs motivate; the point is not that that motivation is necessarily decisive.

Cognitivist motivational internalism is the thesis, then, that necessarily, if I sincerely believe that "I morally ought to φ ," then I will be motivated to φ where that motivation arises solely from that belief itself.

Cognitivist motivational internalism can be formulated in three strengths. The strongest version of this motivational thesis is *decisive* cognitivist motivational internalism. It tells us that necessarily, if one sincerely believes that "I morally ought to φ ," then one will φ (unless prevented by some external force) and that that decisive motivation will arise solely from the belief itself. On this version, there is a necessary conceptual connection between a sincere first-person cognitive moral judgement and *action*.

It is worth noting that *decisive* cognitivist motivational internalism is generally considered to be an implausible version of the thesis. It is not clear that this version of the thesis is psychologically plausible. The motivation, which is built in to all cognitive moral judgements, supposedly overrides all other possible competing motivations. But the strength of *decisive* cognitivist motivational internalism flies in the face of everyday moral experience: it seems all too common that one's sincere moral motives are overridden by competing considerations. What morality requires of us is often hard and we frequently buckle under the pressure. It is also not clear that by denying that moral motivation is decisive one is forced to accept a version of the motivational thesis that lacks moral plausibility. After all, if we think back to the example with which we started, then we can see that what is puzzling is not the fact that the subject in question fails to report the thief; it is rather that the subject fails to be *motivated* to report the thief.

The traditional version of this motivational thesis is *classic* cognitivist motivational internalism. It tells us that necessarily, if one sincerely believes that "I morally ought to φ ," then one is motivated to φ and that motivation will arise solely from the belief itself and, if all else is equal, one will φ . On this version, there is a necessary conceptual connection between a sincere first-person cognitive moral judgement and defeasible motivation. That is, if one sincerely believes that "I morally ought to φ ," then the motivation, which is built in to this moral judgement, provides one with some, but not necessarily overriding, motivation to

φ . If all things are equal – that is, if this defeasible motivation is not defeated – then one will φ .

The weakest version of this motivational thesis is *defeasible* cognitivist motivational internalism. It tells us that necessarily, if one believes that “I morally ought to φ ” and if all else is equal, then one will be motivated to φ and, if all else is equal, one will φ . On this version, there is a defeasible necessary conceptual connection between a cognitive moral judgement and defeasible motivation. That is, if one believes that “I morally ought to φ ” and if all else is equal, then one has some, but not necessarily overriding, motivation to φ . If all things are equal again – that is, if this defeasible motivation is not defeated – then one will φ . It is not entirely clear that the motivation in question is built in to or is internal to the moral judgement in question. I will return to this point presently.

4.4 How should cognitivist motivational internalism be defended?

The challenge is to defend a version of cognitivist motivational internalism that is both morally and psychologically plausible. The motivation for favouring a defeasible formulation of the thesis should be clear: a non-defeasible formulation seems to be unable to meet this challenge. That is, while such a formulation does capture the intuition that moral judgements have a practical pull on us by maintaining that motivation is internal to or built in to the cognitive moral judgement, this formulation fails to do justice to our everyday psychological intuition that it is possible to be left cold by such judgements and our more reflective psychological intuition that belief cannot motivate action alone. A defeasible formulation, on the other hand, captures both of these psychological intuitions. What might be required in order to make all other things equal, after all, is a conceptually independent desire that is neither partly constitutive of nor entailed by the cognitive moral judgement in question. And, if this is right, then cognitivist motivational internalism is not in tension with our everyday psychological intuition – because failure to be motivated by the cognitive moral judgement might be explained by the absence of the aforementioned desire – or with our reflective psychological intuition – because cognitive moral judgement or moral belief does not purport to motivate without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire – and so a defeasible formulation of the thesis seems to be able to meet the challenge. The only question that remains for this formulation is how it preserves the

internalist intuition; the intuition, that is, that cognitive moral judgments have a practical pull on us. After all, on this formulation, motivation is not internal or built in to the moral belief itself.

Defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism

Michael Smith (1994) – the chief exponent of defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism – is thought to preserve the internalist intuition.

