

TEMI ED EVENTI

Is *De Dicto* motivation manifestly a no-go?

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Abstract The aim of this paper is to challenge Michael Smith’s influential “fetishism charge” against motivational externalism – the view that moral judgments motivate only in the presence of a distinct conative state. Smith argues that externalists must explain the reliable connection between moral judgment and moral motivation by attributing to the morally good agent a *de dicto* desire to “do whatever is right”, a desire he regards as morally defective or fetishistic. On the other hand, the virtuous agent, according to Smith, responds directly to the right-making features of actions, such as charity, kindness, or fairness. If the externalist is indeed committed to portraying good agents as moved primarily by the abstract status of rightness, then externalism yields an implausible moral psychology and should be rejected. I argue that Smith’s central assumption – what I call the fetishist platitude, the claim that *de dicto* motivation is intuitively vicious – is far less secure than he suggests. After outlining the internalism/externalism debate and surveying responses to Smith from Svavarsdottir, Olson, Dreier, Miller, and others, I offer two novel objections. First, I show that in non-moral normative domains (such as prudence or health), *de dicto* motivation is not normally regarded as fetishistic; thus, Smith’s purported conceptual truth about virtue cannot be taken for granted. Second, I present cases in which a *de dicto* moral motivation is precisely what enables an agent to act rightly in the face of conflicting non-moral reasons. In such scenarios, it is counterintuitive to describe the agent as vicious or morally flawed. Taken together, these objections weaken Smith’s claim that *de dicto* motivation is inherently defective and therefore challenge his *reductio* of externalism. If *de dicto* motivation can be permissible – or even admirable – then externalists can avoid the fetishism charge without losing a plausible account of moral psychology.

KEYWORDS: Moral Motivation; Fetichism; Externalism; Internalism; De Dicto

Riassunto *La motivazione “de dicto” è manifestamente inutile?* - Lo scopo di questo articolo è mettere in discussione l’influente “accusa di feticismo” di Michael Smith contro l’esternalismo motivazionale — la posizione secondo cui i giudizi morali motivano solo in presenza di un preciso stato conativo. Smith sostiene che gli esternalisti devono spiegare la connessione affidabile esistente tra giudizio morale e motivazione morale, attribuendo all’agente moralmente buono un desiderio di “fare ciò che è giusto” *de dicto*, desiderio che egli considera moralmente difettoso o feticista. L’agente virtuoso, ribadisce Smith, risponde direttamente alle caratteristiche che rendono giuste le azioni, come, per esempio, la bontà, la gentilezza o l’equità. L’esternalismo dovrebbe quindi essere respinto, poiché richiede di rappresentare l’agente moralmente buono come mosso principalmente dallo status astratto del bene, descrivendo una psicologia morale inverosimile. Sostengo che l’assunto centrale di Smith – ciò che chiamo la “banalità feticista”, ovvero l’affermazione che la motivazione *de dicto* è intuitivamente viziosa – sia molto meno ovvio di quanto egli suggerisca. Dopo aver delineato il dibattito tra internalismo ed esternalismo e aver esaminato le risposte a Smith di Svavarsdottir, Olson, Dreier, Miller e altri, propongo due obiezioni originali. In primo luogo, discuto come, nei domini normativi non morali (come la prudenza o la salute individuale), la motivazione *de dicto* non è normalmente considerata feticista. In secondo luogo, presento casi in cui una motivazione morale *de dicto* è esattamente ciò che consente a un agente di agire moralmente, quando vi è un conflitto di motivazioni non morali. In tali scenari, è controintuitivo descrivere l’agente come vizioso o moralmente imperfetto.

PAROLE CHIAVE: Motivazione Morale; Feticismo; Esternalismo; Internalismo; De Dicto

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1 Introduction

THE AIM OF THIS PAPER is to re-examine an influential argument in contemporary metaethics—Michael Smith’s charge of *moral fetishism*—and to challenge whether it truly delivers the decisive blow to motivational externalism that Smith believes it does. In *The Moral Problem* and later writings, Smith aims to show that externalists cannot explain the characteristic motivational profile of the morally good agent. According to Smith, if moral motivation is not internal to moral judgment, then the externalist must explain a good agent’s motivation to perform right actions by attributing to her a standing desire to “do whatever is right”, understood de dicto. But this, Smith argues, is a distortion of the moral psychology of the virtuous agent. It makes the good agent seem fetishistic, concerned mainly with the abstract property of rightness rather than with the concrete morally significant features – kindness, honesty, justice, etc. – that actually make actions right. Smith’s claim that de dicto moral motivation is intuitively flawed is central to his broader argument against externalism.

