ABSTRACT

In chapter 3 of *The Moral Problem* Michael Smith argues for an internalist view of the relationship between an agent’s moral judgments and her reasons for acting. To do this he presents a novel argument against an externalist view of this relationship. This argument depends on a claim that the externalist has only one option for explaining the motivational changes of good people, and that this option is unsatisfactory. By giving a more thorough account of exactly what kinds of motivational changes are at issue, I show that externalists have another option for explaining the motivational changes of good people. I go on to argue that this option is not unsatisfactory in the way in which the first option is. This shows that externalism is not refuted by Smith’s argument.

INDEX WORDS: Ethics, Metaethics, Moral psychology, Externalism, Moral judgment, Motivation, Desire, Fetish, Virtue, Michael Smith
THE MOTIVATIONAL DYNAMICS OF GOOD PEOPLE: AN EXTERNALIST ACCOUNT

by

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THE MOTIVATIONAL DYNAMICS OF GOOD PEOPLE: AN EXTERNALIST ACCOUNT

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I. Internalism and externalism

Michael Smith describes the internalist claim he calls rationalism as follows: “If it is right for agents to φ in circumstances C, then there is a reason for those agents to φ in C” (1994: 62). This claim is ambiguous. On the one hand, it could be interpreted as a substantive claim about the nature of actual moral requirements and their relationship to practical reasons. On the other hand, it could be interpreted as a conceptual claim describing our concept of a moral requirement and our concept of a practical reason (Smith 1994: 63-65). On the former interpretation, the claim is that if there exists a moral requirement for an agent to do something, then there exists a reason for her to do it.1 This sort of internalism depends on a substantive theory about moral facts, a substantive theory about reasons, and their interrelation. On the latter interpretation of rationalism, rationalism does not depend on these substantive theoretical commitments. Rather, it is a claim about our concept of a moral fact (or a moral requirement) and our concept of a reason for acting. Rationalism as a conceptual claim is the claim that our concept of a moral fact (or moral requirement) is, in part, the concept of a reason for action (Smith 1994: 64.).2 As a conceptual claim, it is neutral on the question of whether there are any moral facts.3 In opposition to rationalism as an internalist conceptual claim, is an externalist conceptual claim. Externalism,

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1 This view is sometimes known as “morality/reasons internalism” (Darwall 1997: 306). Darwall puts it this way: “If S morally ought to do A, then necessarily there is reason for S to do A consisting either in the fact that S morally ought so to act, or in considerations that ground that fact” (1997: 306).
2 Miller (2003: 228) describes Smith’s rationalism in much this way. Brink is describing rationalism as a conceptual claim when he says, “Internalism claims that it is in virtue of the concept of morality that moral considerations necessarily provide agents with reasons for action” (1986: 32).
3 So, one can endorse rationalism as a conceptual claim, but deny that there are any moral facts. Such a view would be a sort of error theory (Smith 1994: 63-65; Miller 2003: 111-112). Likewise, it is possible to reject rationalism as a conceptual claim but endorse rationalism as a substantive claim. This would be to hold that there are moral facts which necessarily provide reasons for acting, but that the truth of this is not contained in the concept of a moral fact (cf. note 4.).
in this sense, holds that, whether or not one does in fact have a reason to do what one is morally required to do, this fact is not a mere consequence of the concept of a moral requirement (or the concept of a moral fact). 4 According to externalism, then, it is not incoherent (though it may be incorrect) to think that though an agent is bound by a particular moral requirement she does not have a reason to act in accordance with this requirement.

Smith is primarily concerned with defending rationalism as a conceptual claim (hereafter, just rationalism), though he thinks that the substantive claim is likely to be true as well (1994: 187-189). As a claim about our concept of a moral requirement, rationalism has consequences for our judgments about moral requirements. In particular, rationalism apparently entails a weaker internalist claim. This is the practicality requirement: if an agent judges that it is right for her to do something in certain circumstances, then she will be motivated to do so unless she is practically irrational (Smith 1994: 61). 5 The practicality requirement apparently follows from rationalism because, according to rationalism, an agent’s judgment that it is right for her to do something just is a judgment that she has a reason to do it. 6 Then, if she fails to be motivated to do what she judges she has a reason to do, then she must be practically irrational (Smith 1994: 62). 7 If rationalism entails the practicality requirement, then a rejection of the practicality requirement amounts to a vindication of externalism. The practicality requirement is the internalist thesis on which I will focus in this paper.

4 Brink characterizes externalism with the following conditional: “[I]f the rationality of moral considerations can be justified, it is not merely in virtue of the concept of morality” (1986: 33).
5 To see that the practicality requirement is a weaker claim than the thesis of rationalism, note that non-cognitivists about morality reject rationalism but still can (and probably should) accept the practicality requirement (Smith 1994: 63).
6 An argument that rationalism really does entail the practicality requirement will depend heavily on an account of practical rationality, specifically an account that can explain why it is irrational for an agent to fail to be motivated to do what she believes she has a reason to do. Smith presents an account that purports to provide such an explanation in §§5.8-5.9 of The Moral Problem. Geoffrey Sayre-McCord (1997) presents several interesting objections to Smith’s account of the relationship between reasons and rationality.
7 Here it is very important that rationalism is about our concept of a moral fact. A substantive claim that moral facts are practical reasons does not prove that the concept of a practical reason can be substituted for the concept of a moral fact in ordinary belief contexts. For a related discussion, see Copp (1997: 39).
When a practically rational agent judges that it is right for her to φ and she is motivated to φ, an internalist says that she is motivated because her judgment about the rightness of φ-ing means she believes she has a reason to φ. On the other hand, if an agent judges that it is right for her to φ and she is not motivated to φ, then the internalist says that it must be because she is practically irrational.

When a practically rational agent judges that it is right for her to φ and she is motivated to φ, the externalist explains that it is not just her belief about the rightness of φ-ing, but rather some additional feature of the situation which gives her a reason, and, hence, motivation to φ. Typically, this additional feature will be some other desire that she has. Then, it will be this desire (together with certain beliefs about her circumstances) which motivates her to φ. Perhaps she really likes φ-ing and would desire to φ whether or not she thought it was right to do so. Maybe the agent really desires to please her friends and believes she can please them by φ-ing. Or maybe she believes she can please them by doing what she believes is right. Or maybe she just desires rightness; i.e., she desires to do anything she believes to be right, and so she is motivated to φ because of the combination of this desire with her belief that φ-ing is right. As is apparent from

8 Here, and throughout this paper, I will be presuming a Humean view of motivation (or “motivating reasons”) along the lines of the view held by Smith (1994: ch. 4). According to such a view, an agent is motivated (or has a motivating reason) to φ only if she has a desire to ψ and a belief that φ-ing is productive of (or at least conducive to) ψ-ing.

9 According to typical externalist accounts of moral motivation, it will be some outside desire which provides an agent with a motivating reason to do what she believes it right to do. (See, e.g., Zangwill 2003). This is because most externalists tend to presume that for a reason to be capable of motivating a person, it must be grounded on some desire or interest that person has (see note 8; see also Williams 1980). However, if the Humean theory of motivation were false, there would be another option. In particular, there could be motivating reasons which did not depend on the desires the agent actually had. For instance, to be motivated by a prudential reason would be to motivated, not by a current desire, but rather by a desire one expected to have in the future (Nagel 1970, ch. 6; Smith 1994: 99). Suppose, contra the Humean, that prudential reasons can be motivating reasons. Then, suppose, that in some particular situation, some action is believed to be both right and prudent. Then, a person could be motivated to do what she believed it right to do without an independent desire to do it. Instead of a desire, the additional motivating feature of the situation would be the agent’s belief that she had a prudential reason. This would still be an externalist explanation of the agent’s moral motivation because it does not depend on the claim that beliefs about moral facts necessarily provide reasons for acting. At any rate, since I am presuming a largely Humean view of motivation in this paper, I will not be pursuing possibilities like this one.
these examples, the externalist has no shortage of possible explanations for any given instance of moral motivation. Then, when it comes to explaining why an agent fails to be motivated to do as she has judged it right to do, the externalist has little explaining to do: The externalist says that the missing motivation was no more than contingent and rationally optional in first place.10

Smith defines a *moralist* as an agent who is motivated to do what she judges it right to do, unless she is practically irrational (1996: 176).11 So, an internalist who accepts the practicality requirement says that either an agent is a practically rational moralist or she is practically irrational. In other words, internalists hold that all agents capable of making moral judgments are moralists. An externalist accepts that an agent may be a moralist (or at least a *de facto* moralist), but the externalist also claims that there is another option. An externalist holds that if a person is not a practically rational moralist, then either the person is practically irrational or she is an amoralist.12 An *amoralist* is an agent who, even if she is practically rational, may not have any motivation to do what she judges it right to do (Smith 1994: 67; Smith 1996: 176-178).13 So, an amoralist is an agent for whom a moral judgment does not necessarily provide a reason to act. If amoralists are conceptually possible, then the practicality requirement is false and externalism is true.

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10 To be precise, the motivation is rationally optional given just the *judgment* that it is right to φ. If it really is right to φ, and if rationalism as a substantive claim were true, then she would have a reason to φ. In that case, depending on the relationship between reasons and rational requirements, φ-ing might be rationally required. (See notes 3 and 6.)

11 Smith’s concept of a *moralist* in his 1996 restatement of the argument for the practicality requirement is the same as what he calls a “good person” in *The Moral Problem*. In that sense, a “good person” is simply one who, to the extent she is not weak-willed, is motivated to do as she judges it right to do. (See Smith 1996: 176-177.)

12 The “amoralist challenge” to which Smith responds in his argument for internalism comes from Brink (1986: 29-33). (See also Smith 1994: 66-68.)

13 Smith actually defines the class of moralists in contrast to the class of amoralists (1996: 176). An amoralist (if any exist) is an agent who, without practical rationality, may make a moral judgment that it would be right for her to φ but have *no desire at all* to φ. Hence, to be a moralist, all that is required is that, except in cases of practical irrationality, whenever the moralist judges that it would be right for her to φ, she has *at least some* desire to φ, even if this desire is ultimately outweighed by other desires and she ends up actually doing something else.
In this paper, I will be defending externalism, but not directly. A direct argument for externalism could be an argument that amoralists are indeed conceptually possible (Brink 1997: 18-21). My goal here will be the more modest one of showing that Smith’s argument against externalism (his argument for the practicality requirement) does not succeed.
II. Smith’s argument against externalism

Smith holds that the practicality requirement is true. The central claim in Smith’s argument for the practicality requirement is that an externalist cannot give a satisfactory explanation of what makes a moralist a moralist instead of an amoralist. He argues that the externalist’s only possible explanation of moralists requires implausible commitments about the psychology of morally good and virtuous people. He claims that the only way to avoid such commitments is to accept the practicality requirement.

In particular, Smith argues that there is a “striking fact” that an externalist cannot satisfactorily explain: “a change in motivation follows reliably in the wake of a change in moral judgment, at least in the good and strong-willed person” (1994: 71). The striking fact is the claim that when a moralist changes her mind about what it is right to do, given that she is practically rational, she will also have a corresponding change in her motivation.

As already noted, the externalist faces no significant obstacles in explaining isolated cases in which an agent’s motivation appropriately matches her moral judgment; the externalist can simply point to whichever desire was responsible for the action the agent is motivated to perform and insist that we need not posit that the desire was produced by or in response to the

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14 See note 11.
15 In a defense of his argument for internalism, Smith later states the “striking fact” as follows: “If an agent judges it right to φ in C, and that agent is a moralist, then she is motivated to φ in C at least absent weakness of will and the like” (1996: 176). Then, in another restatement of the argument, he states it as follows: “If a moralist judges it right to do something then she is motivated accordingly, at least absent practical irrationality” (1997: 111). Note that a moralist need not be moved to actually perform the action she believes it is right to do. She must merely have some desire to do it. See note 13.
16 Actually, the striking fact would give us nothing to explain unless we also assumed that some such people (i.e., moralists) actually exist. Smith (1997: 112) makes this assumption explicit.
17 According to a Humean view of motivation, a desire alone cannot really produce an action without at least a trivial belief about how that action relates to her goal. See note 8.
agent’s moral judgment. However, an externalist explanation of Smith’s striking fact must be more complicated. Suppose that, at time $t_1$, the agent judges that it is right to $\varphi_1$. Then, after some deliberation, at time $t_2$, the agent judges that it is right to $\varphi_2$. Suppose also that $\varphi_1$-ing and $\varphi_2$-ing are mutually exclusive. Finally, suppose that the agent is motivated at $t_1$ to $\varphi_1$ and at $t_2$ to $\varphi_2$.\footnote{Even a more minimal supposition suffices to make this an example of the motivational changes of a moralist. All we need is that, at $t_2$, she has more desire to $\varphi_2$, than she did at $t_1$.} The externalist can provide an explanation of the agent’s motivation at $t_1$ by pointing to some desire $d_1$ which provided the motivation. Similarly, the externalist can explain the agent’s motivation at $t_2$ by pointing to some desire $d_2$. But this fails to provide an explanation of one salient feature of this story: that $d_2$ replaced $d_1$ as the agent’s operative desire.\footnote{Along the lines of note 18, at the very least, the salient feature we would need to explain is why the strength of $d_2$ increased relative to the strength of $d_1$.} Although the externalist can explain the relevant motivations for one instance or the other in isolation, it is harder to see how the externalist can explain why the agent’s motivation changed in step with her change in judgment. \textit{Prima facie}, the externalist does not have a good explanation. Smith’s challenge for the externalist is to explain why it is that the moralist’s motivation changes like this.

