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REASONS TO BE GOOD?

Lars Hertzberg

There seems to be a question about reason and morality. Do we have reasons for being good? *Can* we have reasons? Do we *need* reasons?

Someone may ask himself whether a person who seems indifferent, say, to the demands of justice, or honesty, or faithfulness, or humanity can be brought around to taking those demands seriously, and if she can, what would be the best way of doing so? Could we do so by making her realize that there is something she has overlooked or has failed to grasp? Can we think, or be led by others to think, our way to a morally responsible stance?

In this essay, I want to discuss this question from three different angles. In Section 1 I bring up an essay by Philippa Foot, in which she criticizes the non-cognitivist notion that moral judgments are ultimately independent of reasoning. She goes on to argue that if a person is to have reasons for living a life of justice, he must come to think that doing so will, on the whole, serve his self-interest better than living a life in which he turns his back on the demands of justice. Against her, I argue that self-interest cannot ground a genuine life of justice, and that if someone is in need of a reason for a just life, there is no reason that can fulfil that need. In Section 2, I discuss Bernard Williams's position according to which a person can only be given a reason for acting well if the reason accords with some motive she embraces. I claim that he develops his position in such a way that it is left unclear whether it actually excludes any conceivable reason. In Section 3, I take up the case of the Badou family, as presented by the writer Larissa MacFarquhar. The Badous, out of a sense of moral necessity, over the years adopted a huge number of children. The reasons they might give do not differ from reasons most of us would embrace. They had not come to embrace their special way of life through a line of thought, but through a different kind of moral responsiveness.

1. Foot's essay "Moral Beliefs"¹ was a ground-breaking critique of ideas that had been predominant in the meta-ethics of the 1950's, according to which there is a conceptual chasm between what were called descriptive assertions and action- or attitude-guiding utterances (such as moral judgments), and the apparent corollary of this notion: that there are no constraints on the reasons someone may choose to advance in support of a moral judgment. In short, on this view moral judgments are not matters of cognition. Foot argued that this preconception feeds on philosophers' tendency to consider evaluative terms in the abstract. Thus, if we consider a word like "good" without taking note of the type of object being assessed (good knife, good pianist, good boy, etc.) it will appear that its sense boils down to its general commendatory function. But when the word is considered in a specific application, there will be limits (if somewhat flexible) to what grounds can meaningfully be given for calling a someone or something a good one of its kind. The point becomes even clearer if we think of more specific words like "danger," "injury" or "rudeness", which in most uses are action- or attitude-guiding, yet at the same time have a descriptive character in the sense that anyone who understands them will agree (within fairly specific limits) on what will constitute reasons for applying them in a given situation. This is the gist of Foot's attack on non-cognitivism.

¹ There is a closely parallel discussion in her essay "Moral Arguments" (1958).

This debate took place against the background of a conception of language which had been prevalent within the analytic tradition, according to which the sense of things said or written were taken to be determined by the meanings of the individual words and the syntax of the sentences they made up. Some sentences were descriptive, having a truth-value which was to be settled by checking it against the facts; others were evaluative: they had no truth-value since there were no facts to check them against. The idea that an utterance might be both appeared to be out of the question. Thus, there was thought to be no possibility of inferring from the fact that a certain description might apply to a person's behaviour to the idea that some specific attitude was to be taken up towards him. Rather this would always be a matter of how each one of us responded to his behaviour.

Foot's line of argument involved a widening of the perspective taken on the sense of speaking. The grip of the standard view was gradually loosened, the field of vision coming to include the conversational contexts and the human background of our interchanges. Questions of sense came to be seen to depend on the role of the words spoken in a particular interchange. An important milestone in this development was G. E. M. Anscombe's essay "On Brute Facts" (Anscombe 1981), published in the same year as Philippa Foot's essays. The ultimate impulse for this development came from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*.

When the idea of a conceptual gap between factual claims and action- and attitude-guiding utterances came to be seen to be illusory, this opened up for a different approach to moral discourse than that embraced by the non-cognitivists. Words for human character traits, for virtues and vices, it was seen, may be both descriptive and attitude-guiding in the way a word like "rude" is.

