

Practical Reason and Reasons for Action

MPhil

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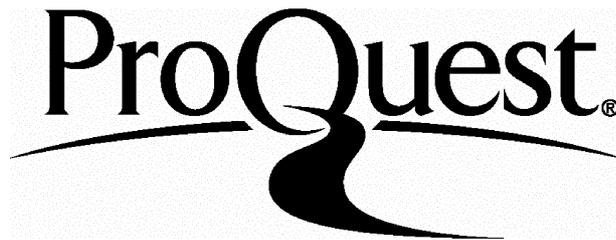
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Abstract

In this thesis, I am responding to Bernard Williams's argument in his three papers published in 1980, 1989 and 1995 that there are no external reasons for action.

I have three aims. My primary aim, which continues throughout the thesis, is to deconstruct Williams's argument in detail and show that it depends for its plausibility on assuming that all values are subjective, and that motivation is external to value judgements.

My second aim is to show that Williams's two assumptions are controversial, and look at what an alternative view on each subject might imply about practical reason and in particular external reasons for action. So I argue in chapter 3 that there are at least some grounds to suppose that some values might be objective, or subjective but in a way which is not dependent only on the individual who holds the values. In chapter 4, I argue that the position that motivation is external to value judgements is not secure.

My third aim is to show that values are incommensurable, and draw out the implications of this for practical reason and the reasons for action debate. I address this in chapter 2. In particular, I argue that incommensurability of values does not imply either that values are subjective, or that motivation is external to value judgements. I conclude that incommensurable values are a problem, but not an insuperable problem, for the external reasons theorist.

I conclude my thesis by detailing how my position on practical reason allows me to describe, in opposition to Williams, external reasons for action.

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Introduction

What constitutes a reason for action has been in dispute for some time in philosophy, particularly in ethics and the philosophy of action, and the issues I discuss come from and affect both areas. In the philosophy of action, debate centres on when it might reasonably be said that an agent has a reason to pursue some course of action, for example, when I can be said to have a reason to make a cup of tea. Some answers given involve only facts about such things as the agent, the action specified and perhaps her circumstances, but others branch into other areas, in particular a theory of value. So answers can range from the simple approach that I have a reason to make a cup of tea only if I want to do so, to far more complex answers involving the value of making tea, which may or may not be relative to me and the circumstances I am in. There is also a division between two positions on the role of reasons for action. One point of view offers answers which focus on reasons as explanations of actions, such as Bernard Williams does, and the other focuses on reasons as having normative force - saying that I *should* make a cup of tea - such as Derek Parfit does.

With the involvement of value-theory and normative force it can be seen that the debate on reasons for action becomes highly relevant to ethics. If a reason for action is related to values, and has normative force, it can become a subject of ethical theory. Williams and others, however, want to oppose this view.

The nature of practical reason is also part of both ethics and the philosophy of action and, as shall become very clear in this thesis, it is important to reasons for action because it provides a background against which the question of what constitutes a reason for action is interpreted. The debate on the nature of practical reason is very broad, and each of the three concerns I concentrate on also has its own more specialised literature. This is because the nature of values and their relation to motivation and action are both central to any theory of practical reason, and also because there is a lack of consensus on all three of these problems. A possible source of confusion in this piece of work is that I am

discussing two different theses which are both normally called 'internalism'.

'Internalism about reasons' is the thesis that Williams argues for, and is a different thesis from the one I call either 'internalism about motivation' or 'internalism about value judgements', which concerns the relation of motivation to judgements about values. Where I have used only 'internalism' to describe the thesis I am referring to, it is because which thesis is being discussed seems very clear in context.

In this thesis I will be concentrating on Williams's argument that reasons for action are all internal, and the debate springing from this. Williams's internalism about reasons is the position that reasons for action are necessarily related to the motivations of the agent having the reason. The question of whether reasons are all internal is important because of the related questions in practical reason. For example, holding that an agent's reasons depend only on his motivations is to deny that reasons for action can be grounded on values which are unrelated to motivations. This in turn reduces the importance of value theory in practical reason, and the role reasons for action can play in a moral theory which aims to prescribe actions by using reasons based on values. Williams actually makes it quite explicit that his target in asserting that an agent has no reasons for action independent of his motivations is at least partly the view of morality that reasons for action can be used in some way to get leverage on the immoral agent. It seems to me that he is right about this part of what he says, but I hope to show that there are many facets to the picture of practical reason he has that underlies his arguments about reasons, and they are not all so plausible.

Chapter 1: Williams's Argument

Introduction

Bernard Williams argues that there are, in his terms, no external reasons for action. What he is interested in, and hence what the debate centres on, is the relation of a reason-statement to what he calls an agent's 'subjective motivational set', or 'S'.¹ This set involves current, and long-term, motivations of the agent, and the elements of it are often referred to by Williams simply as 'desires'.² The relation which Williams thinks holds is that it is a necessary condition of a reason-statement, '*A* has a reason to phi,' being true that the agent, *A*, could decide to phi by way of a reasoning process based on *S*, which he calls a 'sound deliberative route'.³ Such reason-statements are internal. This is certainly not a simple current desires model of reasons for action, but a good deal subtler, since the 'sound deliberative route' demands that the agent's reasons are not based on either of two sorts of mistakes: mistakes in facts or in reasoning.⁴ So an agent can have an internal reason to do something he is not currently motivated to do. Thus Williams can claim that an agent should do something he is not currently inclined to do. The philosopher who believes that external reasons for action are possible merely denies Williams's position that there is any such necessary condition on the truth of a reason-statement.

I am going to argue that, in addition to the explicit assumptions Williams discusses, there are deeper assumptions about the nature of practical reason which his argument rests on, and that, indeed, the debate on internal and external

¹ Williams 1980

² The content of *S* is, however, more complex than this. Elements include 'dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent.' Williams (1980 p105)

³ Williams (1989 p35): '*A* could reach the conclusion that he should phi (or a conclusion to phi) by a sound deliberative route from the motivations he has in his actual motivational set - that is, the set of his desires, evaluations, attitudes, projects, and so on.'

Williams (1995a p186): 'The central idea is that if *B* can say truly of *A* that *A* has a reason to phi, then ... there must be a sound deliberative route to phi-ing which starts from *A*'s existing motivations.'

reasons for action rests, in turn, on these. These assumptions are, first, externalism about value judgements and motivation, and, secondly, subjectivity of values. Further, there is a third thesis, that of the incommensurability of values, which is relevant to the internal reasons debate while not actually being a presupposition of Williams's. I will show why.

Williams's argument

The argument first appears in the 1980 paper.⁵ Williams argues from the viewpoint of what the externalist about reasons wants and would have to claim, arguing that the conditions the externalist requires could never be fulfilled. The argument, left closely allied with what Williams himself says, runs:

- 1) Reasons for action must explain actions.
- 2) (The only) way an external reason-statement could explain an action is if coming to believe it involves acquiring a new motivation.
- 3) The only way premise 2 could be fulfilled in a plausible way is if an external reason-statement is equivalent to or entails that if the agent rationally deliberated, then whatever motivations he originally had, he would come to be motivated to ϕ . This is because external reason-statements aren't related to an agent's S , by definition.
- 4) Therefore all external reasons for action are false, since there is no motivation to deliberate from, to reach this new motivation.

This argument is valid. This is more obvious if it is represented, in outline, like this:

- 1) $R \rightarrow X$ If an external reason-statement is true, then it explains an action done because of it.
- 2) $X \rightarrow M$ If an action is explained, then the motivation which generates it is identified.

⁴ Williams (1989 p36): A sound deliberative route 'involves ... at least correcting any errors of fact and reasoning involved in the agent's view of the matter.'

⁵ Williams has an apparently free-standing argument in the 1995 paper to the conclusion that an external reason-statement is not really a reason-statement. But since this is based on the highly obscure premise that reason-statements should say something '*distinctive*' about the agent

4b) $M \rightarrow S$ If the motivation which generates an action is identified, then an antecedent member of S is identified.

3) $R \rightarrow \neg S$ If an external reason-statement is true, then it does not stand in any relation to antecedent members of S .

Therefore:

4a) $\neg R$ External reason-statements are false.

This seems to me to be an accurate representation of Williams's argument. I will argue that, while valid, it is unsound, because premise 4b is not true in the way that Williams needs it to be. I will look at all four premises, however, since they are obviously all closely linked, and what Williams has to say about each needs to be stated in more detail.

The first premise - that if an external reason-statement is true then it explains actions done because of it - is the most important, since it sets up the conditions for the argument, and these are the conditions which Williams claims an external reason-statement can't fulfil. What he actually says is that reasons for action must sometimes be acted on, and when this happens, the action must be explained by that reason.⁶ So it can be seen immediately that only reasons that have been acted on are relevant to Williams's argument. Unacted-on reasons, whether internal or external, cannot be called on to explain any action. But when there *are* actions corresponding to reasons, the explanation of actions is indeed central to a conception of reasons for action. This has been denied by those opposed to the internalist position.⁷ The concept of explanation seems to be more central to the internalist than the externalist, for reasons that shall become apparent, but it seems to me right that reasons will explain actions and so it would be best to keep this aspect in any understanding of reasons for action. It will be seen that this does indeed present some difficulty for an external conception of reasons, forcing us to

concerned it seems to me that the first argument is by far the more important. Debate also all focuses on the first argument. I will therefore not be concerned with his second argument.

⁶ Williams (1980 p102): 'If there are reasons for action, it must be that people sometimes act for those reasons, and if they do, their reasons must figure in some correct explanation of their action.' He reiterates (p106): 'If something can be a reason for action, then it could be someone's reason for acting on a particular occasion, and it would then figure in an explanation of that action.'

⁷ See for example Parfit (1997).

accept Williams's spelling out of the externalist position in this argument.

Williams is well aware of the importance of this premise, explaining in his 1989 paper that it is one of the motivations of his account of reasons not to separate explanatory and normative reasons; indeed, he wishes to explain the connection between them.⁸ I agree that this is important, although it has been denied, and so I will try to preserve it. The only quibble I have with what Williams actually says in this regard is about the position of the person coming to respond to any sort of reason. The person in this position crucially comes to *respond* to the value or motivation the reason cites, not to *believe* the reason-statement. Whether or not the agent actually believes the reason-statement is irrelevant to his motivation. This way of looking at responses to external reasons will be part of the picture I present, but it does not impact on Williams's position here. Instead, the problem with Williams's argument lies in his interpretation of what the externalist must claim to fulfil this first premise. This will become clear as we examine the next two premises.

His first move in the interpretation of the first premise is to premise 2, claiming that an external reason-statement could explain an action only if coming to believe an external reason-statement involves acquiring a new motivation. Williams doesn't actually explicitly claim that this is the *only* way an external reason-statement could explain an action, instead implying that it is the most plausible. However, his argument clearly needs this claim, and we will allow it. I accept premise 2, with this and one more qualification. Williams has a smaller argument for this premise, running:

- a) 'Now no external reason statement could *by itself* offer an explanation of someone's action.'⁹ Because:-

⁸ Williams (1989): He writes 'if it is true that A has a reason to phi, then it must be possible that he should phi for that reason; and if he does act for that reason, then that reason will be the explanation of his acting. So the claim that he has a reason to phi - that is, the normative statement 'He has a reason to phi' - introduces the possibility of that reason being an explanation; namely, if the agent accepts that claim... This is a basic connection. When the reason is an explanation of his action, then of course it will be, in some form, in his S, because certainly - and nobody denies this - what he actually does has to be explained by his S.'

⁹ Williams 1980 p106

- b) 'nothing can explain an agent's (intentional) actions except something that motivates him so to act.'¹⁰
- c) The most plausible (only) candidate for the motivation is belief. But straightforwardly believing the reason-statement being what produces a motivation is no good. This would be 'merely the state with regard to which an internal reason statement could truly be made.'¹¹
- d) 'Rather, the content of the external type of statement will have to be revealed by considering what it is to *come to believe* such a statement.'¹²

Of this argument, there are two parts. The first part is more important, claiming that identifying a motivation is necessary for action-explanation. I accept it, since I accept both a) and b), because it is true that to explain an action in the way that premise 1 wants, we need to identify a motivation of the agent's. If a person acts on a reason, whether external or internal, there will be a motivation present. Clearly there is no such motivation identified by an external reason for action alone, simply by definition, so an external reason-statement could not explain an action alone. The second part makes a claim about how the motivation necessary to explain an action might be produced. I accept c) and d) too, but with the same qualification as I insisted on with regard to premise 1. This is that the person who comes to be motivated by any reason does not do so by coming to believe the reason-statement, but by coming to respond to the value or motivation that the statement is grounded on. Belief that you have this reason or the self-ascription of the reason in any conscious or subconscious way is irrelevant to your motivation.

So I accept the central point of premise 2. Clearly it does not have to be true that an external reason-statement is always connected with such motivation. When the agent does not respond to the value, just as when an internal reason-statement does not give rise to motivation, the reason cannot be expected to explain any action. But I do accept that the only way an external reason-statement will

¹⁰ Williams 1980 p107

¹¹ Williams 1980 p108

¹² Williams 1980 p108

explain an action is if there is something about coming to respond to this value or motivation that produces a new motivation, independent of previous motivations.

Premise 3 - that an external reason-statement doesn't stand in any relation to elements of *S* - is true just by definition of the difference between external and internal reason-statements. However, what this means for the externalist is further refined by Williams's discussion of this premise. Williams claims that the externalist will have to hold that the motivation an external reason-statement gives rise to when the related action is done must be arrived at rationally.¹³ But it must not be arrived at in the rational way that would make the statement an internal reason statement.¹⁴ That is, it cannot be reached by a sound deliberative route from the agent's antecedent *S*. Part of the reason Williams says this is clear - an external reason must fulfil certain criteria to count as an external reason - but part is not. This part is the part about rational deliberation. What does Williams envisage here by 'rationally deliberated', or 'rationally arrived at'? Well, he does give a reason for externalists having to make this claim. He says it is because externalists want an external reason to be related to a motivation in a particular way: 'the agent should acquire the motivation *because* he comes to believe the external reason statement, and that he should do the latter, moreover, because, in some way, he is considering the matter aright.'¹⁵ It does seem to be true that externalists want something like this, although I would insert the same quibble as above. The agent *believing*, as opposed to *responding* to the value or motivation contained in, the external reason-statement is not what is important. However, Williams is right that this is a central part of the externalist position. A motivation arising independently of previous motivation but by no path that could conceivably be called 'rational' is not enough to ground an external reason for

¹³ Williams (1980 p109) 'the external reasons statement itself will have to be taken as roughly equivalent to, or at least as entailing, the claim that if the agent rationally deliberated, then, whatever motivations he originally had, he would come to be motivated to phi.'

¹⁴ Williams (1980 p109) 'Given the agent's earlier existing motivations, and this new motivation, what has to hold for external reason statements to be true ... is that the new motivation could be in some way rationally arrived at, granted the earlier motivations. Yet at the same time it must not bear to the earlier motivations the kind of rational relation which we considered in the earlier discussion of deliberation - for in that case an internal reason statement would have been true in the first place.'

¹⁵ Williams 1980 p109

action.¹⁶ This, then, seems to be the importance of this premise, and so I accept it in some form. The externalist, to be convincing and allow external reasons to explain actions, must produce a process for being motivated by an external reason-statement, or rather the value it refers to, which is not dependent on previous motivation but is rational. That is the set task. It is the task that *Williams* sets, and to accept it is to accept his challenge to the externalist.

Williams gives one clear, brief statement in premise 4 - that is, 4b, that a motivation can only arise (rationally) if it arises from an antecedent element of *S* - of why he thinks the externalist cannot fulfil this task. He observes that, because of the definition of external reasons, this new motivation cannot be related to the previous motivations by a sound deliberative route. He clearly thinks that there is no other way that a motivation could rationally arise. He writes: 'For, *ex hypothesi*, there is no motivation to deliberate *from*, to reach this new motivation.'¹⁷ This points very clearly to an assumption. This is that you need an antecedent motivation, a member of *S*, to produce a new motivation in a rational way. This is indeed what *Williams* is claiming. If a motivation ever arises rationally it must be by a sound deliberative route from your antecedent *S*, and so if a reason-statement can explain an action, it can only be by being related to the agent's *S*. To refute his argument, while holding that reasons explain actions, this is what the externalist must deny. This, it seems to me, lies in the realm of practical reason, and this is what I will now go on to study.

