

“What Lurks Beneath the Integrity Objection”

Bernard Williams’s alienation and integrity arguments against consequentialism have served as the point of departure for much of the most interesting work that has been produced since then on the topic.¹ My focus in this paper will be upon a line of thought running through Williams’ early formulations of this argument² which suggests that the psychological fragmentation, alienation, and loss of integrity identified by Williams and his interpreters as costs of consequentialism are properly diagnosed as symptoms of a more fundamental problem – that standard forms of consequentialism presuppose accounts of practical reason and deliberation that are in tremendous tension with the rational authority (which they also often presuppose) of their moral requirements. It is this more fundamental problem, I will argue, that is at the core of Williams’ claim that “utilitarianism...cannot coherently describe the relation between a man’s projects and his actions.”³

Williams’ argument takes up the traditional form of utilitarian consequentialism advocated by J.J.C. Smart, and demonstrates that in its very articulation of moral standards such an account presupposes an account of practical reason and deliberation.

¹ Perhaps the two most noteworthy examples are Samuel Scheffler’s [The Rejection of Consequentialism](#), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) and Peter Railton’s, “Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality, in Scheffler, S. [ed.] [Consequentialism and Its Critics](#) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).”

² Williams later offers arguments that he takes to apply against an entire range of moral theories, including consequentialism. (See, for example, “Persons, Character, and Morality,” in [Moral Luck](#) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp. 1-19) These general arguments are in many respects a significant departure from the distinctive criticism of consequentialism that he develops in [Utilitarianism: For and Against](#), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), and lose much of the force of this earlier criticism. For this reason I will focus primarily on the early argument formulated specifically against consequentialism. I suspect that an initial tendency by interpreters (myself included) to read the later, more generalized argument back into the earlier argument tends to obscure central features of the criticism of act consequentialism contained in this earlier work.

³ [Utilitarianism: For and Against](#), p. 100.

He demonstrates that although this account of practical reason and deliberation can plausibly be seen as giving rise to rankings of better and worse overall states of affairs such that rational agents have reasons to promote these states of affairs, the very articulation of such impersonal involving reasons presupposes that they are at most some reasons among others. Moreover, in precisely the cases upon which consequentialists and their critics focus, cases in which conformity to consequentialist moral standards would appear to alienate rational agents from their most fundamental plans and projects, such rational agents will have decisive reasons to act contrary to consequentialist moral standards – to perform actions identified by the consequentialist as wrong. If such determinations of better and worse states of affairs set the standards for right and wrong action, but only provide some reasons among others for an agent to act, reasons that fail to be decisive when acting upon them would result in alienation, the rational agent will frequently have sufficient reasons to do what is morally prohibited. The problem isn't that morality alienates rational agents from their deepest projects and commitments, it is that reason, as consequentialists such as Smart understand it, alienates agents from consequentialist standards for moral conduct.

There are resources in Williams' discussion to explain the tendency by consequentialists to conflate their account of moral standards, properly understood as merely articulating some reasons among others, with an account of such standards as providing ultimate reasons that comprehend all others. I will present these resources, and close by considering the extent to which Williams' criticism generalizes beyond the act utilitarian version of consequentialism articulated by Smart to other consequentialist accounts that invoke very different accounts of practical reason and deliberation.

Williams takes himself to share with act consequentialists such as Smart and Singer an account of practical reason and deliberation upon which an agent's practical reasons are controlled by his desires, broadly construed to include his most central plans, projects, and commitments: "*his* actions and *his* decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified."⁴ It is through appeal to these attitudes and commitments, and what they are attitudes and commitments towards, that an agent determines the best course of action available to him. My reasons, and the decisions to which they give rise insofar as I am rational, flow from my attitudes, projects, and commitments; your reasons flow from your attitudes, projects, and commitments. Such attitudes and commitments are "dispositions not simply of action, but of belief and judgment; and they are expressed precisely in ascribing intrinsic and not instrumental value to various activities and relations such as truth-telling, loyalty, and so on."⁵ A "grounded decision," then, will be based upon reasons that flow from a thorough understanding of such plans, projects and commitments.⁶ To say that the course of action decided upon is one the agent has sufficient or even decisive reasons to pursue is, on such an account, to say that it is grounded in this way.⁷ How do such claims relate to the traditional utilitarian focus on happiness? Williams points out that "happiness...requires being involved in, or at least content with, something else."⁸ It is this 'something else' that he characterizes in terms of the agent's plans, projects, and commitments: "If such commitments are worth while,

⁴ Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 116. In subsequent writings Williams will label this set of desires, broadly construed to include the agent's plans, projects, and commitments, her subjective motivation set.