Foot discusses the virtue of courage. Suppose someone admits that a person's conduct is a mark of courage but claims that in commending her one "goes beyond the facts" (Foot 1967, 95). Foot retorts that being courageous is a quality that helps us in acting well, hence calling it an open question whether or not courage is a good thing to have makes no sense.

Foot then goes on:

... while prudence, courage and temperance are qualities which benefit the man who has them, justice seems rather to benefit others, and to work to the disadvantage of the just man himself... the man who avoids injustice will find himself ... unable to obtain an advantage by cheating and lying; involved in all those difficulties painted by Thrasymachus in the first book of the Republic, in order to show that injustice is more profitable than justice to a man of strength and wit. ... We will be asked how, on our theory, justice can be a virtue and injustice a vice, since it will surely be difficult to show that any man whatsoever must need to be just as he needs the use of his hands and eyes, and needs prudence, courage, and temperance?

... if [this question] cannot be answered, then justice can no longer be recommended as a virtue. (Op. cit., 96 f.)²

This strikes me as an unexpected twist in her argument. Why does Foot feel a need to argue that a concern for justice must be grounded in *self-interest*? She seems to assume that her thinking here is linked to her critique of non-cognitivism: if what makes us embrace a virtue is not our realization that it will benefit us, then it seems we *can have no reason* for embracing it; a person's commitment

² There is a well-known discussion of the essay by D.Z. Phillips (1992).

to justice, it appears, will then be purely arbitrary, the way all moral attitudes are, according to the non-cognitivist.

Consider the case of generosity, which is obviously a virtue. Suppose I extoll a friend for his generosity. I may point to the way he is unsparing of time or money when it comes to helping fellow students in need. My friend is sceptical. She suspects his generous behaviour is bound up with his running for student union president and wishing to become popular. According to my friend, he did not show much concern for needy fellow students in the past. His having motives for acting generously detracts from her admiration for his current behaviour. She might say, perhaps, that she doubted whether he was “truly generous” (note that there is a distinction to be made between a person having motives *for* acting generously and having motives *in* acting generously). There seems to be a tension, then, between the way we think of generosity as a virtue and the idea that virtues are grounded in self-interest.

Now, does this make ascriptions of generosity arbitrary? There is no reason to think it should. People will agree, to an extent, on reasons for calling someone generous. And just as it would make little sense to question the value to a person of being courageous, it makes little sense to question the value to others of a person’s being generous. The fact that a person’s courage may (but clearly does not have to) be purely self-serving, while a person’s generosity is not, does not make the value of the latter any more arbitrary than that of the former. And what goes for generosity goes for justice as well.

There appears to be an undercurrent in Foot’s construal of justice which connects with a recurrent theme in common thinking about morality (in what might be called “folk ethics”). There is an inclination to think of human conduct as governed by a conflict, or tension, between the things that we will naturally pursue, and the demands of morality that are somehow imposed on us from outside, say, in the form of social norms or religious commandments - a conflict between the self and morality. And so, it is thought, we need reasons for subjecting ourselves to the dictates of morality. This attitude is clearly articulated in a review by Allan Gibbard:

We all confront ‘the normative question’: told, say, not to cheat when I could get rich by cheating, I can ask why; why forgo wealth for honesty? Any answer can prompt a further why - and so I face a regress of whys. How, we must ask, can any answer end this regress? (Gibbard 1999, 140)

Our natural inclination is not necessarily self-centred in a narrow sense; as Foot is careful to emphasize, it may include a desire to benefit those close to us or other people whose well-being has come to matter to us. However, the virtue of justice, as the term is used by Foot, “covers all those things owed to other people: it is under injustice that murder, theft and lying come as well as the withholding of what is owed for instance by parents to children and children to parents, as well as the dealings that would be called unjust in everyday speech” (Foot 1967, 96). And all of this, she points out, cannot be accounted for in terms of our natural inclination to treat others benevolently. On the one hand, our affection for others will not extend far enough, and on the other hand the demands of benevolence and justice will sometimes come into conflict with one another (op. cit., 99).