Note that giving explanations of the motivational changes of moralists is not as difficult for internalists who accept rationalism as a conceptual claim. The internalist can point out that the moralist’s change in moral judgment is a change in her beliefs about what she has a reason to do. Given that she has new beliefs about what she has a reason to do, given that she is practically rational (in the fairly minimal sense that one’s motivation is responsive to the reasons one believes one has), she will have new motivation to do what she now believes it is right for her to do. According to the externalist, though, a change in moral judgment does not necessarily provide any new reasons for action (or beliefs about one’s reasons for action). So, without some other explanation of where the new motivation comes from, the externalist’s theory is untenable.
We should note that there are some cases that the externalist can easily explain. Consider Susanna. Suppose that Susanna believes at some very deep level that saving the coral reefs is right and also strongly desires to do whatever she can to help save them. Suppose also that she believes that by donating to the Coral First organization she will promote this goal most effectively. So she judges that it is right to give to Coral First. Furthermore, by virtue of her desire to save the coral reefs and her belief about the most effective way to accomplish this, she also desires to give to Coral First. But suppose Susanna finds out that Coral First is a fraud and their management embezzles most of the donations, and suppose she also finds out that Coral Now is really the organization which does the most to save coral reefs. Then she will judge that it is right for her to give to Coral Now, and, because of her new belief about Coral Now and her desire to save the reefs, she is motivated to give to Coral Now and not to give to Coral First.

The case of Susanna is not at all beyond the externalist’s capacity to explain. The change in motivation which occurs in this scenario is better thought of as a change of plan of action for accomplishing a more basic goal. Some of Susanna’s instrumental desires have changed, but her more basic motive is the same. It is really the desire to save the reefs which is operative in either case. Scenarios of this sort are not the kind that create a problem for the externalist. Smith notes that he has a different kind of scenario in mind. He is concerned with cases in which an agent changes her most basic beliefs about what is right; in Smith’s terms, the agent changes her “most fundamental values” (1994: 71).20

Regarding cases in which a moralist changes her fundamental moral beliefs, Smith claims that the externalist has only one possible explanation of why her motivation changes in line with these changes in beliefs. Since, according to the externalist, the agent’s moral judgments cannot

20 Smith talks here about a change in the agent’s “values” because he conceives of valuing as a kind of believing (1994: 147-151). If, on the contrary, valuing were conceived of as a kind of desiring, then providing an explanation of why an agent’s motivation changed when her values changed would be trivial.
alone be responsible for the way her motivation changes, an explanation of the fact that her motivation does indeed change must also appeal to some element in her overall motivational state, an element which is independent of the relevant moral judgment. That is, it must be explained, in part, in terms of certain desires (or other conative dispositions) that she has. Smith claims, “the only motivational content capable of playing this role, it seems to me, is a motivation to do the right thing, where this is now read \textit{de dicto} and not \textit{de re}” (1994: 74).21,22

Smith’s claim is basically that externalists have to explain the motivational changes of any moralist in the same way we explained Susanna’s change in motivation. The externalist can give such an explanation if the agent has a constant, general desire to do what is right, read \textit{de dicto} not \textit{de re}. This \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right is analogous to Susanna’s desire to save the coral reefs. When Susanna comes to believe that donating to Coral Now instead of to Coral First would best promote her goal, she becomes instrumentally motivated to donate to Coral Now. Similarly, consider an agent who has a general \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right, that is, a desire to perform whichever actions happen to have right-making features. When this agent believes it is right for her to $\varphi$, since she desires to do what is right, she is motivated to $\varphi$. Then, if she instead judges it right to $\psi$ and not to $\varphi$, since she desires to do what is right, she is motivated to $\psi$. The

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21 A desire to do what is right, read \textit{de dicto}, differs from a desire to do what is right, read \textit{de re}, with respect to intentionality (Lillehammer 1997: 188-189). A \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right is about rightness; the object of the desire is the rightness of right actions. Hence, a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right is the desire to do any $\varphi$ such that $\varphi$-ing is right. The idea of a \textit{de re} desire to do what is right is somewhat problematic, or at least a bit confusing. A desire to do what is right, read \textit{de re}, really would be a desire to perform some particular action which is, in fact, a right action. Actually, actions considered \textit{de re}, in this sense, are not precisely what Smith has in mind. When he speaks of a desire to do what is right, read \textit{de re}, he means to pick out a desire which is a desire for the feature of the action which makes it a right action. Hence, the kind of desire he means to pick out would be, for instance, a desire to do what is fair or honest, where “what is fair” or “what is honest” is read \textit{de dicto} (assuming that the feature of fairness or honesty is what, in some particular circumstances, makes the action right). In short, the distinction between a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right and a \textit{de re} desire to do what is right should be understood as the distinction between a desire with the concept of rightness as part of its content and a desire with the content of some more particular right-making feature as part of its content.

22 In Smith’s (1996) restatement of the argument, he dispenses with talk of desires “read \textit{de re}” or “read \textit{de dicto}.” Instead he presents the argument with respect to instrumental and non-instrumental desires for the right-making features of actions. This does not change the substance of his argument. In my discussion here I will integrate the two different presentations.
motivation to do one thing rather than the other does not come from a desire to perform a particular action (or even the desire to perform actions with some particular right-making feature). Instead it is instrumentally derived from the desire to do what is right (1994: 74; 1996: 180). Surely, we should still say that this agent goes from “desiring” to φ to “desiring” to ψ, but these desires are merely derivative. The operative desire is not a desire for any particular course of action. Rather, the operative desire is for any course of action which has the property of rightness. At a fundamental level, her motivation comes from the de dicto desire to do what is right.

Smith argues that this sort of externalist explanation is unacceptable. Smith posits as a constraint on theories of moral motivation that they must be capable of providing explanations of the moral motivation of a good, virtuous person (1994: 75), and even a morally perfect person (1996: 181-182). This is a reasonable constraint. A complete theory of moral motivation should provide an explanation of the motivations of any agent, and, so, a theory of moral motivation is deficient if it can only account for a subset of the relevant cases. Of interest here are the motivational changes of moralists. If the externalist’s theory cannot explain the motivational changes of all moralists, including those who are virtuous or who are exemplars of moral perfection, then the theory is inadequate. Smith claims that externalist can explain the motivational changes of a moralist in only one way: by positing she has a de dicto desire to do what is right. Smith says, “the [externalist’s] explanation is only as plausible as the claim that the good person is, at bottom, motivated to do what is right, where this is read de dicto and not de re, and that is surely a quite implausible claim” (1994: 75). Smith takes this claim to be implausible because he holds that if an agent is really a good, virtuous person, then, when she changes her judgment and judges that she should ψ instead of φ, she should become motivated to ψ because she has a non-instrumental desire to ψ (or at least a desire for the features of ψ-ing which make ψ-
ing morally right). In other words, the relevant object of non-instrumental desire should be that property because of which an action is indeed right, not the property of rightness itself.

Consider Ron. Ron is a moralist because he has a de dicto desire to do what is right. According to Smith (1994: 74-76), an agent like Ron is not motivated in the way that a good person should be motivated. Suppose that Ron is faced with a situation in which he must go to great lengths if he is to save the lives of several innocent people. The only way to save these lives is by φ-ing. Ron judges that it is morally obligatory to save these people by φ-ing. Since Ron has a de dicto desire to do what is right, he is motivated to φ. However, according to Smith, we should expect a good, virtuous person to be motivated by a non-instrumental desire for what it is that makes φ-ing right, viz., the value of the lives of these people. If we thought Ron was a good, virtuous person and we asked him why he was motivated to φ, we should expect him to reply, “because I wanted to save those people.” We should not expect him to reply, “because in this case saving innocent people was right, and I wanted to do what was right.” But Ron would indeed give the latter explanation. Therefore, Ron does not count as a good, virtuous person.

Smith says, “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, where this is read de dicto and not de re” (1994: 75).

23 Actually, Ron might reply by saying either, “in this case saving innocent people was right,” or “I wanted to do what was right,” depending on what information he thought we lacked. For the purposes of the example here, we can suppose he gives the complete reply including both parts. Now, it may seem that the second clause of the reply would not sound like a particularly bad response. However, that is only if we considered it merely superfluous and post hoc. However, since Ron considers the second clause to be the operative clause, the true source of his motivation, we can see Smith’s objection. If his concern for rightness is primary and his interest in the lives of innocent people is merely instrumental, then we should not consider him to be motivated in the way a good person should be.

24 Note that Smith is now talking about a de dicto desire to do what one believes to be right, not a de dicto desire to do what is right. In his account of what motive the externalist must appeal to explain moralists, he moves back and forth between these two desires. I think it is the latter (the desire to do what is right) that he intends, and I think this reading leaves his argument intact. On the contrary, Lillehammer (1997: 189) thinks Smith must intend the former (the desire to do what one believes to be right). I will not pursue this question any further because I do not think the success of Smith’s argument depends on it.
In the case of Ron, his emphasis on the rather abstract *rightness* instead of on the lives of the innocent people amounts to “one thought too many”\(^{25}\) in his practical reasoning (1994: 75). If the truly valuable object is not some abstract concept (viz., the concept of rightness) but, rather, the lives of innocent people, then a truly good person should desire the latter object directly, that is, non-instrumentally. If Ron were really a good person, his concern for the lives of the innocent people would be a non-instrumental concern. Smith claims that elevation of the desire for whatever is right (read *de dicto*) above more particular, less abstract, moral motives amounts to a kind of morality “fetish” (1994: 75-76). According to Smith, a moralist like Ron is not a good person; actually he is a moralist just because he has a morality fetish.

Note that Smith’s objection is not that the externalist’s explanation mis-describes people like Ron who seem to have a morality fetish. The objection is that the externalist will have to explain all moralists in the same way. Even the motivational changes of an exemplar of moral perfection must be explained in terms of a morality fetish, and this leaves the externalist with “a quite incredible picture of moral perfection” (1996: 181).

If Smith is right, then the externalist has only one available explanation of the “striking fact” about moralists, and it turns out that this explanation is inadequate. In that case, externalism would be false and the practicality requirement would be true.

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\(^{25}\) The phrase “one thought too many” comes from Bernard Williams (1976: 18). The example he employs involves a man who is motivated to save his wife instead of a stranger. The man is motivated just because it is permissible for him to save his wife instead of the stranger. He is not motivated directly by a non-instrumental desire to save his wife. His motivation to save his wife is merely derivative. Thus, in his practical reasoning, there is “one thought too many.”
III. The possibility of distinguishing a new disposition

Ultimately, Smith’s argument fails because the externalist need not (and should not) accept the one explanation Smith offers. To see why, we must examine the striking fact that needs to be explained, viz., the “reliable connection,” and the form an explanation of it must take.

Recall the striking fact: that “a change in motivation follows reliably in the wake of a change in moral judgment, at least in the good and strong-willed person” (1994: 71). To put this another way, moralists have a particular disposition: when a moralist changes her moral judgments, she is disposed to undergo a correlated change in moral motivation. Certainly, if the moralist has a de dicto desire to do what is right, then this would explain why she has this disposition. Smith thinks this is the only way an externalist could explain this disposition. I will argue that Smith is wrong about this.

I want to explain why I think that Smith thinks that the externalist has only one possible way of explaining the reliable connection. Smith says of the externalist, “She will . . . insist that what explains the reliable connection between judgement and motivation is a motivational disposition I have in virtue of which I count as a good person. In other words, what explains the reliability of the connection is the content of my moral motivation” (1994: 73).26 There is some question here as to whether the second sentence is, as Smith indicates, simply synonymous with the first. On the contrary, we might think that the “motivational disposition” of which Smith speaks in the first sentence could be any number of things, but that “the content of my moral motivation” he mentions in the second sentence would necessarily refer to a specific first-order

26 Here “good person” signifies someone who is a moralist. See note 11.
desire (like a *de dicto* desire to do what is right). More specifically, it seems that the explanatory motivational disposition could be this: a *disposition to acquire particular non-instrumental desires to perform those actions which have the properties which make them right* or, for short, a *disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one judges it right to do*.\(^{27,28}\) This disposition would explain why an agent who had it would be motivated to do what she believed it right to do, and it would explain why her motivation would change when she changed her moral beliefs. Furthermore, this disposition would not seem to count as a *desire* to do what is right. If this sort of *disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one believes is right* can be properly distinguished from the *desire to do what is right*, then Smith would be wrong to claim that the externalist has only one way of explaining the reliable connection between changes in moral judgment and changes in motivation. In that case, the externalist might have a solution to Smith’s challenge. By way of such a disposition, the externalist could explain the motivational

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\(^{27}\) Just as there is ambiguity in *a desire to do what is right*, such that “what is right” can be read either *de dicto* or *de re*, there is a similar ambiguity in *a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one judges it right to do*, such that “what one judges it right to do” can be read either *de dicto* or *de re*. In fact, neither is exactly right. A *de dicto* reading makes the produced desires just instances of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. A *de re* reading would make the produced desires too specific. (See note 21.) The proper object of desire is not this or that particular action (like uttering some particular words or flipping some particular switch), and it is not *rightness* itself. The proper object of desire is the features of the actions that give the actions moral value, i.e., the features of the actions which make them right. I have attempted to make things clearer by specifying that the desires produced are non-instrumental desires, and, in the longer description of the disposition, indicating that the produced desires are directed toward the right-making properties of actions. Still, both descriptions given so far lack precision. To be precise, the disposition should really be described as *a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to perform actions which one judges to have the properties which make these actions right* (where “actions which one judges to have the properties which make these actions right” is read *de dicto* and “properties which make these actions right actions” is read *de re*). For the sake of brevity, I will often refer to the disposition in question by some variation of one of the descriptions given in the text above, or, sometimes as *a disposition to desire the right-making features of actions*, though this wording is imprecise as well.

