Rock-Bottom Reasons

Cathrine V. Felix

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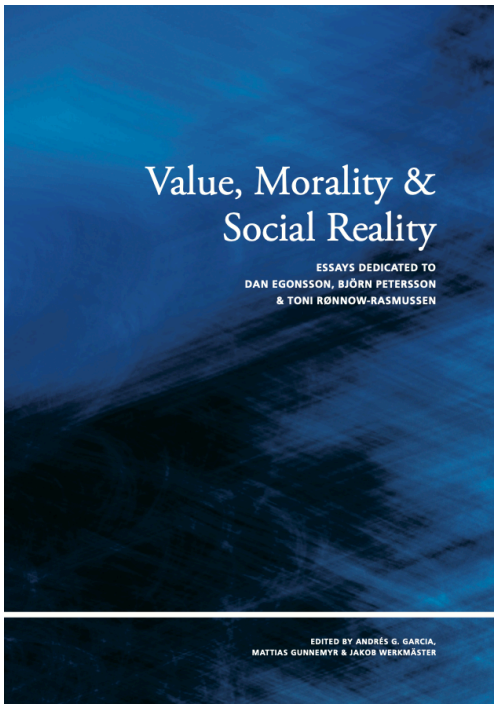

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Since morals… have an influence on the actions and affections, it follows, that they cannot be derived from reason; and that because reason alone, as we have already proved, can never have any such influence. Morals excite passions, and produce or prevent actions. Reason of itself is utterly impotent in this particular.

– David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*

The only rationality of action is the rationality of internal reasons.

– Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"

Abstract. Bernard Williams inspired the debate about reasons for action. He argues that the only genuine reasons for action are internal. I criticize his account and argue for external, *rock-bottom reasons*. Rock-bottom reasons are not psychological states of the agent but responses to the external world and, indeed, the fundamental reasons for action. They are *motivating* reasons in that they motivate action, and they are *explanatory* reasons in that they explain why action occurred. What they are not are *moral* reasons: they do not involve psychological states, including values and the like. Seeing things this way allows for the common-sense view that agents' behavior can be understood without reference to psychology. My view is that human beings are fact-responsive creatures.

Introduction

Bernard Williams' (1981) views on explanatory reasons for action have not received as much attention as his views on normative reasons from the same paper. This is so even though Williams (1999: 102) himself states that the explanatory dimension is very important.[1]

I wish to take the explanatory dimension deeply into account. The multiple dimensions of Williams' views on reasons are thoroughly intertwined even as it is not always clear how they relate. Williams' conclusion *is* clear: the very idea of external reasons for action is empty. An agent cannot have reasons to act that are independent from every aspect of the agent's psychological states (the agent's *subjective motivational set,* dubbed *S*; Williams, 1999: 102)). Without motive, one cannot explain action. In consequence, for a reason to explain action, it must be internal. Thus, Bernard Williams is a skeptic about external reasons.[2]

Williams begins by pointing out that there are two contrasting statements that can be made of an agent's reasons for action:

1. *A* has reason to Φ, and
2. There is a reason for *A* to Φ.

The first statement establishes an essential connection between reasons and motivation; as such it relates to the agent's psychology, and so falls under the heading 'internalist' – in accordance with the Humean claim that only desires can motivate. The statement can be falsified by *A*'s lack of "motive which will be served or furthered by his Φ-ing…There is a condition relating to the agent's aims, and if this is not satisfied it is not true to say, on this interpretation, that he has a reason to Φ" (Williams: 1999: 101).

The second statement establishes no such connection between reasons and motivation. Williams calls it 'externalist'.[3] So, on the one hand, there may be

[1] Williams does not distinguish between normative and explanatory reasons: "some writers make a distinction between «normative» and «explanatory» reasons, but this does not seem to me to be helpful, because normative and explanatory considerations are closely involved with one another" (Williams, 2001).

[2] Sobel (2001: 218) writes: "Williams' claim that reasons must be interrelated with explanation in a particular way… does not support internalism as he supposes". Sobel shifts focus from the externalist-internalist distinction to that between objectivism and subjectivism. "The interesting question is… not whether to embrace internalism or externalism, but whether to embrace objectivism or subjectivism – a debate that may boil down to a dispute about the powers of practical reason to bring about consensus in the motivations of people who start out with radically different motivations" (234-5). Although I find Sobel's approach intriguing, my focus is on the internalist-externalist distinction put forth by Williams.