Note that Foot is talking about whether justice can be “recommended” as a virtue. When the matter is put in terms of recommendation, it is actually forejudged that it must be settled in terms of what will best benefit the agent. However, in a case in which someone is *pleading* with

a person to refrain from treating her unjustly, the hope is that he will *forego* his self-interest. Foot does not seem to be addressing cases like that.

Undoubtedly, Foot's account, like Gibbard's question, touch on an experience we will all sometimes have, in being confronted by the demands of morality: the feeling that, in a given case, the dictates of honesty or faithfulness, say, prohibit our reaching out for that which we most fervently yearn for; the feeling that we have to struggle to suppress our desires. Now, according to Foot, the gap between self-interest and justice is only to be overcome by our recognition that being just (or maybe better: refraining from injustice) is what will best serve our interests in the long run, given the conditions of life in human society:

Those who think that [a man] can get on perfectly well without being just should be asked to say exactly how such a man is supposed to live. We know that he is to practise injustice whenever the unjust act would bring him advantage; but what is he to say? Does he admit that he does not recognize the rights of other people, or does he pretend? ... Philosophers often speak as if a man could ... hide himself even from those around him, but the supposition is doubtful, and in any case the price in vigilance would be colossal. (Op. cit., 100.)

However, it seems to me, Foot sets out the contrast too starkly. She imagines that the man not committed to justice will act unjustly whenever he stands to gain by doing so, but there is no reason why he should be so relentless. He might admit to the advantage of keeping up an appearance of justice in everyday life, yet be ready to seize the main chance when big gains were at stake and there was no risk of exposure. In fact I would imagine that very many of us fall somewhere between the two extremes painted by her: we are normally inclined to be just, at least if the demands are not too great, but will occasionally be tempted by injustice (often telling ourselves that what we are proposing to do is "really all right").

Though we may sometimes feel a conflict between our wishes and the demands of morality, this is not universally the case. Consider the following situation. I am tempted to plagiarize a few pages from another's work. My thesis has to be handed in tomorrow, my future career chances largely depend on my finishing my exam on time, and I see no other way of bringing the work to a satisfactory conclusion. Different possibilities may be imagined here. I may tell myself that this is something I could never do, or I may guiltily succumb to the temptation - let us suppose that in either case, it does not occur to me that the plagiarism might be detected. This is one pair of responses. Another pair is this: I may tell myself that the chances of getting caught are just too great with modern techniques of plagiarism detection; or I may judge I am pretty safe since the work I mean to plagiarize was published in a rare language and the chances of its turning up in a plagiarism test are slim. The second type of conundrum, but not the first, seems to fit the Footian scheme. Here, I am wondering which policy would best serve my interests as I define them. The demands of honesty are seen as external to my wishes; if I choose the honest course, I do not do so *because* it is honest.

People may occasionally reason in the latter, calculative way (for instance, someone who considers the whole business of academic degrees a meaningless rigmarole), but I do not doubt that the first pair of responses, in which I either reject the temptation off-hand or succumb to it, are common. However, they do not answer to the way Foot construes a moral issue. Being tempted to do what my conscience forbids my doing means that *my will* is conflicted. I may recognize the temptation but have no inclination, no desire, to yield to it. Or if I yield, my

conscience may plague me. In yielding I will *also* be acting against my will: I give up one thing I want for another.

My intention here is to draw attention to the latter as an intelligible description of the situation: we recognize that a person may reject such a temptation off-hand, without pondering reasons for and against. At this point, it will be protested that a person's refusal to contemplate a dishonest action will be due to her having internalized the norms of society. It is not an expression of her *true will* the way pursuing her own well-being would be. Now, without wishing to go into the question of what the oft-used concept "internalization" really means, I would argue that this move is without merit: the question of the causal origins of a desire should have no bearing on the desire's being real or not. What we are interested in here are simply the ways in which human actions may be spoken of. There is no reason why self-interested actions should be singled out as more truly mine than those driven by a sense of justice.