⁵ Williams, "The Point of View of the Universe," in Making Sense of Humanity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 164.

⁶ Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 118.

⁷ Williams is notoriously a reasons internalist. But nothing in the argument that follows turns on his commitment to reasons internalism. This point will be taken up directly later in this section.

⁸ Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 112.

then pursuing the projects that flow from them, and realizing some of these projects, will make the person for whom they are worth while happy.”⁹ Happiness results from realizing the worth while projects and plans and honoring the commitments that comprise the subject’s motivational set. The first step in Williams’ account, then, is his suggestion that rational agents have plans, projects, and commitments, a subjective motivational set, from which their reasons for action flow (insofar as they are rational) through sound deliberative routes.

I will now introduce a second step that Williams does not explicitly introduce at any point in his argument. Making it explicit, however, clarifies the nature of subsequent steps. This step points out that any agent can readily adopt a 3rd person observer’s standpoint towards the plans and projects that she and other agents have and the reasons for action to which they give rise. Moreover, she can attempt to determine, from such a 3rd person observer’s standpoint, what outcomes will allow for the maximal realization of everyone’s plans and projects overall. The agent can rank potential outcomes from such an observer’s standpoint according to the degree that each state of affairs allows agents to successfully realize their projects and honor their commitments overall.

It is crucial to note that by itself a 3rd person observer’s standpoint, when adopted towards oneself as well as others, is not itself a source of practical reasons, much less a standpoint of practical reason and deliberation, for any agent.¹⁰ It is instead an observer’s standpoint towards all the projects and commitments and the reasons flowing from them

⁹ Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 113.

¹⁰ Note, however, that the 3rd person standpoint may also serve as a standpoint for the evaluation of the reasons that another agent has. From the 3rd person standpoint we can both observe which projects and ends the agent arrives at through rational deliberation and assess the rationality of the deliberation involved in arriving at these ends. For a detailed treatment of the interaction of the 1st and 3rd person perspectives in both the theoretical and practical spheres see Richard Moran’s Authority and Estrangement (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

that persons have. Because it is a standpoint towards the projects of rational agents and the reasons to which they give rise, and not a standpoint from which any rational agent reasons and deliberates, the occupant of this standpoint, qua occupant of this standpoint, has no reasons. Taken by itself, the observer's 3rd person standpoint is not an independent source of reasons that can even be in tension with the reasons that flow from the projects and commitments of each rational agent. It is an observer's standpoint towards the practical reasons I and others have, not a standpoint of practical reason.

How, then, is such a non-evaluative empirical ranking transformed into an impersonal evaluation of states of affairs as better or worse? Williams' answer to this question provides the third step in his account. In particular, he provides an account of how impersonal moral evaluation can develop out of applications of this 3rd person, observer's standpoint in the pursuit of certain distinctive project or commitment that rational agents may have. In particular, among the worthwhile projects of agents there may be a "higher-order project of maximizing desirable outcomes,"¹¹ a project of a rational agent that is concerned with the projects of all agents. In order to carry out such a higher-order project, such a rational agent must harness the 3rd person, observer's standpoint described above first to observe what the lower-order projects and commitments of other rational agents are, and then to determine empirically which states of affairs will more or less effectively maximize the overall pursuit of their projects and honoring of their commitments. Because among the agent's projects is this "second-order utilitarian project of maximally satisfying the first-order projects,"¹² the rational agent with such a project has a reason to pursue such maximal satisfaction of lower-order projects. As a