Despite the strength and originality of Smith’s challenge, its core intuition has faced criticism. Much of the existing literature questions whether Smith is justified in treating the alleged viciousness of de dicto motivation as a conceptual truth about the moral agent’s motivation, or whether externalists are genuinely committed to the psychological picture Smith attributes to them. This paper adds to this debate by arguing that Smith’s “fetishist platitude” is far less obvious than he claims. The accusation that de dicto motivation is inherently flawed depends on an intuition that is unstable across normative areas and breaks down in moral cases, where de dicto motivation is essential to motivate one to perform the right action.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 introduces the internalism/externalism debate and clarifies the theoretical landscape. Section 3 discusses Smith’s fetishism charge and the distinction between de dicto and de re motivation on which it depends. Section 4 reviews major responses, including objections from Svavarsdottir, Olson, Dreier, as well as Arpaly’s endorsement. In section 5, I present two additional objections: first, that de dicto motivation is not considered vicious in similar normative contexts, and second, that de dicto motivation can sometimes be the only morally praiseworthy motive available to an agent. Section 6 concludes that Smith cannot treat his central premise as self-evident; without it, his argument against externalism loses its effectiveness.

2 Internalism and externalism about moral judgment

Michael Smith’s moral fetishism argument is a

significant contribution to contemporary metaethics, introduced in his influential work, *The Moral Problem* (1994). The argument presents a dilemma designed to challenge *Moral Judgment Externalism* (ME) and support *Moral Judgment Internalism* (MI). More precisely, *Moral Judgment Internalism* is the view that there is an internal or necessary conceptual connection between an agent’s making a moral judgment (e.g., judging that ϕ is right in circumstances C) and that agent being, to some extent, motivated to ϕ in C . MI can come in two different strengths.

Strong Internalism, defended by R.M. Hare, claims that if an agent judges it right to ϕ in C , they are motivated to ϕ in C (cf. HARE 1952, 2.2; HARE 1981, 1.6). *Weak* Internalism (defended by Michael Smith) posits a defeasible connection (as explicitly stated in SMITH 1996). Suppose an agent judges it right to ϕ in C . In that case, she is motivated to ϕ in C , at least absent practical irrationalities like weakness of will, apathy, despair, or other maladies of the spirit. Note that other motivations may override this necessary motivation that the agent might have, so that the agent ultimately fails to ϕ .

In contrast, *Moral Judgment Externalism* is the view that denies a necessary connection between moral judgment and motivation. It characterizes this connection as “altogether external and contingent”. Externalists argue that a moral judgment (which they see as a cognitive state or belief) only motivates if it is combined with a separate conative state (a desire in the broadest sense), which is external to the moral belief itself.

To illustrate this, it is helpful to consider the figure of the amoralist, first introduced into the debate by David Brink (1992). The amoralist is defined as a person who sincerely judges an action as right but is entirely unmotivated to perform it, absent practical irrationality:

if an agent judges it right to ϕ in C , and she is an amoralist, then, even if she does not suffer from weakness of will and the like, she may not be motivated to ϕ in C (SMITH 1996, p. 176).

According to MI, the set of amoralists is empty and necessarily so: there cannot be someone who holds a genuine moral judgment and is not motivated to act on it. On the other hand, ME argues that the amoralist’s behavior — failing to be motivated to fulfill a moral obligation — is immoral but not necessarily irrational. This argument uses the conceptual coherence of the amoralist to show that the norms of morality and those of rationality are distinct and only contingently linked.

3 The fetishism charge as a challenge to externalism

Smith’s famous argument against ME, in con-

trast, leverages the motivational profile of the “moral agent”, viz., of a morally motivated agent. Here, I will focus primarily on a revised version of such an argument set out in a later reply (see the version that appears in SMITH 1996); although there are minor differences between the two versions, the basics are the same.

Smith’s argument starts by noting what he calls a “striking fact”. When good people judge it right to ϕ in C, they are motivated to ϕ in C (absent weakness of will). The striking fact aims to reveal a conceptual truth that both externalists and internalists must accept.

Supporters of MI interpret this fact as holding a moral judgment that prescribes ϕ in C. The externalist, on the other hand, can only make sense of the moralist’s motivation by appealing to the very fact that she is a moralist, i.e., that such an agent has the proper sort of conative attitude that issues the right moral motivation. More precisely, Smith claims that such a person

must have as their primary source of motivation – the motivation that drives all of the rest – a desire to do what is right (SMITH 1996, p. 180).

