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Motivation Patterns in our Moral Reasoning

Robert Adams (1976) has proposed that the role of action according to the standard consequentialist picture should be instead played by motivation patterns. The fundamentality and internality of motives support this reasoning. In this paper, I argue that although motivation patterns are unfit to play the role of actions on the consequentialist picture, they are still useful in moral deliberation. Motivation patterns are unfit to replace action because motivation patterns are only arbitrarily individuated. The effect of which is that the resulting motive utilitarianism is either trivial or indistinguishable from act utilitarianism. However, motivation patterns are a useful resource in specifying essential properties of agents as subjects of ought-claims. There are at least two different ways to make use of motivation patterns accordingly. I rely on a counterpart theoretic analysis of possibility in making the case for the usefulness of motivation patterns but I do not take that analysis to be required. Counterpart theory is only used as a tool in this discussion, even though I do not make an effort to show how other analyses might suffice to do the same.

What Motivation Patterns cannot do for Consequentialism

Consider a motivation pattern, $\mathbf{m_1}$, a time-ordered set of motives, engaged by some agent $\mathbf{P}$. $\mathbf{m_1}$ is purportedly more fundamental than the individual actions carried out by $\mathbf{P}$ over the duration of $\mathbf{m_1}$ because those actions somehow depend on $\mathbf{P}$'s having a certain pattern of motivation, viz. $\mathbf{m_1}$, at that time. For some circumstance, $\mathbf{C}$, and some motivation pattern, $\mathbf{m_1}$, we can say that some time-ordered series of actions, $\mathbf{A_1} \rightarrow \{a:1_1, a:1_2, ..., a:1_n\}$[1], is produced by $\mathbf{C}$ and $\mathbf{m_1}$, viz. $F(\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{C}, \mathbf{m_1}) \rightarrow \mathbf{A_1}$. Also, and I will point out that the following is germane to the thesis of this paper, the individual members of $\mathbf{A_1}$ are themselves produced by one another and under the parameters $\mathbf{C}$ and $\mathbf{m_1}$ such that $G(\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{C}, \mathbf{m_1}, a:1_1) \rightarrow a:1_2$, $G(\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{C}, \mathbf{m_1}, a:1_2) \rightarrow a:1_3$, ..., $G(\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{C}, \mathbf{m_1}, a:1_{n-1}) \rightarrow a:1_n$. Adams' thinking, or so I speculate, is that motivation patterns are more fundamental than actions because they feature as a parameter in both action producing functions above, F and G. Since motivation patterns are also internal to agents, as compared to circumstance of which is definitively external, they are eligible for playing the role that action plays in most moral thinking.

But how are patterns of motivation individuated from one another? A problem emerges on the picture above when we try to answer these questions. Let $\mathbf{m_2}$ and $\mathbf{m_3}$ be patterns of motivation engaged by $\mathbf{A}$ following $\mathbf{m_1}$. Thinking of motivation patterns as more fundamental than actions: an agent having $\mathbf{m_2}$ is fundamentally a function of $\mathbf{m_1}$, such that $H(\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{C}, \mathbf{m_1}) \rightarrow \mathbf{m_2}$ and $H(\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{C}, \mathbf{m_2}) \rightarrow \mathbf{m_3}$. But as long as $\mathbf{m_2}$ immediately follows from $\mathbf{m_1}$ and both are time-ordered, then $\mathbf{m_2}$ is a continuation of $\mathbf{m_1}$, such that $\{\mathbf{m1 \cup m2}\}$ is itself a well-ordered set of motivations, meaning it is also a pattern of motivation. But we also know that any pattern of motivation is a function of any immediately preceding motivation pattern, thus it follows that $H(\mathbf{P}, \mathbf{C}, \{\mathbf{m1 \cup m2}\}) \rightarrow \mathbf{m3}$.[2] What is the point in observing this property of motivation

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[1] I apologize for the formatting here. I used 'a:1' because I can't write a superscript and a subscript at the same time in word, or at least I don't know how.

[2] One complaint that might be raised here is that $\{\mathbf{m1 \cup m2}\}$ is ineligible to be a shared parameter with $\mathbf{C}$ because circumstances have duration too and, in this case, the duration of $\mathbf{C}$ is shorter than $\{\mathbf{m1 \cup m2}\}$. Which times of $\mathbf{C}$ do the relevant actions occur? I don't think this objection works for several reasons, the most of which is that fails to address the argument I give against motivational consequentialism below.