The upshot of this discussion, it appears, is that, Foot to the contrary, if there is such a thing as a genuine concern for justice, it is not dependent on having reasons. *If* our thinking starts from self-interest, wherever it leads us to will not be genuine justice. There may be no reason which makes some people embrace justice or generosity, some wholeheartedly and some to a degree, others hardly at all. They simply do. (Psychological explanations are a different matter.) The variability of human conduct, however, does not entail that moral claims are arbitrary.

2. Bernard Williams, in his essay "Internal and External Reasons" (1981), raises an issue which bears on the question of reasons for acting in morally responsible ways. His essay has given rise to a debate between internalists and externalists concerning reasons. Internalists - like Williams himself - argue that a person may have a reason to perform some action only if he has some motive that is (or that he believes to be) "served or furthered" by his performing the action (he may, of course, have countervailing reasons and hence not perform it) (101 f). Externalists, on the other hand, do not consider the reasons a person may have to be necessarily dependent on his existing motives.

It is not my intention to choose sides in this debate, rather I wish to inquire into some of its presuppositions for the light they may throw on the issue of reasons for being good.

Williams introduces the notion of an agent's *subjective motivational set*, called *S*. For an internalist like Williams, then, an attribution of a reason for doing something presupposes the presence of an appropriate element in the agent's *S*. Williams points out that *S* should not be thought of as static. It may be affected in various ways by deliberation. He also has a liberal conception of what it may contain: not only desires in the narrow sense, but also "dispositions of evaluation, patterns of emotional reaction, personal loyalties, and various projects ... embodying commitments of the agent" (op. cit., 105). He continues: "Above all, there is of course no supposition that the desires or projects of an agent have to be egoistic, he will, one hopes, have non-egoistic projects of various kinds, and these equally can provide internal reasons for action." (Ibid.) In contrast to Philippa Foot, then, Williams is not prepared to stipulate any *a priori* limits to what may ground an agent's reasons. He would not rule out thinking of a conflict of conscience, for instance, as a conflict of will, the way I suggested above, and hence would agree that a person's conscience may ground her reasons for action.

All the same, the internalist account entails that there are limits to the extent to which I may appeal to reasons in order to persuade someone to act in a morally responsible way: say, to take care of his children, to stop cheating on his tax return, to stop bullying his employees, *unless*

his conscience already bids him to act (or not to act) in those ways, or he has some other motive for doing so. According to the internalist, unless the person I am addressing has some suitable motives with which my arguments will engage, I will simply fail to provide her with reasons.

The participants in the internalism-externalism debate, among them Williams himself, tend to construe the issue in ontological terms: the question discussed is whether such-and-such a motive *exists* for this or that individual, rather than the various roles the giving of reasons may have in human intercourse. In this respect, the work of Williams, as of the majority of contemporary philosophers in the analytic tradition, differs from that of Wittgenstein, who encouraged philosophers to attend to questions of meaning in the context of use. This prevents their taking into account the variety of ways in which reasons for action are talked about in common discourse: what an attribution of reasons will amount to is not to be settled independently of the conversational context in which reasons are being spoken about. Reasons, to put it bluntly, do not, simply, "exist". The prevalent attitude in contemporary philosophy seems to be that parodied by Wittgenstein in the following remark:

I am told: "You understand this expression, don't you? Well then - I'm using it with the meaning you're familiar with." As if the meaning were an aura the word brings along with it and retains in every kind of use. (Wittgenstein 2009, para. 117.)

The idea that the meanings of expressions can be identified and scrutinized independently of their use in various contexts tends to have the consequence of producing artificial problems; questions which appear complex or insoluble when studied in the abstract, but vanish when regarded in the daylight of everyday conversation.