\(^{28}\) David Copp (1997) and James Dreier (2000) suggest similarly described dispositions in response to Smith’s argument against externalism. Copp suggests “a disposition to desire straightaway to do what one believes to be right” (1997: 50). I think Copp’s suggestion may be along the lines of what I am suggesting, but Copp does not develop it in enough detail for me to be sure about that. Dreier suggests (2000: 623-629) but later rejects (2000: 631-634) a disposition he calls “suggestibility,” which he supposes to be Similar to Copp’s suggested disposition. Dreier also describes a somewhat similar disposition in terms of second-order desires (2000: 629-637). I will have a lot more to say about second-order desire possibility later.
changes of moralists without having to suppose that moralists have the desire which Smith claims constitutes a morality fetish.

Unfortunately for the externalist, it is difficult to work out this kind of distinction beyond the rough terms I have just suggested. To see why, consider an analogous but more mundane example. Consider the following two people. Carrie has a desire to eat any chocolate that she believes to be available. Camilla has a disposition such that, when she believes any chocolate is available, she acquires the desire to eat that chocolate. I have given their patterns of motivation different descriptions, but it is unclear whether there is a real difference. In fact, I think Smith would claim that they have the same desire. This is a consequence of Smith’s analysis of desire.\(^\text{29}\)

In chapter 4 of the *The Moral Problem*, in the course of arguing for the Humean theory of motivation, Smith develops an account of desires. On this account, desires are simply dispositions to be motivated in certain ways.

Smith’s account of desire as dispositional rejects a phenomenological conception of desire according to which desires are essentially bound up with the passions and emotions associated with attraction and aversion. According to a phenomenological conception, desires are known (and may be introspected) by how they feel. In contrast, Smith offers a functional view of desires. Smith summarizes this view as follows (1994: 113):

[D]esires are states that have a certain functional role. That is, according to this conception, we should think of desiring to φ as having a certain set of dispositions, the disposition to ψ in conditions C, the disposition to χ in conditions C’, and so on, where, in order for conditions C and C’ to obtain, the subject must have, *inter alia*, certain other desires, and also certain means-ends beliefs, beliefs concerning φ-ing by ψ-ing, φ-ing by χ-ing and so on.

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\(^{29}\) Smith does not actually employ his analysis of desires in order to argue for claims like this about the indistinguishability of certain desires or dispositions. However, his view of desires is well suited for making such arguments.
Under such a conception, given that a set of dispositions constitutes a single complex disposition, a desire just is a particular motivational disposition. Then determining the propositional content of a desire is a matter of specifying the functional role of such a disposition (1994: 114).  

We can now reexamine Carrie and Camilla. From a functional perspective, they have the same desire/disposition. If either believes there is chocolate to be had, *ceteris paribus*, she is motivated to eat the chocolate. If either lacks such a belief, then we know nothing about her motivation. If Smith’s conception of desire is right, then that is all there is to it. We have no grounds for distinguishing Carrie’s motivational tendencies from Camilla’s. 

In light of the example of Carrie and Camilla, we can see one reason why Smith’s challenge to the externalist is a difficult one. Earlier I suggested that a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do whatever one judges it right to do might be distinguished from a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. The problem is that each of these motivational dispositions, whether labeled as a “disposition” or a “desire,” counts as a desire according to Smith’s view of desire. And, *prima facie*, these two dispositions play the same functional role. Specifically, when

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30 I am not convinced that Smith’s account of desires is correct, but I accept it here for the sake of argument.
31 One might object here by pointing out a difference between functionalism and behaviorism. Roughly, a behaviorist distinguishes mental states only according to the stimuli which induce them and the behaviors they produce. A functionalist, on the other hand, distinguishes mental states with regard to stimuli and behaviors and, additionally, their relations to other mental states. The dispositions of Carrie and Camilla certainly do not look distinguishable from a behaviorist perspective. However, if the dispositions of Carrie and Camilla, respectively, lead them in different courses of practical reasoning, then they might be distinguishable from a functional perspective. Still, I cannot see how the dispositions I ascribed to Carrie and Camilla would be functionally distinguishable, but with an appropriate functionalist theory of mental states, it might be possible. At any rate, the important point here is that, according to some views, Carrie and Camilla are indistinguishable.
32 One might worry that even if phenomenology is not definitive of desires, it might serve to distinguish them in situations like this. Smith holds that desires need not feel any particular way, but that is not to say they never have any phenomenological content. He extends his dispositional account of desire by suggesting that a desire may actually include a disposition to feel a certain way. He says, “desires have phenomenological content just to the extent that the having of certain feelings is one of the things that they are dispositions to produce under certain conditions” (1994: 114). So phenomenology might be grounds for distinguishing desires in some cases. But, *ex hypothesi*, it is not in the case of Carrie and Camilla. According to the descriptions I gave of Carrie and Camilla, neither is disposed to feel any particular way. If, given the object of their desires (viz., chocolate), it is implausible that there are no sensations or feelings involved, then we might adjust the scenario by adding that either Carrie or Camilla, whenever she believes there is chocolate to be had, feels pangs of hunger. In that case, the motivational tendencies of the two agents, as far as described, remain functionally identical.
a person with either disposition judges that it is right for her to do something, she acquires the motivation to do it.\footnote{Again one might object that the apparatus I am employing for distinguishing desires is behaviorist, not functionalist. (See note 31.) It might be thought that these two dispositions could be distinguished by pointing to different relations they bear to other mental states or different roles they play in, for instance, practical reasoning. At any rate, this possibility does not affect my larger argument because I am about to show that these two dispositions can be clearly distinguished from any perspective, functionalist, behaviorist, or other.} If the disposition I have suggested is not functionally distinguishable from a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right, then, according to Smith’s theory of desires, it just is a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right.

The difficulty here is not just in distinguishing the disposition I have suggested from a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right; the problem is more general. The very description of the reliable connection seems to identify a motivational disposition with a particular functional role, and this functional role is the same as the functional role played by a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right. Hence, it appears that any disposition which explains the reliable connection will be functionally indistinguishable from a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right. This, I think, explains why Smith thinks that the externalist has only one available way of explaining the reliable connection between changes in moral judgment and changes in motivation.
IV. Distinguishing the dispositions

Now I want to show that the disposition I have suggested is clearly distinguishable from a *de dicto* desire to do what is right and still characterizes the motivational changes of moralists. Again, the disposition I am suggesting is this: *a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one judges it right to do.*

Consider an agent with this disposition. When she judges that it is right to φ, she acquires a non-instrumental desire to φ. However, this new non-instrumental desire to φ is just that: non-instrumental. Thus, her new non-instrumental desire to φ, once she has it, is not dependent on the presence of a belief that it is right to φ. Therefore, this desire may persist even if the agent loses the belief that it is right to φ.

In contrast, consider an agent with a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. When she judges that it is right to φ, she acquires a merely instrumental desire to φ. For her, φ-ing is merely a means of satisfying her more basic general desire to do what is right. Thus, her desire to φ is completely dependent on her belief that φ-ing is right. Therefore, when she loses the belief that it is right to φ, she loses the desire to φ.

Though these two dispositions function similarly when the agent acquires a new moral belief, they clearly differ with regard to what happens when the agent loses a moral belief. Therefore, they are distinct from any perspective, functionalist or otherwise.

An agent’s possession of a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she judges it right to do would seem to make her a moralist. If that is right, then Smith is wrong to claim that the externalist can explain the motivational changes of a moralist only by positing her
possession of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. It may be appropriate to explain the motivational changes of some moralists with reference to a *de dicto* desire to do what is right, but other moralists may be most appropriately explained with reference to the other disposition I have suggested.
V. Different dispositions, different sorts of moralists

One may wonder whether an agent with the disposition I have suggested really does count as a moralist. After all, her desires do not track her beliefs about rightness as strictly as they would if she had a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. An agent with the disposition I have suggested has motivational tendencies which differ from those of an agent with a *de dicto* desire to do what is right; indeed, that is the point. But could it be that an agent counts as a moralist only if her motivational tendencies really are functionally indistinguishable from an agent with a *de dicto* desire to do what is right? I think the answer to this question is clearly *no*. Agents with the disposition I have suggested do indeed count as moralists, but they are a little different.

The defining feature of moralists is a certain sort of consistency between moral judgments and motivation to act. Smith says this: “[M]oralists are those people who are such that, when they make judgements about what it is right to do they *are* motivated to act accordingly, at least absent weakness of will and the like” (1996: 176). If an agent exhibits this kind of consistency with respect to all of the moral judgments she makes, then she is a moralist. An agent with a *de dicto* desire to do what is right does exhibit this kind of consistency in all cases. So, in determining whether an agent with a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she judges it right to do is a moralist, it is only necessary to look at the cases in which the motivational changes of such an agent differ from those of an agent who has a *de dicto* desire to do what is right.

With respect to any possible moral claim, an agent can make several different moral judgments: First, if she *does not* already judge that this claim expresses a moral requirement, then
she may come to judge that it expresses a moral requirement. Second, if she does not already judge that this claim expresses a moral requirement, then she may come to judge that indeed it does not express a moral requirement. Third, if she already judges that this claim does express a moral requirement, then she may come to judge that it does not express a moral requirement.

In cases of the first sort, in which an agent makes a new judgment that she is bound by a moral requirement which she did not previously acknowledge, an agent with either disposition will acquire (if she does not already have it) the desire to act as she now believes is morally required. In cases of the second sort, in which an agent judges that a possible moral requirement she does not acknowledge is indeed not a moral requirement, an agent with either disposition will not be disposed to undergo a motivational change. It is only in cases of the third sort, cases in which an agent makes a judgment that she is not bound by a moral requirement she previously acknowledged, that the motivational changes of an agent with a de dicto desire to do what is right may differ from those of an agent who has the disposition I have suggested.

To see that an agent with the disposition I have suggested exhibits the kind of consistency between moral belief and motivation appropriate to moralists, I want to look more closely at the third kind of case, the kind of case in which such an agent’s motivation would differ from that of a moralist who has a de dicto desire to do what is right. Suppose that, at first, an agent who was not already motivated to \( \phi \) comes to judge that it is obligatory to \( \phi \). Then, if she has either a de dicto desire to do what is right or the disposition I have suggested, she will acquire motivation to \( \phi \). Suppose that, later, she judges that it is permissible to \( \psi \), where \( \psi \)-ing is sufficient for not \( \phi \)-ing. This is the instance of judgment of the third sort: She goes from believing that she is morally required to \( \phi \), to believing that \( \phi \)-ing is not morally required. In her new belief state, she considers both \( \phi \)-ing and \( \psi \)-ing morally permissible. On one hand, if she is a moralist because she has a de dicto desire to do what is right, then the motivation to \( \phi \) that she earlier acquired would
disappear at this point. That is because her motivation to \( \varphi \) would have been merely instrumental; it would have been derived from and dependent upon her desire to do what is right along with her belief about the rightness of \( \varphi \)-ing, a belief that she no longer has. On the other hand, if she has a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she believes it right to do, then she will not necessarily lose her motivation to \( \varphi \) when she judges that it is permissible to \( \psi \). That is because her motivation to \( \varphi \) is non-instrumental; once she has it, it is not contingent on the belief that she ended up losing.

This case might appear to be a problem because the agent who has the disposition I have described does not have a change in motivation following her change in moral judgment. Hence, for her, the reliable connection between changes in moral belief and changes in motivation does not seem to hold in this case.\(^{34}\) However, I do not think this is a problem. Recall that with the second sort of change in moral judgment, cases in which an agent judges that a possible moral requirement she does not acknowledge is indeed not a moral requirement, neither the moralist with a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right nor the agent with the disposition I have described will have any kind of motivational change following her change in moral judgment. Hence, the reliable connection between changes in moral belief and changes in motivation is just not exhibited in every case in which a moralist changes her moral beliefs. If moralists are precisely those agents who are consistently motivated to do as they believe it is right to do (absent practical irrationality), then, given that a moralist changes her moral belief, a change in motivation is required if and only if she is not already motivated to do what she now believes it right to do. In the example described above, since the agent with the disposition I have described judges that \( \varphi \)-ing and \( \psi \)-ing are both morally permissible, if she maintains her motivation to \( \varphi \), then she is still

\(^{34}\) Recall Smith’s original statement of the striking fact about the reliable connection: “[I]t is a striking fact about moral motivation that a \textit{change in motivation} follows reliably in the wake of a \textit{change in moral judgment}, at least in the good and strong-willed person” (1994: 71).
motivated appropriately. Therefore, in this sort of case, an agent with the disposition I have suggested still counts as a moralist.