Williams and practical reason

It seems necessary initially to discover what views *Williams* holds about practical reason that would render this final premise plausible. He is holding that there is no rational route to a motivation that isn't a sound deliberative route from an agent's antecedent *S*. Why should we accept, for example, that new motivations

¹⁶ I disagree, then, with McDowell (1995), who argues that *Williams* should not exclude such things as moving rhetoric, inspiration and conversion, a 'shift in motivational orientation' (p74) as grounds of external reasons, at least unless the methods he mentions could in some way be construed as rational.

¹⁷ *Williams* 1980 p109

cannot arise unconstrained by previous ones, and yet give rise to action in a rational way? Well, it seems clear that a conception of practical reason, of how motivations are produced, is what is underlying this premise. It is what's involved in a sound deliberative route from *S*, and what is rational, that can be seen to be central to Williams's argument. Williams only characterises fully his picture of practical reasoning once in these three papers on reasons, so I will quote him in full.

A clear example of practical reasoning is that leading to the conclusion that one has reason to ϕ because ϕ -ing would be the most convenient, economical, pleasant etc. way of satisfying some element in *S*, and this of course is controlled by other elements in *S*, if not necessarily in a very clear or determinate way. But there are much wider possibilities for deliberation, such as: thinking how the satisfaction of elements in *S* can be combined, e.g. by time-ordering; where there is some irresolvable conflict among the elements of *S*, considering which one attaches most weight to (which, importantly, does not imply that there is some one commodity of which they provide varying amounts); or, again, finding constitutive solutions, such as deciding what would make for an entertaining evening, granted that one wants entertainment.¹⁸

It can be seen that, in Williams's picture, *S* dominates. Means-ends reasoning is based on *S*, and combining satisfactions of elements of *S*, attaching weight to elements of *S*, and finding constitutive solutions are all based on *S*. However, it is not clear that we should accept what Williams is claiming - that these sorts of processes are the only possible kinds of rational process - in the absence of further assumptions. Consider, for example, the position of beliefs in practical reasoning. They are involved only in the correct processing of desires. They have no role in the production of desires. This might be acceptable. Many have held that theoretical deliberation, in the absence of some mediating motivation, can have no input into practical deliberation. But consider also the position of values. It is much the same as that of belief. Values which are not merely desires or constructions out of desires cannot be in *S*. Thus practical reasoning involves values only in so far as the agent is motivated by those values. It is important that this is a strong claim of Williams's. It is not just that values, if of the sort that are not desires, are not involved in practical reason, it is that there can be no claims of

¹⁸ Williams 1980 p104

rationality about them. Now the objection is not that Williams is stuck with practical reasoning being only means-end. Practical reasoning clearly involves some manipulation of ends, such as filling in their details. But the ends an agent has are all determined by her *S*. The only new things that can get into *S* are basic desires, which can simply arise in a non-rational way. Everything else in practical reason must be controlled by the antecedent subjective motivational set. This generates all reasons for acting.

Consider the limit of what Williams is claiming. He writes at one point, ‘Should we suppose that, if genuine external reasons were to be had, morality might get some *leverage* on a squeamish Jim or priggish George, or even on the fanatical Nazi?’¹⁹ What he must say about the fanatical Nazi is that the world would be a better place and it would be nicer if he did not kill, but *the Nazi himself still has no reason not to kill*. His motivational set does not contain anything that responds to reasoning about the pain caused by his behaviour, or the evilness of trying to exterminate a whole race. He does not wish to, and he is not disposed to judge that it is wrong, and stopping killing is not a means to any end of his, and these are the only things which could ground a reason for action. But even in the absence of any ‘leverage’ on the Nazi, many would want to claim he has a reason not to act as he does. Why?

Clearly, Williams’s arguments do involve deep, not uncontroversial, assumptions. I will go into them in this chapter only far enough to show that they influence his arguments, and this, the initial formulation of the positions, is necessarily much less precise than the formulations that will be discussed in later chapters, since each assumption is the topic of a further chapter. The first position which renders his views plausible is externalism about motivation of the sort arising from moral judgements or value judgements. Broadly, this is the position that to make this sort of judgement does not require that any sort of motivation is, either conceptually or just in fact, associated with making the judgement. So an agent could hold something to be valuable and yet have no motivation to pursue it

¹⁹ Williams 1995a p216

whatever. In this way, values are separated off from motivations. Motivations are what are crucial in practical deliberation, and it is a quite different question which valuable things an agent finds himself motivated to pursue, and why. In this case, *S* is starting to gain the dominance Williams gives it. The Nazi could hold that his behaviour is wrong and yet there be nothing irrational about his acting against this judgement. The judgement cannot explain an action alone since it isn't connected to a motivation. The motivation must derive from elsewhere - *S*.

The second assumption gives *S* further dominance. It is subjectivism about values. That is, again broadly, that there are no values relevant to practical reason independent of what an agent takes to be valuable.²⁰ In this case, two things happen. First, values that do exist are conceived of as desire-based, and contained in *S* as 'dispositions of evaluation.' They become part of what controls and grounds reasons for action. Secondly, sentences containing what many have asserted to be value judgements - such as 'I have a reason not to kill for profit' - become irrelevant to practical reasoning so long as they are construed as beliefs, or conclusions of theoretical reasoning. That is, they are irrelevant unless a motivation does arise to accompany them, and if this happens, the motivation must originate from *S*. But genuinely external reasons for action have no accompanying motivation. This, then, seems to explain Williams's puzzling allegation about external reason-statements: that they have no *content*. This is true. If values are not objective, and motivations do not arise from them, it can be seen that holding that someone has a reason unrelated to his *S* is an assertion that does indeed have no content. There is nothing that this assertion refers to. The assertion applied to the Nazi who doesn't think that killing is wrong does not refer to anything. Williams's concentration on the *truth* of reason-statements also seems to be explained. In the absence of a relation to *S*, with subjective values, external reason-statements do indeed seem to be false. Indeed, how could the reason-statement about the Nazi be true? However, it can be seen, I hope, that there is some scope, if these two assumptions are denied, for holding that external

reason-statements are true and have content if values are objective and necessarily give rise to motivation. This point will be developed in some detail in the following three chapters of the thesis. For now, I concentrate on Williams's position.

There is reason to believe that there are cases in which the only reasons relevant to the action are internal reasons. To show this, and show more clearly how the two assumptions above are involved in his position, I wish to look at an example of practical reasoning where Williams's view does seem to be the correct one. The values concerned are not objective, instead being subjective and dependent on the desires of the agent involved. Suppose I am deciding what to wear for an evening party. I like wearing green evening dresses and so I am inclined to choose to wear green. However, I also have an equally appropriate red evening dress, and a friend says to me, 'You should wear the red one for a change - you wore the green one last time.' What we have now is a possible reason for me to wear the red dress that I am not currently motivated by. But I am supposing that what dress it is valuable for me to wear for an evening out is entirely dependent on what dress I wish to wear for an evening out. Although this wish, and so the value I place on the eventual choice, will be informed by other motivations I have, such as a wish to wear something more or less daring, or a colour that will or will not clash with the curtains, the values here are all internal. In this case, Williams does seem to be right. The only reason my friend could be ascribing to me is an internal one. If I do become motivated to wear the red dress, this must depend on my own motivations, even if this is merely a motivation to please my friend. There is no other place to look for a change of mind where what is valuable is entirely dependent on what I think is valuable. Therefore, the only appropriate deliberation for me to undertake is that based on my current *S*, and we can trace a motivational history which leads me to my eventual choice. This availability of a 'motivational history' is important to internalists about reasons, since it is due to the position that motivations must derive from prior motivations that there is a motivational history to find, instead of merely a single motivation, for an

²⁰ This is something like what Williams argues (1989 pp37-8). I will discuss this in more detail

explanation of an action. If it is simply not true that there is any motivation in my *S* which could ground a reason to wear the red dress on this occasion, then I have no reason to wear the red dress. Williams is right to claim, in this instance, that all my friend is saying is that it would be nice if I wore the red dress, or that she would like me to wear the red dress. Any demand of hers that I have a reason to wear the red dress in the absence of any motivation of mine is false. It has no content. So if values are not objective, and motivation is external to value judgements, Williams's position has a great deal of plausibility. Thus I will devote a chapter to each of these two assumptions.

The third thesis which is relevant to the internal reasons debate is, I believe, that of the incommensurability of values. This is to hold, again broadly, that values cannot be *measured* or *ordered* one against another. It becomes involved in the debate in a different way from the first two, in that it is at least one possible ground for holding that the positions Williams has on value judgements and on subjectivism about values are correct. Simultaneously, it has some direct impact on what an external reason for action could not be. It leads directly to what Williams calls the 'indeterminacy' of practical reasoning²¹, the general idea of which Wiggins also discusses.²² In brief, this means that practical reasoning cannot be rigidly characterised. The importance of this assumption is that it seems to be true, and so I must show that it does not lead, alone, to the thesis of no external reasons for action. To some extent at least, it does threaten to do so. Consider the following example, where a mother is choosing between values which are incommensurable, whether or not they are objective. She must choose whether to care for a sick child or attend an important meeting. In both cases there are people relying on her. On the one hand, there are many colleagues, and on the other a child she has a special reason to protect. There are the values of the child feeling safe, and the mother's career, which is also indirectly relevant to the child's well-being. The mother is motivated to do both, but cannot do both. Because the conflicting values are incommensurable, there is no one thing it is

in the chapter on the sources of value.

²¹ Williams (1980 p110): 'There is an essential indeterminacy in what can be counted a rational deliberative process.'

right for her to do. So there is no process of reasoning which can be rigidly characterised which will lead her to the right thing to do. It seems to many people that what it is right for her to do, even though it might involve such things as moral obligations, is up to her, and only her. If this is so, this might be thought to undermine any objectivism about values, and so the externalist position on reasons. So I will devote a chapter to showing that, while the externalist position on reasons might require defending from such an attack, it is not demolished.

This, then, is how I think that Williams's position *that a reason-statement could only explain an action by being related to an agent's antecedent S* can be supported:

Values are incommensurable

(which has some independent importance)

and offers some support to both:

Values are not objective (i.e. do not exist apart from one's S)

Therefore statements of values cannot explain actions except when the values are a part of one's S.

Value judgements do not give rise to any motivations

Therefore values do not give rise to motivations unless these motivations are related to an antecedent element of S.

Then if we assume that values are the only possible ground of external reason-statements, and add Williams's premise that reason-statements must sometimes be acted on, and if so, the reason-statement must explain the action, we can see how Williams gets to the conclusion that all external reasons for action are false, from the positions that values are not objective, and that value judgements do not give rise to any motivations.

The fact of these underlying assumptions seems to me to explain why other writers on reasons for action are positioned where they are. This suggests that the positions of the assumptions above in a theory of practical reason is central to the internal reasons debate, instead of only being relevant to Williams's argument

²² See Wiggins (pp230-232).

in particular. For example, McDowell disagrees with Williams by claiming that such things as 'shifts in motivational orientation' can be a case of coming to consider matters aright, and he thinks this is the only way of disagreeing with Williams.²³ So for McDowell, the Nazi could have an external reason not to kill because he could be *converted* to the right way of thinking without this being related to his antecedent motivational set. But the particular point over which McDowell disagrees with Williams seems to me to be selected because he is in agreement with Williams on the points above. For example, although he hints that his view on values might not be precisely the same as Williams's, since he holds that to understand a value judgement is to have a certain sentimental response, it is clearly still a view that has values being closely involved with *S*.²⁴ Parfit, on the other hand, is in a very different position from both Williams and McDowell, since he holds that values are all objective, and so external reasons have a more important function than action-explanation, that is, a normative function. This is the source of his distinction running throughout his paper between normative and motivating reasons. Because of his objectivity, he sees no objection to splitting reasons for action into two sorts according to these two functions, and is therefore free to reject Williams's position that reasons for actions must explain actions. He also clearly does believe that external reason-statements can be literally true.²⁵ And because he puts the emphasis on the normative rather than the explanatory function of reasons for action he holds that reasons are all external.²⁶ The Nazi, as far as Parfit is concerned, has not only got reason not to kill, he has no reason to do what he wants to do, which is to kill.

Christine Korsgaard has yet a different position. She holds that values are intersubjective, so they are not independent of all agents' motivational sets, but nor are they dependent in any ordinary way on what an *individual* takes to be

²³ McDowell (1995 pp72-74 and p82) 'Williams' argument depends crucially on the basic premise that a transition to a correct view of the reasons for acting that apply to an agent ... must be capable of being effected, for the agent, by reasoning.'

²⁴ McDowell 1995 pp79-80

²⁵ Parfit (1997 p 111) 'When we believe that other people have reasons for caring, or for acting, we do not have these beliefs as a way of affecting those people. Our aim is, not influence, but truth.'

²⁶ Parfit (1997) contains an argument for this conclusion.

valuable. But since she holds that anyone just is motivated towards what is valuable, in so far as he or she is rational, appropriate motivation just is present in everyone, and she can agree with Williams that all reasons are internal but for very different reasons from those for which Williams makes this claim.²⁷

Conclusion

We can now start to see how Williams's argument depends on the three assumptions about values, because they support his position that motivations can only arise rationally from prior motivations. I have also indicated how these positions on practical reason affect the whole internal reasons debate.

I now go on to consider the incommensurability thesis and its relation to reasons for action.

²⁷ Korsgaard 1986 and 1996

Chapter 2: The Incommensurability of Values

Introduction

That the values human beings have are incommensurable is an important truth about value, applied importantly to political theory by Isaiah Berlin.²⁸ It is the one thesis which might be taken to support the internalist position about reasons which I am in agreement with. Thus I wish to explore its implications in some detail, and examine how it is related to the other theses Williams himself relies on.

I will be arguing that there are reasons independent of the internal reasons debate for believing that values are indeed incommensurable, and that this presents a problem for external reasons for action, in the question of universalizability of value judgements. This is not an insurmountable problem, since the two theses are compatible in the way I shall indicate. However, the important conclusion about incommensurability I will reach is that it does constrain how we can interpret internalism about motivation, and ultimately constrains an external reason for action.

What 'incommensurability' means

The importance of the incommensurability of values to us arises because what people value, and what people have as ends of practical deliberation, function in a similar way. I think that although the ends of practical deliberation are often values, they are not the same thing. We can sometimes desire something, and so pursue it, when we do not value it, and also value something but not pursue it.²⁹ I shall argue later that we have reason to interpret them as the same thing under certain circumstances, but I am not entitled to this assumption here. However, I am not begging the question against Williams, who clearly links conflicting values

²⁸ Williams (1979) acknowledges his debt to him.

²⁹ So ends are not merely a subset of values. This is a controversial position. For example, Quinn would hold that they are, since any end of practical deliberation has to be regarded as good in some sense.

to reasons for action by way of conflicting obligations.³⁰ So, one of the things ends and values have in common is the fact that some values, and some ends of practical deliberation, are incommensurable with others, and it is the fact that some of the ends of practical deliberation are incommensurable which is directly important to us.

So what is meant by 'incommensurability'? Well, it is concerned with the position we are in when we try to decide what is more valuable. It involves the assertion that, for particular reasons, there is some difficulty in making such a decision. Wondering what is more valuable can apply to two sorts of things. The first is trying to compare values themselves in the abstract, such as trying to decide whether liberty or equality is more valuable. But, far more relevant to our purposes, and far more common, are attempts to compare values as embodied in concrete circumstances. So we would have a particular alteration in liberty and equality in a particular community, and we would want to decide which alteration was more valuable. I will discuss both types of decision, since the two can be different. The first sort of incommensurability, of abstract values, impacts on making concrete choices. It will be clear, though, that the position as regards concrete choices is more relevant. Wondering what is more valuable can also be done by a single person, or by a community of persons. I will concentrate in this chapter on choice by a single person.