For a rough distinction, we may use reasons *prospectively*, by way of recommending a course of action or trying to persuade a person to act in this way or that; we may also use them, for instance, to *explain* or to *justify* what we or someone else did. If I am to justify something I did, the reasons I invoke will not necessarily depend on my own motives in acting (if caught speeding, I may defend myself by the fact that the speed limit sign had been knocked over by a previous driver, even though I actually knew what the speed limit was and simply did not reckon with being caught). Here then reasons may well be external. On the other hand, if I am to explain my action, I would be untruthful if I lay claim to a motive that I did not actually have. Here reasons will naturally be internal. (The border between justificatory and explanatory situations is not of course a sharp one in all cases.)³

The internalism-externalism debate will seem the most relevant when considered in connection with prospective uses of reasons. Here it might be taken to bear on the practical question whether we can make a person change her ways by adducing reasons. I would venture to suggest - though I am not claiming that this squares with Williams's intentions - that one way of regarding the internalist-externalist debate is to take it to be concerned with the conditions under which a prospective reasons dialogue makes sense. An internalist would argue that it does not

³ Justificatory and explanatory uses, we may note, are typically either first or third personal, prospective uses, on the other hand, overwhelmingly second personal. — Maria Alvarez, in her article "Reasons for Action: Justification, Motivation, Explanation" (2016) distinguishes between normative, motivating and explanatory reasons. This tripartite distinction does not directly correspond to the one made here. This, it appears, is connected with the fact that she takes an ontological approach to the issue.

make sense to present someone with a reason for action unless the reason proposed engages with some of that person's motives, while an externalist holds that it may make sense regardless.

It is easy to imagine a type of dialogue in which the internalist position is obviously on the mark. Suppose I tell a friend she ought to go to the dog show, since some very interesting new breeds will be on display there. She may reply: "Why are you telling me? I don't have the least interest in dogs." I realize I had her mixed up with another friend. I will perhaps apologize; in any case, what I said did not provide her with a reason for visiting the show. A recommendation of this sort is primarily suited to situations in which someone has an acknowledged motive for heeding it. The motive may be brought up as part of the dialogue. A friend asks advice on where she should go for a holiday. I ask her what she looks for in a holiday resort, and depending on her answer, I may give her this or that recommendation. In many cases the motive need not even be expressly acknowledged; thus, we mostly take it for granted that considerations of health, economy, legality and safety will carry weight with a person, even if she has not actually signalled a concern with those things.

However, even where prospective reasons dialogues are concerned, the situation may not always be so straightforward. Williams imagines the case of someone refusing to take a medicine he needs, claiming not to care about his health, where "we may well still be speaking in the internal sense, with the thought that really at some level he *must* want to be well" (op. cit., 106); though obviously our interlocutor's response would make us change our way of addressing the matter. Now once we recognize that (even for an internalist) whether a reasons dialogue is meaningful is not limited by the motives acknowledged by the agent, it becomes obvious that those limits are vague at best. This may be so partly because, as in this case, a person may - whether sincerely or not - fail to acknowledge a motive which she actually has (she may be self-deceived, or may not wish to be open with us); of course she may also lay claim to a motive that she does not genuinely embrace.

But besides, whether a person *does have* a given motive or not may be indeterminate. Williams, in fact, recognizes that the process of deliberation that may lead one from one's "motivational set" to accepting something as a reason for acting is not clearly circumscribed: his account of deliberation "has for instance allowed the use of the imagination to extend or restrict the contents of the agent's *S*" (op. cit., 110). He goes on to say that "[p]ractical reasoning is a heuristic process, and an imaginative one, and there are no fixed boundaries on the continuum from rational thought to inspiration and conversion" (ibid.). However, if what belongs to a person's *S* is to be determined through what she can be brought to recognize, through some form of persuasion or another, as a reason for acting, the whole idea of the set having, at a given time, some determinate content, is brought into question. How is one to settle whether at a given moment I have the *potential* for imaginatively being brought to embrace some goal or finding something worthwhile, etc.? Even if one attempt after another at bringing me round may fail, there would seem to remain the possibility that some further way of going about it will succeed. If we were to argue that this individual is beyond persuading on such and such a matter, what kind of claim are we making? It might be suggested that what we are expressing is a moral assessment - perhaps one of admiration or contempt - rather than a psychological hypothesis.

Looking at matters from the practical side, the upshot of this is that taking an internalist view of reasons for action, at least as presented by Williams, seems hardly to involve any restrictions on the kinds of persuasive reasons dialogue one may meaningfully engage in.

Recommending and persuading, it seems, are at different ends of a wide continuum. At one end is the type of case in which we supply someone with a piece of information which -

provided she trusts our goodwill and our competence to judge - will engage with her plans of action. At the other end are cases in which we plead with someone to abandon a course of action or a line of thought on which his mind is strongly set.