Despite the distinct functional roles of the two dispositions (as manifested in the motivational dynamics of an agent who has one in comparison to the motivational dynamics of an agent who has the other), having either disposition is sufficient for being a moralist. It follows that there are at least two different kinds of moralists. A moralist may be a moralist because she has a *de dicto* desire to do what is right, or a moralist may be a moralist because she has a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she judges it right to do. Again, the distinguishing feature is that a moralist with a *de dicto* desire to do what is right does, whereas a moralist with the disposition I have described does not, tend to lose motivation to do what she had previously believed it right to do when she comes to judge that she is not after all morally required to do it.\(^{35}\)

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\(^{35}\) I intend this as a statement about the *typical* motivational patterns of the two kinds of moralists. Whether this holds in a particular case will, of course, depend on what other desires or dispositions the agent has.
VI. What externalists really have to explain

Comparing two different kinds of moralists, notice that an agent who is a moralist because she has a *de dicto* desire to do what is right exhibits a more vigorous, more strict variety of the reliable connection than does an agent who is a moralist because she is disposed to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she judges it right to do. A moralist of the former sort will undergo a change in motivation both when she acquires a belief that there is moral requirement and when she loses a belief that there is a moral requirement. A moralist of the second sort will undergo a change in motivation when she acquires a belief that there is a moral requirement. However, if she loses a belief about a moral requirement (and does not lose it by acquiring a new belief that there is an opposing requirement), then it is not likely (but, of course, still possible) that a change in motivation will accompany her change in belief. Thus, we can see how agents with the different dispositions are likely to exhibit the reliable connection to different degrees. The motivations of an agent who is a moralist because she has a *de dicto* desire to do what is right are sensitive to a particular category of moral judgments to which the motivations of moralists who have the disposition I have suggested are not necessarily sensitive.

Consider Janet. Janet is a moralist because she is disposed to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she judges it right to do. During most of her teenage years, Janet is wild and irresponsible. Then, at the age of eighteen, she is coaxed into joining the military. In the course of her military training and career, Janet acquires a fundamental moral belief about the inherent value of self-discipline. She comes to believe that it is morally obligatory for people to maintain disciplined lifestyles. Since she is a moralist, when acquiring her moral belief about self-discipline,
Janet acquires the motivation to maintain a high level of discipline in her own life. Then, several years after leaving the military, Janet meets new people, some of whom are quite free-wheeling. In the course of getting to know these people, she loses her belief that self-discipline is morally valuable in the way she had previously thought it was. She changes her moral judgment and comes to believe that it is morally permissible for people to live life with less discipline. However, in her own life Janet continues to desire a high degree of discipline. This is manifested in her devotion to her career, her physical fitness regimen, her orderly accounting of her expenditures, her restraint in interior decoration, etc. Her motivation persists despite a change in her moral judgment.

As stated, Janet is a moralist because she has a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she believes it right to do. If Janet had been a moralist because she had a *de dicto* desire to do what is right, then her story would have been quite different. When she acquired her moral belief about the value of self-discipline, she would have acquired a merely instrumental desire to live in a disciplined way. Her desire for discipline in her own life would have been derived from and dependent on her belief that people are morally obligated to live in a disciplined way. Therefore, when she lost this belief, she would have lost the desire which depended on it. Then she would no longer desire discipline in her own life the way she in fact does.

The remarkable thing about the example of Janet is that it shows quite clearly how it could be that an agent’s possession of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right could fail to provide an explanation of why she is a moralist in the way she is. More generally, from this example we can observe that positing possession of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right cannot provide an adequate explanation of the behavior of every moralist, and not just because such a desire seems to constitute a morality fetish. Janet is a moralist, and her motivational changes cannot be
accounted for just by referring to a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. As I just showed, her motivation would have changed in significantly different ways if she had been motivated all along by a *de dicto* desire to do what is right.

Some moralists (unlike Janet) exhibit a vigorous, strict variety of the reliable connection, and other moralists (like Janet) exhibit a less vigorous, less strict variety of it. If there are two sorts of moralists, then the externalist must be able to explain them both. However, the externalist should not be required to explain them both in the same way. In fact, examples like that of Janet show that they cannot all be explained the same way. I claim that, in most cases, an externalist should explain a moralist who exhibits the vigorous, strict variety of the reliable connection by positing the moralist’s possession of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. And I claim that, most cases, an externalist should explain a moralist who exhibits the less vigorous, less strict variety of the reliable connection by attributing to that moralist the disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what she judges it right to do.\(^\text{36}\)

A person who exhibits the strict form of the reliable connection tends to lose any desire to perform certain actions just upon realizing that she is not morally required to perform these actions. This, in itself, would seem to indicate that such a person is less than virtuous. A virtuous person tends to have desires which persist over time, desires which constitute the projects she cares about. We should think that a virtuous person or an exemplar of moral perfection would exhibit a significant degree of stability in the content of her moral motivation. If these thoughts

\(^{36}\) These claims, especially the former, may admit of specific exceptions. In particular, it is possible that a moralist could have the disposition I have described but still exhibit the vigorous variety of the reliable connection. The vigorous variety of the reliable connection differs from the less vigorous variety because the motivations of agents who have the vigorous variety are sensitive to some moral judgments to which the motivations of agents who have the less vigorous variety would not necessarily be sensitive. But that does not mean that there could not be some other contingent feature of the an agent’s psychology such that, when combined with the disposition I have described, makes her motivation as sensitive to moral judgment as it would be if she had a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. Then, an agent with the disposition I have described would exhibit the strict, vigorous variety of the reliable connection. Of course, this new combination of dispositions would be more difficult to functionally distinguish from a *de dicto* desire to do what is right.
about moral virtue are correct, then they give us an independent reason to think that it would be inappropriate to describe the motivational changes of a virtuous person in terms of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. These thoughts also suggest that the disposition I have described would be better suited to explaining virtuous people.

We have two ways of dividing up the class of moralists. First, we can divide the class of moralists according to which disposition makes them moralists. Second, we can divide the class of moralists according to whether the moralist is also a virtuous person. According to Smith’s original argument, we know that a moralist who has a *de dicto* desire to do what is right is not virtuous. We must also think that there would be some moralists who have a disposition I have described and who, for one reason or another, are also not virtuous. However, if, unlike the *de dicto* desire to do what is right, the disposition I have described is compatible with moral virtue, then moralists who are virtuous people could have this disposition. In that case, we will have an externalist solution to Smith’s challenge. Smith argues that, in order to explain the motivational changes of a good, virtuous person, either we must posit her possession of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right, or we must endorse the practicality requirement. Since, the former option is implausible, he argues that we must accept the latter. However, if we can plausibly explain virtuous people in terms of the disposition I have described, then Smith’s challenge to externalism will be answered.

The main task now is to provide a plausible account of the moral psychology of moralists who are disposed to acquire non-instrumental desires to do as they judge it right to do. Just to insist that they have such a disposition is not enough. Basically, all I have said so far about this disposition is this: If an agent in possession of it judges that it is right to perform some action, then she will acquire a non-instrumental desire to perform that action. This actually tells us very little; to give a conditional analysis of a disposition is not to explain how it works. If a plausible
explanation of how such a disposition works is not available, then it is implausible to explain the motivational changes of good people in terms of it. If there is no good explanation of how such a disposition works, then we may be forced to endorse the practicality requirement after all.
VII. The second-order desire solution

Is it possible for an externalist to give a more specific account of what I called a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one judges it right to do? James Dreier’s (2000) response to Smith’s argument against externalism offers an account of the right sort. Dreier explains the characteristic motivational disposition of moralists in terms of second-order desires.\(^{37}\) The disposition Dreier suggests is functionally distinguishable from a *de dicto* desire to do what is right, and it can account for all of the complicated motivational changes we see in moralists. Furthermore, I will argue that an agent who is a moralist because of this disposition does not suffer from fetishism in any way like a moralist who has a *de dicto* desire to do what is right does.

Dreier’s proposal involves a kind of second-order desire patterned off of what David Schmidtz (1994) has called *maieutic ends*. Roughly, a maieutic end is “an end achieved through a process of coming to have other ends” (Schmidtz 1994: 228; quoted in Dreier 2000: 629-630). A maieutic end is a second-order desire because it is a desire to have other desires. In Schmidtz’s view, it is a special kind of second-order desire because it is a desire to have an intrinsic or non-instrumental desire. A maieutic desire is satisfied when the agent who has this desire comes to have a certain appropriate non-instrumental desire for something else. Schmidtz explains, “[J]ust as final ends are the further ends for the sake of which we pursue instrumental and constitutive ends, maieutic ends are the further ends for which we choose final ends” (1994: 229).\(^{38}\) Schmidtz

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\(^{37}\) I am not claiming that a model based on second-order desires is the *only* plausible way to give a detailed account of a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one judges it right to do. In particular, what Dreier calls “suggestibility” may be another option. See note 28.

\(^{38}\) Schmidtz’s talk of “final ends” suggests matters of a person’s ultimate life goals, and, indeed, he means it this
suggests the goal of having a career as a kind of maieutic end (1994: 228-230). The desire to have a career is, in part, the desire to have certain non-instrumental goals, viz., desires to do the activities of that career well. By having desires (and pursuing those desires) related to a particular career in, say, medicine, a person goes some way toward satisfying her desire to have a career. The idea is that desires are acquired as a means to satisfy some end, but the desires are not desires for the means to that end. It is the acquisition of the desires which satisfies the maieutic desire, and, once these desires have been acquired, they do not depend on the maieutic end for their existence.

With ordinary desires (such as my desire to eat an apple) once I have obtained the object of my desire, the desire tends to disappear. The same may apply to maieutic desires: If an agent has a maieutic desire for a non-instrumental desire of a certain sort, then when she acquires the right sort of non-instrumental desire, the maieutic desire need not persist in order to sustain the new motivation. It is this feature of maieutic desires which is crucial to the success of an externalist model of moral motivation based on second-order desires. To see why, consider Dreier’s specific proposal: “[S]uppose that a particular second order desire, the desire to value for their own sake those things that are (or that one believes to be) morally right, is an effective one” (2000: 630). An agent with this maieutic desire has three features which are important for us here: First, she is a moralist. Second, she does not necessarily have a de dicto desire to do what is right. Third, she is not necessarily guilty of any kind of fetishism.

First, observe that an agent with this desire (assuming, as Dreier does, that the desire is an effective one) will be a moralist. When she judges that it is right to φ, no matter what she
believed or was motivated to do before, she will acquire a first-order, non-instrumental desire to φ.

Second, observe that the desire that makes her a moralist is not the same as a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. Suppose that, because of her maieutic desire, she acquired the motivation to φ upon coming to believe that it is right to φ. If she loses her belief that it is right to φ (and not by acquiring the belief that is it right to do something else which requires not φ-ing), then there is no reason to think she will lose the motivation to φ. As Dreier explains of an agent with the maieutic desire, “[H]is end of having moral ends is maieutic, and the ends to which it gives rise are, once arisen, free standing, final ends rather than instrumental ones” (2000: 631). In contrast, an agent who is a moralist because of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right, since her motivation is to do right actions, once she loses the belief that φ-ing is a right action, she will not be motivated to φ. Therefore, the maieutic desire to non-instrumentally desire to do what one believes to be right (read *de re*) is distinct from a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. Thus, we have the specification of a basis of the disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one believes it right to do. This purports to be a full-fledged, not just schematic, solution to Smith’s challenge to externalists.

Third is the claim that this desire does not necessarily amount to some kind of fetish. I will present my argument for this claim over the next several sections. For now, note that if it does somehow amount to a fetish, it is not in exactly the same way that the first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right does. The primary problem with the first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right is that the agent who has it is not motivated to do what is right by the features of the action that make it right. Even if, initially, an agent had a first-order, non-instrumental desire to perform some action which she believed to be right, if she were to undergo a change of moral belief, her new motivation to do what she then believed to be right would have to be instrumental. Suppose
an agent is a moralist because she has a first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right. And suppose that, at first, she believes it is right to \( \varphi \) and also has a non-instrumental desire to \( \varphi \). Then she judges that it is not right to \( \varphi \), but rather to \( \psi \). Absent some explanation, which the *de dicto* desire to do what is right cannot by itself provide, of why she would now lose her non-instrumental desire to \( \varphi \) and acquire a non-instrumental desire to \( \psi \), she will now have a purely instrumental desire to \( \psi \) (as a means of doing what is right) and a conflicting non-instrumental desire to \( \varphi \). Any motivation she now has for doing what she believes to be right will be purely instrumental. The second-order desire proposed by Dreier provides exactly what the first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right does not provide: an explanation of why an agent acquires new first-order, non-instrumental desires in accordance with her changes in moral belief.

