The Externalist Challenge 2

PHIL2315 Value Theory
Dan Marshall
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Admin

Required reading for this seminar: Smith, Ch 3

Reading on water and H2O:
Braddon and Jackson, ‘The Theory of Reference’ (see course website)

Tutorials: 3.30pm, 6.30pm Wednesday 27 Feb

Required reading for next seminar: Smith, Ch 4, Sections 4.1-4.6

Essay 1 due: Thursday 14 March 5pm (Hand in to Philosophy Office or email me at danm@hku.hk)
The moral problem (modified)

1. Moral judgements of the form ‘It is right to φ’ express a subject’s beliefs about an objective matter of fact, a fact about what it is right for her to do [from the objectivity of moral judgement]

2. If someone judges that it is right that she φs then, given she is rational, she is motivated to φ [from the practicality of moral judgement]

3. An agent is motivated to act in a certain way just in case she has an appropriate desire and a means-end belief, where belief and desire are distinct existences [from the Humean theory of pyschology]

4. For any rational person x, provided x’s beliefs stay the same, x’s basic desires can be replaced by any other set of basic desires, and x will remain rational [from the Humean theory of pyschology]
Versions of Internalism (cont)

Rationalism: If it is right for an agent to $\phi$ in C, then there is a reason for her to $\phi$ in C

Practical Internalism (=2): If an agent judges that it is right for her to $\phi$ in C, then, given she is rational, she is motivated to $\phi$ in C

Terminology: Smith calls practical internalism `the practicality requirement on moral judgement'
Conceptual versions of Internalism

Conceptual Rationalism: It is conceptually necessary that [If it is right for agents to \( \phi \) in C, then there is a reason for those agents to \( \phi \) in C]

Conceptual Practical Internalism: It is conceptually necessary that [If an agent judges that it is right for her to \( \phi \) in C, then either she is motivated to \( \phi \) in C or she is irrational]

Def: It is conceptually necessary that \( p \) iff it is possible to know that \( p \) purely on the basis of reasoning

Smith endorses both conceptual rationalism and conceptual practical internalism
Smith’s argument that conceptual rationalism entails conceptual practical internalism (my interpretation)

Smith’s argument (p. 62) relies on cognitivism and the following assumptions:

(R-M) It is conceptually necessary that if an agent has a reason to φ in C then X would be motivated to φ in C if she were rational.

(R) If an agent is rational, then
i) She is motivated to φ iff she believes that she is motivated to φ
ii) She believes that she is rational
iii) She believes every conceptually necessary truths, and she believes everything that is conceptually entailed by her beliefs.
Smith’s argument (made clearer from last week)

Suppose that X is rational and that X judges that it is right for her to φ in C.

It follows from cognitivism that
(o) X believes that it is right for her φ in C.

It follows from (o), conceptual rationalism and (R) that
i) X believes that she has a reason to φ in C

It follows from (i), (R-M) and (R) that
ii) X believes that (she would be motivated to φ if she were rational)
Smith’s argument (cont)

Suppose (for the sake of deriving a contradiction) that X is not motivated to \( \phi \) in C.

Then it follows from (R) that

iii) X believes that she is not motivated to \( \phi \) in C

It follows from (ii-iii) and (R) that

iv) X believes that she is not rational

It follows from (iv) and (R) that she is not rational. Since this contradicts the assumption that X is rational, it follows that X is motivated to \( \phi \) in C.
Smith’s argument (cont)

Conclusion 1 (=practical internalism):
If an agent judges it right to $\phi$ in C, then, given she is rational, she is motivated to $\phi$ in C

Given the above argument is conceptually valid (and it’s assumptions are conceptually necessary), we also have

Conclusion 2 (=conceptual practical internalism):
It is conceptually necessary that [If an agent judges it right to $\phi$ in C, then, given she is rational, she is motivated to $\phi$ in C]

Exercise: Read through Smith’s argument. We will discuss it in this week’s tutorials.
Brink’s argument against practical internalism

Practical internalism is false because it is possible for someone who is rational to judge that it is right to $\phi$ without being motivated to $\phi$

An actual example: The thrill killer Robert Harris (For a powerful description, see Watson, ‘Responsibility and the limits of evil’, pp. 268-274 (see course website))

Harris claimed that he knew what he was doing was wrong and that he simply chose to do it anyway without feeling any conflict (and so without weakness of will etc)
The practical internalist response

- Harris does not have moral concepts
- When Harris utters ‘Killing is wrong’, he is not expressing the moral judgement we would make if we uttered ‘Killing is wrong’
- Therefore, Harris is not a counterexample to practical internalism
Analogy with colour