We may try to *awaken* the other to a motive. A classical case in point is Socrates' attempt, in the *Gorgias*, to persuade Callicles that the hedonism he is advocating would commit him to consequences he would be ashamed to embrace, for instance that his idea of a fulfilled life might consist in continually scratching an interminable itch. Callicles is not moved, but this does not mean that we cannot understand Socrates' effort as a meaningful attempt at persuasion, though admittedly the case is somewhat extreme. However, we are familiar with more everyday attempts to awaken someone to a motive to which she appears indifferent: thus, a wife may say to her husband "If you can't stand up to your father you're not the man I married"; or, debating Finnish immigration politics, someone might say, "In turning our backs on Iraqi refugees, aren't we forgetting the thousands of Finns who were given a safe haven in Sweden during the war?"; or someone might admonish me, "How can you speak that way to your own child, don't you see the look on her face?", or a mother might tell her grown-up son, "If you don't finally get your act together you're no better than a bum", etc. If the exhortation succeeds, are we to conclude that the motive we appealed to was part of the agent's motivational set to start with? Is it even clear what that means?

Cora Diamond, whose work is deeply inspired by Wittgenstein's, in her essay "Anything but Argument" (Diamond 1991), criticizes the claim made by Onora O'Neill, according to which the only way to make someone change her moral convictions, unless her affections already incline her that way, is by means of argument - e.g., if someone is not already inclined (say) to be concerned about animal suffering, we can only make him take the problem seriously by arguing (say) that there is no morally relevant difference between animals and human beings. Diamond writes:

It is simply not true that someone who holds that moral thought must rest on the natural affections is committed to the idea that moral thought will, as a result, be *as narrow as those affections initially are* in all of us, unless something happens to happen to make the affections wider, a bolt from the causal blue, transforming the character of the person it hits. (Op. cit., 296; my italics)

Diamond, then, questions the idea that the only way in which focused thinking can be brought to bear on our moral convictions is through argumentative reasoning; any other type of influence will simply belong to the category of blind causality.

Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, on one level, is a study in the different forms of persuasion to which different individuals are open: e.g. Anne Elliot's submitting to breaking up an engagement through coming to think that her doing so is in her fiancé's best interest, or the vain Sir Walter Elliot being persuaded to approve a tenant through the clever use of flattery, or his taking all proposals made by his eldest daughter seriously while being deaf to those of his youngest daughter, etc. The point is that the question of how a person will be touched by attempts at persuasion is individually conditioned on a much deeper level than is suggested by the idea of a motivational set. There seems to be a scale here from admirable or sensible responses to purely self-centred or capricious ones; the line between reasoned thought and openness to blind causality is a hazy one.

One drawback of insisting strongly on the distinction between external and internal reasons - as Williams in the end does not - is that it tempts one to downplay or disregard one central feature of our moral lives: the capacity of our moral understanding for growing, for becoming more nuanced, more inclusive, more sensitive to the variety of human beings and their needs and predicaments - no less than its liability to shrink, to be blunted, more wrapped up in one's own concerns or those of one's group. It is not to be taken for granted that thought will always be on the side of the good.

When we are genuinely out to try to persuade the other, we hope that our words will make our interlocutor change her stance - will make her see the situation in a different light. Should we say we are trying to provide the other with a *reason* for acting differently? This may be stretching the use of the word "reason" a bit, yet the limit to what we would call a reason is not sharp. Whether or not such pleas will be successful is of course an open question, but so it is with reasons of the more ordinary kind. As Diamond points out:

if we proceed by giving arguments, we presumably do not expect to be able to convince anyone who is incapable of following our arguments, or who is too prejudiced to consider them ... we do recognize incapacities and attitudes of mind which would leave our arguments - however good as arguments they may be - simply passing by those with such incapacities or attitudes. (Op. cit., 292).