There are three parts to incommensurability. The first part is that values, and the ends of practical deliberation, are not reducible to each other, or to a further end.³¹ Take for example the values of freedom and equality. They might well be asserted to be irreducible. Why is this? It is because they are not subsumed under a further value or end. There is no value in terms of which both freedom and equality are valuable. Nor is one reducible to the other. Freedom is not valuable because it yields equality, nor vice versa. So if in a concrete situation you denied one person freedom to grant another person equality, there are no obvious ways

³⁰ Williams 1979 p76

³¹ Wiggins 'Weakness of Will, Commensurability and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire' (in 1979) indicates the importance of irreducibility.

of subsuming these alterations under a single value. This seems to apply to many values. So values are plural, irreducibly so. There can be no single value or end to be pursued in practical deliberation. It is because ends are irreducible to each other that the ends of practical deliberation are multiple. If they were reducible, we could possibly subsume all ends under a single end and identify a single end of practical deliberation. I am asserting that we cannot, and that there is therefore no single end of practical deliberation. Now, this is not necessarily to deny the existence of something like Aristotle's end of *Eudaimonia*,³² construed simply as 'the good', even though this is a commonly given reason for denying its plausibility.³³ But it does involve conceiving of *Eudaimonia* in a particular way, that way being its inclusive form, and deny its possibility as a *single homogeneous* end of deliberation. So long as 'the good' is seen as able to include many things which are good and not reducible to each other, we can allow this vague concept to be the end of practical deliberation.³⁴ But it is not homogeneous.

The second part of incommensurability is that the irreducibly plural ends of practical deliberation are incomparable in some sense. Consider again choosing between liberty and equality in a concrete situation. Clearly one person benefits, while another loses out, but in what way, and how much? How are we to compare the benefit to the loss? Similarly, an entire society might sacrifice freedom either in an individual sense, or at a national level (yielding up some self-determination) in order to achieve greater equality. They are not in any obvious way comparable. One cannot be assessed in terms of the other, or both assessed in terms of some other value or end. To take an example, if both were means to some single end, the value of each would be determinable in terms of contribution towards the end, and thus they would be commensurable. But here, what is gained and what is lost might well be thought not to be measurable at all; they are certainly not measurable in any common scheme.

³² See Nichomachean Ethics (books 1 and 10).

³³ For an example see the Ackrill paper I have cited.

³⁴ Wiggins, in 'Weakness of Will, Commensurability and the Objects of Deliberation and Desire (in 1979), argues that there's room for incommensurability in Aristotle's account, but the end needs to be conceived in the way I have indicated.

That there have been makeshift attempts to provide a common scheme for comparison in concrete choice situations does not tell against this point. One such scheme which is familiar is that of utilitarianism. The utilitarian would approach the freedom-equality trade-off by assessing how much utility was lost and gained, and hence ascertaining in what way overall utility was maximised. This is, indeed, an attempt to measure values, using utility as the 'common measure'. But this does not negate my point, for it is clear that this common measure is only a makeshift one. We do not naturally think of the value of either freedom or equality as reducing to how much overall happiness they create. So reducibility and comparability are linked, since if values are irreducible this excludes one particular form of comparability, although it is true that irreducibility does not imply all forms of incommensurability. Economists, for example, have many methods of comparing ends of practical deliberation where the ends involved are mutually irreducible. This will become clearer later. So incomparability is a different claim from irreducibility. If neither freedom nor equality is subsumed under the further end or value of creating happiness, utility does not provide one sort of scheme for comparison. Indeed, value incommensurability is one good reason for rejecting utilitarianism.³⁵ But, further, there may be other impediments to such schemes for comparison. That is, people's choices might not display one or both of transitivity and completeness. What these mean is that, when choosing between situation *A*, situation *B* and situation *C*, the choices of a single person might be that *A* is better than *B*, and *B* is better than *C*, but *A* is not better than *C*. Thus it might be preferable to save 2 people from excruciating pain than 1 person from slightly more excruciating pain, and better to save 3 people from very slightly less excruciating pain than the 2 people, and so on, but then not find it better to save 1 billion people from very slight pain instead of the one person from excruciating pain. This is what is meant by a series of choices not displaying transitivity. A second version of intransitivity is that *A* is not better than *B*, nor *B* than *C*, but *A* is certainly better than *B*. This can be found in such situations as not preferring 1008 grains of rice to 1000, nor 1016 to 1008, but you certainly prefer 1500 to 1000 grains. As for completeness,

³⁵ For example, Williams (1979 p77) uses it.

this is when an agent is unable to work out a relation between all possible pairs, saying for example that they couldn't possibly choose between *A* and *C*, not even to say that they were roughly equal. Also, people might only be able to say that two situations were roughly equal. So if one situation is improved a little, it doesn't become better than the other. The two remain roughly equal.³⁶ Piles of rice of around 1000 grains are likely to create these sorts of choices. Because they present difficulties for certain forms of comparison, these anomalies all present very serious problems for producing any sort of scheme for comparison of values, as well as making many concrete decisions difficult.

The third important part of the incommensurability of ends is that they conflict. This is what makes their irreducibility and incomparability a problem in practical affairs. This conflict is basic. It is not resolvable by any scheme of comparison, since there is no scheme for comparison. A person who has conflicting ends or values is stuck with the conflict and no easy way out. Whether ends of deliberation or values can conflict entirely independently of human affairs is controversial, but it is not necessary to show that they can to show that values conflict in this basic way. Take, for example, three value conflicts. One cannot both preserve all life and murder your enemies, nor can one preserve the chastity demanded by a Christian morality while also enjoying to the full the recent relaxing of a culturally imposed sexual morality, and, finally, one cannot both show kindness and gentleness to all and refuse to allow one's own concerns to be overridden in an unreasonable way. In these three examples, these values, which might well be ends of practical deliberation, do conflict. But in asserting the incommensurability of ends of practical deliberation I am asserting a great deal more than the existence of conflict. I am asserting something about the nature of at least some of that conflict - that it is basic, because of the non-existence of a scheme for comparison that could be used to resolve the conflict.

³⁶ These sorts of problems are discussed by Griffin (pp95-105), and I am using his terminology.

But, as I have already indicated, the thesis of incommensurability comes in varying strengths, incorporating different claims about irreducibility and incomparability.³⁷

These strengths can be thought of on a scale of decreasing strength:

- a) Complete incomparability: we can't make better than, worse than or equal to judgements about conflicting values. (We could make the judgement that two values are roughly equal but this would not refute this position.) That is, we cannot even place them on any ordinal scale. It implies that there is no *single* ordinal scale we can place all values on.
- b) No cardinal ordering: we cannot place conflicting values on a cardinal scale. That is, we can't place them on a scale where the differences between their positions are proportional to the differences in their values. It certainly implies that there is no *single* cardinal scale we can place all values on.
- c) Non-reducibility of values: values are irreducible, and plural. This doesn't imply that there is *no* way of ranking values; just that they can't be ranked by reduction to each other, or all to a single super-value.³⁸

I have already indicated that I hold *c*, and this is of both values in the abstract and values in concrete choices. It seems to me that position *a* is far too strong to be true of all values everywhere. It seems to be relatively common to place some values higher than others. I value, for example, my family, and I also value chocolate, and any suggestion that I cannot place one higher than the other must be wrong. So we can make ordinal orderings of some abstract values, even if not all. But what is the position when we consider *a* with reference to concrete choices? Ruth Chang offers a very good reason for holding that even when values are incommensurable in the abstract, this will not entail that they are everywhere incomparable when it comes to concrete choices, with an example of an attempt to compare Mozart and Michaelangelo in terms of artistic talent. She says that if they are incomparable, on the grounds that the different types of artistic talent they embody are everywhere incommensurable, then Mozart must also be held to be incomparable with Talentlessi, who is a very inferior artist of the same type as

³⁷ In fact it comes in many varieties. See for example Ruth Chang for an overview. I will concentrate only on a scale of strength which will cover relevant versions.

Michaelangelo. She says this must be wrong, and she seems to be correct.³⁹ So what is the source of this difference between abstract ranking of values and ranking in choice situations? It is that, in the abstract, only the two values in consideration are relevant. And while it might be obvious to rank the value of a family over the value of chocolate, it is not at all obvious that we could rank liberty and equality (in their political senses). But when we come to make concrete choices, other values become relevant. So when we wish to rank liberty and equality in a particular situation, and discover that one or the other gives rise to far greater economic growth than the other, we might decide that this is relevant, alter the criteria we were making the decision under, and choose in favour of the one which also gives economic growth. This then gives us a rational basis for making a decision between incommensurable values. This can be seen as what Ruth Chang would call a choice situation in which we make a justified choice by altering the criteria for making the decision.⁴⁰ It is also like something that Williams says himself. He says that we might sometimes make a decision, and there be a reason for it, but this not mean that the values involved are commensurable.⁴¹ But it is still possible that there are some choice situations in which it is not possible to rank the values, and so position *a* holds. This is where the values involved are incommensurable, and no ordinal scale is available just on the basis of the two main values, but, crucially, there is no relevant third value available on the basis of which to make a justified choice. These are the really hard choice situations which do arise because some values are incommensurable in the abstract. In these cases, a decision has to be made, and this is a non-rational decision. It is not fully justified. If values are incommensurable, this sort of conflict will exist and will not be removable from practical deliberation. I will call this sort of conflict 'basic'.

³⁸ This scale is largely derived from Griffin's work. For example, see p79 for incomparability, p89 for value pluralism, and p93 for cardinal and ordinal scales.

³⁹ Ruth Chang p15

⁴⁰ See Ruth Chang (p9). She holds that all choice situations are comparative, since you can always make a justified choice in this way.

⁴¹ Williams 1979 p79

Williams's views are not wholly clear, since he concentrates more on the nature of value conflict than on the versions of incommensurability that might lie behind it. He has, however, his own scale of the strengths of incommensurability theses, formulated rather differently from that above since he is focused on actual choices:

1. There is no one currency in terms of which each conflict of values can be resolved.
2. It is not true that for each conflict of values, there is some value, independent of any of the conflicting values, which can be appealed to in order to resolve that conflict.
3. It is not true that for each conflict of values, there is some value which can be appealed to (independent or not) in order rationally to resolve that conflict.
4. No conflict of values can ever rationally be resolved.⁴²

I have already given reasons for rejecting formulation 4, as Williams does. It would involve claiming that when we find ourselves with an apparent values clash, but then discovered that in fact these two values were only parts of a subsuming value, we still could not resolve the clash rationally. Clearly, we can. A government trading off freedom and equality in society which is only doing so to maximise seats in the next general election is dealing with conflicting values, but the only problem they have for rational resolution is estimating accurately what difference in seats each policy will make. However, it will become clear that we are claiming something at least as strong as formulation 3. That is, we claim that there are at least some conflicts of values which cannot rationally be resolved. 'Rationally' here means that there is no common scheme to compare values and thus provide a clear-cut choice. There are concrete situations in which we cannot decide whether one situation is better than another, because the values involved are here incommensurable. Obviously, the conflict as experienced may be resolved in particular instances by merely choosing one option, even randomly as by tossing a coin, but this is not the sort of rational decision we are interested in. Williams discusses formulation 3 at some length, but never commits himself to it. He only commits himself to holding the first two formulations.⁴³ Formulation 1 asserts only that there is not one scheme which allows us to resolve *every* value conflict. This seems to be rather uncontroversially true. Formulation 2 is very

⁴² Williams 1979 p 77

⁴³ See Williams (1979 p79, and p77): 'the claim that values are incommensurable does say something true and important.'

similar to formulation 3, except that, as I hope will become clear, the notion of rational resolution is important to incommensurability, and to the internalist position about reasons. Moreover, the more precise claim in formulation 3 does seem to be correct, at least in the sense that will become apparent.

To sum up, then, to say that the ends of practical deliberation are incommensurable is to say that they are incomparable, irreducibly multiple, and conflict in an important way, which I have called 'basic'. That values conflict in practice is a familiar point, but that this conflict is in some cases irremovable in principle is far more important.

That practical deliberation shows incommensurability of ends

The first issue to deal with is what practical deliberation is. I wish to use a relatively vague initial intuitive handle on this notion. This is that practical deliberation is that activity which is involved with such things as actions, intentions, desires and ends. This is because, as shall be seen, my position about the incommensurability of values implies a lot about the nature of practical deliberation, and one of the things it will be seen to imply is that it would be inappropriate to attempt to define it tightly.

The first, most obvious thing that incommensurability of ends implies is, as I have already indicated, that there is no single, homogeneous, end of practical deliberation. There are indefinitely many 'baskets' of goods (to steal a term from economics) an agent might choose, and it is very unlikely to be possible to choose a 'basket' which involves maximising everything an agent values.

For clarity, this assertion about practical deliberation can be contrasted with a possible view of theoretical deliberation, or deliberation about believing. This is a view that might be true, but I do not wish to take a stand on it at all in this thesis; I merely wish to contrast it with my view of practical deliberation in order to

make the latter view clearer.⁴⁴ Indeed, I will later indicate why this view of theoretical deliberation might be thought to be false, and practical and theoretical deliberation thought to be less different in form than this view suggests.

Theoretical deliberation can be thought of in a rough way as deliberation about believing. That is, it is about beliefs already held and possible beliefs to add. The possible view is that, in contrast to practical deliberation, it might be claimed to have a single end, and one criterion for evaluation of its success - truth. That is, the overall end of theoretical deliberation is for the agent to arrive at a true picture of the world, the end of sections of theoretical deliberation to add true beliefs and remove false beliefs, and the aim of every belief to be true. The reason for this single end might be one of two - it might be something in the nature of theoretical deliberation that makes it true, or it might be simply an end every agent has that her theoretical deliberation aims at truth - but the reason does not matter for the comparison. The point is that there would be differences between practical deliberation and theoretical deliberation on this conception. Since there is a single end, there is a scheme of comparison for all intermediate ends. Analysis of what counts as good evidence, or good reasons for believing, is reducible to what yields truth, and evaluable in terms of how successful they are at it, since this is their only function. So rationality in theoretical deliberation is only measurable in terms of this one end. Pursuit of others doesn't *make sense*. This is what is not true of practical deliberation.

The second major feature of practical deliberation under multiple incommensurable ends is, not the existence, but the *nature* of some of the conflict among these ends. Standardly, a person experiencing a conflict of ends in practical deliberation will either have to give up maximising both to have some of each, or else give up one entirely to have the other. The reasons for the clash can vary. I am interested in clashes of the hard sort, where the conflict is, as I have called it in the previous section, basic and irremovable. The best way of investigating the nature of this conflict, and the best way of persuading that some of the ends of practical deliberation are in fact incommensurable, is to look at

⁴⁴ The view has, however, been held. For example, it is not far from Williams's view in 1970

examples. I am going to look at two which have affected my life, and which I expect to continue to affect my life. That values and ends conflict shows only that people find it hard to decide what to do. This is because, although incommensurability implies conflict, the existence of conflict does *not* imply incommensurability. But I hope to show more than that people find it hard to decide what to do. I want to show that the sorts of conflicts we sometimes face reflect the influence of incommensurable values. I am going to attempt to show this by showing that practical deliberation shows the sort of irremovable conflict which will sometimes appear under incommensurability.⁴⁵

The first example I want to present is the choice I face between children, and a career. In deliberation on the subject I have got this far: I will not give up either. I place too high a value on each. It is also clear that, even should I manipulate human affairs and surmount physical impossibilities in a highly skilled manner, I will never be able to enjoy each to the full in the way I would if I did not have the other, competing, commitment. What this means for me as an agent is that two of the things which I value most highly cannot be maximised. And since I will give up neither, I face an endless series of compromises. These have indeed started now, long before the birth of any child of mine, since the career choices I have already made, at eighteen and then at twenty-one, have been made with this in mind. Once I actually have both a career and children, the rate of compromise will intensify dramatically, and constantly frustrating decisions will have to be made on a weekly, if not, I hope, daily, basis. These ends conflict. They do so because it is not possible to maximise both. The conflict is persistent because they are not reducible to each other or to some further end, and they cannot be compared in a common scheme. Abstractly, I cannot rank one above the other. This means that in actual choice situations, some at least will not allow of even an ordinal ordering of these two ends (although some of them will allow me to make

(e.g. see p137).

