

Internalism about reasons: If there is a reason for A to phi, then A has some motive which will be served by phi-ing.

Externalism about reasons: If there is a reason for A to phi, then this reason will persist even when A has no motive which will be served by phi-ing.

Internalism: Gin vs Petrol

Interpretation 1: The sub-Humean Model

A has a reason to phi iff A has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his phi-ing
OR A has a reason to phi iff A has some desire, the satisfaction of which A *believes* will be served by his phi-ing.

Though Williams finds the sub-Humean model too simple, he does think that it can be supplemented by 'four propositions' which will make it more adequate.

Proposition 1: An internal reason statement is falsified by the absence of some appropriate element from S (where S is the agent's *subjective motivational set*).¹

Proposition 2: A member of S, D, will not give A a reason for phi-ing if either the existence of D is dependent on a false belief, or A's belief in the relevance of phi-ing to the satisfaction of D is false.

Proposition 3: (a) A may falsely believe an internal reason statement about themselves, and (b) A may not know some true internal reason statement about himself.

Proposition 4: Internal reason statements can be discovered in deliberative reasoning.

Externalism: Owen Wingrave

As a point of clarification, Williams is clear that being an externalist about reasons does not commit one to viewing these reasons as identical or equivalent to categorical imperatives. Williams does not intend for an external reason to just be an ought claim. So, then, what might an external reason mean?

The first issue in unpacking this meaning is that it is unclear how an external reason would figure in an explanation of an agent's intentional actions. Owen's S has no member which corresponds to joining the army. If his family is right, and he does have an (external) reason, then this has to at some point enter into Owen's psychology. Williams, thus, concludes that the way in which an external reason could link with an agent's psychology is through *belief*.

¹ On page 105, Williams elaborates on what can be in S beyond desires: S can contain such things as dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects, as they may be abstractly called, embodying commitments of the agent. Note that *needs* are not included here and his discussion of needs on pages 105 and 106 explains why.

Psychological Link: A's believing an external reason statement about himself may help to explain his action.

Does merely believing that particular consideration is a reason to act in a particular way constitute a *motivation* (i.e. something in S) to act? If it does, then this seems like there is nothing much to an external reason. Williams thinks this is too fast. What is distinctive of the external reason is that by *coming to believe* an external reason statement one gains an internal reason. This is substantive (and quite queer according to Mackie). Can this substantive claim be made sense of? Williams thinks not:

“...there is no motivation for the agent to deliberate from, to reach this new motivation. Given the agent's earlier existing motivations, and this new motivation, what has to hold for external reason statements to be true, on this line of interpretation, 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. I see no reason to suppose that these conditions could possibly be met.” (pg 109)

In response, the external reasons theorist might claim that Owen has some general disposition in his S to do what he believes there is reason for him to do. So, when he comes to believe that his family is right, this belief + the general disposition give rise to a specific motivation: join the army. This is not a satisfactory reply for Williams, as this does not explain what the content of Owen's belief is. How can a belief in a proposition result in a motivation to act on that belief? This move links belief and desire-creation without explaining how that link is formed.

Another response could be that Williams has vaguely defined the deliberative process in such a way that there is no way for an externalist to answer the question. Williams sees his vague characterization of rational deliberation as a feature, and not a bug. Practical reasoning is not perfect, and there are various ways to flesh it out. The key insight, however, is that this vagueness is not a problem for the internalist.

This is not to say that making externalist claims about a selfish agent is not sensible. The problem is when the weight of such claims is taken to entail that the agent being criticized is irrational. The Wingraves were not intending to criticize Owen's rationality; they were doing something else entirely. The externalist about reasons, however, must deny that. As such, Williams concludes that external reason statements are either false, incoherent, or something being misleadingly expressed. To close, Williams raises a number of related questions which bear on the subject of public goods and free riders.

1. Can we define notions of rationality which are not purely egoistic? Yes.
2. Can we define notions of rationality which are not purely means-end? Yes.
3. Can we define a notion of rationality where the action rational for A is in no way relative to A's existing motivations? No.
4. Can we show that a person who only has egoistic motivations is irrational in not pursuing non-egoistic ends? Not necessarily, though we may be able to in special cases. (The trouble with the egoistic person is not characteristically irrationality.)

For the remaining questions, let there be some good, G, and a set of persons, P, such that each member of P has egoistic reason to want G provided, but delivering G requires action C, which involves costs, by each of some proper subset of P; and let A be a member of P.

5. Has A egoistic reason to do C if he is reasonably sure either that too few members of P will do C for G to be provided, or that enough other members of P will do C, so that G will be provided ? No.
6. Are there any circumstances of this kind in which A can have egoistic reason to do C? Yes, in those cases in which reaching the critical number of those doing C is sensitive to his doing C, or he has reason to think this.
7. Are there any motivations which would make it rational for A to do C, even though not in the situation just referred to ? Yes, if he is not purely egoistic: many. For instance, there are expressive motivations - appropriate e.g. in the celebrated voting case.³ There are also motivations which derive from the sense of fairness. This can precisely transcend the dilemma of 'either useless or unnecessary', by the form of argument 'somebody, but no reason to omit any particular body, so everybody'.
8. It is irrational for an agent to have such motivations? In any sense in which the question is intelligible, no.
9. Is it rational for society to bring people up with these sorts of motivations? Insofar as the question is intelligible, yes. And certainly we have reason to encourage people to have these dispositions - e.g. in virtue of possessing them ourselves.