The case might be one in which we invoke a motive which our interlocutor has acknowledged (or which he claims to embrace), but where he either fails to see that a certain conclusion follows from his commitment, or refuses even to think about what we are saying. (Another possible outcome, of course, if he is honest, is that he will recognize that he does not really care, or care enough, about the matter he initially claimed to find important.)

The upshot of the discussion in this section is that one may give a person reasons for acting in a morally responsible way even if she initially had no inclination to do so, provided the word "reason" is understood in a wide enough sense. But on the other hand, we are not necessarily *in need of* reasons for acting morally.

3. Talk of reasons in connection with moral life is actually fraught with problems. Emphasis on reasons talk tends to focus attention on words and thought rather than life. Philosophers are inclined to regard a person's life as based on what she says, or what she thinks to herself. In fact the relation between the three is complex: questions of sincerity and lucidity aside, there is a great deal of variation in how individuals will put their thoughts or their verbal formulations into practice. Two persons who agree that something's being a lie is a reason against uttering it may yet live up to this principle in highly divergent ways - say, in terms of the priority they accede to the principle, or what utterances they would classify as lies. To be clear how a person's words are to be taken we have to consider the way she lives. In much discussion of moral thought and moral motivation these different aspects of morality seem to be blurred - Williams's use of the notion of a motivational set is no exception here.

I might invoke an experience I have had doing voluntary work in an elementary school. From time to time the issue of good comradeship vs. bullying is brought up in class. There is a special emphasis on not excluding individual classmates from one's games. Now it turns out that these eight-to-ten year old children have no trouble at all giving the "right" answers when

asked how they ought to behave in various situations. If we look to the verbal level, bullying and discrimination are practically non-existent problems in the schoolyard. In practice, however, the relation between classroom declarations and actual conduct varies greatly between individuals. For all that, I would maintain that talk and reflection may have an important part to play in the development of an individual's conscience.

I am not saying that some of the children are insincere when they give their answers. It seems they have a clear understanding of what is demanded of them in terms of fairness and comradeship. It is rather that, in real-life situations, this understanding will sometimes be pushed aside (with a greater or lesser sense of guilt). Too many competing pressures and impulses are in play. One would almost like to say that there are cases in which the insincerity lies in their acting rather than their speech, a person's ability to keep words and life in alignment being a measure of character. And of course, in this respect the schoolyard is an image of the adult world, only somewhat more transparent.

In her book *Strangers Drowning: Grappling with Impossible Idealism, Drastic Choices and the Overpowering Urge to Help* (MacFarquhar 2015), Larissa MacFarquhar reports on interviews she held with various individuals who, each in their own way, go to extreme lengths - at least in the eyes of the world - in attempting to help others, whether people or animals. One chapter is about Hector and Sue Badou. The chapter is a deeply thought-provoking study in the conditions of human goodness and the place of moral requirements in our lives. When the Badous married, they planned to have two children of their own and to adopt two. They did so, but then gradually went on to adopt more and more children, until they had 22 children in all. The children they adopted had special needs, and the Badous were convinced (rightly no doubt) that if they had not adopted them the children's chances of being adopted would have been slim. As MacFarquhar writes: the children "were too old, or too violent, or too traumatized, or unable to walk, or too close to death, or the wrong color, or had too many brothers and sisters" - which, the Badous thought, had to be adopted together (MacFarquhar 2015, 223). It was not that the Badous were naïve or heedless as one might be tempted to assume: in fact, each decision to adopt was preceded by a great deal of soul-searching and calculation. Of course, the Badous had limited means, and each new child meant that ever smaller resources of time and strength were available to the other children, so the decision to adopt was in every case a response to what, for them, constituted a dilemma. There were also several cases in which they considered adopting a child but decided against it, since they felt they were unable to benefit the child. Though everyday life was a struggle, Hector and Sue were clear that there also had to be joy in it; if they had been doing what they did out of a sheer Kantian sense of duty without taking delight in their family, that would have been a failure of sorts.

The special character of the Badous' way of life is brought into relief by considering the responses of those around them. Both Hector's and Sue's mothers were baffled by their children's choices. Their perspective seems to have been typical of that of a parent: they worried that their children were making life too tough for themselves. Hector's mother wanted him to have a better life than she had had (she had sixteen children), yet she loved Hector's children and helped out by babysitting. Hector's brother and sisters, however, "couldn't understand why Hector would go out of his way to find children with mental and physical flaws ... A collection of black and Hispanic and Asian children did not seem like a Badou family to them." (Op. cit., 237.)