As a result, on ME, the judgment that it is right to ϕ in C reliably leads to the motivation to ϕ in C only because the moralist has a causally prior concern whose content is “do whatever is right”. Nevertheless, this concern is something extra and contingent, which isn’t always present; therefore, it’s not the case that every agent making moral evaluations is necessarily a motivated moralist. Moreover, from this fact, a “reliable connection” follows (SMITH 1994, p. 71). This is the observation that in a good, strong-willed, and practically rational agent, a change in motivation follows reliably upon a change in moral judgment.

For example, suppose I initially didn’t think I should donate to a charity that helps with bee preservation. When a local volunteer asked me for a small contribution, I felt no motivation to give. But then the volunteer explained the bee crisis and its significant environmental impacts. Now I realize I *should* donate, after all. And I should also be more motivated to do so. My moral motivation, that is, tracks a change in my moral judgments.

Smith contends that externalists cannot plausibly explain this “tracking condition” in the agent’s motivational profile without characterizing the good agent as fundamentally defective, from a moral perspective. According to Smith, to explain the tracking condition from an ME position, such an agent must be motivated to do the good *de dicto*.

To understand this charge, we need to differentiate between two types of motivational content (for the sake of simplicity, in this paper, the stipulation will be that the agent desires, either derivatively or

non-derivatively, to do what is, in fact, a morally right action, and not merely believed as such). An agent has a concern for the good *de dicto* if she is motivated to do the right thing *qua* right: for all actions ϕ such that ϕ is right and the agent judges it to be right, the agent will have only a derivative desire to ϕ . Her desire is derivative insofar as by ϕ -ing she will satisfy her non-derivative desire to do whatever action turns out to be the morally right one.

In contrast, a concern for the good, when this is read *de re*, involves being motivated to perform a specific right action. There exists an action ψ such that the agent has a *non-derivative* desire to perform ψ , along with the true judgment that ψ -ing is the morally right thing to do. The agent is motivated to ψ directly, simply in response to the right-making feature of the action. For example, an agent might be motivated to spare someone’s blushes because it would be an act of kindness, and she has a non-derivative concern for being kind to others. Acting out of a concern for the good *de re* means being motivated by the intrinsic non-moral properties that make an action right (e.g., caring non-derivatively about the welfare of friends, justice, or equality).

Smith argues that Externalists are forced to adopt the *de dicto* reading to explain how judgment and motivation are reliably tracked. For example, my concern for the environment might explain why I feel motivated to donate to a bee conservation charity. Still, a shift in my motivation to donate would occur with *any* fundraising effort supporting the environment.

Smith finds this explanation implausible for two reasons. First, such an explanation does not align with our intuitions about the psychological processes of moralists. He gives the example of a reformed *utilitarian monster*: an adherent of utilitarianism who comes to believe he is wrong and ought not to be a strict utilitarian and thus undergoes a change in moral motivation (SMITH 1994).

The externalist must describe his change of motivation by claiming he is only motivated to act in accordance with his new moral judgment because he is primarily motivated by a desire to do whatever is right. Smith finds this implausible; the agent in question would not describe her motivations in such a way, nor does it seem the most accurate way of capturing the agent’s psychological experience. The agent’s change in motivation seems to stem directly from his change in valuation, not from a prior motivation to do what is right *de dicto*.

Second, and more relevant to my objections, Smith claims that the externalist explanation is committed to an implausible account of morally good agents. This solution would, in fact, lead to the “moral fetishism” conclusion: the agent’s basic concern is the action’s abstract moral standing, not the substantive features that justify it. Using the intuition pump formalized by Bernard Williams in the

famous example concerning a man in the business of saving his wife, Smith suggests that if the man were motivated primarily by the thought that saving her was the “right thing to do”, he would have “one thought too many”. Being motivated to save his wife because of this concern results in alienating him from the object of his love and treating a virtue as a vice. Externalism thereby characterizes the motivation of the morally good person as a “moral fetish”.

When we think of people who most closely emulate moral perfection, we do not think of them as being motivated to do what is right *de dicto*. It feels odd to claim, for example, that Mother Teresa was not directly motivated to help the poor but was only motivated to do so because she was ultimately motivated to do what was morally right. This type of agents are morally good because they have a non-derivative concern for doing what is, in fact, morally right:

good people care non-derivatively about honesty, the weal and woe of their children and friends, the well-being of their children and friends, people getting what they deserve, justice, equality, and the like (SMITH 1994, p. 75).