More briefly, however, that a motivation pattern in an agent is a function of the immediately preceding motivation pattern in the same agent should indicate that the circumstances must be immediately preceding as well. Finally, this response to the relevant complaint could itself be subject to scrutiny in the case that all the effects of a motivation pattern are covaried with circumstances such that $H(\{\mathbf{C \cup D}\}, \{\mathbf{m1 \cup m2}\}) \neq H(\{\mathbf{C \cup E}\}, \{\mathbf{m1 \cup m2}\})$.

patterns? What we observe is a lack of ground for individuating motivation patterns if motivation patterns are what fundamentally produce other motivation patterns in an agent. We are unable to individuate motivation patterns as a function of which other motivations patterns they produce over circumstance because that relation is indeterminate. We are also unable to individuate motivation patterns as a function of which actions they produce covaried with circumstance because there is no restriction on the granularity of motivation patterns; we could divvy up the motivation patterns of a whole agent's life as fine as the set of the agent's actions. But then what are motivation patterns above actions? The mistake in unrestricting the range of motivation patterns can be demonstrated as such. Let $\mathbf{M}$ be the union of every motivation pattern engaged by $\mathbf{P}$ over the duration of $\mathbf{P}$'s agency. We get the following: $I(\mathbf{C}, \mathbf{M}, \mathbf{m}_1) \rightarrow \mathbf{m}_2, I(\mathbf{C}, \mathbf{M}, \mathbf{m}_2) \rightarrow \mathbf{m}_3, \ldots, I(\mathbf{C}, \mathbf{M}, \mathbf{m}_{n-1}) \rightarrow \mathbf{m}_n$. This relation should look familiar; it maps onto the action-to-action relation described above.[3]

The problem for Adams' motive utilitarianism can be stated like this: if motivation patterns are what chiefly produce subsequent motivation patterns, then what establishes their individual durations? Either each agent is engaged in one lifelong motivation pattern and motive utilitarianism is trivial – it only tells us that the type of person that produces the most utility does so. Or each agent is engaged in as many motivation patterns as actions and at the same intervals as those actions, in which case there is no substantive diction between motive utilitarianism or act utilitarianism. Where act utilitarianism tells us one ought to have done this-or-that, motive utilitarianism tells us one ought to have such-and-such motivation just to be able to perform this-or-that act uniquely for each action.

I can imagine a couple of ways to attempt to rescue motive utilitarianism. For example, motivation patterns are non-arbitrarily individuated by coming to have special psychological properties. Say, entering a conscious state from a restful state marks a new motivation pattern, or any time an agent is allowed deliberate, thoughtful consideration they end engaging in one motivation pattern and being engaging another. Another idea might be to privilege just certain actions performed in a rational state as setting in motion a motivation pattern until the next such action could be performed. Accordingly, some actions are as fundamental as motivations, but most are not. There are certainly other avenues for defending motive utilitarianism, but I am not creative enough to consider them here. Instead, I encourage that potential rescues are only adopted in coherence with the criticism of motive utilitarianism above and not as a means to defend against that criticism. In the next section I propose that Adams' motives, while unfit to replace action in our moral language, prove to be a useful tool for expressing moral truths.

What Motivation Patterns can do for Consequentialism

The story I would like to tell is that Adams had the right idea but came to the wrong conclusion. The wrong conclusion: motives ought to do the work of actions on the consequentialist picture. The right idea: motives are distinct from, and more fundamental than, actions and, importantly, the fundamentality of motives is interesting and useful. Motives can still be used to address Adams' concern that Jack is unable to at once enjoy his visit to the cathedral while remaining mindful of the time. Motives can do this by helping to establish context-dependent references to agents like Jack, whom are essentially engaged in one-or-another patterns of motivation. When referring to Jack in certain contexts, the range of actions he

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However, I think pressing the interrelation of motivation, action, and circumstance so forcefully makes salient the greater objection I propose, that motivation utilitarianism invokes determinism inappropriately.

[3] I have not included $\mathbf{P}$ (it uses $\mathbf{M}$ instead) as a parameter of the motivation pattern producing function I and this omission admittedly raises questions about my claim that I and H can be mapped. My point does not rely on the functions being isomorphic, nor on $\mathbf{M}$ being constitutive of or identical to $\mathbf{P}$. Rather my point simply relies on the cardinality of motivation patterns in $\mathbf{M}$ being no less granular than the complete set of actions performed over $\mathbf{M}$ and that there is some granularity of motivation patterns that map on to those actions. Thus, we observe the poor prospects of motivation patterns playing some bigger picture role in producing moral consequences.

could have performed are logically constrained to those produced by any one of the motivation patterns in the context specified set of such patterns. The advantage of the consequentialist interring motivation patterns this way is that she has acquired another means of countenancing the obstructiveness of causality in moral deliberation.

