

# **Inclusive internalism:**

## **How to be an internalist without being an “internalist” about reasons**

Reasons internalists claim that one’s reasons are grounded solely in facts about one’s motivational states. I argue that the restriction to specifically motivational states is arbitrary. There are other kinds of mental states which could plausibly ground an agent’s reasons. If internalists appealed to a wider range of states, they could better defend against the standard objection to their view. I sketch a pluralistic mental state theory, called “inclusive internalism”, which appeals also to hedonic states, evaluative and normative judgments, and emotions. This view is in the spirit of internalism, but is immune to the most common counter-examples.

### **1 Introduction**

Reasons internalists claim that one’s reasons are always grounded in facts about one’s motivational states—one’s “subjective motivational set”, in Bernard Williams’ (1981) terminology.<sup>1</sup> Reasons externalists deny this. Some reasons might be grounded in our motivational states; but not all of them. Both internalism and externalism come in different varieties. For instance, internalists often claim that the reason-generating motivations are those that would be present after certain kinds of idealizations—e.g., the correction of false beliefs. Externalists, on the other hand, might think that reasons are irreducible and *sui generis*, or that they are grounded in motivation-independent value facts or some such thing.

The debate between internalists and externalists has been ongoing for several decades, but seems to have stagnated. It’s time to shake things up. I argue that internalists have unnecessarily and arbitrarily restricted themselves. There is a family of potentially appealing views—which I’ll call “broad internalism”—that remain true to the spirit of internalism, but which fare better against the standard externalist objections. Broad internalism receives no attention, much less endorsement, in the literature. This paper sketches an inclusive, pluralistic version of broad internalism that should be especially appealing.

### **2 Extensional adequacy and ideally coherent eccentrics**

One desideratum for a theory of reasons is “extensional adequacy”, the ability to account for the reasons that we think there are. A theory which entailed that we all have decisive reason to eat our toenails but no reason at all to pursue our projects or promote human well-being is not worth taking seriously. Testing a theory’s extensional adequacy

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<sup>1</sup> In other words, internalism claims the following: facts of the form “R is a reason for A” are all at least partially (if not solely) grounded in some fact(s) about A’s motivations. This is compatible with the claim that all reasons are *also* grounded in other kinds of facts. So, for instance, one could be a non-naturalist internalist—i.e., someone who claims that all reasons are grounded in motivational facts, *and* the irreducibly normative fact that motivations of a certain kind generate reasons.

involves taking intuitions about example cases as data for the theory to explain. For instance, suppose that there is a party tonight, where the will be dancing (Schroeder, 2007a). Ronnie likes to dance, while Bradley does not. Intuitively, the fact that there will be dancing at the party is a reason for Ronnie, but not Bradley, to go to the party. A satisfactory theory of reasons should explain this and other such intuitions. Indeed, extensional adequacy is often treated as the most important, or even *only*, criterion of adequacy for theories of reasons (Behrens, 2016).<sup>2</sup>

Popular versions of internalism and externalism are both generally considered to be extensionally adequate in ordinary cases (Street, 2009, p. 279). Nobody would accept these views, after all, if they couldn't yield intuitive verdicts in day-to-day cases. For instance, in the Ronnie and Bradley example, internalists can explain Ronnie's reason to go to the party by appealing to his desire to dance, and Bradley's lack of a reason by appeal to his lack of desire. Externalists might appeal to the motivation-independent value of the pleasure that Ronnie, but not Bradley, would experience at the party. Since both theories seem well-equipped in quotidian cases, theorists appeal to more outlandish hypotheticals in order to tease out the differences. Often these cases are posed as challenges for internalism. One such example is an ideally coherent anorexic who "accepts norms that prescribe death by starvation, if the alternative is a figure plump enough to sustain life" (Gibbard, 1990, p. 171). Another is the infamous grass-counter, who is stipulated to be perfectly structurally rational, but has made it his life's work "to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas such as park squares and well-trimmed lawns" (Rawls, 1971, p. 417). The wackiest case of all comes from Derek Parfit:

Suppose that... I want to have some future period of agony... for its own sake. I have no other present desire or aim that whose fulfillment would be prevented either by this agony or by my having this desire to have this agony. After ideal deliberation, I decide to cause myself to have this future agony, if I can. (2011, p. 83)

Sharon Street (2009) calls such figures "ideally coherent eccentrics" (ICEs) because—despite their ludicrous or repugnant motivations—they are supposed to be perfectly structurally rational. They have perfectly coherent sets of beliefs, motivations, and so on.