I will refer to the second-order maieutic desire proposed by Dreier as the *moralist second-order desire* to distinguish it from a first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right. Note, though, that the moralist second-order desire does, in some sense, have “*de dicto* content.” Expressed most simply, the moralist second-order desire is a desire to have desires to do what is right.\(^{41}\) Certainly, the objects of the first-order desires, i.e., “what is right,” are to be understood *de re*, not *de dicto*.\(^{42}\) The important characteristic of the moralist second-order desire is that the first-order desires it produces are not for rightness, in the abstract; they are desires to perform the actions which are right, according to the features of those actions which make them right. Although the first-order desires produced have this “*de re*” character, the second-order desire

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\(^{41}\) See note 27, where I give a precise description of the disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one believes it right to do. The details elaborated with respect to that disposition apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the moralist second-order desire.

\(^{42}\) To be precise, the appropriate object of an agent’s morally relevant first-order desire is the feature of the action which makes it right (where “feature” is read *de re*). However, this means that the appropriate first-order desire will be something like the desire to do what is fair (where “what is fair” is read *de dicto*, not *de re*). Then, the desire to perform some particular fair action (where “some particular fair action” is *de re*) will be a desire derived instrumentally from the general *de dicto* desire to do what is fair, but not instrumentally derived from a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. For an explanation of the way Smith employs the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* contents of desires, see note 21.
which produces them has a “de dicto” character. It is a desire to have desires to do what is right, where “desires to do what is right” is read de dicto, not de re. In other words, the moralist second-order desire is not about having particular desires. It is about having any desire which is a desire is for the right-making features of an action. The first-order desires produced by the second-order desire are for particular right-making features, but the second-order desire is about right-making features in the abstract. This means that the moralist second-order desire and the moralist first-order desire, i.e., the de dicto desire to do what is right, are alike in that the content of each desire somehow includes the concept of rightness in the abstract. In fact, it is this feature which makes each of them suitable for externalist accounts of the motivational changes of moralists in contexts of moral belief revision. To explain the motivational changes of moralists, externalists have to say that what makes a person a moralist is some conative attitude which ties motivation or desire to judgments about rightness in the abstract, rightness as involved in beliefs like the belief that it is right for me to φ in these circumstances.
VIII. Smith’s complaints about the second-order desire solution and Dreier’s response

Smith (1997) has a response to an externalist model of moral motivation based on second-order desires. Brink (1997: 28-29) and Copp (1997: 50-51) each sketch ways that externalists could explain moralists without positing that a moralist must have a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. Neither Brink nor Copp makes explicit reference to second-order desires, but Smith understands their suggestions in terms of second-order desires. Smith says, “Instead of saying, as I suggest, that moralists possess a desire to do the right thing, they both suggest what makes someone a moralist is the fact that they have a desire to acquire noninstrumental desires to perform acts with right-making features” (1997: 115). Dreier rightly indicates that this exact description, as given by Smith, characterizes his view as well (2000: 630).

Smith notes that, according to the second-order desire model proposed, moralists do indeed have the proper attitude toward the right-making features of their actions (1997: 115). However, he holds that, on this model, moralists are still necessarily motivated in a way that is inappropriate for really virtuous people. He notes that, in the case of the moralist second-order desire, as with the first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right, there is an explicitly moral concern. With the first-order desire the concern is with right actions, and with the second-order desire it is about having the right desires. And, hence, to propose that virtuous people are moralists because of a desire to acquire non-instrumental desires to perform acts with right-making features is simply to “reorient the fetish” (1997: 115). Here is how he describes this new complaint (1997: 116):

43 See note 28 above for a brief description of Copp’s suggestion.
The desire I described as a fetish, and which [Brink and Copp] agree sounds perverse, but which they deny a morally virtuous person possesses, is thus on all fours with the desire that they ascribe to the morally virtuous person. They should therefore agree that the morally virtuous person they describe sounds equally precious, equally self-absorbed, equally fixated on something that isn’t of any moral significance: the moral standing of the contents of his first-order desires, rather than the features in virtue of which his first-order desires have the moral standing that they have.

Unfortunately, Smith does not provide an in-depth comparison of the relevant first- and second-order desires to explain why he thinks that the latter is problematic in much the same way as the former. Clearly, there is a difference between the two, as Smith admits. Specifically, according to the second-order desire solution, the motivation to act is directed toward the morally proper object, viz., the right-making features of the act. In order to see whether it is legitimate for Smith to hold that something about the second-order desire model makes it inappropriate for describing moralists who are virtuous people, we must examine the model in more detail.

Dreier gives a relatively brief response to the worry that the moralist second-order desire amounts to a fetish. He considers whether a person who has a moralist second-order desire might be guilty of desiring for the wrong reasons, just as a moralist who has a de dicto desire to do what is right is guilty of acting for the wrong reasons (2000: 636-637). He gives three reasons for thinking that the answer is no. These are Dreier’s reasons for thinking that the moralist second-order desire does not amount to some kind of fetish. First, he notes that internalists and externalists can agree that a good person should hope to be motivated by desires for the features of acts which make them right (2000: 636). He notes that, if asked, everyone would hope that some day in the future she would be motivated by desiring the right-making features (2000: 636). From this, he concludes that there is nothing at all blameworthy about simply having the moralist second-order desire. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with simply wanting to have the right desires or even with simply wanting to be a good or virtuous person. Dreier is right about this, and he is right to explain, “The ground for complaint would have to be that the [moralist second-order
desire] is playing the role in the model that really ought to be played by something else” (2000: 636). After that, the second and third reasons he gives for thinking that the moralist second-order desire is not somehow fetishistic are intended to address this complaint. The second reason is that the moralist second-order desire “needn’t play any maintenance role once the first order motivation is formed” (2000: 636). The third reason is that the desires produced by the moralist second-order desire are not conditioned on the belief that it is right to perform the desired action.

These latter two reasons simply express in different ways the general point about how the moralist second-order desire is functionally distinguishable from a first-order de dicto desire to do what is right. The moralist second-order desire produces first-order, non-instrumental desires that are independent in two ways in which the instrumental desires derived from a de dicto desire to do what is right are not.

With respect to Dreier’s second reason, the new first-order desires are independent from the second-order desire which produced them in that the second-order desire need not play a role in maintaining these desires. This can be seen in the extreme case in which the second-order desire disappears.44 Even in the complete absence of the second-order desire, the first-order desires it produced may persist. In fact, this is how maieutic desires typically work. Recall the maieutic desire about having a career; it was a desire to have certain non-instrumental goals or desires, the kind of goals or desires a person has when she is concerned with her career. Once the person has acquired these desires, her maieutic desire is satisfied and may well disappear. But even once the maieutic desire is satisfied and disappears, the desires acquired to satisfy it may persist. Of course, with respect to the moralist second-order desire, the expectation is not that it will disappear once it has produced new first-order desires in the agent. The moralist second-

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44 Dreier does not mention this extreme case in which the second-order desire disappears though the new first-order, non-instrumental desires persist. However, I think this case does a nice job of demonstrating the way in which the new first-order desires are independent of the second-order desire which produced them.
order desire must persist at least in a latent form until it is needed again to adjust the moralist’s first-order motivations if and when she undergoes another revision of moral belief.

With respect to Dreier’s third reason, a new first-order desire produced by the moralist second-order desire is independent from the belief that the actions it motivates are right. Even if the belief about rightness disappears, since the object of each of the new desires is not the feature of rightness itself, but some other feature (whatever had been thought to be the right-making features), the desires may persist. This I explained before as the reason why a disposition (of which the moralist second-order desire is one realization) to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one judges it right to do is functionally distinguishable from a first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right.

Hence, according to these two latter reasons, Dreier is right to think that the moralist second-order desire is very different from a *de dicto* desire to do what is right and is not bound up with the agent’s motivation in the same problematic way. However, these two reasons are not responsive to the worry Dreier mentioned as the counterpoint to the first reason. That is to say, these two latter reasons do not establish that the moralist second-order desire is not playing a role that should be played by something else. These two latter reasons indicate that, once established, a first-order, non-instrumental desire for some purported right-making feature is free-standing. But they do not show that this first-order desire was established in the appropriate way.

Reconsider the first of Dreier’s three reasons. Dreier says that there is nothing wrong with wanting to be motivated by the right-making features of actions. That is right. But it is not responsive to the real worry. It is notable that Dreier here describes the moralist second-order

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45 Similarly, suppose a person had a career-oriented maieutic desire and acquired the appropriate first-order desires for some career. If some problem arose with her pursuit of her chosen career which made her first-order desires somehow untenable or otherwise unsatisfactory, then she may again need the maieutic desire to prompt her to find new career goals (perhaps relative to a new profession).

46 See p. 31, above.
desire as a “hope” that one will someday be motivated by the features of actions that make them right (2000: 636). We tend to use the word “hope” to describe our attitude toward those desired states of affairs over which we may have little or no control. A desire or an intention, on the other hand, is an attitude toward something desirable that tends to move an agent to attempt to obtain what is desired. And it is the attitude which actually moves an agent to be a moralist which is at issue here. Similarly, note that there is nothing wrong with simply having a de dicto desire to do what is right. That is even clearer if we think of it as an agent’s hope that she will do what is right (read de dicto). The problem with the de dicto desire to do what is right is not its existence. The problem is that, if it is to explain why an agent is a moralist, it, rather than some other desire, must be the desire which effectively moves the agent to action. On analogy, then, we might suspect that if there is a problem with the moralist second-order desire, the problem is not just its existence. The problem would be that, if it is to explain why an agent is a moralist, it, rather than something else, produces the agent’s appropriate first-order desires. This is a worry Dreier aptly raises but does not adequately address.

To see if there is a real problem with the moralist second-order desire, I want to examine its function in realizing the characteristically moralist motivational change under conditions of moral belief revision. To do this, I will compare how this desire makes a person a moralist, in contrast to how a first-order de dicto desire to do what is right makes a person a moralist.

As I mentioned before, Smith does not spell out his criticisms of the second-order desire solution in much detail, though he claims that, vis-a-vis what makes a virtuous person a moralist, the moralist second-order desire is “on all fours” with the de dicto desire to do what is right (1997: 116). I count three different plausible bases Smith may have for drawing this similarity. First, Smith describes the problem with the de dicto desire to do what is right as having to do with being “alienated from the features of acts that [good people] believe make them right” (1997:
114), and we might think that a moralist with the second-order desire has the same problem. Second, Smith specifically says that a person who is a moralist because of the moralist second-order desire is “precious” and “self-absorbed” in the same way that a moralist with a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right is (1997: 116). Third, he claims that a moralist with the moralist second-order desire is “fixated on something that isn’t of any moral significance,” just like a moralist with the \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right is (1997: 116). These three general derogatory descriptions for character traits provide a framework for examining whether the person with the moralist second-order desire really does have anything like the problems that a person with a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right has. My examination will show that there is nothing clearly wrong with the moralist second-order desire, at least not anything like the problems with the \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right. I will not put too much emphasis on the subtleties of the meanings of the terms in these derogatory descriptions (and I certainly have no intention of providing analyses of the concepts involved), but they are useful as labels for the divisions of the discussion. I will take each in turn, spelling out the relevant possible problem and showing that it is not really a problem after all.
IX. The worry about alienation from the right-making features of actions

Are those people who are moralists because they have the moralist second-order desire alienated from the right-making features of their actions? The question here is whether the agent, *qua* agent, is appropriately oriented toward the source of moral value, i.e., the features that make right actions right.

To avoid confusion on this point, it is essential to recognize that it is inevitable that any externalist account of moral motivation that has any hope of explaining the motivational dynamics of moralists will suffer from some sort of alienation of motivation from moral judgment. Externalists hold that motivation and judgment come apart at some level, while internalists deny that they are separated in this way. Specifically, externalists hold that the coincidence of judgment and motivation is contingent, not just on the person’s rationality and strength of will, but also on some sort of desire for rightness (whether *de dicto* or *de re*). Internalists like Smith hold that, given that an agent is practically rational in the appropriate way, the coincidence of motivation with moral judgment is a matter of conceptual necessity.

According to the internalist view Smith prefers, motivation and moral judgment may be thought to be thoroughly non-alienated. They are not alienated because they have the same source. The source of a non-instrumental desire to perform an action with some particular right-making feature is the same as what makes this feature a right-making feature: it is practical rationality (in the special way in which Smith conceives of it). According to Smith, roughly, what makes an action right for some agent in some particular circumstances is that it is what a fully rational version of the agent would want herself to do under those circumstances (1994: 151).
And, if an agent is practically rational, then she will desire to do what she believes a fully rational version of herself would want her to do. Thus, according to Smith, what makes an agent believe that an action is right is the belief that the action is rational, and what makes the agent desire to perform that action is her practical rationality. It is this deep conceptual connection between desire and judgments about rightness (as mediated by a specific conception of practical rationality) that makes Smith’s position characteristically internalist. And, so long as rationality (as Smith conceives of it) is not thought to be an alienating factor, on such an internalist position, a moralist is not alienated from the right-making features of her actions. As such, internalist theories like Smith’s clearly avoid charges of alienation.