Smith claims that the most plausible idea behind cognitivist motivational internalism is this:

though there is a conceptual connection between moral judgement and the will, the connection involved is the following defeasible one. If an agent judges that it is right for her to φ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to φ in C or she is practically irrational. In other words, agents who judge it right to act in various ways are so motivated, and necessarily so, absent the distorting influences of weakness of the will and other similar forms of practical unreason on their motivations. (Smith, 1994: 61)

What makes stronger formulations of the thesis implausible, he thinks, is that they must deny a commonplace feature of human psychology and ordinary moral experience. They must deny that various kinds of conditions – or “depressions” as Michael Stocker (1979) calls them – are capable of completely destroying our motivation while leaving our cognition and evaluative outlook unmarred. Only defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism has a gap between moral belief and motivation that allows one to take this purported commonplace feature of human psychology and ordinary moral experience into account.

Smith cashes out the *ceteris paribus* clause – inserted between moral belief and motivation – in terms of practical rationality. He holds that, if one believes that “It is right that I φ ” and if one is practically rational, then one will be motivated to φ and, if all else is equal, one will φ . The main virtue of this formulation of defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism, Smith thinks, is that it captures the following:

It is a platitude that an agent has a reason to act in a certain way just in case she would be motivated to act in that way if she were rational (Korsgaard, 1986). And it is a consequence of this platitude that an agent who judges herself to have a reason to act in a certain way – who judges that she would be so motivated if she were rational – is practically irrational if she is not motivated to act accordingly. For if

she is not motivated accordingly then she fails to be rational by her own lights (Smith, 1992). (Smith, 1994: 62)

So, according to Smith, first-person cognitive moral judgements are actually judgements about what one takes oneself to have reason to do, and so acting contrary to what one takes oneself to have reason to do is to act irrationally. So either one acts in accordance with one's moral belief, which is a judgement about what one has reason to do, or one is practically irrational.

Smith's distinction between two kinds of reasons for action – *motivating* reasons and *normative* reasons – illustrates this nicely. Motivating reasons “are psychological states that teleologically, and perhaps causally, explain behaviour” (Smith, 2004: 1). Now, as a Humean about motivation, Smith must hold – and does hold – that motivating reasons are constituted by belief/desire pairs. So, on this account, what is necessary for a subject to have a motivating reason to, say, drink a beer is for that subject to want to drink a beer and for that subject to believe that by drinking a beer he will satisfy his desire to drink a beer. Normative reasons “are propositions whose truth would justify acting in a certain way: they are (roughly speaking) facts about the desirability of so acting” (Smith, 2004: 1). Now, as an anti-Humean about normativity, Smith must hold – and does hold – that normative reasons are facts about the desirability of action. So, on this account, what is necessary for a subject to have normative reason to, say, drink a beer is for it to be a fact that drinking a beer is desirable. When we relate this distinction to morality, we see that on Smith's account first-person cognitive moral judgements are beliefs about normative reasons which motivate an agent to act insofar as that agent is rational; such judgements, that is, can purportedly produce behaviour and yet are composed of propositions about what one ought to do whose truth would justify one's behaviour.

A puzzle remains: Smith holds that first-person moral judgements are beliefs about an objective moral state of affairs and yet also the kind of states that motivate those who make them. So, how can Smith hold that moral judgements are beliefs that can motivate, yet also hold that belief cannot motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire? The answer is revealed in his analysis of normative reasons:

The core idea is that facts about our normative reasons for action – that is, facts about what it is desirable for us to do – are facts about

what we would advise ourselves to do if we were perfectly placed to give ourselves advice. (Smith, 1997: 88)

So, for instance, suppose that we say that Kitty has a normative reason to buy fair trade bananas. Smith tells us that what we are saying, when we say that Kitty has the normative reason in question, is that there is a possible world in which a fully rational⁸ Kitty – who has desires “that are completely beyond reproach, from the point of view of reasoned criticism” (Smith, 1997: 88) – would advise less than fully rational Kitty to buy fair trade bananas.