ICEs are thought to present a problem for internalism. They can be stipulated to have met whatever conditions an internalist might impose (e.g., full information, ideal deliberation). Thus, according to internalism, ICEs have decisive reasons to pursue these goals. But this is highly counter-intuitive. I haven't run a poll, but my impression is that most people do think that Parfit\* *should not* cause himself agony, the ICE anorexic should eat a healthy diet, and the ICE grass counter should do something more productive with his life.<sup>3</sup> Thus, ICE counter-examples present tooth-shattering bullets, and constitute the standard objection to internalism.

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<sup>2</sup> Derek Parfit (2011), for instance, seemed to think that extensional adequacy gets lexical priority over all other criteria—e.g., ontological parsimony, epistemic accessibility.

<sup>3</sup> I have serious doubts about the reliability of intuitions elicited by such outlandish hypotheticals (see, e.g., Gendler, 2010; Sunstein, 2005; Weijers, 2013). But, for now, I engage with this debate on its own terms.

### 3 Non-conative internalism

“Internalism” and “externalism” are misleading labels for the views we’ve been considering. They suggest that the dispute concerns whether an agent’s reasons are grounded in facts internal or external to herself—whether the source of one’s reasons is to be found *within* or *without*. The most obvious reading of that distinction, given how “internal” and “external” are typically used in philosophy, would be psychological. The external world, as in “external world skepticism” in epistemology, is the world beyond one’s own mind. Similarly, content externalism in the philosophy of language is the view that semantic content “ain’t in the head” (Putnam, 1975, p. 227). This would naturally lead one to think that the divide between internalists and externalists about reasons is between those claiming that one’s reasons are always grounded in facts about one’s mental states—call this view “broad internalism—and those who deny this. Now, one version of broad internalism would claim that an agent’s reasons are grounded solely in facts about her motivational or “conative” states. But this *conative internalism* is only one of many possibilities.<sup>4</sup>

Consider *hedonic internalism*. This is the view that an agent’s reasons are grounded solely in facts about her hedonic states. This view posits that Parfit\* has an extremely weighty reason, grounded in the pain he will experience, not to cause himself agony. Since it won’t cause any pleasure, Parfit\* will also have no reason to cause himself agony. Therefore, he has decisive reason against doing it. In the anorexic case, death by starvation would be very unpleasant. The pleasures of eating, the many and various pleasures one would experience by continuing to live, and the avoidance of the pain associated with starvation all ground strong reasons to not starve. Though the anorexic would presumably enjoy seeing herself deathly skinny (and therefore would have *some* reason to starve), it’s hard to see how this reason could possibly outweigh the reasons against. The grass counter case is complex. Depending on whether and how much pleasure the man gets from his grass counting, he may or may not have decisive reason to count. If he doesn’t enjoy it, then hedonic internalism says he has no reason to do it. If, on the other hand, he does enjoy it, then he’ll have *some* reason to do it. Whether that reason is decisive depends on how much he enjoys it, and what he must give up in order to do it. If the pleasure is trivial, and he could get more from spending time with his family or reading a good book, then he will have stronger reason to do one of the latter. If he finds grass-counting richly rewarding and has the opportunity to do it without giving up other enjoyable activities, then the view will claim that he has decisive reason to do it. All of these verdicts are quite intuitive and coincide with typical externalist claims. Thus, bringing hedonic internalism into the internalist camp would significantly shift the balance of power in the debate.

Given their close similarity, hedonic and conative internalism really ought to be classified together. Both claim that agent A’s reasons are grounded solely facts about A’s own mental states. The *only* point of difference is whether the relevant states are motivational or hedonic. It would take quite a gerrymandered taxonomy to divide these

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<sup>4</sup> Henceforth, I call the traditional view “conative internalism” to distinguish it from other forms of broad internalism. I prefer the more ordinary term “motivational” to “conative”. But “motivational internalism” is already commonly used for another view (Rosati, 2016).

views, and group hedonic internalism with, e.g., the view that reasons are *sui generis* non-natural facts.