¹¹ Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 114.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

result, the states of affairs arranged on the scale of greater or less effective realization of the lower-order projects of rational agents will be viewed by the agent with such a higher-order project as in the relevant respect better or worse: “desirable outcomes are going to consist, in part, of the maximally harmonious realization of these projects.”¹³

Without some such higher-order project, adoption of this 3rd person observer’s standpoint towards the projects of rational agents yields only a non-evaluative ranking. But when this non-evaluative ranking of the states of affairs that promote the maximization of lower-order projects and commitments is augmented with a higher-order project to promote such states of affairs, the states of affairs ranked on such a scale will come to be viewed not just as ranked higher, but, in virtue of being ranked higher, as in the relevant sense better or worse states of affairs. Moreover, the agent with such a higher-order project will not only evaluate higher ranked outcomes as better, but will have a reason to bring about states of affairs thus ranked; indeed, more reason to bring about states of affair that are ranked as better.

Williams suggests that for the traditional consequentialist such a higher-order project could be at most one project among others, hence that whatever reasons flow from such a higher-order project are themselves only some of the agent’s reasons among others. Evaluation from the 3rd person standpoint in the pursuit of such a higher-order project, he argues, presupposes that “there must be other more basic or lower-order projects which he and others have,” and the best outcomes from the 3rd person standpoint “are going to consist, in part, of the maximally harmonious realization of those projects.”¹⁴ Without such basic plans and projects any such higher-order project appealing to the 3rd person

¹³ Ibid., p. 110.

¹⁴ Williams, “The Point of View of the Universe,” p. 162.

observer's standpoint "would have nothing to work on, and would be vacuous."¹⁵ Such "basic" or "first-order" projects will, Williams suggests, be of various unsurprising kinds: "desires for things for oneself, one's family, one's friends...and in more relaxed circumstances, objects of taste." But they can also include "projects connected with...some cause...or...which flow from some more general disposition towards human conduct and character, such as hatred of injustice, or of cruelty, or of killing."¹⁶ It is largely these basic, first-order commitments and projects of such rational agents that provide the content for the higher-order project.

Typical rational agents, for whom this higher-order project is merely one among others, would not experience such consequentialist morality as in any way alienating. For such typical rational agents the 3rd person observer's standpoint is at most involved in articulating one of their projects – albeit a higher-order project -- among the other projects that such agents have. The reason that flows from such a higher-order project, a reason to promote the highest impersonally ranked state of affairs, will for them compete with other reasons that flow from their other plans, projects, and commitments. If the action that promotes this best overall state of affairs is identified as the morally right action, and all other are wrong, the result would appear to be an account upon which agents have sufficient or decisive reasons to perform actions identified by such a moral theory as morally wrong whenever the reasons that flow from their lower-order plans and projects are sufficient or decisive all things considered. If moral standards support one course of action, but it conflicts with another course of action dictated by lower-order

¹⁵ Both quotations are taken from Williams, Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 110. See also "Utilitarianism and Moral Self-indulgence," in Moral Luck, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 51: "there is no coherent view of human welfare itself which is independent of such issues as what people care for, in non-utilitarian spirit."

¹⁶ Utilitarianism: For and Against, pp. 110-111.

projects that are more deeply grounded in the agent's commitments, the account suggests that such a rationally integrated agent will have decisive reasons to pursue his lower-order commitments, in the process performing an action that the consequentialist identifies as morally wrong. Consequentialist rightness provides only one reason among others for such a typical agent, since it reflects only one (albeit higher-order) project among other projects. If these other lower-order projects and commitments are more central to the agent's subjective motivational set, the agent will have decisive reasons to pursue her lower-order projects rather than her higher-order project, but this is to have decisive reasons to do what consequentialist morality prohibits.