In short, morally perfect people would be moved directly by the right-making features of action, not merely by its moral status, its “rightness”.

On the other hand, someone who desires to do the right thing *qua* right thing is not moved by what is of primary importance, i.e., those very moral properties that make an action right. Agents with such motivation are far from being morally perfect – indeed, Smith claims, they are moral fetishists or vicious.

Given these considerations, Smith concludes that a *de dicto* interpretation of moralists’ moral concern would lead to implausible conclusions; therefore, such content must be about the good *de re*. The result is that ME cannot offer a plausible explanation of the reliable connection between a moral judgment and a change in motivation in the moralist agent resulting from the “striking fact”. ME is therefore to be refuted.

4 Instinct and intelligence

Smith’s fetishism argument against ME has been highly influential, facing several objections as well as endorsements. This section provides an overview of the main objections, which focus on two points. One set of objections questions whether the premise that *de dicto* motivation is inherently fetishistic or defective is valid; another set argues for the existence of alternative explanations available to ME that meet the tracking condition without relying on the problematic *de dicto* motivation.

To offer a more complete overview of its reception, I will also briefly discuss Arpaly’s use of

the fetishist charge in her account of moral worth.

4.1 Challenges to the fetishism premise (a *de dicto* motivation is not necessarily morally defective)

The most direct challenge to Smith’s argument rejects his claim that being motivated by the abstract thought of “rightness” is inherently flawed or defective. Sigrun Svavarsdottir (1999) finds Smith’s charge that externalists are committed to making morality a fetish of the good person “curious”. She observes that Smith’s initial critique depends on the mistaken belief that externalists see the good agent as having a single, monolithic conception, where the desire to be moral is the only self-standing conative state. However, this is not a requirement of ME. Externalists merely assert that the desire to be moral is *part* of the good agent’s motivational structure.

In fact, Svavarsdottir notes that the externalist view of the good agent’s motivation is not limited to concern with rightness but broadly encompasses a «more general concern with doing what is morally valuable or required» (pp. 197-198), including justice, fairness, or honesty. Moreover, it is hardly a moral flaw to care about the moral correctness of one’s actions (e.g., doing the right thing instead of the wrong thing in a particular situation), and ME view does not commit agents to the alienation Smith describes. A moralist’s concern for the right-making feature may predate the moral judgment, as in the case of a child brought up to be polite to strangers. Svavarsdottir remarks how the derived concern for a right-making feature can later operate psychologically independently of the agent’s current desire to be moral.

It is not implausible or undesirable that the good person’s perspective, upon changing a moral judgment, is “seeing” herself as having become occupied with the new end because it is morally valuable. Lastly, a semantic point: moral fetishism is best understood as the trait of setting extremely high moral standards for oneself and others while refusing to entertain any reflective questions about their nature or foundations. This imperfection differs from the overly concerned motivation that Smith describes.

Jonas Olson (2002) argues that *de dicto* concern could serve as a “safety device” or background element when an agent’s *de re* concerns are temporarily insufficient to provide motivation. Teemu Toppinen (2004) acknowledges the externalist suggestion that a desire for the good *de dicto* is sometimes necessary to resist temptations. In certain situations, acting on *de dicto* desires may be “morally preferable and reasonable”. Olson offers the example of inviting a self-absorbed friend to a party solely because it would be wrong to cause him significant sadness, rather than because

of genuine *de re* concern for his hurt feelings from being left out. He concludes that *de dicto* desires are not always morally questionable and that internalists should also allow them to play a role in motivating the agent.

Hallvard Lillehammer (1997) notes that caring about what is right *de dicto* in the case of a fundamental change in values is what keeps the agent acting morally. He argues that a person re-evaluating morality might be «forgiven if his immediate concern for what is right is not direct» (pp. 191-192).

Finally, Alexander Miller (1996) argues that if Smith's internalist explanation of the reliable connection is merely a conceptual truth (i.e., MI is true because MI is true), then Internalism has no explanatory advantage over Externalism regarding the reliable connection. The debate cannot be settled by examining their respective abilities to explain this connection.