[3] Williams does not claim that there are two kinds of reasons: "I shall… for convenience refer sometimes to 'internal reasons' and 'external reasons', as I do in the title, but this is to be taken only as a convenience" (Williams, 1999: 101).

internal reasons for action (Statement 1): reasons substantially connected to *S*. On the other, there may be external reasons not related to *S* (Statement 2). Williams (1999: 111) writes that "the only real claims about reasons for action will be internal claims": i.e., externalist claims are false.

Motivation

The Humean idea inspiring Williams, that people are fundamentally driven by inner states, is widespread and considered by many to reflect common sense.[4] On the internalist view, reasons for action are determined by states of mind. Donald Davidson writes (2001: 3-4): "whenever someone does something for a reason, therefore, he can be characterized as a) having some sort of pro attitude towards actions of a certain kind, and b) believing…that his action is of that kind".[5]

Every reason for acting must include a desire and a belief[6] : whenever an agent performs an action, part of her reason must be that she wants to achieve some result and another part must be her belief that performing the action will achieve the desired result. Say that I have a desire to catch your attention and believe that waving is a way of achieving that result; I further believe that *this* is an act of waving. I need the belief to guide my action and achieve my goal. Crucially, the belief merely guides action and cannot, on the internalist view, motivate action. Williams starts off from this view, but he makes some adjustments.[7]

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[4] Millgram (1996: 197) neatly expresses the popularity of this view: "experience shows that the internalist take on reasons can appear enormously compelling to a very wide range of the philosophical community, from freshmen in their first ethics class to seasoned professionals in their most tough minded moods".

[5] The term "pro-attitude" was introduced to serve as a broader term than "desire" in the sense used by Hobbes, who treated all motives as desires. It was coined by Nowell-Smith (1954: 112) and adopted by Davidson among others. (Nowell-Smith also writes of *con-attitudes*.) For Davidson (2001), a pro attitude consists of "desires, wantings, urges, promptings, and a great variety of moral views, aesthetic principles, economic prejudices, social conventions, and public and private goals and values in so far as these can be interpreted as attitudes of an agent directed towards actions of a certain kind." See also Petersson (2000).

[6] It is widely recognized that Davidson (2001) resurrected the belief-desire view for contemporary analytic philosophy. Its historical source is normally taken to be Hume, so it is sometimes called the *Humean story* (Smith, 1998). It is also referred to as the *desire/belief-thesis* (Bittner, 2001), the *Standard View* (Dretske, Stoecker & Sandis, the *Standard Model* and *Standard Story* (Hornsby, 2003). and the *Received View* (Stoutland, 2007). The most common label until recently was the *Belief Desire Model* (Petersson, 2000). Bratman's version is sometimes referred to as the BDI Model for belief-desire-intention. Bittner (2001: 29) traces the idea of "desire providing the impulse and reason guiding it" far beyond Hume all the way back to Socrates' speech in Plato's *Phaedrus* (246a6-7).

[7] Ingmar Persson (1997) has argued it's doubtful that Hume himself was a Humean in the modern sense. Thanks to Björn Petersson for this information.

Williams' on Internalist Reasons

Williams (1999: 101) offers a simplified version of the Humean view: "*A* has a reason to Φ iff *A* has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his Φ-ing", which he calls the *sub-Humean model*. A large part of Williams' subsequent discussion amounts to a refinement of the sub-Humean model to make it easier to set up against the externalist account.

Williams (1999: 102) emphasizes that "basically, and by definition, any model for the internal interpretation must display a relativity of the reason statement to the agent's *subjective motivational set*" (emphasis original). Still, he says that even though the agent's subjective motivational set is discussed "primarily in terms of desire" (105), this is only intended in a formal philosophical sense. According to Williams (102), for something to be an internal reason, the action in question must be suitably related to an element in *S,* whose members are *not* restricted to desires[8]: "*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" (105).

Williams (1999) offers two main arguments against externalism: one concerning explanations of actions, and one based on the role of practical reasoning in action.

1. "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" (102).

2. "…No external reason statement could *by itself* offer an explanation of anyone's action… The whole point of external reason statements is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations. But nothing can explain an agent's (intentional) actions except something that motivates him so to act" (106-107).