The rational agent would not in such cases be alienated by consequentialist morality, but from consequentialist morality. Conformity to consequentialist moral standards in such cases would be profoundly alienating, but on the account of practical reason presupposed by the consequentialist in the very articulation of these standards such conformity would make no sense -- it would be to act contrary to decisive reasons to do what is wrong.¹⁷ The threat to consequentialism is to the rational authority of its moral

¹⁷ Consider, for example, how such an account applies to Williams' famous George example. George has a deep commitment that gives rise to a central lower-order project of not producing chemical or biological weapons. Let us assume that he also has another project, a higher-order project to promote agents' lower-order projects overall. The first project will be furthered by refusing to do WMD research; the second, let us assume, will be furthered in George's case by doing WMD research (poorly!). George thus has two projects which give rise to reasons to pursue conflicting courses of action; the 2nd is the consequentialist moral project. Which it will make sense for him to pursue will presumably depend upon the centrality of these respective projects – how deeply each is grounded in his fundamental commitments. If it is the lower-order project that is more central to George's subjective motivational set, as Williams suggests, George will have decisive reasons to pursue it rather than his higher-order project in this case. But this is just to say, for the consequentialist, that he will have decisive reasons to do what is morally wrong. Acting in pursuit of the higher-order project would undermine his very integrity as a rational agent, but on such an account of moral standards George would appear to have decisive reasons to maintain the integrity of his rational agency and act immorally. Moreover, the account of moral standards presupposes, in its very articulation of such moral prohibitions, that George has such decisive reasons to do what morality prohibits. If, for another agent, it is the higher-order project that is more firmly grounded in her commitments, then she will have decisive reasons to do what is morally right, and will act with integrity in so doing. Indeed, consequentialism would appear to be the perfect theory for avoiding alienation from a rational agent's own deepest projects and commitments at the hands of morality.

standards, not one of alienation and disintegration at the hands of such standards. The structure of traditional consequentialism, as it is rendered explicit by Williams' account, suggests that although acting in accordance with consequentialist morality would often alienate agents from their deepest commitments, the agent will always have decisive reasons not to act contrary to her deepest commitments. Such commitments, ex hypothesi, are more central to her plans and projects than is her higher-order project, hence she will have decisive reasons to maintain these commitments rather than to do what consequentialist moral standards identify as right.

But what if the consequentialist persists, in the face of these countervailing considerations, in appealing to just such an assumption that its moral requirements are authoritative? The fourth step in Williams' account is his contention that consequentialists such as Smart do in fact persist in making this assumption that morality is authoritative. Such consequentialists, he argues, persist in the normal conviction that the "point of the question what acts are right, relates to the situation of deciding to do them."¹⁸ Williams' account has shown that Smart's consequentialism presupposes that moral standards for right and wrong action merely identify the course of action that most effectively realizes one of the agent's projects, a higher-order project that is at most one among others the rational agent has reasons to pursue. But he also points out that at the same time the theory puts forward as the standpoint of rational agency that of the 'agent as utilitarian,' from which the agent "is committed only to...his higher-order project of maximizing desirable outcomes."¹⁹ For such an agent as utilitarian, with only this overarching higher-order project, all reasons are grounded in the 3rd person observer's

¹⁸ Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 128.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

standpoint. When I reason from this standpoint of the agent as utilitarian I “must be just as much responsible for things that I allow...as I am for things that I... bring about. Those things also must enter my *deliberations*, as a responsible moral *agent*, on the same footing.”(emphasis mine)²⁰

Although the account presupposes that a rational agent appropriately takes into account the various projects, whether lower or higher-order, that he has good reasons to pursue, it also claims that his deliberations as a “utilitarian agent” are entirely “a function of all the satisfactions which he can affect from where he is.”²¹ Williams’ diagnosis suggests that the theory 1)presupposes 1st person standpoints of non-impersonal rational agency from which agents have myriad projects and commitments that give rise to reasons, 2)adopts a 3rd person, observer’s standpoint towards these lower-order projects that are revealed from such 1st person standpoints and the reasons to which they give rise, 3)appeals to a higher-order project to promote such lower-order projects to rank resulting states of affairs not from better to worse (since such higher ranked outcomes more effectively further this higher-order project), then 4)puts forward a second standpoint of rational agency, that of the agent as utilitarian, a standpoint with a single ultimate project -- the higher-order project of impersonal maximization of the overall realization of the lower-order projects that rational agents have reasons to pursue. It is this last step, step 4, that engenders profound alienation and loss of integrity, transforming consequentialism from perhaps the most alienation free theory of moral standards to the most profoundly alienating theory of moral reasons.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

²¹ Ibid., p. 115.