■ 4.2 Alternative externalist models

James Dreier (2000) countered Smith's charge by developing models of moral psychology that explain the connection between judgments and motivation in terms of a concern for the good *de re*. Based on David Copp's work (1997), Dreier presents the model of the Morally Suggestible person, who has a disposition to acquire non-instrumental *de re* desires upon coming to believe that an action is morally right. This model avoids fetishism because the newly acquired desire is original, direct, and non-instrumental; the agent "really does love avocados" (the analogy for the moral end). It satisfies the simple tracking condition because the person predictably wants to do whatever she believes to be right.

Dreier addresses a possible objection that this disposition is a *de dicto* desire by noting that the acquired desires are non-instrumental, unlike the merely instrumental desires of the agent motivated *de dicto*. In addition, he proposes a superior Externalist alternative: a person regulated by a second-order desire to desire to do what is right. The second-order desire acts as a "maieutic" force, generating the first-order desires (e.g., to vote for social democrats), which are then free-standing, final ends, and non-instrumental. Because the immediate first-order motivation is *de re* (concern for the right-making features), the agent is not a fetishist. Dreier argues that this model is superior because, unlike the original moral suggestibility model (which fails when facing moral uncertainty), the second-order desire model meets a more sophisticated tracking condition.

Smith would object to this picture as well, arguing that the second-order desire itself is fetishistic, making the agent "equally precious, equally self-absorbed". Dreier rejects this, claiming that nobody can reasonably object to the desire to want to

be moved by the right-making characteristics of actions. The fact that the first-order motivations are only *causally* dependent on the second-order desire, rather than rationally dependent on it, means the agent is not acting for the wrong reasons.

■ 4.3 De Re motivation and moral worth

Finally, it is important to recognize how Nomy Arpaly uses the moral fetishism charge to develop her own standards for assigning moral worth to an agent's praiseworthy actions. Arpaly's (2002) account essentially formalizes the idea that being motivated by the abstract thought of "rightness" or *de dicto* motivation does not confer moral value if those judgments are separated from the true reasons behind the action. Specifically, for an agent to be morally praiseworthy, she must have performed the right action «for the relevant moral reasons» – that is, «for the reasons for which the action is right» (pp. 84).

This requirement emphasizes that the agent must be motivated by the intrinsic features of the action, such as concern for welfare, justice, or fairness. Acting merely out of a sense of "duty" or "rightness" is seen as lacking. She argues that the issue is that agents might have a flawed understanding of what is truly good, understood *de dicto*. For example, a Nazi soldier might help a slave escape to serve his evil cause, believing this to be good *de dicto*. But motivation based only on the conscious, abstract desire to follow one's own principles or moral judgments is not enough for moral worth if those principles are wrong.

Conversely, when the agent is motivated to do the good *de re*, they are driven by what are, in fact, the right-making features of an action. In short, Arpaly applies the spirit of Smith's fetishism charge by showing that true moral merit depends entirely on *de re* responsiveness to objective moral facts, thereby rejecting the moral value of abstract, *de dicto* duties that may rest on potentially mistaken moral beliefs.

■ 5 Two additional objections

I am now going to present two additional objections to Smith's argument for the fetishism or viciousness of acting out of a concern for the good *de dicto*. Smith claims that common sense indicates that agents who display such an attitude are vicious or, at best, non-virtuous.

However, when one shifts from the realm of morality to a different normative system, such a lack of virtue becomes much less clear. It appears that in those areas, people are more likely to attribute some "goodness" to an agent who acts out of a derivative desire to do the right thing; or at least, it doesn't seem that such an agent would be

regarded as unquestionably vicious. Therefore, the first objection argues that if it makes sense to compare cases in different normative domains and those cases lead to different judgments, then Smith's "fetishist platitude" becomes less convincing. Specifically, what he considers a self-evident truth is no longer justified, and he would need to provide a more developed argument.

Secondly, there are cases where, even though a *de re* concern for doing the right thing is absent, the mere *de dicto* motivation of the agent can make all the difference between doing what is right and acting wrongly. Although it might have been more virtuous to hold a concern for acting rightly *de re*, ultimately, it is the *de dicto* motivation that prevents the agent from doing something wrong and actively contributes to the right behavior. Labeling such an attitude as vicious seems inappropriate, since the agent did act rightly in the end, and it wasn't a fluke that she did so. Therefore, while it may still be an open question whether a *de dicto* concern is also a sign of virtue, it is clearly false to claim that it is vicious.

Below, I provide two examples to demonstrate each of the objections listed above in turn.