But if this high standard, as set by internalist theories, for non-alienated moral motivation is what the externalist’s theory is supposed to satisfy, then the deck has been stacked from the beginning. To the extent that one thinks that an agent’s motivation should be geared toward the purported right-making features of actions via a conceptual connection between moral judgment and rationality instead of via some other desire or disposition, then one will find fault with externalism itself, not just some subtle consequence of the theory. If the question of whether internalism or externalism is correct is a live question, a charge of alienation, interpreted such that any non-rational desire or disposition is alienating, would beg the question.

Although, by one standard, any externalist account of the motivation of moralists will involve some degree of alienation, that is not to say that all externalist accounts are equal vis-a-vis alienation. In particular, it is worthwhile to emphasize that there is a lower standard for non-alienated moral motivation which is satisfied by the second-order desire solution but is not satisfied by the theory positing a de dicto desire to do what is right. The problem of alienation is clear with respect to moralists who have a de dicto desire to do what is right. It is not the

47 I describe Smith’s internalist account of moral motivation in a bit more detail later (p. 65).
rightness itself that is the source of the moral value of some action, but the features in virtue of which it counts as right, that make it valuable. To be motivated by the desire for right actions (read *de dicto*) rather than a desire for the right-making features of actions, would be to be alienated from the real source of value. On such an account, the agent has no direct desire (only an instrumental one) for that which is really valuable. Indeed, this is one way of explaining the original fetishism charge. In contrast, according to the second-order desire solution, moralists do have direct, non-instrumental desires for that which is really valuable. On this account, a moralist has a direct concern for the features of actions which make the actions right.

As far as I can see, there are only two available interpretations of the charge that an account of motivation makes virtuous people out to be alienated from the right-making features of actions. On one hand, an expansive interpretation of alienation (i.e., one which makes the standard for non-alienation the same as the standard for internalism) presumes the truth of internalism and rules out externalism in advance; hence, it is question-begging. On the other hand, with a more specific interpretation of alienation, an account which posits that virtuous moralists have the moralist second-order desire emerges unscathed.
X. The worry about being precious and self-absorbed

Now consider the worry that a moralist who has the second-order desire is precious or self-absorbed. The last worry was that the moralist second-order desire, as a contingent desire that an agent might have, somehow separates or alienates a moralist’s motivation from the features of acts which make the acts worth desiring. The worry now is about the moralist second-order desire itself and whether the way in which it ties a moralist’s motivation to the right-making features of acts makes the agent overly concerned with herself. To put it another way, the last worry was about the separation between the agent’s motivation and the features that make actions right, and this worry is about what it is that separates the two.

Smith says the following of moralists with the de dicto desire to do what is right: “They seem precious, overly concerned with the moral standing of their acts when they should instead be concerned with the features in virtue of which their acts have the moral standing that they have” (1997: 115). In this complaint Smith is combining the worry about alienation and the worry about preciousness. It should be clear now that the second-order desire solution avoids the worry about alienation. However, the outstanding worry is that they have the appropriate first-order desires only because they are overly concerned with their own moral standing, specifically with the moral standing of their first-order desires. As Smith puts it, “It isn’t now about their actions. Rather it is about themselves and their own desires” (1997: 115). What should move a virtuous person to be a moralist should not be a self-centered and overly self-conscious focus on herself.48

48 Smith originally describes the moralist, on the externalist’s account, as being a moralist because of a “self-consciously moral motive” (1994: 74).
To see how worries about preciousness or self-absorption might arise even in the absence of worries about alienation, consider an analogy. Suppose some fine wine is a fine wine because of its particular flavor, aroma, and texture. A person who prefers a glass of this wine could want it because she enjoys its flavor, aroma, and texture, or she could want it just because it is “fine.” If her motive is the latter rather than the former, this wine snob is alienated from the features of the wine which make it fine, the features which make it worth preferring. This wine snob is like a moralist who has a de dicto desire to do what is right. But now compare this wine snob to someone who has taken it upon herself to become a wine connoisseur. In order to become a wine connoisseur, she desired to prefer wines with fine features, and she developed a sophisticated taste for the features of fine wines. She enjoys the opportunity to attend wine tastings, and, when she does, she is not after fineness, read de dicto; she is after the particular fine features of wines that satisfy her sophisticated taste. This wine connoisseur is not alienated from the fine features of wines; rather, she desires fine wines for what makes them valuable (that is, preferable to mediocre wines). This wine connoisseur is more like a moralist with a moralist second-order desire, a moralist who desires to perform right actions for the features of those actions which make them morally valuable. But this raises a real worry. We might (with good reason) suspect that, not only is the first wine snob precious and self-absorbed, so is the second wine drinker, the wine connoisseur. In that case, we might think that the moralist with a moralist second-order desire would be similarly precious and self-absorbed.

Before directly considering whether a moralist with the moralist second-order desire is precious and self-absorbed, I want to elaborate the example of a wine connoisseur to make it clearer why we might think that such a person is precious and self-absorbed. Consider the case of Jennifer, who has become a wine connoisseur. As I described the wine connoisseur, she took it

49 The analogy between wine tasting and moral motivation only goes so far. I do not wish to imply that the right-making features of actions are very much like secondary qualities.
upon herself to become a connoisseur. Suppose that before Jennifer was a connoisseur she did
not really care for wine. Before, if she was going to drink an alcoholic beverage at all, even if it
was with a nice meal, she was content with a cheap beer. But then suppose that she went on a
date to a wine tasting and found herself embarrassed by her lack of sophistication. After that, she
acquired a desire to appear sophisticated, and she thought that being a wine connoisseur would be
a good way to achieve this end. So, in order to become a wine connoisseur, she wanted to
develop an appreciation for the fine features of fine wines, and she proceeded to do so. At first
this took a bit of work, but now she has a first-order appreciation of the fine features of fine
wines. However, her second-order desire to have a first-order appreciation of the fine features of
fine wines is still geared toward her ultimate goal of seeming sophisticated. Suppose that a new
variety of wine has become stylish, and it is a kind of wine which Jennifer has not often tasted and
which she has never really enjoyed when she has tasted it. If Jennifer persists in her lack of
appreciation for this newly stylish wine, she will appear to lack “up-to-date” sophistication about
wine. Hence, her second-order desire to be a sophisticated wine connoisseur motivates her to
acquire a taste for (that is, a desire for the fine features of) this kind of wine.

Jennifer does seem to be really precious and self-absorbed. She is overly concerned with
being sophisticated and, specifically, with having a sophisticated palate. I think the problem with
Jennifer is that her second-order desire (her desire to non-instrumentally desire the fine features of
fine wines) is ultimately a means to achieving a sophisticated self-image. The analogous worry
with respect to moralists would be that the moralist second-order desire is ultimately the agent’s
means of ensuring her good moral standing. If a moralist’s concerns for the morally significant
features of actions come from what is ultimately a concern for the moral standing of her own self,
her own moral character, then she might very well seem precious and self-absorbed. This is how I
understand the worry that having the moralist second-order desire makes an agent precious and self-absorbed.

Now consider in greater detail the analogy between the wine connoisseur (specifically, Jennifer) and the moralist with the moralist second-order desire. We can identify at least four different desires Jennifer has which, at some level, explain why she has a first-order appreciation for the fine features of wine:

(A) The desire to seem sophisticated
(B) The desire to be a wine connoisseur
(C) The desire to have tastes characteristic of a wine connoisseur
(D) The desire to non-instrumentally desire the fine features of wines

As I described her, Jennifer’s primary desire is desire A. The object of desire B is the means to the satisfaction of desire A. The object of desire C is constitutive of the object of desire B. And the object of desire D is a specification of the object of desire C.

On analogy, we can identify four desires an agent might have which, at some level, would explain why she is a moralist:

(E) The desire to seem morally virtuous
(F) The desire to be a morally virtuous person
(G) The desire to have attitudes characteristic of a morally virtuous person
(H) The desire to non-instrumentally desire the right-making features of actions
Note that desire H is what I have called the moralist second-order desire. The relationships among these four desires a moralist might have are the same as the relationships among Jennifer’s desires. The primary desire is desire E. The object of desire F is the means to the satisfaction of desire E. The object of desire G is constitutive of the object of desire F. And the object of desire H is a specification of the object of desire G.

If a moralist has desires E, F, G, and H, in the relationship I have described, I think we should say that she is really precious and self-absorbed. In fact, she looks even worse than someone who is merely overly concerned with her own moral standing. She is overly concerned with her own moral standing just because she desires to seem morally virtuous. Her moralism is ultimately a consequence of a desire to have a certain self-image or persona. However, according to the second-order desire solution, being a moralist does not require desires E, F, or G. It only requires desire H, and it is possible to have desire H without having the others.

This amounts to a response to the worry that to have the moralist second-order desire is to be self-absorbed. The idea is that the moralist second-order desire need not be merely a desire for the means to having a virtuous character (or, worse, the appearance of a virtuous character). In fact, the moralist second-order desire need not be about the agent’s self or her own character at all. Now it is true that the moralist second-order desire must be, in some sense, self-regarding. It is not self-regarding in the sense that the desire is self-reflexive (i.e., as if the desire were about itself); it is self-regarding because it is an agent’s desire regarding the other desires of that same agent. But that does not mean that the content of the moralist second-order desire must involve a thought of one’s own character or a thoughts about one own moral standing. To think that the moralist is concerned with her character or her moral standing is to attribute desire E, F, or G, to her, a desire which is for something more than the bare moralist second-order desire.\textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{50} If a moralist can avoid being self-absorbed by having just desire H and lacking desires E, F, and G, then we might think that we could also have a wine connoisseur who is not self-absorbed. This wine connoisseur would
When Smith claims that an agent with the moralist second-order desire is precious and self-absorbed, his worry is that the agent is too concerned with “something that isn’t of any moral significance: the moral standing of the contents of his first-order desires” (1997: 116). Smith is probably right that the moral standing of the contents of an agent’s first-order desires is not of any independent moral importance. Hence, to be overly concerned with this sort of moral standing would not be appropriate for a truly virtuous person. However, just to have the moralist second-order desire is not necessarily to have this concern at all; rather, it is a concern about just the contents of one’s first-order desires. Just because the moral standing is not morally significant, that does not mean the contents, themselves, of an agent’s first-order desires are not morally important. In fact, the importance of the contents of an agent’s first-order desires is the basis for Smith’s objection to the idea that all moralists could be motivated by a first-order de dicto desire to do what is right. If a moralist is a moralist because of a de dicto desire to do what is right, then she is not morally virtuous because her first-order desires have the wrong contents. It seems right to think that whatever could make for a difference between a morally virtuous person and a person who is not morally virtuous (which, in this case, is the contents of the person’s first-order desires) must be something which is of some moral significance. Just as justice, truth-
telling, and the happiness of others are all morally important and morally desirable, it is also morally desirable to have good motivations, i.e., to desire non-instrumentally the features of acts which make them right. Hence, a morally virtuous person should be concerned that her first-order desires have the right contents. Furthermore, as something morally important, this is not just something to hope for; it is something to pursue, and that means being moved by a desire for it.
XI. The worry about a desire amounting to a fixation

The worry about fixation is that the moralist second-order desire is somehow too strong. Smith says that, in comparison to a moralist with a *de dicto* desire to do what is right, a moralist with the moralist second-order desire is “equally fixated on something that isn’t of any moral significance: the moral standing of the contents of his first-order desires, rather than the features in virtue of which his first-order desires have the moral standing that they have” (1997: 116). I have just argued that the contents of an agent’s first-order desires are of moral significance after all (though the moral standing of those contents may not be morally significant). However, even if it is legitimate for a virtuous person to be concerned with the contents of her first-order desires, that does not mean that this concern should be unbounded. We still might think that the right-making features of actions are of much more moral importance than are the contents of the agent’s first-order desires. To the extent that an agent is fixated on the latter at the expense of the former, there is something wrong with her; she has a fixation which makes her less than virtuous.

Up to this point, when discussing how moralists who have a *de dicto* desire to do what is right fail to be virtuous people, I have mostly emphasized the objections having to do with alienation from the right-making features of actions. Along those lines, the problem with a moralist who has a *de dicto* desire to do what is right is that what ultimately motivates her is not the features of acts which make them right. Hence, she is alienated from the source of the moral value of these actions. In addition to this objection about alienation, there is another related problem with moralists who have a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. The problem is not just that this desire, rather than something else, is what motivates the moralist to act morally. The
problem has to do with the idea that a virtuous person is supposed to be, not just the kind of person who has some desire to do what she believes it right to do, but rather the kind of person who is always actually moved to perform the action she thinks is right. The problem is that, if a moralist with a de dicto desire to do what is right is supposed to be virtuous in this sense, then the de dicto desire to do what is right will have to be the very strongest desire she has. Hence, we might say that this desire amounts not just to a fetish, but also to a fixation.