The reason that the rational demands upon the ‘agent as utilitarian’ are experienced as alienating is that they are put forward as rational demands that the agent not do what the theory seems to allow that agents often have sufficient or even decisive reasons to do. Moreover, these demands are from a standpoint that presupposes such reasons in the articulation of its moral standards even as it denies them standing as reasons in its application of those moral standards. The reason the theory is an attack on the agent’s integrity is that the reasons that consequentialists presuppose an agent has to follow through with her lower-order projects and commitments lose their standing as reasons from the standpoint of the agent as utilitarian, who takes the higher-order project to provide the only ultimate reason for action. By acting in pursuit of the higher-order project she will systematically thwart the pursuit of plans and projects that the utilitarian consequentialist presupposes agents have, projects that often appear to be more central for her as an integrated rational agent. But:

It is absurd to demand of such a man, when the sums come in from the utility network which the projects of others have in part determined, that he should just step aside from his own project and decision and acknowledge the decision which utilitarian calculation requires.²²

Williams’ point is that traditional consequentialism requires the agent to make two different all things considered rational evaluations in each case. From the 1st person standpoint of the rational agent the impersonal standpoint plays a role in articulating one among the projects that a rational agent has reasons to pursue. What the agent will have sufficient or decisive reasons to pursue will be a function of the relative depth of the commitments and centrality of the projects in her motivational set. From the standpoint

²² Ibid., p. 116.

of the agent as utilitarian that one moral project among others itself becomes the standpoint of rational evaluation. The agent as utilitarian takes herself always to have decisive reasons to act in pursuit of this higher-order project; other projects and commitments figure in this second rational evaluation not as sources of alternative reasons, but as the object of the single ultimate higher-order reason. This second rational evaluation from the standpoint of the agent as utilitarian is put forward as supplanting the 1st person standpoint of the rational agent, but at the same time it presupposes in its very articulation the legitimacy of the very standpoint of rational agency that it purports to supplant. As a result the theory alienates an agent “in a real sense from his actions and the source of his actions in his own convictions...but this is to neglect the extent to which *his* actions and *his* decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions that flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified.”²³ As Williams argues, “my life, my action is quite irreducibly mine, and to require that it is at best a *derivative* conclusion that it should be lived from the perspective that happens to be mine is an extraordinary misunderstanding. Yet it is that idea that is implicitly contained in the model of the point of view of the universe.”²⁴ The point of the Williams inspired diagnosis is that consequentialism both presupposes that I am the rational agent whose life and actions are “quite irreducibly mine,” and at the same time takes me to be the rational agent for whom one of my higher-order projects is *the* ultimate project, hence for whom my projects and commitments are merely some among others, such that any reasons to live my life from “within” can be at best derivative. The agent as utilitarian dismisses in its application the first-person standpoint of integrated rational agency that

²³ Ibid., pp. 116-117.

²⁴ “The Point of View of the Universe,” p. 170.

the theory presupposes in its very articulation of its moral standards. This is why it is “in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity.”²⁵

What explains the tendency by consequentialists to invoke this assumption that moral standards have rational authority in the face of the obvious structural obstacles for doing so? Part of the answer surely resides in the independent plausibility of the conviction that moral requirements have rational authority. But as we have already seen, the very structure of traditional consequentialism is difficult to reconcile with this conviction. Williams’ examples are of cases in which these lower-order projects provide such rational agents with reasons that weigh against, and in some cases are decisive with respect to, whatever reasons they have to pursue a higher-order project on projects – the consequentialist’s moral project.

An additional contributing factor appears to be the higher-order nature of the consequentialist moral project, its status as a project that comprehends all other projects in its content. But here Gary Watson’s remarks on higher-order desires are relevant. Watson points out that although there is a sense in which higher-order desires comprehend certain lower-order desires this is not, as is sometimes assumed, a sense that allows them somehow to subsume the motivating force of those desires. Higher-order desires, although they are desires concerning desires, “are themselves simply desires, to add them to the context of conflict is just to increase the number of contenders; it is not to give a special place to any of those in contention.”²⁶ As higher-order desires they comprehend lower-order desires in their content, but they are not for this reasons more comprehensive or authentic motives. Similarly, higher-order projects are themselves

²⁵ Utilitarianism: For and Against, p. 117.

