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Moral Reasons

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ABSTRACT
My primary aim in this essay is to clarify the notion of a moral reason. To accomplish this, I criticise in the first section the main conceptions of moral reasons. In the second and third section, I explain my account of moral reasons, arguing that moral reasons are a kind of social reasons, and illustrate it by examples. Although the concept of a moral reason is central to our moral thinking; it has received scant attention in the philosophical literature. Furthermore, it is a very unclear notion and causes confusions in ethical debates. It has always been an objective of analytic moral philosophy to clarify perplexing notions, and this paper attempts to contribute to this goal.

0. *Introduction*

In this paper, I aim to clarify the notion of a moral reason. Specifically, the question I have been addressing is when does someone present a moral reason for something rather than, for instance, a prudential or legal one. There are, of course, many other questions about moral reasons that are worth considering as for example whether they are overriding, whether there are different kinds of moral reasons, or whether they are necessarily motivating. Some have investigated moral reasons from the logical point of view and have, for instance, asked whether moral reasons are a special kind of reasons or whether there are special rules of inference for moral reasoning. In this essay, I do not deal with the *logical* problem of moral reasons and throughout this paper I am assuming that the examples I give are indeed reasons. My aim is rather to determine the conditions that render such reasons *moral* reasons. 'Reason' can be taken in a *justificatory* or *explanatory* sense.[1] In this study, I am dealing with *justifying* reasons. I am not concerned with the problem of moral motivation. Often we use the term 'moral' evaluatively (the opposite of moral is then *immoral*), but we also speak of moral problems, moral emotions, or moral motives in a way that is not evaluative. We mean, then, that

[1] For instance, Skorupski (1997) holds that 'considerations whose absence from a person's mind are blameworthy are moral reasons' (p. 350). It is, however, clear that he uses 'reason' in an explanatory sense because these reasons are what *impel* people to do something (ibid.). That is, he deals with the problem of moral *motivation*.

these things belong to the realm of morality and not, for instance, to law or convention. The opposite of moral is then *non-moral* (or *amoral*). It is this latter use of 'moral' that concerns us here. My problem is to demarcate moral reasons from other kinds of reasons and not to make normative ethical claims.

We make the distinction between moral and non-moral reasons quite naturally in our ordinary ethical thinking. Many claim that they are against abortion for moral reasons, some argue that the USA had a moral reason to invade Iraq while others hold their reasons were purely selfish; and even in our ordinary daily decisions we feel that we may have prudential reasons *for* something but moral reasons *against* it. This shows that the distinction between moral and non-moral reasons is woven into our moral thinking. It is, however, nevertheless obvious that we do not have a clear notion of moral reasons. It has always been an objective of (analytic) ethics to remove perplexities of our moral thinking by clarifying central concepts of morality. This paper attempts to contribute to this goal.

To this aim, I will in the first section present and criticise the main conceptions of moral reasons. In the second section, I explain my view of what makes *simple* reasons moral reasons, which I will then expand to *complex* moral reason in the third section. It has often been held that moral reasoning is a species of practical reasoning, that is, a type of reasoning directed towards what to *do*. Even though this is an oversimplification because we can, for example, give moral reasons also for motives, I will confine myself in this paper to moral reasons for or against actions. I wish, however, to emphasize that my account can be extended to other kinds of reasons also.

1. *Critique of Main Conceptions of Moral Reasons*

Some authors seem to think that the concept of a moral reason is so clear that there is no need for elucidation.[2] Others are aware that it is an elusive notion and try to clarify it. In what follows, I shall present and criticizes these conceptions of moral reasons. This section will also provide the background for my own account of moral reasons.