⁴⁵ It can be seen that I disagree with Ruth Chang (p21) when she argues that the nature of conflict cannot show incommensurability, saying that 'rational resolution' of conflict is just the determination of whatever comparative relation exists between the conflicting items. I disagree because sometimes this comparative relation is based on an extra consideration, and can only justify the decision (in Chang's terms) because of this extra consideration. This does not imply commensurability.

a justified choice when a third value is relevant). The conflict in such situations will be irremovable. They are incommensurable.

The second example I wish to consider is that of faith in God, and a solid trust in human reason as an important indicator of the truth and guide for human beings. These do inform practical deliberation, and although they are obviously heavily involved in theoretical deliberation, I also see both as ends of practical deliberation. They are to be furthered. These are not readily reconcilable, and in practical deliberation I have got less far than above: I don't know which, if either, to give up. Nor is it obvious that compromise is possible on an action-by-action basis. To perform an action to further my faith seems, necessarily, to attack human reason, and vice versa. Instead, I am stuck with two incommensurable values, and actions end up depending on one or the other, or on a mangled rationalisation of some middle position involving reason in faith which, to me, is uncomfortably close to untenable. Since I have made no decision about whether to give one of these ends up, conflict happens in many ways. In deliberation about particular actions, it is constantly there, and deliberation about the ends themselves occurs. This involves attempts to reconcile the two, and consideration of which, if either, is more valuable. These two values have proved to be, for me, incommensurable abstractly, and, even more than the choice between career and family, give rise to basic conflict in actual choices.

I hope it can be seen in some detail now that the nature of conflict in practical deliberation is such as to reflect plural, irreducible, incomparable and conflicting ends. That there are conflicts as basic as I have shown is the best indicator of this. But it is not only an indicator because the conflict I have used as examples is irremovable. Conflict such as conflict between avoiding the dangers of crossing streets and all the good things that can be obtained beyond the four streets around my house is irremovable in one sense at least. It will always be there. But it is not incommensurable. I have no difficulty in ranking these two options, with the good things I can obtain ranked much higher than the value of avoiding risk of injury by crossing roads. The other sorts of conflict I have used show incommensurability because they persist due to the difficulties I have experienced

in ranking the values involved. I cannot rank one value abstractly above the other, nor can I decide in many concrete situations. Even with full information about how things will turn out, which is the lack which makes for many other sorts of conflict in practical deliberation, I still feel I do not have enough information to make the choice. This sort of irremovability is linked to the realisation that, however exhausting this conflict might be, its presence is not irrational, and its removal is not rationally desirable. This is where the fact of incommensurability starts to be seen to have an impact on what we can understand by 'practical reason'. The existence of conflict is not a *failure*. Consider: is it desirable that I find it easy to decide whether to favour family or career? Wouldn't this only be the case if I cared far more about one than another? Is it in the slightest bit irrational that I care about both? Williams argues convincingly⁴⁶ that conflicts of this sort persist over time and through many decisions in spite of conflict, and this is indeed what I indicate in the examples. He compares the notion of trying to avoid conflict to the notion of choosing to believe nothing with the aim of believing nothing false. He thinks it is ludicrous, and I concur. It seems to me that this ludicrousness suggests strongly that the presence of this conflict is *not irrational*. This conflict is still, however, different from conflict in theoretical deliberation, where theoretical deliberation is seen as having a single end. The first thing to note is that conflict still occurs in theoretical deliberation. But it is different. A person can certainly be in the position of not knowing whether to believe a proposition or a theory or not, since she can have evidence to support it and evidence against it. But the value of this evidence, and the scheme by which we can compare them, is whether it indicates the truth or not. There is a matter of fact about what the truth is, and whether the person gets there or not determines how successful she is. That a theory might have more explanatory power than an opposing theory is not a reason to choose that theory in itself. It is only so if it is thought that this is a normally reliable method of getting at the truth. The conflict here might even persist for a time, but it is not irremovable. The values are reducible to truth and compared in those terms.

⁴⁶ Williams 1965 p114-5

The third feature of practical deliberation I want to look at is its process. The fact of incommensurability has implications about what must be involved in this process. That there is no single good outcome of practical deliberation certainly indicates that there is no single way of reasoning guaranteed to reach the good outcome. But there are further implications. There are no ways of reasoning guaranteed to reach 'a' good outcome. This is because there are no definite good outcomes. Every outcome consists of a 'basket' of ends achieved, and has necessitated much compromise, and the complete rejection of some ends still conceived of as valuable.

Instead of involving set standard methods of reasoning, practical deliberation is far more haphazard. It involves good theoretical deliberation, and means-end reasoning, as is generally recognised. But it also involves far more. It is not possible to see it as a search for the best way to act in each situation. Instead, it involves ingenuity and imagination in rearranging human affairs to minimise conflict between ends, and surmounting physical obstacles.⁴⁷ But it can also be seen that a very large part of practical deliberation lies in sorting and ranking, adopting and rejecting ends. This also requires imagination to envisage what ends are valuable as an aid to deciding between them, and the ability to discover conflict and decide on its importance. Attempting to avoid value conflict altogether is useless, as I have said. Values will always conflict, and it is in nobody's interests to have no values at all. Thus every agent is forced to attempt to overcome conflict if he wishes to act at all. There is no rational process, in the sense of a scheme for comparison of values, to be found for doing this. It is not true that a perfectly rational agent could always perceive and follow the best course. Instead, a perfectly rational agent will admit the nature of the conflict here.

The examples I have given above already show this feature. In considering both children and career, and faith versus reason, my deliberation constantly comes

back to ways to reconcile these ends. In some cases, practical affairs can be manipulated to remove the conflict, but in some cases they can't. Then, deliberation moves to which end is more relevant, or more valuable, or more appropriate and so on. This sort of deliberation is very important, and does not follow any recognisable system or set of rules. It can't, because there is no scheme for comparing the ends. This is precisely why it is so exhausting. It is a central part of the normal operation of practical reason.

A piece of practical deliberation might follow this sort of path:-

- 1 identify a possible goal
- 2 compare it to other goals
 - adopt and decide to act on it
 - adopt and store merely in goal form for now
 - reject
 - reformulate - return to 1
- 3 identify a possible means
- 4 compare it with other means to this and other ends
 - adopt so far because consistent
 - adopt so far once the opposing means is rejected
 - adopt in spite of the inconsistency
 - reject and return to 3
 - reformulate - return to 3
- 5 compare it with other goals
 - adopt because consistent
 - adopt once you've rejected the opposing end
 - adopt in spite of conflict
 - reject and return to 3
 - reformulate - return to 3
- 6 act, or intend to act⁴⁸

⁴⁷ This is emphasised by both Williams and Wiggins. See Williams (1980 p105) on imagination's role, and Wiggins (1977 p267).

⁴⁸ This idea was suggested by S Williams's paper (p127) where he attempts something similar.

It should be noted that this plan merely illustrates how practical deliberation characteristically proceeds (or circles) and lays out the various places where problems are encountered. What it does not do is offer any ways of overcoming the various problems which people will meet in practical deliberation precisely because values are incommensurable. It cannot do this. What strikes an agent as important at each point is not set beforehand. How an agent will decide to move at every conflict point is no less set. Indeed one person can perfectly consistently choose for one value at one time and another value at a different time and this be a fact which does not need explained away. In some decisions I choose to further career plans over family plans, and in some decisions I do the opposite. This is not irrational, or unreasonable, and we do not have to insist that I 'really' value one or the other. I value both and they conflict. This is why it cannot be true that a person has to pursue an end for it to be the case that she values it. There is nothing unreasonable about holding a value, and considering it as an end of practical deliberation, but it always being rejected in favour of other ends in action. This idea will be pursued further below, and in chapter 3.

This is all in striking contrast to our supposed picture of theoretical deliberation having the single end of truth. The process of theoretical deliberation can still involve ingenuity, but it is no longer true that anything goes. All values are referred back to truth. Since the aim of deliberation is known, we can draw up standard ways of deliberating which we know are effective, such as deductive and inductive reasoning, and offer rules to be followed, or which are followed, to render these as effective as possible. We can identify things which must, unequivocally, be done in an effective piece of theoretical reasoning.

Take as an example of a simple piece of theoretical deliberation the decision whether a piece of meat is still good to use - as you might well have to decide as part of practical deliberation. You have various reasons for believing that the meat is okay, and that it is not:-

- a) The best before date is still to come
- b) You accidentally left it out of the fridge overnight

c) It smells 'a bit funny' but you know no more about what that might mean. In practical deliberation about whether to use the meat, many further factors are going to be relevant, like whether you have money for any other food, whether you have any other food already available, and who you would be feeding it to - yourself, or others, particularly children. In theoretical deliberation on our picture, though, all you want to know is the truth. Presumably, the particular truth you want to know in this case is whether eating the meat will make a person ill. The end of even the related piece of practical deliberation is not so simply stated. For example, it cannot be stated as trying to discover 'the best thing to do,' because this in turn would have to be defined in terms of ends - ends that conflict. There is no such thing as the best thing to do here where this is defined independently of which ends you decide are the more important. Once you come to a guess about how dangerous the meat is likely to be, your decision is still swayed by whether you are more afraid of illness than you dislike going hungry because you cannot afford more food. You experience conflict in theoretical deliberation here because you don't have enough information to make a conclusive decision, but certain sorts of conflict are not here as parts of theoretical deliberation. There is no conflict about the *end*, about what you want to achieve. And each piece of evidence is linked in a clearly understood way to that end. So the things that make you believe the meat is safe don't conflict with the things that make you believe it's dangerous in the same way that ends conflict in practical deliberation. Of course, there are examples of far more complicated pieces of theoretical deliberation, and I will discuss one or two of these later.

In conclusion, the incommensurability of values yields the impossibility of overcoming conflict in a rational way in practical deliberation. This is an important fact for individuals, and also for anybody trying to organise collective action. We are forced to try to overcome conflict and make decisions under conflict merely because we need to act. For individuals and for societies, choosing ends is the most important part of practical deliberation.

Incommensurability, universalizability and reasons for action

Why, then, would incommensurable values be a problem for external reasons for action? Fundamentally, the answer to this is because they imply the non-universalizability of at least some value judgements. In this section, I will explain why this is a problem for external reasons. Simultaneously, although I take it to be pretty uncontroversial, on the grounds of what I have already said, that Williams does hold an incommensurability thesis,⁴⁹ some details of what he holds will be made more explicit.

Incommensurable values have an impact on what we think of 'ought-judgements' about actions. These can be made on the basis of all values, not just moral values, although most of the literature concentrates on the latter. Now, I have said that incommensurability implies that in many situations there is not one action that is the all-out best one for a person. It might seem to imply that there cannot be one thing a person all-out ought to do. This does not have to be true of all situations, since it is possible that in some situations there will only be one relevant value, or the values that are relevant are commensurable or don't conflict at all. The number of times it will be true depends on how extensive you think conflict is, but incommensurability implies it will at least sometimes be true.

Thus we can imagine a situation in which I am committed to some meeting or other, in the course of my career, where others are depending on me to be present, but that my child is ill that day, off school, and there is nobody else available to look after her. We have a clear clash of values, and since in this case each involves responsibility to other people, it would often be seen as involving a moral clash. I would often be thought to have a responsibility to care for my child, and a responsibility to turn up to the meeting, quite independent of the fact that I do actually want to do both. But since it would be utterly inappropriate, both for my child and my colleagues, to bring a sick child to the meeting, or to foist her onto a colleague she doesn't know, I cannot do both.

⁴⁹ See for example Williams (1979), specifically on what it means for value conflict.

In this situation, many people would say that I ought to go to the meeting, and I ought to care for my child. But if this is true, then it must also be true that there are situations in which I am, through no apparent fault of my own, unable to do everything I ought to do. Unless we can find a common scheme that will remove the conflict - which will be difficult given that responsibilities to others, relative harm involved, and special responsibilities to your own children are all involved - we cannot produce an all-out ought-judgement. That is, if the values involved are incommensurable, it is just not clear what I ought, all-out, to do, if there *is* something I ought, all-out, to do. Nor is it clear that there is anything which is the best thing for me to do. Williams argues that this is a result of incommensurable values,⁵⁰ saying that there cannot be an all-out ought judgement. Whichever I do will provide deep regret over the rejected option. I will feel enduring guilt over either option, should I reject it. Whatever decision I make, it is not the case that the alternative decision would have been the wrong one, under incommensurability. I concur.

This last point is really what is centrally important. We have said that incommensurability implies that there is not a single rational best course of action available in every situation. Here we put the point a different way, as Williams also argues. When you have a clash of two things you ought to do, you are not being irrational, nor are you at fault. You're not trying to overcome error.⁵¹ This contrasts with the making of ought-judgements in theoretical deliberation, since, here, all ought-judgements are related to the same value. One clearly *ought* to believe the truth, and derivatively one ought to follow paths of reasoning most likely to lead to you believing the truth. Suppose that the meat is safe to eat. There is one thing you ought to believe, that the meat is safe. You will reject the false evidence, or false beliefs, without regret. That is, the 'funny smell' and the worry about having left it out of the fridge are straightforwardly misleading. You reject them without care and attempt to remember that that particular smell does not indicate bad meat. In practical deliberation, though, you experience regret,

⁵⁰ Williams 1965 p113

often long after the action is carried out, and do not necessarily make further similar decisions the same way. Williams is particularly keen that this should be recognised. 'It seems to me a fundamental criticism of many ethical theories that their accounts of moral conflict and its resolution do not do justice to the facts of regret and related considerations: basically because they eliminate from the scene the 'ought' that is not acted upon.'⁵²

A possible response might be to say that I ought to do both. But this has implications for the common thought that it is only if one *can* do something that it can be said that one ought to do that thing. Here, I ought to do two things, of which I cannot do both. Clearly, I can do each. But if it is thought that I ought to do *both*, then ought does not imply can. This is a reason for thinking that there cannot be an all-out ought judgement, or best thing to do, in this sort of situation. If an all-out ought-judgement can't be either 'I ought to attend the meeting', or 'I ought to care for my child', and 'I ought to attend the meeting *and* care for my child' is also ruled out, then there is nothing else that could reasonably be the all-out ought-judgement here.

It can therefore be seen quite clearly that universalizability of moral or other value judgements is also hit. On the basis of the above, we cannot claim that, if I decide to care for my child, I must generalise the claim for all others in relevantly similar situations.⁵³ More generally, if an agent makes a decision in circumstances in which the options are incommensurable, then it doesn't follow that anyone in similar circumstances should make this same choice. Precisely because such an agent experiences the conflict allows him to understand the difficulty of making such decisions and is likely to make him resist asserting universalizability. But it might be thought that we can take this further. Even for judgements by the same person at different times, we cannot always universalize, since it is not unreasonable that I choose for my child now and for my career at some other time. The whole process of compromise is, indeed, going to demand this. At any

⁵¹ Williams 1965 p110

⁵² Williams 1965 p113

time where there are incommensurable values in conflict, we cannot make an all-out ought judgement, select the single best course of action, or universalize the values involved.

The relevance to the external reasons debate can now be seen to be direct. An external reason-statement is often seen as an all-out ought judgement. That is, it is seen as a judgement about what the agent ought to do, based on the circumstances he or she finds herself in. This is in contrast with an internal reason-statement, which holds the reasons to be relative to the agent's own ends.

The argument can go further, when we consider what position we are in to criticise the actions a person eventually chooses to make. We presumably want to avoid having to say that there is no way we can claim that an agent should have selected a different end, and hence a different action, either in terms of her own long-term ends, or possibly even in terms of ends she ought to have. This seems to be a strong intuition, since we use these forms of criticism frequently, making judgements about other people's actions, and our own. I can wish I had acted in a different way, realise I should have acted in a different way, and others can also point out these things to me. But incommensurability might be thought not to allow this.