²⁶ “Free Agency,” in Agency and Answerability (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 28.

simply projects that the rational deliberator has good reasons to pursue. To add them to the set of the rational agent's projects is just to add to the reasons such a rational agent must take into account, it is not to give a special place to any of the reasons that are in contention. Higher-order projects comprehend lower-order projects as their object, but they do not for this reason provide more comprehensive or authentic reasons.

I have lower-order reasons from my standpoint of practical reason and deliberation, reasons to cultivate friendships, achieve excellence in my chosen field, etc. -- to pursue the projects that I value as a rational agent. From my standpoint as a practical reasoner and deliberator I also have higher-order reasons to maximize the extent to which agents accomplish what they have good reasons to do, higher-order projects that I value along with the first-order projects. These are projects to maximally promote the realization of the lower-order projects that I and other agents have reasons to pursue. Pursuit of this higher-order project requires the adoption of an impersonal standpoint from which I can evaluate states of affairs as better or worse overall insofar as they effectively further or thwart my higher-order project. Such a higher-order project concerning projects comprehends all other lower-order projects that rational agents have good reasons to pursue. But Watson's remarks concerning higher-order desires allow us to see that although higher-order projects in this sense comprehend other lower-order projects as their object, they do so in a way which presupposes that they are not comprehensive projects, projects that provide comprehensive reasons for rational agents. Rather, such higher-order projects are, *ex hypothesi*, just some among the other projects that I value from my standpoint as a practical reasoner and deliberator. If I make the mistake of viewing such higher-order projects not as some projects among others, but as

comprehensive projects that provide the agent with comprehensive reasons, then the impersonal standpoint adopted for the purposes of articulating certain higher-order reasons comes mistakenly to be viewed as the standpoint of practical reason and deliberation, the standpoint from which the comprehensive project for a rational agent is properly articulated.

Williams' challenge, as I have presented it, is to a traditional version of utilitarian consequentialism, one which he takes to presuppose a distinctly internalist account of practical reason and deliberation. But how broadly does it generalize to other forms of consequentialism, forms that may involve very different accounts of practical reason and deliberation? It would seem that the answer is: quite broadly. The Williams diagnosis would appear to apply with equal force, for example, whether the agent's pursuit of her plans and projects is understood eudaimonistically, as in Smart's case, or, for example, preference theoretically. More significantly, aspects of the challenge readily transpose from Williams' own reasons internalist account to a reasons externalist account.²⁷ For Williams the plans, projects, and commitments that make up an agent's subjective motivational set control the agent's reasons. Very roughly, if there is a sound deliberative route from this subjective motivational set (whatever its content) to some course of action, the agent has a reason to perform such an action. The 3rd person observer's standpoint that such an agent can take up towards his reasons and those of others is not itself a source of reasons, on such a view, except insofar as it is involved in the elaboration and articulation of one or more of the projects in the subjective motivational set of the particular agent in question. Impersonal evaluation only becomes a source of rational demands insofar as it is relevant to one of the projects that a rational

²⁷ See "Internal and External Reasons," in Moral Luck.

agent has, and the strength of these demands is a function of the relative centrality for an agent of the project[s] in question.