(1) It seems that the paradigm of moral reasoning is *reasoning from moral principles*.[3] Such principles can explicitly state that some kind of action is morally right or wrong. For instance, when somebody reasons that the death penalty should not be outlawed because it reduces the murder rate and whatever reduces the murder rate is morally right. This reasoning refers to the al-

[2] See, for instance, Dancy (2000, 49) for whom it seems obvious that 'Since she was alone and in trouble, he should have offered help' is moral reasoning. Similar also Audi (2001, 163) or Postow (2005).
[3] See, for example, Nelson (1999), Toulmin (1976, 106), or Wallace (1997).

leged moral principle that actions are (*prima facie*) right if they reduce the murder rate. The form of our reasoning is the same when we justify an action using other moral principles, for instance, the Principle of Utility. Often, however, such principles do not explicitly claim that some actions are morally right; among them are Kant's Categorical Imperative, the Golden Rule, D. Ross' prima facie principles, or the principle of non-maleficence ("above all, do not harm"). My objection applies to both kinds of such principles.

For at least three reasons, it seems to me obvious that this account is inadequate. (i) Stating moral principles need not yield a reason *at all*. The pious Muslim Ali berates his workmate Mahmoud for having lunch because it is Ramadan. 'You should not eat between sunrise and sunset in Ramadan' is for Ali (at least intuitively) a moral principle. But the atheist Mahmoud does not care about Islam and therefore Ali does not give him a reason against having lunch. That one should fast in Ramadan, is for Ali a moral reason to abstain from having lunch but it is no reason for Mahmoud and therefore it is for him *a fortiori* no *moral* reason.

(ii) Even if a moral principle gives somebody a reason to do something, this reason need not be a *moral* one. If Paul reasons that he should return a book because he has promised to do so, he has, according to Ross (1930) and many others, presented a moral reason for returning the book. But this need not be the case. Paul valued promise keeping and therefore he had a reason to return the book. But the *explanation* for his valuing promise keeping may be such that this reason does not qualify as a moral reason. Psychological research shows that our valuations can be acquired in many different ways.[4] As a child, Paul might have been consistently punished for breaking his promises and rewarded for keeping them. Such a process of conditioning can induce a deep aversion against breaking promises. I think it is evident that he did not give a *moral* reason for returning the books if this conditioning caused his desire to return it. As will be argued in the next section, reasons need to have a special genesis to count as moral reasons and Paul's reason for returning the book may not have the right origin.

(iii) So called moral principles make simple moral reasons *indistinguishable* from simple non-moral reasons. Let us change the situation in (ii) slightly. Again, Paul argues for returning the book by stating that he has promised to return it. But he wants to keep his promise because he knows that the library does not lend any books to those who do not return them promptly. He is anxious to avoid this because he needs the book for his research. I think we can aptly say that Paul has now a *prudential* reason for keeping his promise. However, Paul *could* desire to keep his promise because he knows that other students need the book and he is anxious to avoid problems for them. I think

[4] See e.g. Eagly and Chaiken (1993).

most will agree that Paul has now a *moral* reason to return the book. From this it follows that 'because I have promised to φ' is sometimes a moral reason and sometimes not. But if we hold that reasoning from the principle of promise-keeping (or any other 'moral principle') renders reasons *moral* reasons, we cannot make this distinction, and different kinds of reasons become indistinguishable. However, since there is a clear distinction between simple moral and prudential reasons, the account currently under consideration cannot be adequate.

This is not to say that reference to the Golden Rule or any other moral principle *never* gives someone a moral reason for doing something. What I hold is rather that referring to such principles does *not necessarily* constitute a moral reason and that the essence of moral reasons must therefore be sought somewhere else.

(2) Some take the view that we reason morally when we give a *reason for a moral judgement*.[5] When we say 'Smith is a despicable person because he tends to ignore people's feelings' and assume that 'Smith is a despicable person' is a moral judgement, then, according to this view, 'he tends to ignore people's feelings' is a moral reason (Beardsmore, 1969, ix).

There is, however, an obvious objection to this view. Even if we concede that the judgements are indeed moral judgements, a reason given for them need not be a moral reason. If we assume that 'I should not murder' is a moral judgement, I can give many different reasons for it. 'Because I might face the death penalty' and 'because it is unlawful' are only two of them, the first may be prudential the second a legal one. A reason for a moral judgement is therefore not necessarily a *moral* reason.