In order to see whether the moralist second-order desire might amount to a fixation in a similar way, I want to look a bit more closely at why the first-order de dicto desire to do what is right might be thought to amount to a fixation. Smith’s complaint is that if a de dicto desire to do what is right is to explain how moralists who are really good people are moved to act (never mind, for now, whether they are motivated by the right features of the actions), then no other non-instrumental desire can even play a role in the explanation of the agent’s moral actions. Here is how Smith explains the complaint (1997: 113):

After all, a noninstrumental desire to look after family and friends wouldn’t be kept in check by the desire to do the right thing under conditions of moral belief revision. It would simply remain and produce a motivational conflict, a conflict which one side should win. The desire to do what is morally required would then have to be weighed against the noninstrumental desire to look after family and friends, and, unhappily, it might lose. On this picture of the moralist, there is therefore always the potential for an agent who acquires noninstrumental desires to do various things which she believes to be morally required to be led astray. Better, it would seem, not to acquire such desires at all. Better if you are morally virtuous, anyway.

Smith’s argument here requires some comment. First, notice at the end where Smith mentions the condition about being “morally virtuous.” Here Smith intends the morally virtuous person to be distinguished from the kind of person who could be morally “led astray” by other non-instrumental desires. In other words, to be morally virtuous, in this sense, is not just about reliably having some desire to do what one believes to be right; it is to be always actually moved
to perform the actions one believes to be right, notwithstanding desires to do otherwise.\textsuperscript{52} Not only does a virtuous person have some desire to do what she believes to be morally right; she actually does it (or at least tries to do it).\textsuperscript{53} Now consider what happens when a person who is morally virtuous in this way, under conditions of moral belief revision, has, in addition to a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right, a non-instrumental desire to do what she believes it is right to do. Suppose that, at first, she believes it is right to φ and also has a non-instrumental desire to φ. Then she judges that it is not right to φ, but rather to ψ. She will now have an instrumental desire to ψ as a means to doing what she believes is right and a conflicting non-instrumental desire to φ. In order for her actually to be moved to perform the action she believes is right, her \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right would have to outweigh her non-instrumental desire to φ. And, crucially, this point generalizes: It is not just that her \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right would have to outweigh this other particular non-instrumental desire; her \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right would have to be strong enough to outweigh every other first-order, non-instrumental desire she might have. Otherwise, if there were some other non-instrumental desire as strong as her \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right, then, if this stronger desire were to oppose the \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right, the latter would lose and the agent would be “led astray.” Hence, in order for a moralist with a \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right to be morally virtuous, her \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right would have to be really, exceedingly strong, stronger than any other moral desire she might have.\textsuperscript{54} Hence, it would amount to a fixation.

\textsuperscript{52} Hence, the concept moral virtuousness is not playing the same role in this argument as it has typically played in most of the arguments under consideration thus far. (In most of the other arguments I have discussed, a premise that an agent is morally virtuous means that this agent will have non-instrumental desires for the right-making features of actions.)

\textsuperscript{53} Note that to be morally virtuous, in this sense, is more demanding than merely being a moralist, since a moralist is merely someone who (given that she is practically rational) does not make a judgment about what it is right for her to do without having some desire to do it (as opposed to an amoralist who, without practical irrationality, may make moral judgments without any desire to act accordingly). Recall that Smith originally defines moralists as those agents who are not amoralists (1996: 175-176). (See note 13.)

\textsuperscript{54} Actually, according to the passage excerpted above, Smith’s suggestion is that, if the person is to be morally virtuous, it would be better for her not to have any other non-instrumental desires besides the \textit{de dicto} desire to
If it is a first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right which makes an agent a moralist, if she is always to have the overall motivation to act as a morally virtuous person would, then the desire which makes her a moralist must amount to a fixation. So, the question is whether this applies to the second-order desire solution. If it is the moralist second-order desire which makes an agent a moralist, and if she is always to have the right overall motivation, then must the moralist second-order desire similarly amount to a fixation? This is how I understand the worry about fixation with respect to the moralist second-order desire.

The first step in responding to this worry is to consider a moralist who is virtuous (in the sense that she is always actually moved to perform the act she believes is right) and see what needs to be true of this person and her moralist second-order desire in order to ensure that she is virtuous, i.e., what it is that ensures that she is not led astray. So, suppose that a person merely has the moralist second-order desire. All that is being supposed is that she has some desire to non-instrumentally desire the right-making features of actions. Given this minimal supposition, what could go wrong which could keep her overall motivation from being as it should? That is, how might she be led astray? I see three possibilities. These three possibilities will indicate the ways in which the minimal supposition has to be extended. Then, given these additions, the question will be whether what we end up with amounts to a fixation.

The first possibility is that, though the person has the appropriate moralist second-order desire, this desire may fail to produce any first-order desires at all. Not only would this mean that the person would not, under conditions of moral belief revision, be always actually moved to do what she believed it right to do; it would mean that she probably would not be a moralist at all.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{55}\) See note 53.
One worry along these lines is the thought that, in order for a second-order desire to be effective in producing first-order desires, the person with such a desire would have to be able to simply acquire first-order desires at will. Suppose an agent has a second-order desire to have a non-instrumental, first-order desire to φ. It is unclear how desiring to desire to φ could get one to desire to φ. Desiring is not like raising one’s arm; it does not seem to be under the same kind of direct control. Of course, even if we have little direct control over our first-order desires, that does not mean that we have no control whatsoever over them. We indirectly affect what desires we have. To take a non-moral example, if I desire to desire to drink water, I can achieve this by sitting out in the sun while eating a lot of salty food. To take a potentially moral example, if I desire to have the desire to avoid eating meat (that is, a desire to be averse to eating meat), I could watch a video about inhumane slaughter houses. Smith often mentions, as an example, a good person’s non-instrumental desire to look after family and friends. If I wanted to have this desire, I could look at my old photo albums and read novels about loving families.

However, the sort of indirect control that we can typically exercise over our first-order desires may be inadequate in some particularly demanding scenarios of moral belief revision. Suppose a moralist undergoes a change of belief about what it would be right for her to do in certain circumstances, such that she now believes it would be right to do something she, until then, had no desire to do. Suppose also that she happens to be in the relevant circumstances right at the moment when she changes her moral belief. Then, if she, as a virtuous person, is to be actually moved to perform the action she believes is right, and, as a virtuous person, is to be motivated by the features of actions that make them right, then she has to acquire a new first-order, non-instrumental desire really quickly. She might not have time to read novels or watch videos or otherwise condition herself to be responsive to the right-making features of the action she believes she should perform.
Then the upshot of this first possibility of how a moralist could fail to be virtuous is that a highly virtuous moralist must have some means (whether direct or indirect) of acquiring the first-order desires she desires to have, and she must be able to employ these means as quickly as is called for by her circumstances.

The second possibility for how a person with the moralist second-order desire might fail to be a virtuous moralist is closely related to the first possibility. The first possibility was that the second-order desire may not produce or otherwise bring about the acquisition of first-order desires. The second possibility is that, even if the second-order desire can affect (whether directly or indirectly) the agent’s first-order desires, it may not be able to affect them to the degree necessary or in the right way to ensure that the agent is actually moved to do what she believes it right to do. To be more precise, suppose an agent has several competing first-order desires and has a second-order preference about which desire she wants to move her. If her preferred first-order desire is not sufficiently strong in comparison to any competing first-order desires she has, then, though she will be a moralist since she has some desire to do what she believes it right to do, she will not be a highly virtuous person because she will not be moved to act in accordance with her moral belief.56

Recall that with respect to a moralist who has a first-order de dicto desire to do what is right, in order always to act in accordance with her moral beliefs, the de dicto desire to do what is right has to be strong enough to swamp every other first-order desire with which it might conflict. Similarly, here, in order for the moralist with the second-order desire always to act in accordance with her moral beliefs, the first-order desire by which she desires to be moved must be strong enough to outweigh every other first-order desire with which it might conflict. So, in addition to

56 Harry Frankfurt (1971: 15) describes this sort of situation as one in which the agent does not have freedom of the will. He identifies the will with the desire which actually moves an agent to act (1971: 8). So, if an agent is unable choose which desire actually moves her (according to her second-order preference for some desires rather than others), she is not free to will as she desires to will.
having the bare moralist second-order desire (and having it be effective in actually producing first-order desires), this requires two additional abilities: A virtuous moralist must be able effectively intensify the first-order desires by which she wants to be moved, and she must be able to effectively weaken the first-order desires by which she does not want to be moved.⁵⁷

Furthermore, as explained with regard to the first possibility for how a moralist could fail to be virtuous, some circumstances of moral belief revision may be very demanding. They may be demanding in such a way that the virtuous moralist is required to adjust the strengths of her first-order desires very quickly. Presumably, an agent’s control over the relative strengths of her first-order desires is similar to the control she has over whether or not to acquire a particular first-order desire. So, here, in order to avoid failure, the virtuous moralist must be able, by direct or indirect means, to adjust the strength of her first-order desires as quickly as is called for by the circumstances at hand.

The third possibility for how a person with a moralist second-order desire could fail to be a virtuous person is a bit different from the first two possibilities. The first two possibilities for failure had to do with the conformance of an agent’s first-order desires with her second-order preferences about these desires. In contrast, this third possibility for failure has to do with just the second order of desire. The possibility here has to do with competition among second-order desires. Just as a person’s first-order desires may come into conflict with each other, her second-order desires may also conflict or compete with each other.⁵⁸ Bracket for a moment the first two ways in which having a moralist second-order desire may be insufficient for ensuring that a

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⁵⁷ These two abilities could be construed as a single ability: the ability to effectively increase the relative intensity of the first-order desires by which she desires to be moved.

⁵⁸ Frankfurt acknowledges this possibility as one in which the agent has not resolved the question of what she wants her will to be. In Frankfurt’s terminology, the person does not have a second-order volition. He explains, “If there is an unresolved conflict among someone’s second-order desires, then he is in danger of having no second-order volition; for unless this conflict is resolved, he has no preference concerning which of his first-order desires is to be his will” (Frankfurt 1971: 16).
moralist is moved as a virtuous person should be. If, in addition to having a moralist second-order desire, an agent has other desires about her first-order desires, her overall preference regarding her first-order desires may not be to be moved by a desire for the right-making features of actions. For example, suppose a person desires to have a “unique” and “original” character and, hence, desires to have distinctive first-order desires, desires which are different from the desires that most people have. Suppose that she also has a moralist second-order desire. These two second-order desires could oppose each other in contexts in which a particular non-instrumental desire for something which is morally right, say, making others happy, is a common non-instrumental desire for people to have. Given the conflict between the two second-order desires, the agent may not have a well-defined preference for which particular first-order desires are to move her. Or, even worse from a moral standpoint, the non-moralist second-order desire may be the agent’s strongest second-order desire, and so she may desire to be moved by first-order desires to do things which she believes are not morally right. In that case, even if she has the ability to effectively adjust her first-order desires so that the ones she wants to be strongest are strongest, she may desire to adjust them in an immoral way. Not only would this prevent her from being morally virtuous; in some circumstances, it might mean that she would not even be a moralist.

To avoid this third possibility for how a moralist could fail to be virtuous, the moralist would have to have the moralist second-order desire be her strongest, that is, her predominant, second-order desire. Recall that in the case of the moralist who has the first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right, in order to ensure that she would always have the right overall motivation to act, that desire had to be strong enough to defeat any other first-order desire. Similarly in this case, to ensure that a moralist with the moralist second-order desire always has the right overall
second-order motivation, the moralist second-order desire must be strong enough to defeat any other second-order desires she has.

The three possible ways in which a person who merely has a bare moralist second-order desire could fail to be a virtuous person point to three corresponding conditions which the moralist must meet if she is to be morally virtuous. Now I will consider whether each of these conditions amounts to a fixation in anything like the way the predominance of a first-order \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right does.

The first two conditions have to do with a person’s ability to control her first-order desires according to her preferences about her desires. In general, this does not seem to be a fixation or any other kind of vice at all. Rather, it seems to be a talent that would be a virtue in those who had it. We admire those who have a high degree of self-control. Especially with regard to the first condition, the condition that the agent must at least be able to acquire first-order desires which she desires to have, I cannot conceive of what could be objectionable about this.

The second condition, that the person must be able to adjust the strength of her desires so that they conform to her second-order preference, is somewhat more suspect. It is the degree of authority by one desire over all other desires that may appear problematic. Think about the way the first-order \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right amounts to a kind of fixation. If it is strong enough to ensure that the person who has it always has the right overall motivation, then it defeats any other desire with which it competes. In that case, the person’s other first-order desires would be relevant to action explanation only insofar as they were consistent with the \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right. That is because, if the moralist had a first-order desire which opposed the \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right, then she would never act on the basis of this desire. Furthermore, the desires which are consistent with the \textit{de dicto} desire to do what is right are also irrelevant to action explanation. That is because whatever action the person is to perform
would have been already determined by the *de dicto* desire to do what is right. If the non-
instrumental desires have moral content and are for actions the agent believes to be right, they
would motivate the agent to do the same thing as would the agent’s *de dicto* desire to do what is
right (which is stronger anyway). Hence, if a *de dicto* desire to do what is right is the agent’s
strongest first-order desire, then any other morally directed first-order desire the agent has will be
irrelevant from the standpoint of action explanation.