On a reasons externalist account,²⁸ by contrast, the 3rd person observer's standpoint is a standpoint towards the reasons that agents in fact have whether or not there is a sound deliberative route to those reasons from the current set of the agent's plans, projects, and commitments. But such a standpoint will be relevant to the agent's reasons, thus externally understood, only if among the reasons the agent in fact has are reasons that involve the adoption of such a standpoint for their articulation. Thus, a reasons externalist may well take each agent in fact to have good reasons to stand by his or her friends. From an observer's standpoint my reasons to stand by my friends are just another set of reasons one agent has to stand by his friends. But this observation by itself provides me with no additional reasons. Only if, among the other reasons I and other agents in fact have, are good higher-order reasons to maximize the extent to which agents succeed in achieving the ends and projects that they in fact have good reasons to pursue will agents have, in addition to a good reason to stick by their own friends, good reasons, for example, to maximize the extent to which people stick by their friends. Such a good reason will involve the 3rd person standpoint for its articulation, and can compete with the aforementioned reasons that agents have to stick by their own friends. Acting in accordance with some of these reasons will often interfere with others, and which action it makes more sense to pursue will depend upon which of the relevant reasons are in fact decisive in the circumstances. Thus Scanlon has argued that a person "who values friendship will take herself to have reasons, first and foremost, to do those things that are

²⁸ Such as that articulated by John McDowell, for example, in "Might There Be External Reasons?", in World, Mind, and Ethics, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 68-85.

involved in being a good friend: to be loyal...to spend time with her friends, and so on.”²⁹

In addition to such lower-order reasons, Scanlon suggests, a person who values friendship will also have higher-order reasons that involve “holding that it is good that friendship should occur and that friendship is therefore ‘to be promoted’.”³⁰ But these good higher-order reasons presuppose that rational agents have such good lower-order reasons; indeed, they are reasons to promote states of affairs upon which rational agents have the opportunity to act on such good lower-order reasons -- to be loyal, etc. to their friends. Scanlon takes it to be clear; moreover, that it is the lower-order reasons “that are most central to friendship,” and that “when conflicts occur these reasons take priority over the reasons we have to promote friendship.”³¹ Higher-order reasons to promote friendship are reasons to promote the extent to which rational agents can act on the good lower-order reasons that they have to be good friends, and a person who appropriately values friendship will stick by her friends in typically cases in which such higher and lower-order reasons are in conflict.

Of course it is open to a reasons externalist consequentialist to maintain both that each agent does in fact have such higher-order reasons to promote the overall realization of what agents in fact have lower-order reasons to value, and, pace Scanlon, that such higher-order reasons are always decisive in conflicts with such lower-order reasons. But the burden would appear to fall squarely upon the advocate of any such account to demonstrate that although such higher-order reasons presupposes that agents have other lower-order reasons, they are always decisive with respect to such reasons in cases of conflict. This burden is all the more pressing because intuitively, we often appear to have

²⁹ Scanlon, What We Owe to Each Other, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

sufficient reasons to act in accordance with such lower-order reasons in such cases of conflict. Moreover, virtually every account of practical reason, whether internalist or externalist, accepts that fundamental non-impersonal reasons are sometimes sufficient reasons for agents not to bring about the best overall outcome – to do what the consequentialist identifies as wrong. But this is precisely to accept that whatever higher-order reasons we have are not always decisive with respect to our lower-order reasons.³²

³² More fundamentally, aspects of Williams' argument readily generalize because its central point is that the impersonal standpoint is a higher-order standpoint that is taken up towards the lower-order non-impersonal reasons of rational agents. Such lower-order reasons, he suggests, reveal much of what agents value, and higher-order reasons reveal additional values of rational agents, values that presuppose the independent and potentially conflicting values reflected in these lower-order reasons. Only if such a rational agent has a reason to bring about the higher ranked states of affairs and prevent the worse ranked states of affairs will the fact that some outcome maximizes satisfaction of agent's lower-order reasons provide her with reasons for acting. But if the impersonal standpoint is a higher-order standpoint that is taken up towards the lower-order reasons of agents, then by assumption whatever reasons such an agent has to promote overall outcomes will be at most some reasons among others. This is just to say; however, that any reason to do what the consequentialist identifies as morally right will simply be one higher-order reason among other (often conflicting) lower-order reasons. As Williams' examples suggest, such reasons often appear to fail to be decisive within the context of an agent's other reasons. On any consequentialism that fits this general structure, whether eudaimonistic or preference theoretic, monistic or pluralistic, or wedded to reasons externalism or reasons internalism, the central threat is that the integrated rational agent who accepts act consequentialism is alienated by reason from moral standards.