5.1 Haley the health-conscious

Imagine an agent named Haley who cares a lot about living a healthy lifestyle. For example, she pays close attention to the food she eats. More specifically, she has a non-derivative desire to eat foods that are healthy – thus, a derivative desire to eat what turns out to be healthy. Since Haley is not an expert, her judgments about what is healthy and what is not are based on what reliable experts, like dietitians and doctors, say on the matter.

Does this make Haley a health food fetishist? Although Haley has sometimes exhibited extreme habits, such as serving her friends oat bran pizza crust or spirulina cheesecakes simply because they were, let's assume correctly, considered healthier than traditional versions, it's not clear she is a "health fetishist" – or at least not more vicious than someone who has a genuine concern for eating those specific foods. In fact, an agent with a *de re* motivation would respond to the "healthy-making" features of food, such as being rich in certain vitamins and low in fat. Smith would have to admit that intentionally seeking out food with these qualities is what the health-conscious do, whereas buying whatever food correctly appears on the list of healthy options would be a vicious attitude.

The issue is that such health-making properties are easily defeated: for example, someone on Warfarin is advised not to consume what are apparently very healthy foods like leafy vegetables high in vitamin K. In this case, the *de re* agent would need to respond directly to the characteristic of being high in vitamin K when not on Warfarin, to have a *non-*

derivative desire for foods with this specific trait. But this seems too demanding for explaining a non-vicious, health-conscious agent!

What is healthy for an agent in a specific situation largely depends on certain background conditions; therefore, the appropriate healthy-making feature turns out to be a very specific property, like the one above. It doesn't seem plausible or natural to label everyone who isn't responsive to it as a viciously health-conscious person.

In conclusion, what common sense suggests is that Haley is a health-conscious person who is not vicious, as she is motivated to eat whatever is healthy. Care for eating spirulina or oat bran specifically does not seem necessary. On the contrary, our intuition indicates that such a specific concern would more likely be seen as a sign of a spirulina or new-age food fetishist.

5.2 Sean, the new social democrat

Smith gives an example of someone who, originally convinced he should vote for the Libertarian Party, comes to realize he should actually vote for the Social Democrats. We are asked to imagine two people debating whom to vote for, one of whom is already convinced he should vote libertarian and is motivated accordingly. During the debate, he realizes he is wrong; he understands he should vote for the social Democrats, and, because he is "a good and strong-willed person," his motivation naturally follows.

This example aims to demonstrate that the motivation to vote for the social democrats is a *de re* motivation rather than *de dicto*. However, by slightly modifying the example, we can show that it is very possible for such a man to be motivated *de dicto*, and that this does not seem inherently fetishistic or vicious. For instance, suppose Sean is the man in the example. After the conversation, Sean realizes that voting for the social democrats is the morally right choice. Nonetheless, Sean has non-moral reasons to vote libertarian – imagine that his financial interests are best served by the libertarians. Considering his reasons, he concludes that doing what is right is more important, so he becomes motivated to vote for the social democrats (derivatively).

Sean's motivation in this example clearly aligns with Smith's description of being motivated *de dicto*. However, unlike being morally vicious, Sean has, intuitively, done the right thing. Since he had non-moral reasons conflicting with the moral reason to vote social democratic, it is better that he was motivated *de dicto* than that he was motivated to do the wrong thing or became paralyzed by his conflicting reasons. Nor is Sean weak-willed; his ability to overcome the non-moral reason in favor of the moral one indicates that he *is* strong-willed. Sean's motivation here is not a sign of moral fail-

ure but rather shows that he has acted for a commendable reason. The above examples show that Smith's assertion that being motivated *de dicto* amounts to a form of moral viciousness or fetishism is not as obvious as he thinks; a much stronger defense of that claim appears to be necessary.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have summarized Smith's argument against motivational externalism, focusing specifically on his claim that it is only plausible to understand moral motivation in the good agent as involving a *de re*, rather than a *de dicto*, concern for the good. Among other objections already discussed in the literature, I have presented two additional points. First, in other normative domains, an agent showing a *de dicto* concern is not obviously labeled as "vicious". If this conclusion seems plausible in other normative areas, then, by analogy, it could also be plausible in the moral realm. Second, in some cases, only a *de dicto* motivation can lead the agent to do the right thing. However, it then becomes unclear how this can be easily classified as a vicious attitude.

In conclusion, if any of the objections seem convincing, then Smith's claim that the motivation to do the good *de dicto* would have implausible consequences is not obvious and needs more argumentation on his part. Additionally, since this claim is essential for his argument against motivational externalism to succeed, Smith's attack turns out to be less decisive than it first appeared.

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