A reply to this objection might be that a reason for judgements that state *explicitly* that an action is (*prima facie* or all things considered) morally right or wrong, must be a moral reason. But this view is also not tenable. John, an ethical egoist, holds that an action is morally right *iff* it is in his best interests. That he benefits from *φ-ing* more than from any other alternative, is therefore a reason for his moral judgement that he should do φ. Hardly anyone, however, would agree that this self-interested reason is a moral reason. And those who accept egoistic reasons as moral reasons can be confronted with much weirder moralities. Jane may hold that an action is morally right *iff* it is done on Mondays. This renders the reason that φ was done on a Monday a *moral* reason. Since anything can be regarded as morally right, anything can be a moral reason, if we accept the view under consideration. In general, the kind of judgement for which a reason is given can never determine the kind of reason for this judgement.

(3) A variant of the account discussed in (2) is the view that moral reasons

[5] See, for example, Beardsmore (1969), Gillett (2003), or Thomson (1999, 10-13).

are *reasons for resolutions of moral problems*. L. Kohlberg and his school have conceptualised moral reasons in this way. These moral psychologists ask their subjects to judge cases which are intuitively classified as *moral* dilemmas because they involve a conflict of interests. The subjects are then asked how a certain problem should be resolved and why they think so. Their justifications for what should be done in a given case are considered to be *moral* reasons.[6]

An investigation of this kind of moral psychological research shows, however, that the subjects give reasons of different kinds. Some are egoistic, some are prudential or legal, and some may indeed qualify as moral reasons. This shows that even if the problems these subjects are confronted with are moral problems, the reasons why they should be resolved in a certain way need not therefore be *moral* reasons, in the same way that a justification for moral judgements need not be a moral justification.

(4) In popular religious thinking, morality and religion are inseparable and God is seen as the foundation of morality. In a theistically viewed world, the paradigm of a moral reason seems therefore a reason based on God's will. For instance, Brown (1966) claims that saying 'If God commands something, then it is right to be done' is pleonastic (p. 158). Reasoning such as 'I should donate money to charities because God endorses it' or 'I must not murder as God condemns it' seem thus to be clear cases of *moral* reasoning.

As I see it, however, such religiously grounded reasoning is not *ipso facto* moral reasoning. The problem of this kind of reasoning was first pinpointed by Socrates who asks in Plato's *Euthyphro* whether an action is right because the gods will it or whether the gods will it because it is right. In our present context, the first alternative (that something is right because God wills it) is the relevant one. Among its problems is the well-known consequence that anything could be right as long as God wills it, which was apparently accepted by William Ockham. For present purposes, however, I wish to emphasize another problem of religiously grounded reasoning. When I reason that I should not murder because God condemns it, I value the proposition that God condemns murder (if I did not, this proposition would not be a reason for me against murder). If I value it I do so for a certain (explanatory) reason. I might hold that when I do things that are condemned by God, I may end up in hell; and it may be this belief that explains my concern about what is condemned by God. In this case, I present a *prudential* reason against murdering someone but clearly not a *moral* one, despite my reference to God. Since there are reasons based on God's will that are *not* moral reasons, and since there are obviously moral reasons that are *not* based on God's will, it is neither sufficient nor necessary for a moral reason to be religiously grounded.

(5) Some seem to hold that if a reason refers to so called *thick concepts*

[6] See Bebeau et al. (1995), Colby & Kohlberg (1987), Muhlberger (2000), and Spielthenner (1996). A similar view has been held by Horty (2003).

such as *cruel*, *callous*, *just*, or *brave*, it is necessarily a *moral* reason.[7] Two simple examples will suffice to show that this view is not tenable.