It should now be clear how cognitive moral judgements are practical. Kitty believes that she has a normative reason to buy fair trade bananas. The foregoing analysis of normative reasons tells us that what this means is that Kitty believes that a fully rational version of herself would advise a less than fully rational version of herself to buy fair trade bananas. And, Smith tells us,

[b]eliefs about normative reasons, when combined with an agent's tendency to have a coherent psychology, can thus cause agents to have matching desires. (Smith, 1997: 100; also see Smith, 1994: 179)

Kitty's belief about what she has normative reason to do *causes* her to want to buy fair trade bananas when she has a disposition towards a rational psychology. Now, this defeasible version of cognitivist motivational internalism is compatible with Humeanism about motivation; after all, what is necessary for motivation is a conceptually independent desire – a desire which Kitty could fail to have if she were practically irrational.⁹ And so, Smith concludes, Kitty is either motivated by her first-person cognitive moral judgement or she is irrational “by her own lights” (Smith, 1994: 62).

Now, while it is clear how Smith's defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism accommodates the everyday examples of apathy and is also compatible with the Humean theory of motivation, it is unclear how it captures the internalist intuition. Some commentators, like David Copp for instance, take Smith's defence to have done justice to this feature of the thesis:

Smith agrees with the internalist... that the connection between a person's judgement that she would be right to do ϕ and her being motivated to ϕ is due to something internal to the judgement. After all, the agent's judgement, which of course, as an objectivist, Smith

takes to be an ordinary belief, is that she would be right to do ϕ . It is this fact about the content of the belief that accounts for its ability to explain her doing ϕ . The fact that the belief can explain the agent's action is due, in other words, to the belief's content, which is essential to it, or "internal" to it. This is the core internalist intuition. (Copp, 1997: 36–37)

The internalist intuition is preserved, at least on Smith's account, because the belief about normative reason causes the desire that, in combination with that belief, motivates action.

The problem is that once the *ceteris paribus* clause is inserted between moral belief and motivation it is no longer clear that motivation is *internal* to moral belief, because *external* factors are necessary for motivation. Smith, for instance, claims that if a subject has a belief about a normative reason, and if that subject has a disposition towards a rational psychology, then the belief about a normative reason will cause that subject to have a desire to act in accordance with her first-person cognitive moral judgement. What this tells us, then, is that a subject can fully believe the content of her first-person cognitive moral judgement and not be motivated to act in accordance with that moral judgement simply because the subject lacks a tendency towards a coherent psychology. Smith will point out that, if one lacks a tendency toward a coherent psychology, then one is irrational. But, from the cognitivist motivational internalist's point of view, whether or not the subject is irrational is beside the point; the problem, after all, is that moral cognition is motivationally inert without the assistance of this non-moral tendency towards a coherent psychology. It is not the individual's commitment to her first-person cognitive moral judgement that causes the desire to act in accordance with that judgement; it is, rather, the individual's freestanding non-moral tendency towards a coherent or rational psychology that causes the desire to act in accordance with that judgement. It is difficult to see how Smith – or indeed any proponent of defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism – can preserve the idea that motivation is built in to the cognitive moral judgement.¹⁰

One might think that the failure to capture the internalist intuition is a price worth paying for a plausible moral psychology. After all, while the motivation is not internal or built in to the cognitive moral judgement, when the thesis is formulated in this way it is not only compatible with the Humean theory of motivation but it can accommodate those everyday examples of moral failure.

There is an underlying assumption here that the cognitivist motivational internalist would do well to critically examine before weakening her thesis so considerably.¹¹ The assumption is that amoral and apathetic agents can make sincere first-person (cognitive) moral judgements but fail to be moved by those judgements. This assumption implies that non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism is false. However, those who embrace a non-defeasible cognitivist formulation of the thesis can explain the phenomena in question: perhaps amoral and apathetic agents do not make sincere or genuine moral judgements, which, in turn, explains why they fail to be motivated appropriately. That is, it is possible that the agents in question are not adept at making genuine moral judgements, and so it is possible that their failure is a cognitive one as opposed to a motivational one. Perhaps, that is, such agents do not quite grasp the contents of their first-person cognitive moral judgements in light of their psychological condition. The point is just this: one needs to determine whether these examples reveal a purely motivational failure or a cognitive failure before concluding that they do in fact represent genuine counterexamples to a non-defeasible formulation of the thesis.