### 3.1 *Objections to hedonic internalism*

One might object that, while a sensible taxonomy could be produced which groups conative and hedonic internalism, the latter view fails to respect important motivations behind the former. One objection claims that hedonic states, unlike motivational ones, don't involve an exercise of one's agency. Conative internalists, I agree, are keen to maintain a connection between an individual's reasons and her agency. So, if hedonic internalism does not establish such a connection, then it should be kept separate. A related objection claims that hedonic internalism presupposes that certain hedonic states have response-independent (dis)value, which will not sit well with conative internalist motivations. This too would be a problem, if true. However, neither of these objections hits the mark. A person's hedonic states *are* importantly connected with her agency. And hedonic internalism is *not* committed to claims about response-independent value.

There are a few ways to cash out the first objection. One might claim that hedonic states don't involve an exercise of agency because we don't choose what pleases or pains us. Hedonic states simply assail our experience, and our agency is expressed only in our response to them. But, then, motivations are the same way. Urges, impulses, and desires seem to simply bubble up into awareness. Typically, we exercise our agency, not by controlling which motivations beset us, but in deciding which we will act on.<sup>5</sup> So, hedonic and motivational states are on a par.

Another way of cashing out this objection would be to claim that it is possible for a person to change her motivations, but not her hedonic states, by thinking—e.g., deliberating or learning new information. If this were true, it would be a way in which conative states are more agentic than hedonic states. But it's not true. For instance, many people initially enjoy eating meat. But learning about the treatment of animals in factory farms can easily spoil that pleasure. Similarly, deliberation about the morality of the practice might make the presence of meat on one's plate physically uncomfortable. For another gustatory example: isovaleric acid has a distinctive, earthy smell. Whether that odor repulses or delights depends on whether one believes one is smelling dirty socks or ripe cheese. Naturally, not all hedonic states are so easily influenced. It would be hard to think one's way out of the pain resulting from a brick landing on one's bare foot. But, of course, many motivational states are similarly obstinate. A mother's urge to protect her child, or the impulse to fight or flee when dropped into a lion's den cannot easily be thought away. In short, some reactions, both hedonic and motivational, can be changed merely by thinking. But others may be so deeply biologically ingrained that we cannot eschew them.<sup>6</sup> Again hedonic and motivational states are on a par.

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<sup>5</sup> "When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all of your desires, something which... chooses which desire to act on" (Korsgaard, 1996, p. 100).

<sup>6</sup> Our hedonic responses are far more plastic than we often give them credit for. Those who have practiced mindfulness meditation know that painful bodily sensations can cease to be aversive if one focuses on them in the right way. It's common to experience things like joint pain while sitting in a meditative posture. But, if

A final attempt to spell out the first objection would be to claim that motivational, but not hedonic, states are goal-directed or action-oriented. Again, if true, this would make conative states agentic in a way that hedonic states are not. But, again, it doesn't appear that this is true. In psychology, pleasure is thought to function as a cue that one has achieved, or is making satisfactory progress towards achieving, one's goals (Carver, 2003). Pleasure's job, in other words, is to encourage an organism to pursue certain options, and direct attention to where it is most needed for continued goal-pursuit. Pain is plausibly thought to serve the opposite function. We are pained by bodily harm, the avoidance of which is a central goal for all organisms. And we are pained at least as badly by our failures and setbacks. Dan Haybron puts the point thus:

[O]ne way to have something as a goal is to be prone to meet it with joy, even if it never occurred to you to want it. Put another way, if you wanted to instill certain goals... into an organism, you might give it desires for those things; but you could also give it the propensity to be made happy by them, or unhappy by their absence. In fact, given that desires are often formed in ignorance of what their fulfillment would be like, the organism's evaluative response tendencies—what makes it happy or unhappy, brings it pleasure or pain—might be the most reliable metric of what its most important goals are. (2016, p. 36)

In other words, hedonic states are plausibly goal-directed and action-oriented, just like motivational states.<sup>7</sup> So, once again, they are on a par. There may yet be some sense in which motivational states are agentic, while hedonic states are not. But I'm prepared to conclude otherwise and reject this objection.