(i) The soldiers Jones and Smith have tortured a prisoner of war. Jones says, 'We shouldn't have electrocuted him because that was cruel.' Jones disvalues their cruel treatment of the prisoner, otherwise he would not have given a reason against their action by saying 'that was cruel'. But since he can disvalue their cruelty on different grounds, his reason need not be a *moral* one. Suppose that Jones knew that their superiors would not tolerate torturing detainees and that he would get into trouble if it became known that they treated a captive cruelly. If this belief caused Jones' disvaluing their cruelty, he gave a self-interested reason but not a moral one.

(ii) But are not *justice reasons* necessarily morals reasons for doing something? Again, what I deny is the 'necessarily'. I do not doubt that we often give moral reasons when we refer to justice. But the point is that we do not always do so and this shows that it is not the reference to justice as such that makes a reason a *moral* reason. Let us take one example to illustrate this.

James discusses with his friend the problem of just income taxation and takes the view that all incomes should be taxed equally. James holds a strictly egalitarian conception of justice, according to which all benefits and burdens are to be distributed equally. I am not considering here whether this view is economically reasonable but whether James presents necessarily a moral reason when he says, 'Our taxation system should be changed because it is unjust.' The answer, I submit, is that we do not know whether 'because it is unjust' is a moral reason as long as we do not know *why* James disvalues unjust (i.e. unequal) taxation. He may disvalue inequality *intrinsically*. As already mentioned, there is much research in moral psychology (and other branches of psychology) about the problem of why people value something. According to this research, it is possible that someone disvalues inequality because of early conditioning and disvalues it therefore *for its own sake*.

An analogy may help. We can learn to disvalue inequality similarly as we can learn to disvalue unpunctuality. Some people disvalue unpunctuality intrinsically (they just dislike it) and some disvalue injustice (more precisely, what they *mean* by 'injustice') intrinsically. Now, it seems to me obvious that if someone argues, 'I must hurry now because I shouldn't be late' he does not give a moral reason if he just dislikes being late (that is, disvalues unpunctuality intrinsically). For the same reason, someone does not give a moral justification when he says, 'Our taxation system should be changed because it is unjust' when he disvalues injustice (in our example *inequality*) intrinsically. To value principles of justice intrinsically is principle worship rather than moral

[7] See, for instance, Dancy (1996) or Gibbard (1992).

reasoning.[8]

I do not doubt that James' reason *can* be moral. Let us assume that he is convinced that equal taxation leads to an egalitarian society and he believes that it is best for people to live in such a society. In this case, he does give a moral reason, as will become apparent below. The point I wish to make here is that the fact that someone refers to justice in the reason he gives does not *ipso facto* make this reason a *moral* one. If I am right about this, reasons are not moral reasons *because* they are based on *thick concepts,* and it was only this what I wanted to argue for here. This remark applies to all views considered in this section. All proposed reasons (from moral principles, for moral judgements, for a resolution of moral dilemmas, etc.) *can* be moral reasons. What I have tried to show is that no such reason is necessarily and always a moral reason. If this is correct, it follows that 'moral reason' cannot be defined as has been proposed by these authors.

2. *Simple Moral Reasons*

The aim of this section is to determine what *renders* reasons *moral* reasons. Our moral reasoning is usually complex. It involves separate strands of reasons often leading to separate conclusions. In this section, I will explain when a *simple* reason is a moral reason. The next section deals then with *complex* moral reasons. The basic idea of what makes a practical reason a moral reason is fairly simple: Moral reasons are *grounded* in the valuations of others and it is this *genesis* that renders them moral reasons.

Obviously, this needs elaboration and refinement. Let us first consider an example. 'Doctors who attend elderly people in nursing homes often prescribe tranquillizers to keep these people immobile. This practice must stop as it impairs the health of the patients.'[9] This is a reason against prescribing tranquillizers to elderly people in nursing homes. The premises consist of two different elements: beliefs and a valuation. The belief is that doctors who attend elderly people in nursing homes often prescribe tranquillizers to keep these people immobile, and what the reasoner disvalues is the presumptive fact that this practice impairs the health of the patients.