Suppose blind Jane is blind from birth, but has a reliable method of applying colour terms to things (say by feeling certain tactile sensations via a machine)

Claim 1: While blind Jane is able to apply colour terms reliably, she does not have colour concepts, and hence can’t make colour judgements

Claim 2: The case of Harris is similar. While Harris might apply moral terms reliably, he does not have moral concepts (since he lacks the appropriate motivations). Hence he does not make moral judgements.
Objection to the practical internalist response

• The analogy with colour is unconvincing
• While it is plausible that someone can’t have colour concepts without having certain colour experiences, it is not obvious why one can’t have moral concepts without having certain motivations

Note: Later, Smith will propose an analysis of moral concepts which, if correct, provides a reason to think that rational people can’t have moral concepts without having the appropriate motivations.
Smith’s argument for practical internalism

Smith’s claim: Practical internalists can explain (F), while practical externalists cannot explain (F). Hence practical internalism is true.

(F) If x is a good and rational (strong willed etc) person at time t, then a change in moral judgement in x just after t is typically accompanied by a change in moral motivation in x.
Smith’s practical internalist explanation of (F)

(F) is easy to explain given practical internalism since (F) is entailed by practical internalism and (RP).

(RP) If x is rational at time t, then x will typically remain rational just after t
Attempt 1 at an externalist explanation of (F) (My reconstrual of Smith p73-74)

An externalist might try to explain (F) by endorsing (G-M1).

(G-M1) x is good person at t iff, for any p, if x judges at t that it is right for her to p then she is motivated at t to p

Problem: (G-M1) doesn’t explain (F) since, given (G-M1) and practical externalism, there is no reason to think that x will typically remain good after t (when she has a change in her moral judgement)
Attempt 2 at an externalist explanation of (F) (Smith pp. 74-76)

An externalist might try to explain (F) by endorsing (G-M2).

(G-M2) x is a good person iff x is motivated to make it the case that (for any p, x does p iff p is right)

(F) Is entailed by (G-M2) together with (MP) and (RP), given people have no other basic “moral” motivations (and given plausible assumptions about rationality).

(MP) People typically keep their (basic) motivations (at least over short periods of time)

(RP) If x is rational at time t, then x will typically remain rational just after t

Therefore: if (G-M2) is true, it can be used to explain (F).
Smith’s objection to (G-M2)

“[C]ommonsense tells us that if good people judge it right to be honest, or right to care for their children and friends and fellows, or right for people to get what they deserve, then they care non-derivatively about these things. Good people care non-derivatively about honesty, the weal and woe of their children and friends, the well-being of their fellows, people getting what they deserve, justice, equality, and the like, not just one thing: doing what they believe to be right” [p. 75]
Smith’s objection to (G-M2) (cont)

“Indeed, commonsense tells us that being so motivated is a fetish or moral vice, not the one and only one moral virtue.” [p. 75]

Hence, (G-M2) is false: someone whose basic motivation is to do what is right is not a good person.
What explains practical internalism?

As noted on slide 15, we can explain (F) by appealing to the truth of practical internalism. But what explains the truth of practical internalism?

The truth of practical internalism can be explained given the following two analyses (and given cognitivism and (R)):

Analysis 1: ‘It is right for X to φ in C’ means ‘There is a reason for X to φ in C’

Analysis 2: ‘There is a reason for X to φ in C’ means ‘X would be motivated to φ in C were X rational’
What explains practical internalism? (cont)

The explanation:

Analyses 1 and 2 entail rationalism and (R-M) respectively.

As argued on slides 6-9, practical internalism follows from cognitivism, rationalism, (R-M) and (R).

Hence, analyses 1 and 2, cognitivism and (R) entail practical internalism, and hence explain why it is true.
Foot’s argument against rationalism

F1) Whether it is right for X to $\phi$ in C does not (typically) depend on what X’s desires are in C

F2) Whether X has a reason to $\phi$ in C (always) depends on what X’s desires are in C (since what it is rational for X to do always depends on what X’s desires are)

FC) Rationalism is false
Smith’s response

Smith rejects F2

He argues for the rejection of F2 in chapter 5
Conclusions

• Smith wants to defend both conceptual practical internalism and conceptual rationalism
• According to Smith, Brink’s argument against practical internalism leads to a deadlock
• According to Smith, there is a further argument in favour of practical externalism, which shows that practical externalism is true
• According to Smith, Foot’s argument against rationalism fails