We're well-positioned now to see why the second objection (that hedonic internalism is committed to claims about the response-independent value of hedonic states) also fails. Since our pleasures and pains are bound up in our agency, in the ways just discussed, hedonic internalism is not committed to claims about response-independent value. Hedonic states are, as Haybron put it, some of our most basic "evaluative response tendencies". They reflect our goals, cares, and concerns just as much as our motivations do. Hence, the claim that one's reasons are grounded in hedonic states does not depend on claims about the

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one focuses on the feeling of discomfort itself, the sensation can become painless. This is why meditation is now sometimes prescribed for people suffering from chronic pain (Hilton et al., 2017; Nascimento, Oliveira, & DeSantana, 2018). Expert meditators are even supposed to be capable of entirely disengaging their natural pain responses (Kakigi et al., 2005; Peper et al., 2006). Most famously, in 1963 Thích Quảng Đức drenched himself in gasoline and set himself on fire to protest the war in Vietnam. The striking thing about the famous photo of this event is the almost serene look on his face. No one experiencing the kind of agony that *I* would feel in such circumstances could have maintained such equanimity. While the details are not yet well understood, researchers are exploring the neurological mechanisms behind these effects (Nakata, Sakamoto, & Kakigi, 2014; Tang, Hölzel, & Posner, 2015). In any case, what's clear is that we can influence our hedonic states to a remarkable degree just by thinking.

<sup>7</sup> One might object that people often feel pleased when they *think* they have achieved or are making progress towards some important goal. But, if they are mistaken, then that pleasure couldn't plausibly ground a reason for the agent. But notice that a hedonic internalist can appeal to the same kinds of idealizations that conative internalists do. Perhaps the hedonic states that ground one's reasons are those that one *would have* if one were properly informed, structurally rational, etc.

response-independent value of those states. Rather, the idea is that they partially constitute our evaluative outlook, our take on the world. (More on this below.)

### 3.2 *Inclusive internalism*

The most appealing version of broad internalism would likely incorporate a range of mental states. There are many kinds besides the motivational and hedonic that might plausibly ground reasons.

Normative and evaluative judgments, for instance, are not always (or not strongly) motivating and their objects aren't always pleasant. Imagine someone who judges that it would be good, or that he ought, to give most of his salary to charity, but doesn't feel motivated and wouldn't enjoy doing so. It seems plausible that his judgment—even in the absence of motivational and hedonic states—could ground a reason for him to donate. One might also include emotions—including reactive attitudes like pride and shame. It seems plausible that the fact that one will be ashamed for not donating to charity, or would be proud of having donated, could ground reasons to give. Emotions normally bring motivations in train. But if this were not so, in some unusual case, why not think the emotions themselves ground reasons for action? For instance, loving someone usually means being motivated to be with them, protect their interests, and so on. But suppose, bizarrely, that while Abe truly loves Bea (and suppose Bea reciprocates), Abe is not so motivated.<sup>8</sup> We would ordinarily say, I think, that Abe has strong reasons—grounded in the fact that he loves Bea—to spend time with her, protect her interests, etc.

It strikes me as arbitrary to pick just one of these kinds of mental state as the sole grounds for one's reasons. Actually, it's worse than arbitrary because these states are interrelated and interdependent. Empirically, we now know that these different mental states form organic unities, or "complex syndromes" (Sripada, 2016). In fact, a good case could be made that they form a homeostatic property cluster—i.e., a natural kind (Bird & Tobin, 2018; Kumar, 2015). This means that one doesn't really understand the mental state in question unless one sees how it fits into a larger set of psychological processes. An appealing theory of reasons, I think, would respect this fact.

To illustrate, while I've been distinguishing hedonic and emotional states, we now know that these are actually members of the same genus. Emotions (e.g., pride) and hedonic states (e.g., the pleasure of a good meal) are both kinds of affective states (Barrett, 2016). Affect is a basic psychophysiological phenomenon which varies along two dimensions: valence, and arousal (Barrett & Russell, 1999). "Valence" refers to (un)pleasantness; "arousal" refers to activation or energy level. Joy, for example, involves high arousal positive affect, while anger involves high arousal negative affect. Awe involves low arousal positive affect, while gloominess involves low arousal negative affect. When the object of an affective state is a bodily sensation, we tend to call it a pleasure or pain. As a couple of