I am not committed here to the view that a practical reason is a belief-and-desire complex, but I do hold that it is a *necessary condition* for a moral reason to contain a valuation. This is a widely shared view, even though the ter-

[8] Extreme forms of this kind of intrinsic valuations of justice are exemplified by the Habsburg emperor Ferdinand I who justified wars by his motto '*fiat iustitia et pereat mundus'* (Let justice be done, though the heavens fall) and Heinrich von Kleist whose nineteenth century narrative *Michael Kohlhaas* depicts a man who values justice for its own sake and above all else which turns him into a robber and a murderer.

[9] As most other examples, this reasoning is not valid. But the logical assessment of moral reasoning is not my concern in this paper.

minology varies. Some prefer to speak of *desires*[10] or *attitudes*[11] or use other terms.[12] But these are only different ways of saying the same thing, namely, that practical reasons need a valuational premise. In our example, it is in my view clear that the reasoner would not have justified his view that the practice of prescribing tranquillizers must stop if he had not disvalued its purported consequence. Assume that he claims that he wants the prescription of these drugs to be stopped because it impairs the health of the patients. We say, 'Surely, you are against their impairment' and he replies, 'Not at all, I don't care about it.' We would not know what to make of this and would probably assume that he has a hidden reason against this practice (something he really values). Of course, this is not a proof for the view that practical reasons must include a valuational element. I am not, however, dealing here with the problem of practical reasons in general and therefore I can somewhat dogmatically assert that a valuation is a necessary condition for every practical reason and therefore *a fortiori* for moral reasons (in the sense considered in this paper).

These valuations have an *explanation* and it is this explanatory reason that distinguishes moral reasons from other kinds of practical reasons. Let '*C* stand for what is (dis)valued by the reasoner. We can then specify what kind of explanation a reasoner's valuation must have if a reason he presents is to be a *moral* reason.

> The explanation for a reasoner's (dis)valuing *C* is his belief that *C* is (could be) related to something that is (will be or could be) (dis)valued by others.

Let me explain this by referring to the given example. (1) The reasoner disvalues the putative fact that the health of patients is impaired. This negative valuation has an *explanation*. According to the proposed principle, this explanation is an *explanatory reason*. Some of our valuations are *purely caused*. Psychological research indicates, for example, that some of our odour preferences are biologically determined (Moncrieff, 1966) and Brandt (1998) holds that our aversion to spiders and snakes may be caused by evolution. If valuations are *only causally* determined, a reason containing such a valuation cannot count as a moral reason. A simple example can illustrate this. 'The conditions under which animals are raised for food are appalling and must therefore be changed.' Assume that the reasoner's negative valuation of these conditions is *caused* by the stench on a poultry farm (without involving any belief e.g. about the welfare of the animals). We would not then say that he gave a *moral* reason for changing these conditions.

The valuations can have more than one explanation and usually they do. I

[10] For example Audi (2004) or Broad (1985).
[11] See, for instance, Stevenson (1944) or Davidson (2001).
[12] Such as 'interest', 'preference', 'utility', 'intention', 'purpose', 'aspirations', 'wants', 'plans', 'ideals', or 'aims'.

can disvalue the impairment of patients in nursery homes because I feel pity for them, but also because I expect to be among them one day and do not want to be impaired. Different explanations yield different reasons. At this point, however, I am dealing with simple reasons, that is, reasons which have only *one* explanation.

(2) The reasoner must believe that what he (dis)values is *related to* something (e.g. a state or event) that others (dis)value. This relation can be of different kinds. It can be *causal,* as in our example where taking tranquillizers is believed to cause health impairment, or *non-causal* e.g. deductive, inductive, mereological, and in trivial cases of moral reasoning, it is the *identity* relation. In 'I should not play the piano in the evenings because it keeps my neighbour from sleeping', I disvalue the proposition that my playing the piano keeps my neighbour from sleeping. This, however, is identical to what another person (my neighbour) disvalues. In such cases the explanation why the reasoner (dis)values *C* is his belief that *C is* something that is or could be (dis)valued by others.