One might think that it is fairly clear that the failure exhibited by these agents is purely motivational as opposed to cognitive. After all, it is plausible to assume that amoral and apathetic agents are competent with moral concepts and that they understand the contents of their moral judgements, and so there is no reason not to take these examples at face value. Now, while it goes beyond the scope of this chapter to demonstrate that these examples do not constitute counterexamples to a non-defeasible formulation of the thesis, it is worth noting that the scientific analysis of the real-life cases of amorality and apathy give us reason to doubt that the failure exhibited by such agents in such examples is purely motivational.

Michael Smith, in light of Michael Stocker's examples of apathy, is especially concerned to accommodate "depressives". Smith, like Stocker, is convinced that these agents can "see all the good to be won or saved" but simply "lack the will, interest, desire or strength to pursue the good" (Stocker, 1979: 744). He is convinced, in other words, that they are not cognitively impaired but merely motivationally impaired. But we need only look at the standard elucidation of a Major Depressive Episode in order to see that this is not the received scientific understanding of such agents. The DSM-IV tells us:

The sense of worthlessness or guilt associated with a Major Depressive Episode may include unrealistic negative evaluations of one's worth or guilty preoccupations or ruminations over minor past failings

(Criterion A7). Such individuals often misinterpret neutral or trivial day-to-day events as evidence of personal defects and have an exaggerated sense of responsibility for untoward events. For example, a realtor may become preoccupied with self-blame for failing to make sales even when the market has collapsed generally and other realtors are equally unable to make sales. The sense of worthlessness and guilt may be of delusional proportions (e.g., an individual who is convinced that he or she is personally responsible for world poverty). (DSM-IV-TR, 2000: 350)

The real-life case of apathy is clinical depression. But, if the DSM-IV is correct, then it is not clear that an agent in the throes of a depressive episode can or does "see all the good to be won or saved" as supposed. Quite the opposite appears to be true: the depressed agent seems to be incapable of seeing the world – and especially themselves – aright. The DSM-IV suggests that depression *does* impair one's cognitive function and that the depressive agent tends towards irrational thought processes that change the way in which information is processed. Moreover, not only is this understanding of the condition supported by scientific findings on clinical depression more generally,¹² but the DSM-IV goes on to state explicitly that "[m]any individuals report impaired ability to think, concentrate, or make decisions" (DSM-IV-TR, 2000: 350). It is far from clear, then, that apathy or depression *only* impairs motivation, as the foregoing purported counterexamples suggest. The cognitivist motivational internalist should not, then, rush to accommodate these agents by weakening her thesis before properly ascertaining the nature of these agents and their impairments.

In sum, then, no defeasible formulation of cognitivist motivational internalism can capture the internalist intuition due to the gap that is inserted between moral judgement and motivation. Moreover, one of the primary reasons for weakening the internalist thesis in this way is to accommodate a range of examples, which the internalist may not need to amend her thesis to explain adequately.

Non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism

So, given the problems with a defeasible formulation of the thesis, it seems as if a non-defeasible formulation is in order. However, when the thesis is formulated in this way, the problem is that it tends to make normative or moral beliefs motivationally exceptional.

In order to see this, very briefly consider neo-Aristotelian accounts of moral motivation, which tell us that moral (or normative) beliefs can

motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. On these accounts, the virtuous person reliably perceives a situation in a way that enables her to recognize, and see in a favourable light, the morally salient features of a situation that point to a particular course of action, and the way in which she sees a particular situation puts her in a cognitive state that provides her with her one and only motivation for action.¹³

However, as Margaret Little points out, “[t]o claim that it is something *cognitive* that guarantees motivation has struck some as egregiously ad hoc” (Little, 1997: 75). So, why think that desire is not part of the causal explanation of the virtuous person’s action? Why think that a moral or a normative belief could motivate action alone?