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<sup>8</sup> It's not entirely clear whether this is actually possible. Emotions induce specific sets of "action tendencies" (i.e., motivation to perform certain kinds of actions). In fact, psychologists typically distinguish emotions partly by the action tendencies that they produce (Fredrickson, 1998; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). If emotion and motivation are not actually separable, as I suspect, then this further supports the claim I make in the next paragraph.

neuroscientists write, pleasure “is never merely a sensation, even for sensory pleasures. Instead pleasure always requires the recruitment of specialized brain systems to actively paint an additional ‘hedonic gloss’ onto a sensation” (Berridge & Kringelbach, 2013b, p. 83).<sup>9</sup> This “hedonic gloss” is positive affect (Barrett & Russell, 1999; Berridge, 2003; Berridge & Kringelbach, 2013a). Of course, sensations can also be “painted” with negative affect, in which case they are experienced as painful (de Wied & Verbaten, 2001; Keefe, Lumley, Anderson, Lynch, & Carson, 2001; Kenntner- Mabilia & Pauli, 2005; Rhudy et al., 2005). When the object of an affective state is *not* a bodily sensation (for instance, something one has done), we tend to call it an emotion (such as pride or shame). In other words, emotional and hedonic states are fundamentally the same kind of thing. The difference is in their objects.

It’s also worth mentioning that affective responses are one’s largely non-conscious evaluations (or, as psychologists often call them “appraisals”) of things (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013; Seligman, Railton, Baumeister, & Sripada, 2016; van Peer, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2014). In fact, affect has been argued to qualify as a form of cognition on standard definitions of the term (Duncan & Barrett, 2007). Our emotions are thus central to our evaluative perspectives. And there seems not to be much of a distinction between affective states and explicit evaluative judgments. If anything, the difference might just be in the degree to which a person is conscious of the evaluation.

The fact that these various mental states are so intermingled might explain why the terms we use to talk about them vacillate between different senses. For instance, many philosophers now follow Philippa Foot in treating terms like “desire” and “preference” as ambiguous between motivational and affective senses (Foot, 1978, p. 148; W. A. Davis, 1984; T. Scanlon, 1998, pp. 37–41; Sumner, 1999, p. 121). The term “desire” sometimes “indicates a motivational direction and nothing more” (Foot, 1978, p. 148), yet it can also indicate the state of finding something “pleasing or agreeable, or welcoming the opportunity to do it, or looking forward to it with gusto or enthusiasm” (Sumner, 1999, p. 121). Valerie Tiberius argues that a person’s values (which are often lumped together with desires) are best understood as her “affective dispositions” (Tiberius, 2014, 2018)—i.e., tendencies to have certain emotional responses to the valued object.

All this is to say that internalists would do best to adopt a pluralistic view like the following:

***Inclusive internalism:*** Reasons for agent A to  $\phi$  are grounded in A’s mental states, including (but not necessarily limited to): motivations whose object is, or would be made more probable by,  $\phi$ -ing; hedonic states that A would experience as a result of  $\phi$ -ing; evaluative or normative judgments about  $\phi$ -ing, or about things that would result from  $\phi$ -ing; emotions whose object is  $\phi$ -ing or that would result from  $\phi$ -ing.

Inclusive internalism strikes me as a very plausible view. Yet, to my knowledge, no one has endorsed anything like it. The payoff for inclusiveness is the ability to posit more reasons. So, if one is attracted to conative internalism, but finds it extensionally inadequate, a pluralistic view like this will be very appealing. Obviously, the more states one includes in one’s theory, the more reasons one will end up positing. One could fine-tune the extension

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<sup>9</sup> This helps explain how sensations can persist while their painfulness dissipates. (See note 6.)

by manipulating the states it appeals to and the conditions or idealizations it places on them (e.g., full information and coherence).

#### **4 Conclusion**

To summarize, internalists have limited themselves unnecessarily. By appealing solely to motivational states, they have ignored other kinds of states, facts about which could plausibly ground an agent's reasons. This restriction is arbitrary and makes the view weaker. If internalists claimed that an agent's reasons could also be grounded in hedonic states, evaluative judgments, and emotions they would do much better in defending against the standard objection to their view. I offered a rough sketch of such a view, called inclusive internalism, which I think is plausible and attractive.

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