Many of the Badous' neighbours spoke of them as saints. MacFarquhar notes that there was an

ambivalence that hovered when people called Sue and Hector saints. Saints were notorious for caring as much about strangers as about their own families. Some claimed that this impartial, universal love for all people was a noble, if difficult, thing, something to aspire to, even if only saints could achieve it. But to most people, partiality to one's own - loving family and friends more than strangers - was at the heart of what it meant to be human. (Op. cit., 253)

Invoking the idea of sainthood was at the same time a defensive move and a slightly begrudging recognition. There seems also to have been the thought that if you are a saint, self-sacrifice is really easier for you than for the rest of us.

There seems to be a philistine temptation to ridicule a couple like Sue and Hector Badou, to call their way of life misguided; on the other hand, for someone to point to them and say that that is how we all should all live would in all likelihood be a pointless, empty gesture.

How are we to view the difference between the Badous and the average family? Shall we say that what made them different were their moral convictions? Did they embrace reasons for action that most others would reject? Most people would probably agree that it is important to do what one can to help children in dire need. The Badous, in turn, would agree with the majority in wishing for economic security, time to themselves, freedom from worries. There was simply a difference between the way they and others were *touched* by the things most of us agree in finding important. (There is a parallel here to the variations in the way people in our society are touched by the suffering of animals.)

The Badous' way of life, as I see it, was not underwritten by a peculiar system of moral thought. It was not *based* on any specific set of reasons for action that others would have rejected. It is a different matter that *within* their way of life, what counted as a good reason for doing something was different from what many of us would put forward.

While the Badous shared the common wish for security and freedom from worries, they saw obstacles to the fulfilment of that wish, in the form of one more child who urgently called for their love and support - obstacles which, to most of us, do not even exist. Those were children who would rarely come to the notice of most other people, and if they did, people would tell themselves that there was really nothing they *could* do about it, apart, perhaps from making a donation to *Save the Children*:

They [the Badous] never told themselves that because a child was a stranger he was not their problem: if they heard about a particular child who was suffering they felt he was as much their problem as if he were drowning at their feet, or had been left on their doorstep. (Op. cit., 248 f.)

Where the Badous differed from most other people, then, was not in their having embraced a line of reasoning that took them in a different direction from a shared reality. If by a reason we mean a conversational move, an articulated claim that is apt to make a person act in some particular way, we might not be able to identify any set of reasons that would set the Badous off from the average citizen.

In answer to the questions we asked at the outset, whether we can have and whether we need reasons to act in morally responsible ways, what may be said at this point is that there is no general answer to them. There are no limits set *a priori* to the things that may move us.

I will end by quoting Peter Winch, another philosopher whose work, not least in moral philosophy, was deeply influenced by Wittgenstein's thought:

It is characteristic of many ... philosophers ... that they think of the relation of morality to conduct in terms of the reason a man has for doing one thing rather than another. A philosopher of very different style who has sharply criticized this conception is Jean-Paul Sartre who said, perhaps with exaggeration but still with point, that when I come to deliberate - to consider reasons for and against doing something - '*les jeux sont faits*' ('the chips are down'). If we wish to understand the moral character of a particular man and his acts it is, often at any rate, not enough to notice that, for such and such reasons, he chooses a given course of action from among those he considers as alternatives. It may be at least as important to notice *what he considers the alternatives to be* and, what is closely connected, what are the reasons he considers it relevant to deploy in deciding between them. (Winch, 1972, 177 f.)⁴

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⁴ Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at a seminar in honour of Lilli Alanen at the University of Helsinki, September 2016, at a seminar organized by Raimond Gaita in Melbourne in November 2016, as well as at the research seminar at Åbo Akademi, January 2017. I wish to thank the participants in these seminars for stimulating responses. Particular thanks are due to Oskari Kuusela and Merete Mazzarella for helpful comments.

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