Well, the Humean theory of motivation is not beyond suspicion,¹⁴ and, as John McDowell, following Thomas Nagel (1970: 29–31), points out, a full explanation of a subject’s action may well cite a desire without concession to the Humean theory of motivation:

Suppose, for instance, that we explain a person’s performance of a certain action by crediting him with an awareness of some fact that makes it likely (in his view) that acting in that way will be conducive to his interest. Adverting to his view of the facts may suffice, on its own, to show us the favourable light in which his action appeared to him. No doubt we credit him with an appropriate desire, perhaps for his own future happiness. But the commitment to ascribe such a desire is simply consequential on our taking him to act as he does for the reason we cite; the desire does not function as an independent extra component in a full specification of his reason, hitherto omitted by an understandable ellipsis of the obvious, but strictly necessary in order to show how it is that the reason can motivate him. Properly understood, his belief does that on its own. (McDowell, 1998: 79)

Non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalists, like McDowell, think that a belief motivates action alone. However, in virtue of being motivated all the way to action, we consequentially ascribe or credit the motivated subject with a desire. As Nagel puts it:

That I have the appropriate desire simply *follows* from the fact that these considerations motivate me... But nothing follows about the role of the desire as a condition contributing to the motivational efficacy of those considerations. (Nagel, 1970: 29)

The desire in question is not a robust conceptually independent desire of the sort the Humean tells us is necessary for motivation; the desire is just a logical consequence of the fact that the belief in question motivated the subject to act. The desire does not play a causal role in producing the action; the desire in question is no more than a consequence of the fact that the first-person cognitive moral judgement motivated the subject to act.

The problem with current non-defeasible formulations of the thesis is not that they reject the Humean theory of motivation; the problem is that they fail to reject it completely. Their arguments imply that, while the Humean theory of motivation applies to all non-normative beliefs, it does not apply to normative beliefs. The focus on the virtuous person's motivation, or the way in which prudential beliefs might motivate us, suggests that only a special set of beliefs are motivationally efficacious, as opposed to belief being motivationally efficacious in general. What this means is that proponents of these accounts face a burden to justify the motivational exception that is made for moral or normative beliefs. It would be simply *ad hoc* to insist that normative beliefs are motivationally special. What the non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalist has to do is explain how a change in content converts a state that is generally thought to be motivationally inert – and perhaps even incapable of motivation – into a state that is motivationally efficacious. And it is difficult to see how the non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalist can both meet this burden and preserve what is distinctive about her own position. After all, once one kind of belief is shown to be motivationally efficacious, it will be difficult to maintain that all other beliefs are motivationally inert.¹⁵

4.5 Lessons for the cognitivist motivational internalist

It looks like we have reached an impasse. The cognitivist motivational internalist can either formulate her motivational thesis defeasibly or non-defeasibly. If she formulates it defeasibly, then she fails to accommodate the core internalist intuition. However, if she formulates it non-defeasibly, then she is lumbered with a burden to justify the motivational exceptionality of cognitive moral judgements. However, the cognitivist motivational internalist should not despair. By considering the problems with each formulation, she can learn how not to argue for cognitivist motivational internalism, in addition to learning the best strategy for providing a psychologically and morally plausible formulation of her motivational thesis.

Defending a defeasible conceptual connection between cognitive moral judgement and motivation is how *not* to argue for motivational internalism. The defining feature of motivational internalism is that motivation is internal or built in to the moral judgement; it is this feature that most clearly distinguishes it from motivational externalism.¹⁶ But we have learnt that – no matter how sophisticated the defence – defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism places a gap between moral judgement and motivation that renders it unable to accommodate this core internalist intuition. The *ceteris paribus* clause – no matter how it is cashed out – is the external factor that plays a mediating role between the judgement and the motivation. After all, if things are not otherwise equal (however that is to be understood), then an individual will not be moved *in the slightest* by his or her sincere first-person cognitive moral judgement. At the very least, this kind of formulation is certainly much weaker than what central figures in the debate had in mind.¹⁷