This is so because it is often thought that when an agent makes a decision under conflict, and is then satisfied with this decision, this decision must have been the right one. For example, I decide, after much soul-searching, that although I care for my child a great deal and am very aware of the extent of my special responsibilities towards her as my daughter, the extent to which I will let my colleagues down if I miss the meeting is too great, and she must be left in the care of someone I would have preferred not to leave her with, at least for the duration of the meeting. If I am satisfied with this decision once made, and continue to be so, then it might well be thought that when I say 'I had most reason to attend the meeting', then this is straightforwardly *true*. This is based on the assertion of the

⁵³ Wiggins 'Universalizability, Impartiality, Truth' (in his 1987) and Winch make the same

agent in question. I am certain I made the right decision. Similarly with other decisions, such as the decision to become a lawyer or a doctor, or marry one man rather than another, or favour reason over faith and so on.

But if this is so, it makes the notion of criticism of actions from a point of view external to the agent vanish. It is not relevant for another person to assert that I 'really' had most reason to care for my child, or choose a different career, or marry a different man, or favour faith over reason. If I am certain that I did the right thing, then it is true that I did. I made the correct choice between incommensurable ends. But this means that the final choice lies with the agent - with his convictions about the decision. Criticism based on the decision of another person becomes irrelevant. Importantly, criticism from the point of view internal to the agent - in terms of the ends the agent himself has chosen, is still available. Thus, we avoid making the counterintuitive move above. For example, someone who knows my value-structure can criticise actions of mine as not consistent with my ends, holding that I should have favoured the alternative action and end. This seems to be the sort of viewpoint I look at my own action from, when I come to regret making the very decision I did make. That is, I regret more than not doing the rejected alternative, because I will regret that anyway, but I realise that in fact I favoured the other end in this case.

The implication that it is only up to each agent to choose his or her own ends under incommensurability seems to lead us to an analysis of success in practical deliberation as only measurable in terms relative to the ends the agent has chosen. Thus the only reasons for action are relative to the ends an agent chooses - i.e. they are internal, on Williams's understanding. We are not committed to saying that ends are merely competing desires, since we can criticise based on the ends of the agent, so we can still fulfil some of the intuitions we have insisted on above. But some forms of criticism are not appropriate. You cannot relevantly say that I ought to have cared for my child when I maintain that I made the right decision.

move.

Although this line of thought does present problems for external reasons, I do not think this sort of argument goes through. I intend to argue for this. First, however, I must separate out the precise role incommensurability is playing. In the above argument, I think, the theses of externalism about value judgements and, in particular, a position on the sources of value are also involved. Once these are separated, it will become clear that holding value incommensurability does not push us towards internalism about reasons for action on its own.

The independence of this thesis

The extent to which the three main theses I am interested in are actually connected is important to establish. I hold that each position, standing alone, does not imply any of the others. This is because none of the combinations of positions is inconsistent. This position is not uncontroversial - incommensurability might be thought to offer some support for externalism about motivation, and subjectivism about value, as I shall indicate.

I look first, then, at the less controversial combination, internalism about motivation and incommensurable values. Incommensurability does not imply either possible position about the relation of motivation and value judgements. This might be thought not to be true, since if you experience a conflict of values or ends, we have said that it must nevertheless be possible to choose only one course of action without irrationality. So it cannot be true that if you find something valuable you are moved all the way to action, on the incommensurability thesis. This is because of the nature of conflict of values. If it is basic, we can understand that rejecting actions based on one value, even consistently over a lifetime, does not imply that the value *itself* is rejected. It is merely impossible to further it given other values. Often, you will not act on something you hold to be very valuable, without irrationality. This seems to be a necessary position to adopt. However, the conflict here is only with a very strong thesis of internalism about value judgements - that you have to act on what you find valuable. This thesis in itself seems implausible. Incommensurability of

values, and what it implies about practical deliberation, is not inconsistent with a weaker, and more plausible, internalism thesis.

To show this, we should note that incommensurability of values might lead you to hold that you can still be said to find something valuable even if you never *act* on it. But you are still *motivated* to further that value. It enters your practical deliberation, and the inability to further it can be the source of anything from slight irritation to enraged frustration. So the incommensurable values thesis is perfectly consistent with the internalist thesis that if an agent finds something valuable, he or she must be *motivated* to act on it, where it is that assertion about the motivation, and not about the action, which is crucial. And this is still not the weakest form internalism about motivation can take.

Incommensurability, however, does also seem to be consistent with externalism about motivation, whether stronger or weaker. That we experience conflict tells us nothing about how the motivations that inspire that conflict are related to values. So the fact of incommensurable values and ends does not imply either position on value and motivation, although it does exclude a strong internalist view.

Does either of the positions on motivation imply incommensurable values and ends? It does not seem so. Incommensurability tells us that it might be impossible to act in a rationally best way, given conflicting values, with or without attendant motivations. It does not tell us that these motivations must arise in any particular way from any particular source. Thus externalism or internalism about value judgements does not imply incommensurability of values either.

The two theses, then, are independent to this extent: if we have incommensurable values and ends, we cannot hold a strong internalist thesis about motivation. That is all.

The more controversial position I hold is that realism about the sources of value - i.e. holding that values are objective - and incommensurability or

commensurability are consistent. This is controversial because asserting values to be objective is often correlated with holding them to be commensurable, reducible to each other, and value judgements to be universalizable. This is because, if values are really in the world, then by knowing this value we can know what is the best thing to do - an idea that descends most notoriously from Plato.

Objectivity about values is often associated with unanimity about value judgements, or at least convergence of judgements, and thus is divorced from the notion of conflict. Williams, for example, seems to argue that value conflict, if it does not imply subjectivity about values, at least indicates that it is likely to be true. He believes that as a result of objectivism about values and cognitivism about judgements (the two are often closely associated but not necessarily so, as I will argue in chapter 4), we get: 'moral judgements being straightforwardly assertions, two inconsistent moral judgements cannot both be true, and hence (truth being the aim of assertions) cannot both be acceptable: one of them must be rejected; its reasons must be defective; something must be wrong.'⁵⁴ But of course this result is unacceptable if you hold that values are incommensurable, and inconsistent value judgements can both be good judgements.

While objectivism about values is traditionally associated with the project of identifying with certainty the best course of action, then, it is simply not true that incommensurability of values implies that these values are not objective. Even if values really conflict, this does not imply that they are subjective. We can envisage holding that ends are given externally, but conflict. But there is an argument to the effect that, were moral values to be objective, this would mean they must be commensurable. This is the argument that if conflict among value judgements is inconsistency of value judgements, and truth does not admit of inconsistencies, how can we *not* claim that, if these value judgements are objective, at most one of them can be true in cases of conflict? I think we can avoid claiming this because conflict among value judgements does not imply inconsistency of the relevant value judgements in all cases. The cases in which

⁵⁴ Williams 1966 p21

they do not imply inconsistency are the hard cases, where the values involved are incommensurable. We have said that perfectly rational agents acting in these circumstances do not wish to impose the decisions they come to on others in similar circumstances. What they recognise is that there is no inconsistency in choosing, for example, to care for your child, or to pursue your career. So I would not wish to imply by my choice that other mothers choose similarly. There is no real disagreement between mothers who choose differently in a single situation. (Although obviously there are differences between mothers who *consistently* choose differently - we would then assume that they valued their careers and families differently.) If we genuinely hold that there is not one best thing to do here, even if the values involved are objective, we must also hold, as a result of the incommensurability thesis, that two mothers making different choices are not making inconsistent choices. In other cases, there *is* only one judgement which is true. This is where values are commensurable, or a third value which is obviously relevant allows a choice.

Subjectivity about the sources of value also seems to be consistent with incommensurability or commensurability. There is no reason to suppose that values chosen by human beings are more likely to conflict than not to conflict.

Is either position on the sources of value more plausible when we look at actual practical deliberation? It seems to me that the answer to this question, on an intuitive level, varies widely according to which sorts of values we consider. We are far more inclined to hold that such ends of practical deliberation as morally correct conduct are externally given, while such things as a preference for dark over milk chocolate are entirely up to the choice of the agents concerned. This would mean that the value of morally correct conduct exists without anyone adopting it as valuable, while the value of chocolate does not. The deeper importance we attach to conflicts of moral values than to choices of chocolates, and other facts about the nature of that conflict, do not tell us that incommensurable values are subjective, or that they are objective. There could be conflicting plans of action equally supported by how things are. Thus the point we have got to is that incommensurability of values implies the existence of

conflict of a certain nature in practical deliberation, which we have found to exist. However, it implies *nothing* about what might be the most appropriate way of sorting through this conflict. Indeed, it leaves open the possibility that the most appropriate way varies from value to value. This is where a conception of the *sources* of value is necessary to proceed further in looking at success in practical deliberation.

The link to internalism about reasons for action

Now that we have separated out the two further theses from that about incommensurable values, I hope it can be seen that the line of argument above does not go through. That is, that values are incommensurable does not imply that all reasons for action are internal. I believe that the reason for this is that the argument relies for its plausibility on an underlying premise about the sources of value. Incommensurability alone implies nothing about this. So, the above approach sounds plausible if you believe that the sources of value are internal to persons, that is, discoverable or decidable on a person to person basis, but it sounds implausible if you think they are external to individuals, even if they are not external to all individuals as a collectivity.

So far I have avoided this issue, but if we consider now the examples I have used in comparing theoretical and practical deliberation, it will be seen that there is a difference in addition to the difference as to whether there is a single or multiple ends. This is the source of the value involved. Truth is often seen as a value with an external source - it is not dependent on agents choosing to value it - while values like children, careers and so on are internal to the agent - they depend on the agent choosing to value them. It has become obvious that this difference is an additional, important one, and I want to look at how much of the results above are carried by the incommensurability/commensurability distinction, and how much by prior conceptions of the sources of value in practical deliberation.

If we think through the examples, conflict remains, and its nature does not alter. If you retain incommensurability, even though you suppose for the moment that

my responsibilities to my child and to my career are internal to my valuing of them, the problem of working out which takes precedence retains the same *nature*. As an individual agent, I am facing a largely similar choice. And theoretical deliberation still has conflict of a non-basic level, if truth is an internal to agent value, so long as it is the single end of theoretical deliberation.

However, the consideration of criticism above alters completely on the supposition that responsibilities to child and career are external. The agent still experiences conflict, and still has to decide what to do in the light of this conflict. But it is no longer true that we cannot reasonably say that I should have chosen to care for my child if there are external standards or sources of value which give us reason to judge this. In cases other than the hard cases, this could happen often. Others have potential access to what it is really right to do, rather than the only possible source of these things being within the agent concerned, so that judgements of this sort can only jump off from the ends of the agent concerned. If there is either an objective, or a socially determined source which yields that responsibility to child takes precedence: I can be criticised for my action, and for my incorrect ordering of ends. In the hard cases, of course, there cannot be criticism unless we have some external reason to believe that one of the values is more important, so that we rank them in a particular way. This, though, would have to be argued for specific value-pairs and I have done nothing like this. I am merely pointing out that it is a possible line to take.

Looking at the problem from the opposite point of view, we can consider our reactions to theoretical deliberation considered in ways parallel to incommensurability in theoretical deliberation. The first of these alternative pictures of theoretical deliberation is under the underdetermination of theory by data. This is a reasonably simple idea. There is still a *truth* of the matter, but we have competing theories, and no way of telling, from existing data, which theory is closest to the truth. For example, we have good reasons for believing both general relativity theory, and quantum mechanics, having evidence to support each, and gaining explanatory power from each. Both theories cannot be true as they stand, however, and the evidence cannot conclusively support one or the

other.⁵⁵ In fact, we have enough experimental evidence to suggest that they are both false. In this situation, values other than truth become important in theoretical deliberation. Theories can be compared on such grounds as explanatory power, and simplicity, and are valued for these qualities. But truth remains the ultimate, single value, and it remains external. Conflict is at a deeper level than before, but the interim values still come down to truth. They are valued only in so far as we believe they approximate to the truth. Evidence, explanatory power and simplicity are commensurate with truth. Here, conflict remains, but it is not basic. It is also clear that we can criticise the results of theoretical deliberation.

The second alternative picture of theoretical deliberation is much further away from our original picture than this, and it may be the reason why we have such enduring metaphysical debates as the one on the nature of personal identity. It is that there is no fact of the matter. What we take to be facts are dependent on our observation of the world, our interpretation of it, and what we take to be evidence does not all have to be consistent in the end. In this case, we get multiplication of ends of theoretical deliberation, such as simplicity, explanatory power and coherence with other beliefs, and these could be seen now as incommensurate values. Thus conflict becomes as deep as that in practical deliberation. But the biggest difference here is that these values might well no longer be understood as external values. (They could still be interpreted as external, of course, but let us consider the results if we take them to be internal.) How useful each end of theoretical deliberation is will vary from agent to agent and community to community. And, now, criticism on the part of others of the conclusions we come to seems less obviously sound. I might choose the theory with the greatest explanatory power, while you choose that which is simplest. What grounds do we have for criticising each other?

⁵⁵ They give different predictions about the behaviour of an electron orbiting a proton, for example, and they paint different and contradictory pictures of the Big Bang and of black holes. General relativity predicts that black holes can never get smaller, they can only get bigger, whereas quantum theory predicts that black holes, if left to themselves, will slowly evaporate. Guth convinced the scientific world that quantum theory predicts that there would be some periods during the Big Bang when the universe expanded much faster than the speed of light, which is contrary to general relativity theory.

So the intuition above - that the agent who makes a decision under conflict and is satisfied with it must be correct that the action chosen was the best thing to do - is misleading. Agents may still choose badly in such situations - indeed they might choose against even the two options involving what is truly valuable, or choose incorrectly in a situation where there is no conflict. Even when there is no single rational best course of action, there can still be agreement about what constitute bad courses of action.

So looking for room for criticism in our new conception of practical deliberation has led us to acknowledge the need for a position on the sources of value. The position is relevant to internalism about reasons for action because the notion of success in practical deliberation is linked strongly to the notion of value. If someone wishes to deny that all reasons are internal, she needs to deny that success in practical deliberation is dependent solely on desire, and value seems to be the most likely candidate for an alternative to desire. But the thesis of incommensurability is irrelevant to the question of whether there are any values distinct from desires. It can only tell us something about the forms that success in practical deliberation can and cannot take. For the thesis that there are only internal reasons for action, the crucial question is whether we can be wrong about what ends we select for ourselves in a way that is independent of our other ends. Incommensurability cannot answer this.

Conclusion

We have examined the implications of incommensurability for value conflict in practical deliberation, and shown that conflict of a basic nature does exist. We have come to the conclusion that values are incommensurable.

We have also seen that incommensurability alone does not imply that reasons for action are only internal, but it does constrain them. They cannot all be all-out ought-judgements, since this would be inappropriate in cases of basic conflict.

Chapter 3: The Sources of Value

Introduction

I have argued that Williams holds that there are no values relevant to an agent's reasons for action which do not depend crucially on the agent in question's subjective motivational set. I will now take up this argument in more detail, examining what Williams's position involves, and arguing for a different one.

I will argue that Williams is a subjectivist and his position depends for its plausibility on this, and I will present considerations against the view that all values are subjective, and hence against the thesis that all reasons for action are internal.

Distinctions

What I mean by the 'sources of value' is not straightforward, nor is it unitary. I am not interested, except perhaps derivatively, in questions as to which things are valuable, or whether their value is intrinsic or extrinsic, and so on. I am interested in how values are related to individual human beings and their reasons for action. That is, are there values which exist independently of an agent's, or a group of agents', motivational set or sets? There are various distinctions in debate about the nature of values, in particular moral values, which are relevant.