To explain what it takes for something to be an external reason for action, Williams offers the example of an agent who has no interest whatsoever in obtaining what she wants/needs. He reasons that if there really is some such person, then she also "has no reason to pursue these things" (Williams, 1999: 105). If she needs life-saving medicine to survive yet refuses to take it, and one continues thinking that she has a reason to take the medicine, then one cannot mean reason for action in an internal sense (the agent is fully unmotivated), so reason in this case must be *external* reason

[8] Contrary to what one might suppose, a desire need not have any connection to strong emotions; what is meant by "desire" is simply that which an agent has whenever motivated to act. Consider the story (Reuters, 2007) that went viral in 2007 of the Buddhist monk in Thailand who hacked off his penis with a machete because he had an erection during meditation. He refused to allow the doctors to sew it back on because he wanted to avoid such distractions in the future. It can be argued that, for the ascetic, it can be rational – given her motivations – to deny herself something that arouses in her powerful feelings.

for action. Williams reasons that it is an assumed part of everyday communication that "people… say things that ask to be taken in the external interpretation" (Williams, 1999: 106). If one says to the person who lacks interest in her own well-being that she has a reason to take the medicine, one means an external reason. Williams offers another example: namely Henry James' story of Owen Wingrave, who lacks the motivation to follow family tradition and join the army: "Owen's family urge on him the necessity and importance of his joining the army, since all his male ancestors were soldiers, and family pride requires him to do the same. Owen Wingrave has no motivation to join the army at all, and all his desires lead in another direction: he hates everything about military life and what it means. His family might have expressed themselves by saying *that there was a reason for Owen to join the army*" (Williams, 1999: 106; emphasis original). At the same time, "…no external reason statement could *by itself* offer an explanation of anyone's action" (Williams, 1999: 106-107). That there is a reason (his family's reason) for Owen to join the army cannot explain Owen's reason not to: "for if it was true at all, it was true when Owen was not motivated to join the army" (Williams, 1999: 107). Although Williams does not find explanation by external reasons useful, he does find it necessary to make improvements to the original Humean model.

Williams' Refined Sub-Humean Model

First, *A* can have reason for acting without believing this to be the case. There might be something in the agent's situation that she fails to recognize as a means to reach her ends. If *A* wants to win a game of chess, there are moves she has a reason to make even though she might not see them.

Second, *A* might have reason to act even when *A* lacks any desire to do so. Consider Iris, who was not motivated to stop smoking in 1999, yet had reason to stop smoking already then, even though she did not realize that she has such a reason until 2013 when she – through practical deliberation – realized it to be the case. Iris might see herself as having been a nonsmoker at heart in 1999 and having valued quitting cigarettes already then. On Williams' account, this is acceptable, because *stop smoking in 1999* belongs to Iris's overall motivational structure.

By contrast, Ronny, who was also a smoker in 1999 and remained one in 2013 might well have deliberated and come to the conclusion in 2013 that he had reason to stop smoking – without also concluding that he had reason to do so already in 1999. Back then, Ronny valued smoking over quitting and had no reason – within his overall motivational structure – to stop.

Williams' interpretation of practical reasoning is wider than that of the original Humean model. Part of his refinement is that, on his view, deliberation is not limited to becoming aware of causal means to an end through overt reasoning (1999: 104):

> 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, economic, 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 irresoluble 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.

As noted above, it is compatible with Williams' approach that an agent's rational reasoning can make her aware of reasons she had at some point in the past that she was not then consciously aware of: An agent can come to see that he has reason to do something which he did not see he had reason to do at all. In this way, the reasoning process can add new actions for which there are internal reasons (Williams, 1999: 104).

Williams envisions a more fruitful role for practical reasoning than the original Humean model. "Practical reasoning is a heuristic process, and an imaginative one" (Williams, 1999: 110). Practical reasoning is far more than means/ends reasoning to satisfy desires. At the same time, something can count as a reason for an agent if and only if the reason bears a link to aspects of the agent's psychology. This is where Williams departs from the externalist, because "the whole point of external reason statements is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations" (Williams, 1999: 107). It is time to spell out and then criticize Williams' views on external reasons.

Internal vs. External Reasons

Williams (1999: 108-109) claims that "…an element which the externalist theorist essentially wants [i.e., lacks], [is] that the agent should acquire the motivation because he comes to believe the reason statement, and that he should do the latter, moreover, because, in some way, he is considering the matter aright." He continues (109):

> If the theorist is to hold on to these conditions, he will, I think, have to make the condition under which the agent appropriately comes to have the motivation something, that he should deliberate correctly; and 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 Φ.