We may think that something similar might apply to the second-order desire solution. If a
person has a clear second-order preference about which first-order desire she wants to move her,
and if she can effectively bring it about that the preferred first-order desire does move her, then
any other first-order desire which competes with the preferred first-order desire will not figure in
the explanation of what she actually does. In that sense, any other morally significant first-order
desire will be irrelevant from the standpoint of action explanation. However, this case differs
substantially from the first-order case. That is because the person’s non-instrumental, first-order
desire to do what she believes it is right to do (read *de re*) is not at all irrelevant from the
standpoint of action explanation. In fact, the explanation of what she actually does depends
completely on this first-order desire. This non-instrumental, first-order desire plays a crucial role
in the process by which the moralist second-order desire moves a moralist to perform the actions
she which believes to be right. It is only the desires to do the things the agent does not believe to
be morally right that are reduced to irrelevance by having the moralist second-order desire and,
with it, a high degree of control over her first-order desires. The first-order *de dicto* desire to do
what is right amounts to a fixation because, in the presence of this desire, *no* other morally
relevant desire matters. The moralist second-order desire does not amount to a fixation in the
same way because, in the presence of this desire, some other desires do matter. The ones that
matter are precisely the ones that should matter: the non-instrumental desires to perform those actions which one believes to be morally right.

In general, we might think of the difference between moralism based on a first-order desire and moralism based on a second-order desire like this: A first-order moralist desire is always, at least counterfactually, in competition with any other first-order desires that the moralist has. And, in any such competition, if the person is to be motivated to do what she believes is right, then it is a foregone conclusion which desire will be the winner. The relationship between a second-order moralist desire and the moralist’s first-order desires is not characterized by competition. Desires of different orders just do not compete in the same way that desires of the same order may. There will still be conflict, in some sense, between a first-order desire to do one thing and a second-order desire to desire to do something different. But the conflict is not competition; it is a conflict in which one desire directs or rules over another desire. And, if the person is a virtuous person because of a moralist second-order desire, then, in such a conflict, the second-order desire will persevere, and the contrary first-order desire will give way. But this is just what we should expect in a virtuous person. Not all first-order desires a person has are of equal value (or even of any positive value) because not all of them are desires for morally good objects. First-order desires for what is not morally good should give way in favor of first-order desires for what is morally good. And these first-order desires for what is morally good are unencumbered (or even promoted) by a moralist second-order desire.

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59 A loose metaphor may help. The first-order moralist desire is like a like a great striker on a soccer team, a player who can take the ball from any place on the field, beat every player on the other team, and score at will. It does not matter at all what the rest of her team members do; the great striker can even steal the ball from her own team members if she has to. No matter what else happens, with this player on the team, the team will win. The second-order moralist desire is like a great coach who directs a great team. She can choose which players are playing at any moment, and she can bench a player who does not fit the game plan. And on this team the players always do what the coach asks them to do. The team with a great coach will be a winning team, too. But the coach cannot ensure victory by herself; the team can only win with the participation of the right players at the right times (as decided by the coach).
The third condition required to ensure that a moralist second-order desire will make a person virtuous is that the moralist second-order desire must be strong enough to defeat any other second-order desire the person has. Second-order desires do not directly compete with first-order desires, but second-order desires may directly compete with each other. I have explained that, in order to ensure that a moralist with a first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right always has the right motivation, this desire must be strong enough to defeat any other desire. It seems that the predominance of one first-order desire over all the other first-order desires amounts to a kind of fixation. Hence, we may wonder whether an analogous point applies to a second-order desire which is predominant over all other second-order desires.

I think the answer is clearly *no*. I think the primary reason for this is straightforward, and it has to do with a disanalogy between a predominant desire of the first order and a predominant desire of the second order. In the case of an agent with a predominant first-order moral desire, she has only one practically relevant moral concern of *any* order. Even if she has second-order moral concerns, these concerns will be practically irrelevant because they could never produce first-order concerns which could move the agent to do anything other than what she has a predominant first-order desire to do. In the case of an agent with a predominant second-order moral desire, she does not have just one practically relevant moral concern. She has manifold practically relevant moral concerns. She has a predominant second-order concern and a variety of important first-order moral concerns (i.e., the ones she prefers to have). Hence, a predominant second-order desire cannot be thought to amount to a fixation in the same way a predominant first-order desire does.

Still, we may wonder whether it might be the case that a virtuous person should have many second-order desires, no one of which is predominant. I do not think so.\(^6^0\) Having a

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\(^{60}\) Actually, we might think it would be unfortunate not to have a predominant second-order desire. For an agent to lack a definite preference about which desires are to be the ones which move her, is to lack a second-order
predominant second-order desire does not require having no other second-order desires. And having a specifically moral second-order desire be predominant simply means that in situations in which there are several competing first-order desires which an agent might like to have, the ones she will most want to have will always be the morally good ones. This looks appropriate both in cases of conflict between second-order desires and in cases of accord among second-order desires.

First, suppose an agent has both a moralist second-order desire and also a desire to have the desires which would make her a cunning entrepreneur. Then there will sometimes be opposing first-order desires that she might like to have. If she is morally virtuous, then we should expect that the desires she will most want to have will be morally good ones. So, in general, in cases of conflict between second-order desires, the moralist second-order desire should win.

Now suppose an agent has both a moralist second-order desire and a desire to have desires to do what is honest. Suppose that in a particular situation it is right to φ, and what makes φ-ing right is that φ-ing is honest. Both of her second-order desires would, if effective, produce the same first-order desire. So which should be the one that produces it? Similarly, we may ask what should be the agent’s basis for desiring the desire to be honest. It would be odd to say that she should desire to be honest because of her desire to desire to be honest. Without some thought of why the desire to be honest is a good desire to have, this motivation for desiring to be honest would be no better than the principle that one should desire what one wants to desire. On the other hand, it seems plausible that a virtuous person should desire to be honest because she

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volition, in Frankfurt’s sense (1971: 10). (See also note 58.) To lack second-order volitions altogether is to be a wanton, in Frankfurt’s terminology. He says, “I shall use the term ‘wanton’ to refer to agents who have first-order desires but who are not persons because, whether or not they have desires of the second-order, they have no second-order volitions” (1971: 11). Such agents, he thinks, should not even count as persons. Now, to be fair, to say that an agent lacks a predominant second-order desire is not to say that she never has a second-order volition. Instead, even if no one second-order desire is always predominant, she may have different second-order volitions at different times (and hence still count as a person, not a wanton). But note that always having a predominant second-order desire is just tantamount to having second-order volitions which exhibit consistency over time.
desires to have good desires (where the good desires are desires for the right-making features of actions). After all, if it were not right in this situation to do what is honest, then, in this situation, the desire to do what is honest would not be morally desirable at all. Hence, we should think that even when second-order desires are in accord, it is appropriate for the moralist second-order desire to be the effective second-order desire.

Thus, a predominant moralist second-order desire is further distinguished from a predominant moralist first-order desire. In the second-order case, but not in the first-order case, it is plausible to think that, in a virtuous person, the moralist desire would always be the effective one. So, having a predominant second-order desire is not undesirable in the same way that having a predominant first-order desire is. Hence, it would be, at best, misleading to say that the former amounts to some kind of fixation.

A person who has a moralist second-order desire and is such that she meets the three conditions just discussed is surely an extraordinary individual. However, that in itself gives us no reason to describe her extraordinary traits as some kind of undesirable fixation. A person with a high degree of self-control with respect to her first-order conative states is admirable, not fixated. And a person whose first-order concerns are chosen on the basis of a higher order concern, especially if the basis for choosing some concerns over others is their moral value, exhibits a kind of moral focus which also enviable. Hence, being a moralist because of a moralist second-order desire does not amount to having a fixation in anything like the way that being a moralist because of a first-order *de dicto* desire to do what is right amounts to a fixation.
XII. Why it is difficult to be highly virtuous

One statement of the “striking fact” that needs to be explained by internalists and externalists alike is the following: “If a moralist judges it right to do something then she is motivated accordingly, at least absent practical irrationality” (Smith 1997: 111). For externalists, the difficulty in explaining this fact about moralists arises when the aim is to explain moralists who are *morally virtuous people*, both in the sense that they care non-instrumentally about the right-making features of right actions and in the sense that they are always actually moved to perform the actions they believe to be right. I have argued that, given that the agent satisfies several other conditions, a model of moral motivation based on second-order desires can explain how an agent can be a moralist and virtuous in both of these ways.

One consequence of the model of moral motivation on offer, a consequence which became especially clear when considering whether this model makes a morally virtuous person out to have a kind of fixation, is that morally virtuous people will be extraordinary. For one thing, not only will a virtuous person have a clear aim regarding what she would like her desires to be, she will also have to possess an extremely high level of self-control with respect to actually having her desires be as she would like them to be. Only under these conditions can we ensure that she will have the appropriate overall motivation in those demanding contexts in which she changes her moral beliefs and immediately needs to act in accordance with her new moral belief. Then it might be thought that the externalist account on offer makes the requirements for moral virtue too high. But I do not think so.
Even on Smith’s own internalist account, being a virtuous person would be very demanding. It is just that instead of requiring, as I propose, that the morally virtuous person must have clear and highly effective second-order desires, Smith requires that the virtuous person be highly practically rational in a very particular way. And, given Smith’s particular conception of practical rationality, this is a very tall order. Under the demanding circumstances just mentioned (those contexts in which an agent changes her moral beliefs and is immediately in a context in which she believes she morally should act on those beliefs), on any account, internalist or externalist, a virtuous person’s non-instrumental desires need to be immediately responsive to a change in moral judgment. According to Smith, this will happen because an agent’s moral judgment is a judgment about what it would be fully rational to desire under the circumstances (1994: 177). If the person fails to desire accordingly, then it is the case that her desires do not cohere with what it would be fully rational to desire; hence, she is incoherent in a way that makes her irrational (1994: 177). Thus, on Smith’s account, it is the person’s rational faculties which are supposed to take her straight from a belief about what it is rational to desire all the way to actually having the corresponding desire, and, if she is virtuous, having that desire be so relatively strong that it actually moves her to act. It seems to me that Smith’s account makes being highly virtuous just as demanding as does an externalist account like the one I have been defending. It is just that on Smith’s account, the relevant demands are demands on the agent’s rational faculties, whereas, on the externalist account, the demands are that the agent have a clear second-order preference about her desires and a high level of self-control.

Highly virtuous people should be unusual according to any plausible account of moral motivation, and that is because, in reality, such virtuous people are unusual. My suspicion is that charges of fetishism (in terms self-absorption, preciousness, fixation, and of alienation from the right-making features of actions) with respect to the second-order desire solution owe some
of their plausibility to the extraordinary character of the people for whose motivation the externalist is supposed to give an account. According to the externalist second-order desire solution (or any other plausible account), the motivational changes of an extremely virtuous person will be weird, that is, extraordinary, but not fetishistic.
XIII. Concluding remarks

The description given here of the moralist second-order desire provides a more specific account of what I described generally in earlier sections as a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one believes it right to do. Hence, it amounts to a response to Smith’s challenge to externalists. With such an account, externalists are in a good position to offer plausible explanations of the motivational changes of all moralists. Some moralists will be moralists because of a *de dicto* desire to do what is right. Others will be moralists because of a moralist second-order desire. The moralists who are virtuous people will all be in the latter group (but not everyone who has a moralist second-desire will necessarily be virtuous).

Of course, this way of dividing up the class of moralists presumes that *every* moralist must have either a *de dicto* desire to do what is right or a moralist second-order desire. And this seems unlikely. We might expect there to be other possible contingent psychological features besides a *de dicto* desire to do what is right and a moralist second-order desire which would be suitable for making an agent a moralist. I think it is likely that we could describe other dispositions which would work.61 Notably, we might discover other plausible ways that a *disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one believes it right to do* might be realized.62

61 For instance, I suspect that an agent could have a disposition comprised of a moralist second-order desire working in tandem with a mitigated *de dicto* desire to do what is right, and that this disposition, suitably specified, could make the agent a moralist. Whether such a moralist could be a virtuous person would require more thorough investigation.

62 Depending on what theory of dispositions is in play, different realizations of *a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one believes it right to do* would count as the same disposition. In that case, there may be few distinct dispositions which would make a person a moralist. However, then the descriptions of the different realizations might have different features which would make each seem more or less suitable for describing different kinds of moralists.
If there were other ways to realize or describe a disposition to acquire non-instrumental desires to do what one believes it right to do, then we might find that one of these makes for an even more plausible account of the motivational changes of virtuous people than does the moralist second-order desire. In fact, the single best externalist account of the moral motivation of virtuous people is not likely to be decisively identified independently of a full-fledged theory of moral virtue. In this way, normative ethics may supply further constraints on metaethical theories about moral motivation.

If the arguments presented in this paper have been successful, then Smith’s argument against externalism is refuted. This, of course, does not prove that externalism is the correct theory of moral motivation, but it shows that theorists have one fewer reason to accept the practicality requirement. Externalists, just as well as internalists, can provide plausible accounts of the motivational changes of good and virtuous people.
REFERENCES