The first distinction is that between cognitivism and non-cognitivism. Cognitivism is the position that value judgements (or, more commonly, moral judgements) are sentences which can be assessed as true or false. Non-cognitivism is the denial of this position, so non-cognitivists hold that value judgements are not literally true or false. These positions are relevant to Williams, since he has a concern whether reason-statements are *true* or not. The conclusion of his first argument is, not that external reason-statements are neither true nor false, but that all external reason-statements are *false*. Hence Williams is a cognitivist about reasons for

action. But there is a second set of distinctions which is also relevant to discussion of Williams's work, since what we are concerned with is the independence of values from the motivational set of the agent. This is, whether this motivational set is involved in *all* value statements. So, of both cognitivist and non-cognitivist doctrines, the distinction between ones in which values are necessarily attached to *S* and those in which values can be independent of *S* is also relevant. In the first case, whether the sentence which is a value judgement is true or false is dependent on either objective fact on the one hand, or subjective fact, which might plausibly be the subjective motivational set of the agent, on the other. So for example when we say, 'People are valuable,' when this is objective, its truth or falsity is dependent on the objective fact that people are valuable. Alternatively, we can say, 'Chocolate is valuable for me,' which we shall suppose to be subjective. The truth or falsity of this depends on a subjective fact - that I like and enjoy chocolate. In the second case, imperatives do not seem to be necessarily related to the agent's *S*, whereas if he is merely expressing emotions in making a value judgement, the judgement must be related to his *S*.

These various positions are relevant to Williams's arguments, although he does not discuss them in the context of the internal reasons debate. This is unfortunate, since his precise position must be gleaned from his other work. But there is yet a third distinction which might be relevant. What we are concerned about is not only whether values are dependent on agents' motivational sets, but whether they depend on an individual agent's motivational set. So if some values are assessable as true or false, and are subjective, but are dependent not on an individual agent, but on groups of agents, then an individual agent can still be wrong about what he takes to be valuable. On this sort of view, what is important about values isn't what's in the world, but representations of what's in the world - points of view - particularly those of individuals. As Nagel says, we don't need values to be real *objects* to be *real*. What we are concerned about is not some fact independent of human beings as such, but whether anyone, or which people, from which point of view, would find something to be valuable. A value is, in this sense, more or less subjective according to whether it is or is not tied to one particular point of view - particularly that of a particular individual. Thus subjectivity is presented not as a

feature of what is in the world, but of how human agents represent what is in the world.

This distinction is considerably more subtle than a traditional subjective versus objective values distinction, and correspondingly complex. Points of view that are important can be of individuals, small groups, key groups, majorities, or all individuals (this last sometimes rather the same as if it were no individuals). In this category, we find distinctions like Nagel's between agent-neutral values - that is, values which ground reasons for actions such that they are a reason for anyone to do it - and agent-relative values - which ground reasons for action such that the reason involves as essential a reference to the person having the reason.⁵⁶ He now thinks some values can be wholly agent-relative.⁵⁷ Values relevant to single agents, and values relevant to all agents have important places. This is different from another distinction he uses, that of 'degrees of externality'. This refers to how far the consideration is independent or not from the concerns of sentient beings.⁵⁸ Here we have groups becoming important. Thus Korsgaard's intersubjective values fit into this category. These are values constructed from the subjective, when we come to share each other's values. They spring from groups. Some are universal, springing from common humanity, but others spring from such things as friendships, marriages, local communities and shared interests - clearly far smaller groups. Korsgaard herself would call her account not objective or subjective, but rationalist. That is, an object or state of affairs is good if there's a sufficient practical reason for realizing it. This reason comes from our 'nature, condition, needs, and desires.'⁵⁹

This third distinction is often written off as if it were somehow of a piece with the traditional objective - subjective distinction, but this can be misleading. The values conceived of as independent of an individual's *S* are not objective in the normal sense. Nagel writes of the new use of 'objective': 'If objectivity means anything here, it will mean that when we detach from our individual perspective

⁵⁶ Nagel 1986 p153

⁵⁷ Nagel 1986 p159

⁵⁸ Nagel 1986 p153

and the values and reasons that seem acceptable from within it, we can sometimes arrive at a new conception which may endorse some of the original reasons but will reject some as false subjective appearances and add others.⁶⁰ It is very clear that this use of 'objective' does not mean something like 'values really existing in the world independently of the opinions or motivations of agents.' The two should not be conflated. Even when we meet the notion of a value which is only relevant to one individual, only valuable from that point of view, which looks very like an old-fashioned wholly subjective value, the two are not identical. The claim about points of view is a different claim, and is to be contrasted not with real values, but with values appealing to more points of view.

Williams's position

Williams's position might be read as that there are two sorts of values. There are those which do have a relation to the subjective motivational set of the individual, and these are grounds for internal reasons for action. And, secondly, there might be those which do not have any relation whatsoever to the motivational set of the individual concerned, but these are irrelevant to and cannot ground reasons for action. This is suggested when he discusses why we can insist on some relations with the agent's *S*, but not others.⁶¹ There are two relevant comments of Williams's. First, he notes how close the internalist and externalist positions are on a particular interpretation of his work: 'if we are licensed to vary the agent's reasoning and assumptions of fact, it will be asked why we should not vary (for instance, insert) prudential and moral considerations as well. If we were allowed to adjust the agent's prudential and moral assumptions to some assumed normative standard, then obviously there would be no significant difference between the internalist and the externalist accounts. We would have allowed into the notion of a 'sound deliberative route' anything the externalist could want.'⁶² Here, it is his reference to an 'assumed normative standard' as opposed to standards of such things as correct means-end reasoning, or knowledge of facts,

⁵⁹ Korsgaard 1986 p487

⁶⁰ Nagel 1986 p140

⁶¹ Williams 1989 pp36-7

which is interesting. Clearly there is an important difference between these two sorts of things for Williams. He explains his own position: ‘any rational deliberative agent has in his *S* a general interest in being factually and rationally correctly informed. ... on the internalist view there is already a reason for writing, in general, the requirements of correct information and reasoning into the notion of a sound deliberative route, but not a similar reason to write in the requirements of prudence and morality. Somebody may say that every rational deliberator is committed to constraints of morality as much as to the requirements of truth or sound reasoning. But if this is so, then the constraints of morality are part of everybody’s *S*, and every correct moral reason will be an internal reason.’⁶³ So the crucial difference as Williams sees it is that every agent has an interest in correct deliberation, but not necessarily in prudence or morality. Well, I agree that every agent has an interest in being factually and rationally correctly informed, as Williams says, and so we can reasonably claim that this is part of everyone’s *S*. This is so even if the agent is often *not* actually motivated in this way. So reason-statements can be true in virtue of this element, still explain action, and yet the agent often not act on them. It would be difficult to see how any agent could *never* act on this sort of motivation, however. But what is it that makes Williams claim that every agent does not have in his *S* motivations such as moral considerations, whether he acknowledges them or not? In pursuit of this, we need to examine how Williams’s views on the positions I have outlined above contribute to his views on reasons for action. It is also worth noting briefly that although inserting moral and prudential considerations into *S* and insisting that everyone has an interest in and therefore a reason for acting in certain ways would be technically to agree with Williams on the internal reasons debate (it is how Korsgaard agrees with him), this is a position he would oppose. This is because he sees his position as opposing the ‘magic leverage view’ of morality. He thinks it is misleading to hope that moral requirements can somehow get a purchase on

⁶² Williams 1989 p36

⁶³ Williams 1989 p37

the immoral agent, and we should give up any attempt to approach morality in this way.⁶⁴

Cognitivism

Williams does not commit himself on the point of cognitivism about value judgements, but his work independent of the reasons for action debate suggests that he has non-cognitivist leanings.⁶⁵ However, when he discusses moral conflict, he comes to the conclusion that moral conflict shares features with both desire and belief conflict.⁶⁶ And his concerns about the truth or falsity of reason-statements clearly indicate at least some leanings towards cognitivism about reasons. But in asserting that the truth or otherwise of a reason-statement is entirely dependent on a relation specifically to motivations, Williams is pointing at the heart of his argument. It is the involvement of the motivational set in the only relevant values, and therefore the subjectivist or objectivist standpoints, which are truly crucial. For this reason, I am going to ignore the cognitivism/non-cognitivism debate from now on, in favour of the cognitivist standpoint. This will significantly clarify exposition, and I choose cognitivism because it seems to me far simpler to show the possibility of the falsity of his assumptions if we take the cognitive standpoint on values.

Subjectivism

If Williams accepts a cognitivist position on value judgements, he must hold that the truth of these value judgements is subjective. This is to hold that what is true about what is valuable is dependent on what you think is valuable. So for an

⁶⁴ Williams (1995 p216) 'I cannot see what leverage it [morality] would secure: what would these external reasons do to these people, or for our relations to them? Unless we are given an answer to that question, I, for one, find it hard to resist Nietzsche's plausible interpretation, that the desire of philosophy to find a way in which morality can be guaranteed to get beyond merely *designating* the vile and recalcitrant, to transfixing them or getting them inside, is only a fantasy of *ressentiment*, a magical project to make a wish and its words into a coercive power.'

⁶⁵ See for example Williams 1966, 1993 and 1995.

⁶⁶ Williams (1965 p 117): 'a moral conflict shares with a conflict of desires ... the feature that to end it in decision is not necessarily to eliminate one of the conflicting items.... Moral conflicts

agent acting, it is meaningless to ascribe to him values which he does not agree with. We can say, 'Chocolate is valuable for me,' and not thereby be committed to the position that chocolate is valuable *simpliciter*. This is not to say that the statement is unassailable. We can still ask whether it is true that chocolate is valuable for me and show that it is by showing how chocolate promotes, in relation to me, something which is valuable in itself, such as sensory pleasure. This truth or falsity seems to be independent of the *judger's* motivational set, but it is not independent of *my* motivational set. So the point is that values are relative to the person holding them, and acting on the basis of them. The best evidence for the claim that Williams holds this is that he makes it clear that even deliberation about ends is controlled by *S*. He writes: 'One of the most important things deliberation does, rather than thinking of means to a fixed end, is to think of another line of conduct altogether, as when someone succeeds in breaking out of a dilemma.'⁶⁷ Although deliberation is not limited to means-end reasoning, it is limited. There is no suggestion of finding what is valuable in a way that is separate from the motivations of the agent deliberating. This is opposed to a picture of agents attempting to discover what is valuable independently of their motivations. This can also be seen when Williams looks at the role of imagination in practical deliberation. 'More subtly, [the agent] may think he has reason to promote some development because he has not exercised his imagination enough about what it would be like if it came about. In his unaided deliberative reason, or encouraged by the persuasions of others, he may come to have some more concrete sense of what would be involved, and lose his desire for it, just as, positively, the imagination can create new possibilities and new desires.'⁶⁸ But this is only concerned with *developing* the agent's motivational set. It is not concerned with discovery of what is valuable, but with what *the agent finds* to be valuable. In the later paper, he considers what deliberation does apart from means-end reasoning. In view of this, I think that Williams does hold that values are internal to individuals, and that his picture of practical deliberation is heavily

do not share with conflicts of desire ... the feature that there is a general freedom to adopt a policy to try to eliminate their occurrence.'

⁶⁷ Williams 1989 p38

⁶⁸ Williams 1980 pp104-5

affected by this. It is limited to reasoning based on what is found to be valuable by the individual agents concerned.

This position also seems to be necessary for his argument.⁶⁹ It makes it a good deal more plausible that the selection of appropriate ends of practical deliberation are internal to individuals. If values are subjective, then agents must choose what they think to be valuable for themselves, in some unexplained way. And if this is so, then claiming that agents have reasons to act in accordance with particular values they do not see as valuable is indeed absurd. It would be like claiming I have a reason to wear the red dress, when I have no such motivation even after careful thought and in full possession of the facts. On the other hand, consider Williams's position if values are not internal to agents. In this case, an agent's choosing to value something is not what makes it true that it is valuable. Now, when I choose to put my children before my career, or have a long hot bath instead of practising the piano, it is no longer the case that this choice of mine, which remains when corrected for correct deliberation and full knowledge of relevant facts, determines what is the most valuable thing to do. The opinions of other people, or the objective facts, about what is valuable are relevant. Suddenly, it is far less plausible to claim that I do not have reason to pursue these things, since I have no motivation to do so.

It might be thought that Williams explicitly rejects my view of the grounding of his arguments, because he insists that internalism about reasons doesn't depend on a fact versus value distinction. He says that if you use a concept of value, even if you think about it as being valuable independently of what you think about it, then it is part of your *S*. But if you base a reason-statement on such a value when the reason-statement is about an agent who doesn't use this concept, the reason-statement isn't true. To show that the reason-statement was true, 'the speaker

⁶⁹ That is, Williams's first argument. It is interesting to note that the position that values depend on motivations might well also be the source of the otherwise confusing 'distinctiveness' objection of Williams's second argument (1995 paper, see footnote 5). Objective values have long been associated with circumstances alone determining what is the right thing to do, and so what any agent has reason to do. This seems to be the position Williams is particularly opposed to in this paper.

would need to show that the agent *has reason to use that concept*, to structure his or her experience in those terms.⁷⁰ This is indeed what I need to claim. But Williams thinks that even if objective values of this sort do exist, they are irrelevant. This is suggested in his discussion of Mackie's position that ethical qualities are like secondary qualities. In this paper, he asks how it could be a matter of fact that ethical qualities are real,⁷¹ since it is not clear what it would mean to say that a requirement or demand is part of the fabric of the world.⁷² This is because our experience doesn't represent objectivity of this kind.⁷³ It makes no difference to us. He sums up his position with: 'ethical qualities are felt to be in some sense independent of us and our motivations, whereas in truth they are dependent on us and our motivations.'⁷⁴

It seems to me that Williams has an important point. Even if we do not deny the existence of objective values, we clearly stand in a very insecure epistemic relation to them. Our attempts to discover what is valuable involve much soul-searching, and also a significant degree of interaction with others. We commonly consult friends, family and authorities of various descriptions when making choices where values conflict, and these consultations focus on more than the practical aspects of these choices. Indeed, the consultation is sometimes more abstract, in the absence of a specific problem to focus the mind. But what we must bear in mind is not to insist on a distinction that makes no practical difference.

Non-subjectivity of values

What Williams has to claim is that there are no values relevant to practical reason which are not crucially dependent on an individual agent's *S*. I hold that some values are as Williams says they all are, but that these are not the only sorts of values relevant to reasons for action. So I am saying that values are not all of one kind. They do not all have the same source.

⁷⁰ Williams 1989 p38

⁷¹ Williams 1985 p204

⁷² Williams 1985 p205

⁷³ Williams 1985 p207

⁷⁴ Williams 1985 p211

Some are as Williams needs. These are values like the value of my wearing the green or the red evening dresses. On a cognitivist understanding, it is true or false that it is valuable that I wear the dress, but only because of my own motivations. The only relevant end is whether I enjoy the evening, according to my own evaluation, and so whether it is true that the red or the green is the more valuable choice is wholly dependent on what I would enjoy. All the comment of the friend who says, 'You should wear the red dress,' is aiming to do is to elicit a similar motivation in me. Whether this occurs or not depends on my prior motivations. It seems to me that decisions of this sort are very common. Will I buy *Milk Tray* or *Black Magic*? For me the choice is easy - I adore dark chocolate and would always choose *Black Magic*. If I am planning on sharing the chocolates, of course the choice is different.

But it seems to me that values cannot all be dependent on what I am motivated towards.⁷⁵ Even for an individual agent, there seem to be places where the two come apart. Even in the cases I have discussed of the red dress and the chocolates, I do not value them merely because I am motivated towards them. I value them because I am at peace with my motivation in some way. I endorse it. I do not believe that there is anything bad about my motivation, nor do I desire not to be so motivated. But it is still true that my own motivational set is central. If it were not true that I was motivated towards it, there would be nothing valuable about it.

But it seems to me that not all valuable things follow this pattern. We do have mechanisms for deciding what is valuable and choosing ends, and we are concerned that these choices are right in some way. If these mechanisms are all determined by an antecedent *S*, they are severely limited. So it is worth looking at different kinds of values. Also, we standardly treat different values in very different ways. Some of these differences lie in such things as how important a particular value is - that is, how *valuable* it is relative to other values. But I think

⁷⁵ Smith discusses this, and I am in agreement with him on this point. (See 1994 pp139-43.)

that there are other differences between sorts of values. For example, some values vary as to who we allow to judge them, and so do such things as advise about them, and allocate praise and blame based on them. I think that these sorts of differences go to show that different values do in fact have different sources. If this is so, and some exist which are not subjective on an individual basis, then there will be values available to ground external reasons for action.