Williams assumes that the external-reasons theorist should accept Hume's basic point that reason alone cannot motivate: "…there is no motivation for the agent to deliberate *from*, to reach this new motivation" (Williams; 1999: 109). The only cases Williams sees as potentially supported by externalism about reasons-for-acting are those that involve persuasion or manipulation (Williams 1999: 107):

> The basic case must be that in which A Φ's, not because he believes only that there is some reason or other for him to Φ, but because he believes of some determinate consideration that it constitutes a reason to Φ. …Owen Wingrave might come to join the army because (now) he believes that it is a reason for him to do so that his family has a tradition of family honour.

Four points bear noting. First, if Owen's family convinces him to join the army, he does so by giving in to pressure: he acts as a puppet on a string, lacking (so the argument goes) any personal motivation to act as he does. As commonly understood, external reasons appear to constitute too narrow a concept, unlikely to explain all one might want to explain when explaining actions. On the other hand, understanding them on Williams' terms – allowing in the exceptions that he does – not only does not help them but risks widening their scope too far. If this is what external reasons are about, the internalist position seems a better alternative. The question is, must the externalist accept Hume's linking of reasons to motivation? Such a view fails to conceive of reasons as external in what one might see as a meaningful sense.

Second, if Owen is moved by other persons' reasons, he is indeed moved to action by external *factors*, but, crucially, I would argue, not by external *reasons*. To be driven by external reasons should be reserved for responding to facts about the external world. It is not to respond to the manipulation or interests of others.

Third, Williams presents his case as if responding to external reasons is equivalent to responding to systems of justification held by others, such as Owen's family. According to their values, joining the army is the right thing to do. Doing so is internal to their values but external to Owen's. The question here is, why should it be a problem for the externalist about reasons if a person fails to be personally motivated by a set of values held by some group of people, such as family? Indeed, Williams argues elsewhere (1999b) for such relativism about reasons.

Fourth, one can well ask why it is so important for Williams to appeal to an agent's personal motivational set. The answer seems to be an assumption that the act must somehow stem from a choice: it must be up to the agent. This is probably why Williams contrasts internal and external reasons in the way he does. For him, internal reasons stem somehow from free will, while external reasons are due to outside forces.

Williams does not tell the whole story about Owen Wingrave. It is highly likely that Owen was homosexual. (He also opposed his family's stated wish for him to get married.) Being a homosexual in the army was at the time – and still is in many

parts of the world – incredibly challenging. Presuming Owen was gay, his resistance to signing up is probably attributable to his sexual orientation: a part of him deeply rooted in his character and identity as a human being. In that case, Owen responded rationally to external reasons: namely, the poor treatment many gay people received in the military.

What are internal reasons if not the reasons described above? What is more intrinsic to a person than her sexual orientation and love interests? If one is sympathetic to this way of thinking though, it makes a problem for Williams' focus on motivation and personal choice. In most people's experience as backed by accumulating scientific research, sexual orientation is not a choice (never mind a choice that can be altered)[9] unless one believes in the discredited practice of conversion therapy. If internal reasons can come down to something like sexual orientation, then Williams' preferred internal reasons appear just as narrow and problematic as the external reasons he criticizes, for the agent's motivation to act / not act can have its wellspring in something *not* freely chosen, being deeply rooted in character and identity.

It might be that an agent is genuinely motivated to Φ but, due to her core nature, is simultaneously motivated not to Φ: i.e., she is conflicted. Consider an extremely shy person motivated to speak up against her tyrannical boss but most likely to keep quiet. One could say that she manipulates herself to do something different from what she would like to do.

Of external reasons for action, Williams (1999: 111) concludes that "there is, I suggest, a great unclarity about what is meant", outside cases of external manipulation and the like. Much of the problem though is of his own creation.

Internal reasons are not the kind of things that can be true or false the way external reasons can be and generally are. Values are not true or false. Core identity is not true or false: it just *is*. External reasons are of another ilk. They are not grounded in the psyche of an agent or a shared system of values as with Owen's family. External reasons for action are responses to facts that the agent knows and responds to in the world, more or less consciously. An agent acts according to external reasons when she responds to how things are in the world.

It is time to make the positive case for external reasons. Most of the time and unusual cases aside, the reasons why people act are in the world and not in their minds. Human beings are, at heart, fact-responsive creatures driven not by psychology but response to reality, which offers up the "rock-bottom" reasons: the *real* reasons for action.