To motivate and set the stage for the proposed, alternative treatment of motivation patterns, let us examine a potential difficulty for the consequentialist regarding 'ought-implies-can', which I take to be a requirement of any adequate moral theory. Suppose Jack did not donate to charity but he ought to have donated to charity. We assume that if it is true that Jack *ought* to have donated, then Jack *could* have donated. Using possible world semantics to analyze this embedded modal feature of moral theories, i.e. that ought-implies-can, we might say that just insofar as Jack *could* have donated there is a possible world wherein an individual sufficiently similar to Jack *does* donate. What counts as 'sufficiently similar' is context dependent and flexible, and we should ask whether the similarity relation in question ranges over pertinent moral properties. Jack *qua* married-to-Jill, for example, eliminates few possibilities regarding the actions Jack could perform. Jack could not marry Jill *for the first time* essentially, but there is no reason to eliminate the possibility that Jack remedies poverty on a global scale. That Jack ought to have implemented a global scale solution to poverty when we expected he only need to have made a modest donation is a difficulty for the consequentialist.

This difficulty is treated by adopting similarity relations analytic to all ought-claims. To see how, notice that trying to draw up a boundary around which possible actions are legitimately considered using only the resources of agents, actions, and morally relevant facts is unsatisfactorily circular. Jack *qua* only-able-to-perform-*such-and-such*-acts, and Jack *qua* always-acting-perfectly-morally are question begging and uninformative. If consequentialism is to be successful, the counterpart relation must include only amoral properties. So, relying on the counterpart relation to preclude the possibility of Jack's performing certain actions *tout court* is out. Other, admissible counterpart relations might be analytic to all ought claims however. Jack *qua* constrained-by-actual-physical-laws is an example of one such counterpart relation. That Jack ought to have conjured gold from mere æther is not true because Jack could not have simply conjured gold in any world where all and only actual physical laws obtain. Sharing the same beliefs is another similarity relation analytic to ought-claims. Consider, I have a possible counterpart according to *some* similarity relation that accomplishes world peace in the time and place that I manage to overcook my pasta. However, I do not believe myself at all capable of doing what he did, much less have the prerequisite knowledge; I could not have done what this particular counterpart has done. When asking 'what ought I have done?', the counterpart relation quantified over should be a subset of the extension *qua* has-*such-and-such*-relevant-beliefs.[4]

Allowing the that two similarity relations above are analytic to ought claims the difficulty facing consequentialism, that logical possibility extends far beyond what is called for to determine right action, is plausibly satisfied. So, what use is left for motivation patterns? There are two different accounts of motivation patterns being useful. It could be that motivation patterns are analytic to ought claims or that they are not analytic but useful. Assuming motivation patterns are analytic, each eligible subject of an ought-claim is analyzed **P** *qua* having-*such-and-such*-motivation-patterns-at-*such-and-such*-times. The underlying premise of this analysis is that some actions could not have been performed by **P** because of limitations on how motivation patters are covaried between on another in an agent with genuine personal identity, genuine relevant beliefs, and whom is bound to actual nomology. To buy into this account of motivation patterns, I think one of the rescues discussed at the end of the last section would be required to partition an agent's life into motivation pattern sized chunks with something like moments of clear-headedness serving as dividers to those chunks. As I mentioned last section, these rescues could be used to defend Adams' take on motivation patterns. However, I do not see why the fundamentality of motivation

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[4] Likely having sufficient abilities to perform an action is another similarity relation analytic to ought-claims.

patterns makes for a genuine claim to their playing the role standardly played by acts. Beliefs, abilities, and knowledge are likewise internal and more fundamental than action but they do not strike us as adequate to replace action. On the other hand, and to abuse an old saying, 'actions speak for themselves.'

Even if we deny that motivation patterns are analytic to ought claims, they can still be useful in our moral deliberation. On this account, the logical limits of our moral failings are not further developed, but context specific limits are established instead. So, it is only true if Jack ought to have paid attention to the time – while thinking of Jack as someone engaged in certain motivation patterns at certain times – if Jack could have. This account has the added benefit that there is no need to rely on potentially artificial motivation pattern partitions. Any motivation pattern can be used as a similarity relation. The obvious downside to this account of motivation patterns is that the afforded defense of our moral integrity is as shallow as context. How productive is it to talk about what Jack ought to have done by attributing more essential properties to him than what is strictly required by ought-claims? Quite productive, I expect. There are contexts in which we are not concerned with whether one absolutely ought to have behaved in some way, rather we are concerned with whether she ought to have given certain essential properties internal to the agent. Moral deliberation conducted within legal or social paradigms are ready examples. Jack being prone to fits of rage could not have helped but say something he didn't mean, or Jack preoccupied with cathedral art could not have noticed his wandering into an off-limits area, etc. There is a salient moral component to these discussions that does not reach the full extent of absolute moral assessment. I think the idea is best ascertained by pointing out how familiar we all are of sentences of the form, ⌐ Yes, she should not have ... but ... ⌐. Perhaps the top-level abstraction of this account of motivation patterns are contexts wherein one attempts to argue sympathy for wrongdoing given how easily we fall into immoral behavior owing to the human condition.

Works Cited

Adams, R. 'On Motives and Morals' *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 73, No. 14, Aug. 12, 1976, pp.467-481