(3) I need not be *sure* that this relation holds. Very often we believe that it *could* hold or that there is a certain probability for it. 'I should not play the piano because it could disturb my neighbour' is also a moral reason (given that the other conditions are met), and for morally sensitive persons, even slight chances can yield reasons for doing or omitting something.

(4) The reasoner believes that *C* is related to something that is *(dis)valued by others*. The 'others' can be anyone who is believed to be capable of valuing something. It is not required that others are indeed able to value; what is necessary is only that the reasoner justifiably *believes* they are. If Nancy argues that she should feed her dog on hamburgers because it (literally) likes them and she has some justification for this belief, she has a moral reason to do so whether or not dogs are really able to value something. For a moral reason, at least *one* other must be involved, but the reasoner can refer to many others if they are taken *collectively*. If we care about elderly people in nursing homes collectively, their impaired health yields a reason for opposing prescription of tranquillizers.

This point is central for my conception. In my view, morality is essentially social and a moral reason is necessarily a *social* reason, i.e. a reason that is socially grounded. Most of my objections in the first section are made on this basis. Any practical reason becomes a moral reason if it can be shown that it is socially grounded, and any allegedly moral reason can be shown *not* to be a moral reason if it can be shown that it is not socially grounded. It is a good exercise to apply this rule to the examples given in this paper.

It is worth noting that the valuation of others need *not* be a moral one. Jane is looking for a birthday gift for her husband. She knows that he likes Schubert's *Wanderer Fantasy* and she knows also that he thinks Maurizio Pollini's

interpretation is the best. That settles it for her. Her reason is based on an aesthetic valuation of her husband but it is nevertheless a *moral* reason. Also, whether others value something *absolutely*, or *comparatively* (prefer one outcome to the other), or whether they value it *intrinsically* or *instrumentally* does not matter. It is even irrelevant whether their valuation is deviant, regrettable, or indecent. If I think that John wants another shot of heroin and needs some money for the drug, this can provide me with a *moral* reason to give him the money. It may well be that I have better reasons against giving him the money and that it is (seen overall) morally wrong and morally reprehensible to fund his addiction, but this is not the point here. We must be careful not to confuse the meta-ethical sense of 'moral' with the normative ethical sense.

(5) To give a moral reason, it is not required that we are *sure* that others value the consequences of our action. It is sufficient to believe they *could* value them. 'I shouldn't ask her about her late husband as this *may* make her sad' is moral reasoning (given the other requirements are met); and if I conjecture that this *will* make her sad, I have also given a moral reason. This means that the believed *potential* and *future* valuations of others can also make a reason a *moral* reason. We often have *combinations* of possibilities: 'I should not play the piano because my neighbour *might* hear me and, if he does, he *may* feel disturbed' is also moral reasoning.

If the valuational element of a reason has an explanation as outlined, we can say that this reason is *socially grounded*, and my account of moral reasons can be succinctly expressed as follows:

S's reason for doing *x* is a *moral* reason *iff* it is *socially grounded*.[13]

In other words, a moral reason is a *social* reason and to reason morally is to reason *socially* (in the outlined sense).[14]

There is an obvious objection to the view proposed here. It has been held that what is really relevant for moral reasons is whether our actions are 'objectively' good or bad for others and not the valuations of others. In other words, what renders reasons *moral* reasons does not depend on the others' valuations but on the consequences of actions which are (believed to be) good or bad for them. We touch here on a problem of value theory that has occupied much of the metaethical debate in the last century. There is not room here for a full-scale discussion of this problem. My present object is, rather, to outline my reasons against this view.

The fact that an action has positive consequences on others need not give

[13] Of course, also reasons which someone gives *against* doing *x* are *moral* reasons *iff* they are socially grounded.