The first set of values of this kind that exist might be known as ‘intersubjective’.⁷⁶ Often, in the case of such values we believe that some particular group of people has a privileged position in determining what is valuable in a particular area. To make the idea here clearer, I will develop two examples. They are both cases where there is a value that we do not trust an individual’s judgement about.

The first is that of political values, particularly as embodied in laws. These are normally such that society demands that individuals find reasons to obey them. Yet they are in theory determined by the majority or, in practice, by a small ruling elite. Now there is some doubt about a citizen’s obligation to obey the law in certain controversial cases, like enforced conscription, but I am not talking about these. There are many values commonly enshrined in law which are yet disapproved of by a small minority. For examples, take the facts that our society is against violence, has many rules about road use, redistributes wealth, and enforces many duties, such as that of parent to child. Peace, a road system, increased equality and acceptance of such burdens are generally accepted as valuable. This is just bad luck for members of society who do not agree. Our political system - the privileged elite subject only to broad indications from the majority - has decided that these things are valuable, and it enforces that decision. People can be blamed and punished for non-compliance.

The second example is that of values where expertise is valued and deferred to. I am thinking of aesthetic values, which are interesting because it seems plausible that aesthetic values do not exist apart from what everyone thinks. That is, if no

person thinks that a sunset is beautiful, then it is, arguably, not beautiful. But on the other hand, we would claim that someone who thought Renoir's work valueless was wrong. This is because in most established arts there are groups of experts - at both performance and interpretation - and in the main those experts are deferred to. We allow for individual taste, but still hold that the works of Renoir, Picasso, Da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Mozart, Bela Bartok, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, William Golding, Marlowe, Brecht, Ted Hughes, Sheamus Heaney, Christopher Wren, and many less well known performers in fields like dance, drama, film and photography all have value. As a society, we support particular artists, and not others.

It does not seem to me from these two examples that we accept that an individual is the final arbiter of what is valuable. In many other cases points of view become important. If we have no knowledge of a particular area, we bow to those who do. I do not understand why we would do all of these things if it were true that the only values relevant to a person's practical deliberation were those he decided within himself.

This brings us on to consider the second possible source of external reasons for action. It is objective values. The most common reason for rejecting the existence of objective values, or asserting their irrelevance, is the Humean one - holding the position that they could never motivate. This, however, will not be available as an objection if the argument of the next chapter is successful. So the way is open to argue that there are objective values. By this, I mean values which are not dependent on the motivational sets or beliefs of any people. They would still be valuable despite what people thought of them. These are things which are valuable not because of any relation they bear to the *S* or beliefs of any person or group of people. They are valuable because of their inherent characteristics, or some other relational characteristics.

⁷⁶ This term is borrowed from Korsgaard, but it is not intended to mean the same as she means by it.

For example, people are valuable and not because people generally value them. They are valuable because they have such things as autonomy, thought and creativity. They have these characteristics whether or not a person or group of people finds them to be valuable. This is why animals are valuable. At least some animals lack the capacity to find themselves to be valuable. That they are anyway suggests that their own opinion is not crucial to their value. They are also valuable independent of people's opinions of them. We take pain to animals to be bad, and not bad because we think it so. Other less obvious things can be valuable in this way. Take for example a dialysis machine. It is valuable because it can save life. Life is an objective value. The machine can still save life even if nobody realises it can. So it is still valuable even if people do not recognise the property that makes it valuable. However, this is still a relational value. If it should be transported through space by a freak accident to a planet where it is perfectly built for torturing captives, it is no longer valuable. But its value then cannot depend on people finding it so since, presumably, those who use it for torture still find it useful.

Although these values are not solely dependent on an individual's *S*, I reject Williams's position that they are irrelevant to practical reason. In part, this is because I think that they can motivate independently of an agent's antecedent *S*, and this will be dealt with in the next chapter. But partly, this is also because there are ways in which we use these values which reflect their importance to practical reason. There are things like praise and blame which indicate that we expect people to have reasons based on them. Williams, of course, rejects this position. He holds that blame is only connected with reasons for action because people generally have a disposition to do things that people they respect expect of them.⁷⁷ When there is no such disposition, he thinks blame is offered in the hope that there will be at some point in the future,⁷⁸ and blame is actually inappropriate for people who will not respond even to this.⁷⁹ I think that it is straightforwardly not true that this is how we use and think of notions of blame and punishment, but

⁷⁷ Williams 1989 p41

⁷⁸ Williams 1989 p42

⁷⁹ Williams 1989 p43

that Williams is right that if we thought values were subjective on an individual level this would undermine any other use of blame. In fact, we do no such thing because both objective and intersubjective values exist.

Valuable things other than those I have mentioned are on the borderline between intersubjective and objective values, and others are on other borderlines. For example, take Niagara Falls and the Grand Canyon. They are both magnificent. But is their magnificence just a relation to the motivational sets of people - perhaps it's seen as dispositional - or is it inherent? If it is the first, then their magnificence is subjective, even if it is intersubjective. If it is the latter, their magnificence is objective. So it can be seen that the boundaries of the sorts of values are blurred. Some decisions might in some cases involve only subjective values, but in others involve more. If we take my example of the choice of a dress to wear, we can see that it takes very little to put it in one of the other categories. For example, if I am wearing it to my grandmother's 92nd birthday party, and she disapproves of young ladies wearing red and will become very upset if her own granddaughter does so, are the values involved in my decision about wearing the dress now still wholly dependent on what I think is valuable? So it can be seen that decisions about values are not just to be made over what is valuable and how much, but over the source of the value. We are concerned with what it is appropriate to refer to in order to decide what is valuable in a particular case. Just as we are often wrong about what things are valuable and how much, we can be wrong about which category the value lies in. So, for example, communities can be wrong about objective values. In spite of the obvious problems we do have in deciding what is valuable, I think I have said enough to show that Williams's assumption that the only values relevant to practical reason are those which depend on the motivational set of an individual is highly controversial.

Sources of value and externalism about reasons

The existence of values which are not dependent on the *S* of an individual is relevant to the internal reasons debate because we now have values available which are relevant to practical reason which are available to reason, not only

motivation. Also, each individual is no longer the final arbiter of what is valuable for him. Others can criticise his choice. Thus, when faced with the Nazi who insists that human life is only worthwhile in certain forms, we can deny this. We can criticise his evaluation as wrong and irrational. Since Williams seems to allow that values and reasons for action are closely linked, we can disagree with Williams to a large extent.

However, it is worth noting that we still cannot fully disagree with Williams. We still do not have an external reason for action on his terms, since we have still not shown how these values can explain action. We have only said that they can ground reasons for action. So a discussion of externalism about motivation is still necessary. This is because, on the externalist thesis about motivation, motivation arises from some other source than the evaluations made by an agent. This is why Williams can demand a motivational history for any motivation. Even a motivation arising simultaneously with a value judgement must be traceable through desires to its original desires. Original desires merely arise, in a non-rational way. These are not subject to rational constraints, and so neither are ends.

So Williams's claim that we cannot assert irrationality about someone's actions is supposed to hold in two separate ways. The Nazi is not straightforwardly wrong about his ends because values are subjective. Also, the Nazi has a further choice about whether to act on his values. So he could have value for human life, and not being motivated to pursue this value is not irrational. His actions are directly based on his own desires, which are not subject to rational constraints. So his actions are not irrational in cases of the kind above. We can only say that the world would be a better place, it would be nicer, if he did not kill.

To disagree with Williams, then, we have to claim two things. We claim that the process of value acquisition, even for individuals, is subject to rationality. Secondly, we claim that motivations are not in fact detached from a person's values but are closely involved in them. Under these circumstances, external reason-statements can be true, and can make a claim about the rationality of the

agent who is failing to act on one. We will be concerned with the second claim in the next chapter.

Conclusion

I have shown that Williams's position depends for plausibility on the position that values are subjective on an individual basis. I have also argued that this position is controversial, and indicated how we can oppose Williams's view of reasons if we allow objective or intersubjective views of the sources of some values.

Chapter 4: Values and Motivation

Introduction

I have already argued that Williams holds externalism about moral judgements of a particular type, which informs his arguments on reasons for action. I will here argue in much more detail that his position on reasons for action is dependent on this thesis and show how it is. I will discuss, in line with what else I say, the more general thesis of externalism about value judgements rather than only moral judgements. This is not to depart significantly from what Williams holds, since what he holds true of judgements about morals he also holds of judgements about other values. I will offer some reasons for rejecting externalism about motivation, and hence further reasons for rejecting the thesis that all reasons for action are internal.

Value judgements and motivation

The thesis of externalism is the denial of internalism, which holds broadly that the making of value judgements is in some way linked to motivation to pursue what is valuable in some appropriate way. The thesis comes in varying strengths, as do most. I have already argued that internalists cannot make a claim that links making value judgements directly to action because of incommensurability, although the bald fact of value conflict would also give this on its own. But this does not touch many of the versions of internalism.

Michael Smith gives a very useful summary of the strengths the internalist thesis comes in.⁸⁰ I intend to use his summary to explore this thesis, but I will have to adapt it. He is interested only in moral judgements, whereas I am interested in a broader range of value judgements. The adapted summary runs:

⁸⁰ Smith 1994 pp60-62

- a) *Extreme internalism*: there is a conceptual connection between a value judgement and appropriate action. ‘If an agent judges that it is valuable for her to phi in circumstances C, then she will phi in circumstances C.’
- b) *Strong internalism*: there is a conceptual connection between a *value* judgement and the will. ‘If an agent judges that it is *valuable* for her to phi in circumstances C, then she is motivated to phi in C.’⁸¹
- c) *Practicality requirement on a value judgement*: there is a defeasible conceptual connection between *value* judgements and the will. ‘If an agent judges that it is *valuable* for her to phi in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to phi in C or she is practically irrational.’⁸²

I have already rejected the first version here as inconsistent with incommensurability of value judgements. It is also highly implausible. In many situations, whether it is because of incommensurability or not, it is likely that there is more than one thing we judge to be valuable to do where we cannot do both. This would violate extreme internalism. The second version of internalism, strong internalism, would indeed allow us to oppose Williams if it were true. However, although it is less strong than the version I have already rejected, it would still need defending. There seem to be cases where an agent can make evaluative judgements, where he or she is not motivated by them. A common example is that of a depressive, who is not motivated to do many things they have valued highly and still assert that they value highly. Thus a depressive can be apparently unmoved by past or potential harm even to a much-loved family member or friend.

So we will be interested instead primarily in the third version of internalism, although I will sometimes discuss the second. The thesis, and which version or versions of it might be true, are important for Williams, and in theories of value or practical reason generally, because they govern the impact values have on our motivations, quite independently of where we think values come from, or how they are generated. If values can motivate, then they can explain actions in the way demanded by his first argument. If they can go further, and motivate without

⁸¹ Adapted from Smith (1994 p61).

bearing a particular relation to the agent's antecedent *S*, then they can ground external reasons for action which Williams cannot dismiss as irrelevant.

I have already argued that this thesis is independent of incommensurability of values, but whether or not a position on motivation is independent of one on the sources of value remains to be seen. On the surface, they seem to be independent. That values are subjective has been advanced as an explanation of why values motivate, but it does not imply that they motivate, nor does the position that values are objective imply that they do not motivate. And in the choices between cognitivism and non-cognitivism about value judgements, it has been held both that beliefs do and do not motivate, and that desires motivate, or that they are merely a by-product of motivation, or the process of a *value* motivating. So the theses might be independent.

However, it does not seem to be unlikely that there is some deep background theory about the way in which values lead to actions which would naturally depend on what we think values are. This would seem to be the case quite straightforwardly, for example, if we analysed what is valuable in terms of what is desired, even in some complex way. And what we think values are might be affected by a conviction as to whether they necessarily motivate. Thus we must take care with this thesis.

Williams's picture

Externalism about value judgements is crucially connected with Williams's interpretation of the requirement that reasons must explain actions. Since the externalist holds it to be possible to find something valuable, but be unmotivated without irrationality, he needs to find an added motivation to explain *any* action. A value judgement alone cannot be enough. And indeed, this is what Williams wants. For a reason to explain an action done for that reason, it must identify a motivation of the agent's. To re-quote Williams: 'When the reason is an

⁸² Adapted from Smith (1994 p61).

explanation of his action, then of course it will be, in some form, in his *S*, because certainly - and nobody denies this - what he actually does has to be explained by his *S*.⁸³ This then affects the whole way Williams sets up his first argument - looking for the motivation that can explain a person's coming to believe an external reason-statement. It makes for the position that what is necessary is an *antecedent* motivation - which is a motivation that must have been produced by a sound deliberative route from *S*. If a new motivation cannot be produced just by a value judgement, then prior *S* is the only place to look for the explanation of such a motivation arising, and so all reason-statements that explain actions must be internal.

This can be contrasted to the internalist position on motivation. In this, the appreciation of a new value can give rise, in a rational way, to a new motivation, which is also rational, but has no motivational history. Thus my discovery that people are valuable will give rise to motivations in favour of protecting them, and I do not have to add that I *wished* to protect them to explain actions performed because of this evaluation. Externalism about motivation is the key to Williams's assertion that there is nothing *irrational* in not responding to an external reason. For him, there is also nothing irrational in holding something to be valuable and not being motivated to further it. The internalist disagrees.

That externalism is not an obvious assumption

It is worth noting at the outset that the internalist claim is only that we will be motivated *in favour* of those things we find valuable. Since there is nothing in this claim to say that that which we hold to be most valuable always outweighs in terms of motivations that which we hold to be less valuable, the internalist about motivations is not claiming that we will always be motivated all the way to action in pursuit what we judge to be most valuable. The link between value and motivation is not so simple as this, and conflation of 'valuable' and 'most valuable' would cause confusion in internalist accounts. To remove another

⁸³ Williams 1989 p106

possible source of confusion, it is worth noting that, throughout this section, I will be concerned with value judgements which are not part of an agent's *S*. I will be interested in both the forms of internalism which are not wholly implausible, and which would both cause problems for Williams's argument.

Externalism about motivation is initially plausible because there are some enduring problems which push people towards externalism in this area. This is that people sometimes do seem to have no motivation to pursue what they claim to value. An example I have already given is that of a person suffering from depression. Now, there are standard ways out of this problem. What people assert to be valuable might not be what they really hold valuable, and the value judgements they seem to make might not be 'real' value judgements in some way. The real problem arises if this answer is held to be inadequate. This is where those who hold externalism in this field assert that we ascribe value independently of our often wayward motivations. What we value is separate from what we are motivated in favour of. Further, when we are interested in the second formulation of internalism, there is nothing irrational in this separation of motivation and evaluation.

Brink argues something like this. He says that amoralists use moral terms in the same way that we do. That is, they pick out the very same properties we do when we use moral terms. This is some evidence that they use moral terms correctly. However, they don't see *any reason* to do what they take to be required. The implication is that they are making value judgements (moral judgements are a type of value judgement), but they are totally unmoved by them, so the first version of internalism is false. Further, there is nothing irrational about their being unmoved, so the practicality requirement on value judgements is also false. The problem with this sort of argument is that it is a matter of interpretation. The internalist can just reply that the amoralist, despite using moral terms, is not really making a value judgement. He is not saying that he takes these moral things to be valuable. Smith points out that externalist arguments based on use of moral (value) terms by unmoved agents cannot be conclusive. He suggests that we compare the assertion to saying that because a blind person can use colour words, because he

knows a great deal about when and how they are and are not applied, this would not lead us to suppose that the blind person really has colour concepts.⁸⁴ He thinks that the correct response to this allegation by the externalist about motivation is to say that the amoralist tries and fails to make moral judgements.

This is a problem, because internalism about motivation also has its own initial appeal. This is because of the well known 'magnetism' of value. This is just a way of saying what many find true; that when an individual finds something valuable, he is 'drawn' to it. This can be, and has been, described in many ways, but fundamentally means what internalism claims: that when you find something valuable, you are motivated to further it. I adore children, for example, and I am motivated, always, to protect them. Similarly for many other values.