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[9] Depending on where one lies along a sexual spectrum or within a space of sexual possibilities, some people do have a choice whether or not to explore a side of their identity they have not previously examined. In any case, how one identifies sexually is a highly complex matter far beyond the purview of this paper.

Fact Responsiveness

Consider Maria, who is driving a car (Stoutland, 2007). Approaching an intersection, she sees a red traffic light ahead and stops. The explanation for her action is nothing more than that the traffic light was red: she took *this* fact[10] about the world to favor her stopping the car.

Yet this answer is not available for Williams, who would be compelled to identify some desire, the satisfaction of which the agent is acting in accordance with. Remember: *A* has reason to Φ iff *A* has some desire the satisfaction of which will be served by his Φ-ing (Williams, 1999: 101)). Even though Williams' view is significantly more sophisticated in the end, it demands a reason to act that it be substantially rooted in the psychology of the agent. To explain Maria's behavior, Williams must add something like a goal within Maria's overall subjective motivational structure *S*, something like an overarching goal of obeying the law: her desire and thus motivation points towards that goal; she has an accompanying belief that, if she stops at the light, her desire will be satisfied; etc. Of course, such a story might be true in some cases; but it is a bold claim indeed to say that *all* cases are like this. Such a claim would be as audacious as Hume is in the introductory quote, where he takes his point about the impotence of reason as proven. As Anscombe (1981) has pointed out, it is highly doubtful that Hume or anyone else has proven any such thing (or could).

There are reasons why an internalist account of reasons for action nevertheless retains appeal, notably in cases of false belief. Say that Belinda walks across the room to open her door; it is fitting to appeal to a belief such as "somebody rang the doorbell" – both in the case where somebody actually has rung her doorbell and where she is mistaken. Such an example is easily explained by the internalist by appealing to the agent's inner psychological state. The externalist runs into trouble with cases of false belief, because – on her view – reasons are external to the agent, and it seems odd that something that is not the case can nevertheless be a reason.

This is where I see the appeal to rock-bottom reasons being most useful. Instances of reasons for acting based on false beliefs[11] can either be due to the agent's psychological profile – which neither internalists nor externalists need have problems with – or the false belief can be traced back to a response to external circumstances: what I am calling rock-bottom reasons. It is, I think, just a matter of Gricean conversational implicature that one rarely mentions the external triggers that give rise

[10] The literature reveals differing preferences regarding use of terms. Many prefer "state of affairs" (e.g., Dancy, 2000; Stoutland, 2007), or "true propositions" (Smith, 1997). Suffice to say that I prefer the term "facts" because facts are what I see human beings being reason responsive to, favoring them to act in certain ways and not others. *Pace* Dancy and Stoutland, I do not accept the possibility of "non-factive" states.

[11] Of course, there can be cases where the agent's belief is true even though this is not what moves the agent to act, and they can be handled in a similar way.

to false beliefs; they seem not worth mentioning. Instead, one focuses on that which is most relevant to the context one finds oneself in. Anscombe (2000: 8) writes:

> I am sitting in a chair writing, and anyone grown to the age of reason in the same world would know this as soon as he saw me, and in general it would be his first account of what I was doing; if this were something he arrived at with difficulty, and what he knew straight off were precisely how I was affecting the acoustic properties of the room…then communication between us would be rather severely impaired.

In ordinary discourse, it is not difficult to communicate or understand what is going on in false-belief cases. In philosophy or psychology though, one ignores the triggering reasons at one's peril. They have important theoretical ramifications, as in the debate over internal vs. external reasons.

It is important briefly to consider those unusual cases identified by Dancy (2000) where what appropriately is taken as reason for acting is a false belief *per se*, untethered to external facts. Dancy (2004: 124) writes: "normally, if things are not as I believe them to be, I do not in fact have the reason that I take myself to have".[12] That the mere fact that an agent has a belief is normally *not* a reason for acting is neatly illustrated by Dancy's countering example of a hill walker and a crumbling cliff: the walker knows himself well enough that, aware that he *believes* it is dangerous to climb a cliff, he knows, too, he will get so nervous he is likely to panic and fall. He sees the cliff and out of compulsion forms the belief that the cliff is crumbling – whether it is or not – thus dangerous to climb. In this case, that the agent has this belief is a good reason to avoid climbing the cliff, regardless of actual circumstances.