[14] I wish to emphasize that this definition is *precising* or *reforming*. That is, it is intended to make the meaning of a term, which is already used in ordinary language but has not a clear meaning, more precise and herewith the term more useful.

the reasoner a moral reason because he may not know or believe this. The fact that my playing the piano makes the life of my neighbour objectively better is not a reason for me to play it, if I neither know nor believe this. This means that, to obtain some plausibility, the view under consideration must be that something is *believed* to be good or bad for others.

However, the example of Pollini's Schubert interpretation shows that we can give moral reasons without believing that the consequences of our actions are 'objectively' good for others. Jane had a *moral* reason because her reasoning was based on her husband's valuation and *not* because she thought that buying Pollini's Schubert CD would be 'objectively' good for him. From this it follows logically that it is not a necessary condition for a moral reason that the consequences of an action are believed to be good or bad for others; and this implies that this is *not* an essential feature of moral reasons.

At this point, I can now argue against a conception of moral reasons which I have not yet mentioned. Some identify moral reasons with *other-regarding* or *altruistic* reasons and mean by 'other-regarding' the intention to benefit other persons. Stoljar (1980), who holds this view, asks us to suppose that we know that *X* will make another person *A* miserable and claims 'here you may refrain from *X-ing* for ... a moral reason ... in that *A's* welfare happens to be important to you' (p. 29). But the welfare of others can be important for many reasons and we can intend to benefit others on many grounds. If *X* intends to benefit *A*, his intention can be based on his desire to make *A* dependent on him, in which case his reason 'I should φ because this benefits *A*' is clearly *not* a moral reason. There may be a more charitable interpretation of what these authors mean. For instance, Blum (1980) states explicitly that altruism is 'a regard for the good of another person, for its own sake' (pp. 9-10). But even if we interpret 'other-regarding' and 'altruistic' in this sense, we are still left with the problem that a moral reason need not be based on the good or welfare of others. This means that conceptualising moral reasons as altruistic reasons is too narrow. Every altruistic reason is a moral reason, but not every moral reason is an altruistic reason.

3. *Complex Moral Reasons*

Thus far I have dealt with *single* reasons. As I have already mentioned, our reasoning is usually complex involving different strands of reasons. The object of this section is to outline my view as to when such extended reasoning can be called *moral* reasoning. Two distinctions can make my discussion clearer. We can first distinguish between *equivalent* and *ambivalent* reasoning. This distinction seems to me quite natural because our reasoning often consists of reasons *for* an action and reasons *against* it. In this case, I call it *ambivalent*. If all reasons are for something or all are against it, I call the reasoning *equiva-*

lent. Second, if all reasons of a complex reasoning are of the same kind (e.g. legal, prudential, or moral), I call the reasoning *homogenous*; if they are of different kinds, I call it *heterogeneous*. Based on these classifications, we can distinguish four different kinds of complex moral reasoning, which I shall now briefly explain. I shan't be able to consider complicated reasons and I have to restrict myself to the simplest form of complex reasoning, that is, moral reasoning consisting of only two reasons. However, I wish to emphasize that my exposition can easily be extended to more complicated reasons.

(1) A *homogeneous-ambivalent* reason consists of reasons *for* and *against* an action (that makes it *ambivalent*), but all reasons are of the same kind (thus it is *homogeneous*). Suppose that a person *A* argues for toughening the laws that regulate the emissions of greenhouse gases. Her reasoning consists of the following two reasons: (i) *A* believes that tightening up on greenhouse gas emissions could prevent a change in the earth's climate and that future generations would suffer from such a change. By hypothesis, their suffering explains why she disvalues climate change. *A* gives therefore a (simple) moral reason for tightening up on the emission of these gases. (ii) However, *A* is aware that tougher laws may hurt the economy and that this may be to the disadvantage of many people now living who may lose their jobs. Since the problems of these people also count intrinsically for *A*, she has also a (simple) moral reason against advocating tougher laws.

Even though *A* has a reason for and against a certain policy, which makes it more difficult for her to work out a rational decision, it is easy to determine when complex reasoning of this kind is *moral* reasoning. It is moral *iff* all reasons it consists of are moral reasons.