For the internalist, externalism has counterintuitive results. These lie in the division between motivations and values/ends. First an agent chooses what he finds valuable, then he chooses what he wishes to pursue. Desires mediate between values and actions. And if a desire (or some other motivation) is what is crucial in issuing in an action even if there is a positive evaluation, then it is often thought that if there is a desire in the absence of a positive evaluation, or even if there is a negative evaluation, then there can without irrationality still be the action. So the agent can genuinely hold that mugging old ladies is a terrible crime, a misuse of superior power, and without irrationality not only choose to mug old ladies, and thus be motivated in a way directly opposed to his value, but never be motivated not to mug old ladies, or to prevent such things happening, or suffer the slightest remorse.

This is firmly opposed to the internalist picture. In this, should an agent find something to be valuable (or disvaluable), this already involves motivation to further it (or oppose it), unless he is irrational. Irrationality here can occur because it is known that some things can interfere with this normal link. However, when it is interfered with, this is because of irrationality. The

⁸⁴ Smith 1994 pp68-70

externalist can assert that there is normally a reliable link between evaluations and motivations, but he is committed to the position that the link does fail, and that when it does, there is nothing necessarily irrational in this failure. So for the externalist, there is an explanatory gap which does not affect the internalist. This is because, for the externalist, motivation operates separately from evaluation. So when an agent comes to make an evaluation, whether desire follows is explained by factors other than the evaluation. For the internalist, when an agent makes an evaluation, nothing further is necessary to explain the action, since a motivation is attached to the evaluation. That this link sometimes fails is due to irrationality. That is, other factors, the absence of which we can normally assume, interfere to upset the link.

The idea is, then, that there are formal constraints on a rational thinker that do not derive from psychological constraints. This is certainly true of theoretical deliberation. There are constraints on theoretical reasoning which do not flow from what you already believe. This is true because we have to make a distinction between logical truths, which are believed, and rules of inference, as has been shown by Lewis Carroll.⁸⁵ Rules of inference are not on the same level as beliefs. Accepting the *modus ponens* rule is not the same as accepting the logical truth that $p, p \rightarrow q \Rightarrow q$. So we cannot assume that *practical* reason is solely a matter of what truths one accepts given what desires one accepts. The consideration that practical syllogisms sometimes do not carry through to action or even motivation, as I have discussed above, does not negate this point. It is well-known that things can interfere with the process even of theoretical inferences as simple as *modus ponens*. Consider: Belief 1 *If my son has been lost in the North Sea for three days or more then he is certainly dead.* Belief 2 *My son has been lost in the North Sea for four days.* Belief 3 *My son is still alive.*⁸⁶ We can explain this problem. The mother's emotional need to believe her son is still alive interferes with her theoretical reasoning. But it does not negate the fact that knowing the first two is enough to know that her son is dead.

⁸⁵ Railton (pp76-78) discusses the Lewis Carroll example in some detail, in analogy with practical deliberation.

⁸⁶ Williams uses such an example (1965 p107).

Indeed, Williams already accepts some constraints on practical deliberation that are not constituted by an agent's motivational set. I am thinking, here, of the means-end rule. Korsgaard discusses this, saying that it is possible not to be motivated by thinking phi-ing a means to an end of yours.⁸⁷ This seems to be true. The depressive can fail to respond to realisation that walking down to the local shop is an easy way to get the chocolate they've been longing for as much as he or she can fail to respond to the judgement that getting out more would be valuable for him or her. As Korsgaard claims, if the first sort of failure is irrational, and it is commonly thought to be, then the second sort of failure is also irrational. So Williams is already admitting of a broader conception of practical rationality that does not flow from either the agent's motivational set, nor from theoretical constraints. He has not shown that there aren't *more* constraints of this nature on practical reason. So practical rationality could include the reliable production of motivations from evaluations.

And so we have come to one of the major issues underlying the debate about motivation. This is the position that judgements about values which are not part of an agent's *S* couldn't possibly motivate. This is just the Humean view that reason cannot motivate. It can be seen that this, if true, would be a substantial boost to Williams's position. But accepting this as a ground for the belief in externalism seems unreasonable, since they are equally controversial. Korsgaard, for example, has argued convincingly that motivational scepticism, which is doubt about the scope of reason as a motive, always depends on what she calls 'content scepticism', which is doubt about the bearing of rational considerations on deliberation.⁸⁸ As she writes, 'the motivational analysis of the case depends upon your views of the content of rational principles of action, not the reverse.'⁸⁹ And we have seen, in the previous chapter, no reason to suppose that considerations about value, even if not part of an agent's *S*, are irrelevant to practical deliberation.

⁸⁷ Korsgaard 1986 p12

⁸⁸ This is the thesis of Korsgaard (1986).

⁸⁹ Korsgaard 1986 p16

Finally, then, I have shown that Williams is not secure in his position that a theoretical conclusion cannot generate motivation. Since this motivation follows directly from the evaluation, and a motivational history is not necessary to explain why it arises, Williams is also not secure in his position that motivations can only arise because of previous motivations. Since I assume we would accept that motivation arising because of a value judgement is rational, then there is space for the external reason theorist to claim that value judgements can motivate rationally. Thus, there can be external reasons for action which will explain actions performed because of them.

Implications of internalism for practical reason

The internalist position governs part at least of the relation between desire (*S*) and values. It has implications for the status of values in practical reason. To reiterate, finding a value does involve finding a potentially explanatory motivation, and also finds an end of the agent. So values are important to practical reason because of their impact on the motivations of the agent.

Williams also cannot object to values being the sources of reasons if they can explain actions performed because of them after all. As Mele defines what Williams's is denying: 'Justificatory reasoning can non-accidentally generate a motivational belief in *S* without that belief's deriving its motivational force (even in part) from any of *S*'s antecedent motivations.'⁹⁰ We have defended this claim, showing that its falsity is not a secure assumption for Williams to rest an argument on. It is not secure because reasoning about values independently of *S* is relevant to practical reason since some values are independent of *S*, and when such values motivate, the motivation springs from the value judgement and not from *S*. If this picture is justified, we can now claim that finding something valuable and not being moved by it is irrational, *contra* Williams.

⁹⁰ Mele p425

To reiterate, though, we do need the position we have taken on the sources of value to disagree with Williams fully. Internalism about motivation alone achieves only that we can criticise agents as irrational if they do have a value and are unmotivated to further it. So I am being irrational in some way if I do value children highly and am unmotivated, perhaps through something like depression, for example, to further that value. The difference between this position and Williams's is that he would accept this criticism, but only if the agent had actually accepted protection of children (presumably, some specific children) as an end of hers. This would be grounded on something like the thought that if she were not so depressed, she would be so motivated, so the necessary motivation is somewhere in her *S*. He would not accept that, finding children valuable, the agent is irrational not to be motivated because of this. However, it does not take us to a further degree of criticism. It does not hit the Nazi, who doesn't *judge* that it is valuable for him not to kill. To say that he has a reason for having a different end, we need a different claim.

It is worth noting, however, that while we can now claim that values are related to an agent's motivations, this relation is not the simple one that first springs to mind. Values are not simply weighted, so that the thing most highly valued gives rise to the greatest motivation, and gets furthered. Far less is this true in any consistent way over time. That most highly valued now, even if it is indeed furthered now, might still lose out, to the same values it defeats now, at some point in the future. Incommensurability gives us reason to believe this. Values do not impact on practical deliberation in this simple way. Thus we must remember that there is a limit to how much we can claim for an external reason-statement.

Conclusion

Williams is dependent on the thesis that motivation is external to value judgements for his interpretations of the explanation premise that sets up his whole argument against external reasons for action. Yet it is not an obviously true assumption. I have given some reasons for believing it to be false. If it is, the way is open to have external reasons for action even on Williams's terms.

Conclusion

It can be seen now that, having shown that Williams's assumptions are not secure, we have left the way open for a very different picture of practical reason from that of Williams. This is that values are not all of one sort, and, in particular, are not all subjective on an individual basis. I have argued that there is at least some support available for the idea that some values are objective, and some subjective, but on a level that involves more than one person. Further, the thesis that the making of value judgements is necessarily connected with motivation is not obviously false. This is so whether we consider the weaker position that making a value judgement either leads to motivation or the agent concerned is irrational, or the stronger position that making a value judgement always leads to motivation. This is to be contrasted with Williams's externalist position on motivation, and his corresponding view that the explanation of motivations' arising is that they derive from the prior subjective motivational set of the agent, or merely arise (*non-rationally*, which means that they cannot explain the necessarily *rational* link between an external reason-statement and an action) to become part of the agent's motivational set.

Assuming this picture is accepted at least as plausible, we are also in a position to state what an external reason for action is. We have two choices of sorts of values on which to ground one. These are objective values, and intersubjective values, since we have excluded individually subjective values by agreeing with Williams that the only reasons that can be grounded by values which are subjective on an individual basis are internal reasons of the sort he describes. I am going to describe one external reason of each sort. In the process, I will also address four challenges to the externalist about reasons which Williams states explicitly, and show how they can be met on this picture.

The first is in direct response to the Nazi example Williams himself refers to. The Nazi does not judge human life worthwhile *per se*. He judges that only human life of a particular sort is worthwhile. From the position that values are not all

subjective, and holding that the worth of human life in particular is an objective value, it is now meaningful to criticise the Nazi's *ends*, instead of merely the way he goes about satisfying the ends he happens to have. He is wrong about human life, in an important way. He has a reason not to kill. The fact that he is operating within a political community which also judges that the life he is destroying is not worthwhile is irrelevant here, since this value is not intersubjective but objective. The whole community is wrong just as he is. So we are now in a position to respond to Williams's first challenge. This comes when he asks what it is that an external reason-statement means, or is, distinct from many other things we say about agents. He writes that external reason-statements 'are false, or incoherent, or really something else misleadingly expressed.'⁹¹ The reason-statement is not false, because it is based on a value which is objective, and therefore life is still valuable, and so can ground a reason for action even though the agent is currently unmotivated by it. The statement is perfectly coherent, referring to the value of life in a straightforwardly understandable way. It is not something else misleadingly expressed, because the reason-statement can explain action done because of it in a way that is independent of the antecedent subjective motivational set of the Nazi, as I will now explain again.

The reason-statement is external, not only because the Nazi is not currently motivated by it, but because it is not necessarily true that any action done because of it has to derive from the Nazi's antecedent subjective motivational set. It is certainly possible that he can come to be motivated because of compassionate tendencies in his subjective motivational set, but this is not what we are interested in. The crucial claim is that he can come to be motivated, rationally, because reasoning leads him to apprehend the value of human life, and this apprehension gives rise to the motivation necessary to explain his action of ceasing to kill, even if this involves his own death. Even if the internalist about reasons claims that there has to be a motivation in his *S* to explain an action, this is fine. The appropriate motivation can arise in the *S*, so long as it does not arise in some way controlled by antecedent members of *S*. This is the basis of our response to

⁹¹ Williams 1980 p111

Williams's second challenge when he asks: 'What is it the agent comes to believe when he comes to believe he has a reason to phi? If he becomes persuaded of this supposedly external truth, so that the reason does then enter his *S*, what is it that he has come to believe? This question presents a challenge to the externalist theorist.'⁹² What the agent comes to believe is that human life is valuable, regardless of its race or religious beliefs. Coming to believe this involves coming to respond to this value, which involves motivation to protect and not destroy life. What the Nazi does not have to do (although he might do it) is come to believe 'I have a reason not to kill'. He only has to believe 'Human life is valuable'.

I move on now to our second example of an external reason for action. I am going back to my problem of whether to attend an important meeting in the course of my career, or care for my ill daughter. Now, I am supposing that my choice is between missing the meeting and leaving my daughter alone in the house for about two hours. To provide us with an intersubjective value against doing this, let us suppose that there is a law against leaving children under the age of fourteen years alone, and that my daughter is thirteen years old. Society has decreed that constant supervision of all children under this age is necessary, and it is a value that has enough consensus to be built into law. Currently, I am considering disobeying the law, on the grounds that I know my daughter well enough to know that she is not at risk of doing something stupid at home, and she is not ill enough to be at risk from her illness. Nevertheless, I am aware that laws of these kinds are necessary to protect many children younger or more unwell than my daughter, and to allow legal proceedings against parents who truly do neglect their children. Normally, I heartily approve of such laws, and such protection of children. I come to be motivated to obey the law, even though I am irritated, since I know it is unnecessary in this case. Now, this alteration in motivation could be based on my antecedent motivational set. But I claim that it could also be based on my reasoned acceptance of the necessity for such laws, and that such laws are exceptionless. Thus, the motivation arises from my rationally arising belief in the value of such laws in the society in which I live, and

⁹² Williams 1989 p39

my acceptance, which is also rational, that the existence of some irritating situations, where the laws are hampering, is unavoidable.

We can turn, again, to William's challenges. The third is: 'What is the difference supposed to be between saying that the agent has a reason to act more considerately, and saying one of the many other things we can say to people whose behaviour does not accord with what we think it should be?'⁹³ In this case, and in the case of other intersubjective values, we are saying that there is a law or other form of imposed reason for acting in the way the reason-statement prescribes. This is to say a good deal more than that it would be better or nicer if I stayed at home and cared for my daughter. It also allows us, in this case, access to blame and punishment. If I disobeyed the law and my daughter came to harm through this, I would justly be punished.

Fourthly and finally, Williams also asks, 'What is it the agent comes to believe when he comes to believe that there is a reason for him to phi, if it is not the proposition, or something that entails the proposition, that if he deliberated rationally, he would be motivated to act appropriately?'⁹⁴ Here, Williams is right. I come to believe that obeying the law and caring for my daughter under these circumstances is valuable, and this does indeed entail the proposition that if I deliberated rationally I would come to be motivated to stay at home and miss the meeting. But, here, the deliberation I undertake is not deliberation from *S*, so it is not the sort of deliberation which would render the reason-statement a true *internal* reason-statement. It is deliberation about values, which can be theoretical deliberation which is not controlled by *S*, since values are not wholly determined by what I take to be valuable. The reason-statement is a true external reason-statement which I can come to be motivated by.

There are, however, aspects of Williams's opinions about the nature of practical deliberation, and therefore reasons for action, which I remain thoroughly in agreement with, and these are the aspects which spring from my acceptance of the

⁹³ Williams 1989 p40

incommensurability of values. There is one notable way in which an external reason for action could be interpreted which I have not claimed for it. This is a claim about an all-out reason for action. That is, a claim that an agent in particular circumstances has reason to do one and only one thing. This is a judgement that acknowledgement of the incommensurable nature of values makes very difficult to accept. And asserting that some values are objective, and motivation can be generated by value judgements, is not enough to defend such a view. The most plausible case of this sort of all-out reason judgement is the now-familiar Nazi. Presumably, most people will agree that he does in fact have *most* reason not to kill, as well as *a* reason not to kill, and stopping killing is something he should direct all efforts towards until it is achieved. But this assertion must, in terms of this thesis, depend on unanimous agreement of readers. We have no basis to claim this, since the objectivity of the value of not taking life does not tell us that this is one of the most important values. Even if this is true, it is a significant further claim. Nor does the claim that motivation will be involved in the acceptance of the value of life entail that the Nazi will be *most* motivated to stop killing, rather than do one of the many other things he judges to be valuable. We noted in the chapter on values and motivation that there is not a simple link between evaluations and action, since motivations don't seem to weigh against and cancel each other in any simple way, and this is where understanding of this problem is important.

What this means is that practical deliberation does indeed show a lot of the indeterminacy argued for by Williams and Wiggins. Although values are *not* decided on a person by person basis, they are certainly not discovered and ordered easily. Because of incommensurability, the nature of an external reason is constrained. I have certainly not shown that an all-out external reason is not possible. There may be arguments to show that some values should outweigh others, and perhaps that motivations should rationally follow such weightings, but I hope I have shown that producing one involves a great deal of difficult further work. This means that when Williams claims that thinking that moral reasons will

⁹⁴ Williams 1980 p109

provide leverage on the Nazi if we claim that they are reasons for action rather than something else 'is only a fantasy of *ressentiment*, a magical project to make a wish and its words into a coercive power', he is absolutely right. That is, he is right if he means that we cannot claim that the Nazi has all-out reason, independently of his motivational set, to cease killing. I have said nothing that would knock this down.

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