There is yet more reason not to favour this kind of defence of cognitivist motivational internalism. One of the main reasons to formulate the conceptual connection between moral judgement and motivation defeasibly is to accommodate the intuition that it is possible for some agents – that is, amoral and apathetic agents – to make sincere first-person moral judgements and yet be left motivationally cold by such judgements. But these purported counterexamples to non-defeasible formulations of the thesis assume that it is possible to sincerely judge that “I morally ought to ϕ ” and yet not be motivated to ϕ ; they assume that it is possible, in other words, to suffer from a condition that just impairs one’s motivation but somehow leaves one’s cognition intact. The problem with being too easily swayed by these examples, and thereby too easily tempted to weaken the internalist thesis in light of them, is that the scientific literature does not present these agents as suffering with merely motivational impairments; studies show, for instance, that depressives suffer from cognitive impairments that change the way in which these individuals process information that pertains to themselves and their situation. More work is needed on what, if anything, these purported counterexamples actually show. But, as it stands, these examples of apathy and amorality are not nearly compelling enough to motivate a cognitivist motivational internalist to formulate her thesis to accommodate them when that results in weakening the thesis so that it cannot do justice to the defining mark of motivational internalism.

The cognitivist motivational internalist has learnt that defending a defeasible conceptual connection between cognitive moral judgement and motivation is how *not* to argue for cognitivist motivational

internalism. It follows, then, that defending a non-defeasible conceptual connection between the judgement and the motivation is how to argue for the motivational thesis. However, one caveat is in order. A non-defeasible formulation of the thesis will fail if a motivational exception is made for moral or normative beliefs. That is, if one simply maintains that the Humean theory of motivation does not apply to moral or normative beliefs even though it does apply to all other beliefs, then one faces an ultimately insurmountable burden to justify the motivational exception that is made for moral or normative beliefs. So, once again, the cognitivist motivational internalist learns something instructive: she needs to defend a non-defeasible conceptual connection between cognitive moral judgement and motivation that does not make a motivational exception for moral or normative beliefs. After all, if she does that, then she defends a morally plausible version of the thesis, since the core internalist intuition is accommodated, and she defends a psychologically plausible version of the thesis, since there would be nothing motivationally exceptional about moral beliefs.¹⁸

Still, one might think, it is a tall order to demonstrate that there is nothing exceptional about motivationally efficacious beliefs in general. This would involve arguing that all beliefs – even humdrum beliefs about cats being on mats – can motivate action without the assistance of desire. The order is not as tall as it might at first seem. I have argued at length elsewhere that all beliefs – not just moral or normative beliefs – can motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire.¹⁹ I have argued, in short, that all beliefs, no matter what their content, can motivate the action of assent in the appropriate circumstances without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. While I cannot rehearse that argument here, I want to explain its significance for the possibility of a complete defence of non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism.

Two problems stand in the way of non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism and these are: the possibility of amorality and apathy, and the motivationally inert nature of belief. I have already shed some doubt on the challenge that the possibility of amorality and apathy poses for non-defeasible formulations of this thesis. (Of course, a lot more work is required, but these examples – which have been largely uncritically accepted as problematic for non-defeasible formulations of the thesis – are far from decisive.) The bigger issue is the objection to the thesis based on the nature of belief. However, by demonstrating that all beliefs, no matter what their content, can motivate action without

the assistance of a conceptually independent desire, I have already shown that an objection based on the nature of belief does not reveal anything problematic about non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism. After all, since all beliefs can motivate at least the action of assent without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire, we have no reason to accept that belief is a motivationally inert state. The significance of a complete argument against the Humean theory of motivation reveals, in short, that the central organizing problem of meta-ethics – the moral problem – is based on a misconception of the nature of belief.

A complete defence of non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism will require, among other things, that an account of cognitivist *moral* motivation be given and that the examples of amoralism and apathy be dismissed. However, the aim of this paper is not to defend a non-defeasible formulation of the thesis, but rather to argue that a defeasible formulation is how not to argue for the thesis and to suggest that the purported problems with a non-defeasible formulation of the thesis are far from insurmountable.