(2) In *homogeneous-equivalent* reasoning, all reasons are of the same kind and all of them are either for or against an action. Let us change our example slightly and assume that *A* gives the following reasons for toughening the laws regulating emissions of greenhouse gases: (i) She still holds that if they are not tightened up, future generations will suffer hardship. As already mentioned, *A* therefore has a moral reason for promoting a change of these laws. (ii) In addition, *A* believes that people in developing countries especially would suffer from the rise in temperature of the earth's atmosphere, and this also counts for her intrinsically. She has, therefore, a further reason to support tougher laws. Her reasoning is *homogeneous* because both reasons are moral, and since both reasons are *for* toughening the laws, they are *equivalent*; her reasoning is thus *homogeneous-equivalent.*

This kind of homogeneous reasoning is *moral* reasoning *iff* at least one constituent reason is a moral reason. Please note that this is logically equivalent to the explanation given in (1) because, if one constituent reason is moral, all are moral because of the homogeneity of the reasoning.

(3) The constituent reasons of a *heterogeneous-ambivalent* reason are of

different kinds and they are partly for and partly against the conclusion. (i) If *A* believes that future generations would suffer from climate change (which she disvalues intrinsically) and believes that tougher laws for cutting carbon emissions can prevent this change, she has a moral reason to endorse toughening these laws. (ii) If she holds the additional view that stricter laws would be a financial burden to her, she has a *non-moral* reason against tightening up on these laws. Since one of *A's* reasons is a moral reason but the other is non-moral, her reasoning is *heterogeneous*; and since she has one reason for and another against tougher laws, her reasoning is *ambivalent*, that is, her reasoning is *heterogeneous-ambivalent*.

As I now see it, complex reasoning of this kind is moral *iff* at least one constituent reason is a moral reason. Though these reasons may be of different logical strength, it is *not* necessary that the stronger reason(s) must be moral. Even if the stronger reason is a non-moral reason, the reasoning should still count as moral reasoning. Let me briefly illustrate this. I am driving on a lonely road and meet a hitchhiker who wants a free ride. Since I know that the area is crime ridden, I feel uncomfortable with a stranger in my car and I thus have a strong non-moral reason against stopping. However, my reasoning is nevertheless moral if the stranger's desire to hitch a lift counts for me intrinsically and provides me thus with a moral reason for giving him a lift. This may seem obvious, but let us now change the example. The person I meet on this lonely road is injured but my reason not to stop is still stronger than my reason to help. We may now say that not giving him a lift is morally wrong, but this is not the point here. My complex reasoning still qualifies as moral reasoning as long as his plight counts for me intrinsically and provides me with a simple moral reason for helping. It is again essential not to confuse metaethical and normative ethical viewpoints.

(4) *Heterogeneous-equivalent* reasoning consists of reasons that are of different kinds but are all for or against the conclusion. (i) Suppose *A* believes that people in developing countries especially would suffer from climate change, which she disvalues in itself, and that she is convinced that stricter laws could prevent this impending catastrophe. She then has a *moral* reason to support stricter laws against the emission of greenhouse gases. (ii) If *A* believes in addition that she may also personally suffer from the rise in temperature of the earth's atmosphere, she has in addition a *non-moral* reason for endorsing laws against these emissions. Since her reasons are heterogeneous and both are for stricter laws, her complex reason is *heterogeneous-equivalent*.

Complex reasons of this kind are moral *iff* they do not consist only of non-moral reasons. Whenever we reason for or against something, we can call it moral reasoning (in the metaethical sense) as long as at least one of our simple reasons is a moral reason, even if we have more non-moral reasons, and even if our non-moral reasons are stronger.

The question I have been addressing in this paper deals with what renders a reason someone has a *moral* reason. The answer, I have submitted, is that a *simple* moral reason is a reason that is socially grounded (in the explained sense) and a *complex* moral reason is a reason that contains at least one simple moral reason.

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