What makes Williams'' internalism on reasons for action most problematic is that people lack direct access to the motives of others; they must infer motives instead, judging on the basis of statements and observable actions. Given their interpretative skills and ability to cooperate, they nevertheless manage, more often than not, to understand others' motives. Morton (2003: 1) writes:

> You are walking towards a closed door, with your arms full of groceries. Another person is also approaching the door, slightly ahead of you. He accelerates his pace slightly. This generates an expectation in you. He has either seen the problem you face and intends to solve it by opening the door for you, or he sees that you might expect him to open the door and is rushing to get through before the issue arises.

It is part and parcel of everyday interactions with others that people form expectations this way, judging as best they can whether someone is cooperative or not, adjusting to one other's behavior as needed. Serious questions remain about how exactly they do this. It seems as though it cannot be because they directly *see* the motive of others. Williams, who seeks to explain actions in terms of agents' motives has difficulty cashing out exactly what happens when understanding others'

[12] Dancy (2004: 124) credits Joseph Raz (1986: 142-143) for these sorts of arguments.

actions. In particular, he struggles to account for cases where the agent's action does not reflect the agent's motive. As author Aksel Sandemose complained: "it is so annoying when my neighbour approaches me when I'm working in the garden. He doesn't understand that I'm busy writing my next book".

When explaining reasons for action, it is not only possible but often necessary to explain behavior without reference to psychology. This is because one often has no way of knowing what exactly goes on in the agent's mind when performing an action, and, moreover, there are actions where the agent's motivation is no help in understanding the agent's reasons for acting. Instead, one must focus on details of the agent's situation at the time, relating these to one's background knowledge. In this way, one can form an understanding of which external circumstances the agent is responding to and so arrive at her rock-bottom reasons.

One could object that, if one fails to consider the possible psychological motivations that make an agent act as she does, one would be downplaying the importance of the agent's rationality in justifying her behavior and so failing to distinguish properly between her actively intentional actions and mere happenings for which she is somehow responsible. There are good reasons why one does not normally attribute full agency to young children, most non-human animals, or the severely brain damaged.

The objection is fair, as far as it does. What does not follow is that *all* action explanations must be linked to an agent's psychological states so as to constitute proper explanations. All one needs to counter Williams' internalism is some cases that require no link to *S*. Although it is reasonable to require agents to fill certain rational requirements before attributing actions to them, that need not mean knowing every motivation for every action for every agent – or even assuming that relevant psychological states could be determined, even in principle.

Ascribing psychological explanations to actions is something people often if not indeed generally do, lending Williams' account its unquestionable appeal. When interacting with others, people try to imagine the other person's point of view – adopt her perspective – in explaining to themselves why the person acts and responds as she does. People judge one another on their understanding of the person's character; *ceteris paribus,* one trusts one's gut feelings about what someone is "really" like regardless of externally observable signs one can point to and name. It feels natural to describe people as envious, jealous, joyful, absentminded, etc. I have no quarrel with any of this. At the same time, it's important to remember that even the most skillful judge of others can be mistaken in her judgments. Maybe the sweet, shy colleague at work abuses her son? Maybe the seemingly brilliant shopkeeper rarely pays her bills? The moral of the story is, psychological explanations for actions can be useful, even necessary, more often than not correct. If they proved often wrong, cooperation would be difficult to imagine. At the same time, they are *not* always useful, *not* always needed, *not* always to be counted on. Reasons for any number of actions can best be determined without resort to psychological states.

Conclusions

Behind agents' reasons to act lie rock-bottom reasons, responding to facts in the world, that serve as the ultimate motivating force for actions. The most significant distinction between my approach and Williams' is that he rejects external reasons for action while I support them and, indeed, consider them primary. Next up is his focus on grounding reasons in ethical considerations. Even though Williams wants to be seen as speaking in general of reasons to act, ethical considerations are always close at hand, whereas I take them to be secondary. That can make it seem as though Williams and I are talking past each other even though, really, we are not. I am not making claims one way or another about ethical considerations for reasons to act.

If I have managed to show that Williams' arguments against externalism do not hold and that external reasons for action are needed at least in some instances, I rest content. I give the final words to the poet Gunnar Ekelöf (1941): *det finns ingen annan styrka än inre styrka / och den kommer utifrån* ("there is no other strength but inner strength, / and it comes from outside"; *translation mine*).

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