4.6 Conclusion

Despite being pre-theoretically intuitive, cognitivist motivational internalism is thought to be inherently problematic, which leads those working on issues in moral motivation to conclude that the only plausible formulation of this thesis is a defeasible one. I have argued that we should not draw this conclusion. Defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism is unable to capture the distinctive mark of motivational internalism – that motivation is internal or built in to moral belief. Moreover, the reasons in favour of weakening the thesis in this way are either false or suspect. The first reason to defend a defeasible conceptual connection between cognitive moral judgement and motivation is to make room for a conceptually independent desire that can explain motivation; after all, the underlying assumption is that belief is motivationally inert, and so unable to motivate action without the assistance of such a desire. However, I have argued elsewhere that belief is not motivationally inert, and so there is no special reason to assume that a motivationally efficacious cognitive motivational judgement needs the help of a conceptually independent desire to motivate. The second reason to defend a defeasible conceptual connection between (cognitive) moral judgement and motivation is to accommodate the litany of examples of agents who seem to be capable of making sincere first-person moral

judgements but who are unmoved by such judgements. However, I have argued both that these examples can be explained by non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism, and that the standard scientific understanding of depression, at least, is unfriendly to the analysis that suggests that such examples are problematic for non-defeasible formulations of the thesis. I have argued, in short, that defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism is how *not* to argue for motivational internalism, and I have suggested that, while much work remains, there is reason to be optimistic about the possibility of a complete defence of non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism.

Notes

1. I thank Sergio Tenenbaum and Tom Hurka for comments on an earlier draft of this chapter.
2. After all, as Van Roojen adds, if desire is partially constitutive of or entailed by belief, then "belief will itself, together with the appropriate means-end belief, constitute a motivating reason" (Van Roojen, 1995: 38).
3. Smith formulates the moral problem as follows:
 1. Moral judgements of the form "It is right that I ϕ " express a subject's beliefs about an objective matter of fact, a fact about what it is right for her to do.
 2. If someone judges that it is right that she ϕ s then, *ceteris paribus*, she is motivated to ϕ .
 3. An agent is motivated to act in a certain way just in case she has an appropriate desire and means-end belief, where belief and desire are, in Hume's terms, distinct existences (Smith, 1994: 12).

Take note of the way in which Smith formulates the second and third propositions of his moral problem. Smith tells us that moral judgements motivate *ceteris paribus*. I claim that moral judgements motivate *simpliciter*. Smith's formulation of the practicality of moral judgements is much weaker than my formulation: Smith just claims that moral judgements will motivate if all other things are equal; I claim that moral judgements will motivate even if all other things are not equal. Smith also tells us that belief cannot motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. I claim that belief cannot motivate without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire that is neither entailed by nor constitutive of the belief in question. Smith's formulation of the Humean theory of motivation is much weaker than my formulation: Smith just claims that a conceptually independent desire is necessary for motivation but he allows, in a way in which my formulation does not, that the necessary desire could be entailed by the belief in question.
4. The everyday examples include cases of amorality (Railton, 1986; Brink, 1989, 1997; Svavarsdóttir, 1999; Shafer-Landau, 2000) and apathy (Stocker, 1979; Blackburn, 1984; Smith, 1994; Mele, 1996; Shafer-Landau, 2000); evil (Joyce, 2001); and volitional impossibility (Shafer-Landau, 2000; Miller, 2008a). The scientifically informed examples include cases of psychopathy

(Brink, 1989; Doris and Stich, 2005); depression (Stocker, 1979; Smith, 1994; Mele, 1996; Doris and Stich, 2005) and persons with Ventromedial deficits (Roskies, 2003; Doris and Stich, 2005).

5. After all, a necessary connection between this kind of moral judgement and motivation is compatible with the following: "In all the relevant worlds, agent S has a standing *de dicto* desire to do what S judges to be right which, when combined with S's judgment, generates a desire that is solely responsible for motivating S to act" (Miller, 2008a: 234).
6. As Alfred Mele notes, cognitivist motivational internalism is "internalist in two senses":
 - first, believing oneself to be morally required to A metaphysically or conceptually (hence, internally, in a formal sense) guarantees that one has a motivation for Aing; second, what is guaranteed, more precisely, is that motivation for Aing is built in to any belief that one is (oneself) morally required to A and is internal to belief of that kind in this sense. (Mele, 1996: 730)
7. David Brink, in response to Smith's argument in *The Moral Problem*, states that "many parties to debates about moral motivation have in fact accepted and relied on my stronger formulation of internalism [non-defeasible motivational internalism]. This certainly seems to be true of the noncognitivists" (Brink, 1997: 8). See, for example, Price (1974: 186), Stevenson (1944: 13) and Mackie (1977: 23).
8. With regards to the conception of "full rationality" (or "fully rational") that Smith uses in this analysis of normative reasons, he says:

My suggestion is that to be fully rational an agent must be suffering from the effects of any physical or emotional disturbance, she must have no false beliefs, she must have all relevant true beliefs, and she must have a systematically justifiable set of desires, that is, a set of desires that is maximally coherent and unified. Furthermore, I argue that it is part of what we mean when we say that a set of desires is systematically justifiable that the desires that are elements in that set are desires that other people would have if they had a systematically justifiable set of desires. Fully rational agents converge in the desires that they have, and converge by definition, because it is part of what we mean by the rational justification of our desires that people who have such desires have a justification for them that other people also could see to be a justification. A justification for one agent to adopt a desire to act in certain circumstances is justification for another to adopt a desire to act in that way in those circumstances as well. (Smith, 1997: 89)

See Copp (1997) and Sayre McCord (1997) for criticism.
9. This is a very weak version of the Humean theory of motivation. Humeans about motivation ordinarily deny that belief can cause desire. See Hurka (1995) and Lenman (1998) for criticism.
10. Sigrun Svavarsdóttir (1999) makes this point in a slightly different way. She also thinks that motivational internalists, keen to preserve the internalist intuition, should be suspicious of the mediating role that is played by practical rationality:

the introduction of the practicality requirement condition opens up a can of worms. The question becomes, What is built in to that constraint?

That is to say, what sort of notion of practical rationality is being used? We need a more informative formulation of this condition before evaluating an internalist thesis that incorporates it. Indeed, motivational internalists should be very cautious in accepting this vague qualification of their thesis if they want to use the internalist thesis as a constraint on an account of moral thought. For once the rationality condition is introduced, it may be argued that the internalist constraint has no bearing on what sorts of mental acts a moral judgement is, but rather reveals some of the norms or requirements of rationality. (Svavarsdóttir, 1999:164–165)

Svavarsdottir's final point is a forceful one. One might suspect that Smith's version of cognitivist motivational internalism tells us more about the "requirements of rationality" than it does about the motivational efficacy of first-person cognitive moral judgements.

11. There is actually another assumption: belief cannot motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire. Now, of course, Michael Smith does not merely assume the truth of the Humean theory of motivation; he argues for it (Smith, 1994). That said, the Humean theory of motivation is widely and rather uncritically accepted in meta-ethics, but, as I argue in the final section, it is a philosophical psychology worth rejecting.
12. See Ellis (1987); Beck (1963, 1987); Miranda and Person (1988); Miranda et al. (1990); Roberts and Kassel (1996); McDermut et al. (1997); Solomon et al. (1998).
13. The virtuous person is decisively motivated, and so, while this is an example of non-defeasible cognitivist motivational internalism, it is an example of the strongest version of the thesis. However, not all morally motivated agents are virtuous agents. Non-virtuous agents are motivated by their first-person cognitive moral judgements, but, because these agents are not in the same cognitive state as the virtuous person, these agents are not decisively morally motivated. For neo-Aristotelian accounts of motivation that maintain that moral cognition can motivate unassisted, see: John McDowell (1998), Mark Platts (1979), David McNaughton (1988) and Margaret Olivia Little (1997).
14. For example, see Miller (2008b), Schueler (2009) and Bromwich (2010).
15. Since I have argued elsewhere (Bromwich, 2010) that all beliefs can motivate action without the assistance of a conceptually independent desire, I think that this is an ultimately insurmountable burden of justification.
16. Zangwill (2003).
17. See footnote 7.
18. Psychological plausibility is also predicated on the assumption that the scientific literature on amoralism and apathy will undermine the motivational externalist's challenge of amoralism and apathy.
19. Bromwich (2010).

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