

Are Amoralists like Color Blind People?:

A Review of the Debate between Michael Smith and David Brink

Shohei Edamura

0. Introduction

In this paper, I will argue that *pace* David Brink, amoralists and color blind people are analogous in that both of them do not have any internal point of view when they have judgments. According to Michael Smith, amoralists, like color blind people, lack access to indispensable components of the concepts for making judgments about a given sphere of reality. Though Brink introduces several objections to Smith's analogy, I will focus upon the following one: Brink claims that the analogy between amoralists and color blind people fails because while color judgments may involve noncognitive components, moral judgments do not. Against this objection, I will argue that though moral judgments may not involve noncognitive components, color and moral judgments can be analogous in that both of them lack an internal point of view: Both of amoralists and color-blind people use the terms to refer to the items which other people use in certain ways, and their ways of grasping the terms depend upon other people's point of view. In the first part of my paper, I will introduce Smith's analogy between amoralists and color blind people in his book *The Moral Problem*, and explain how it works for his defense of motive internalism. In the second section, I will introduce Brink's criticism of Smith's analogy and why Brink thinks that Smith cannot defend his motive internalism⁽¹⁾ on the basis of this analogy. This leads to the discussion of how Smith would answer this criticism. In the third section, I will summarize Smith's refutation of the institutional account of morality and how it helps him to refute the criticism. Finally, I will show why Smith is not begging a question against motive externalists like Brink.

1. Smith's Analogy in *The Moral Problem*

Smith claims that amoralists are analogous to color blind people. He assumes both of them can behave *as if* they had some concepts which they in fact do not have completely. Amoralists can tell how good people would judge and act in accordance with their judgments. For example, they may say that good people would help an old lady injured in an intersection because they suppose that it is right to do so. The amoralists would not be motivated by this judgment, and might suppose that it is annoying and useless to help that lady. Color blind people can tell how sighted people use color

terms without having color experiences. For instance, they can tell what kind of things are called “green” (Granny Smith, green signal light, leaves in summer etc.) without seeing green objects. But both amoralists and color blind people lack an important component of these concepts. To understand Smith’s idea appropriately, I will quote an important passage from him at length:

The point is rather that the *very best* we can say about amoralists is that they try to make moral judgments but fail. In order to see why this is not ad hoc, consider an analogy. There is a familiar problem about the conditions under which we should say of someone that she really makes colour judgments (Peacocke, 1983, chap. 2; Tawil, 1987). The problem can be brought out by reflecting on the case of someone, blind from birth, who has a reliable method of using colour terms. We might imagine that she has been hooked up to a machine from birth that allows her to feel, through her skin, when an object has the appropriate surface reflectance properties. Now such a person certainly has a facility with colour terms, a facility that allows her to engage in many aspects of the ordinary practice of colour ascription. For she uses terms with the same extension as our colour terms, and the properties of objects that explain her uses of those terms are the very same properties as those that explain our uses of colour terms.... However, despite the facility such a blind person has with colour language, many theorists have thought that we should still deny that she possesses colour concepts or mastery of colour terms. For, they say, the ability to have the appropriate visual experiences under suitable conditions is partially constitutive of possession of colour concepts and mastery of colour terms (Peacocke, 1983, pp. 29-30, 37-8).... (Smith, 1994, pp. 68-9)

Smith is thinking about an extreme example here. A blind person, in this case, has an extraordinary ability (with the aid of a special machine) to distinguish the surfaces of physical objects. As a result, she can tell the difference between “green things” and “blue things” by the difference of their surfaces: Blue objects are supposed to reflect high-frequency electromagnetic waves more than green objects do, and they might be smoother than green ones. Nonetheless, she does not have color concepts, since visual experiences are an essential component of color concepts. So, though she can use color terms as if she were making color judgments, actually she is not. For Smith, amoralists are analogous to her, since they are using moral terms as if they were making proper moral judgments.

We have to take note of the context in which Smith suggests this analogy. Brink once argued that the existence of amoralists shows that motive internalism fails (Brink, 1986, p. 30; Smith, 1994,

p. 66). For Brink, an amoralist has judgments about what he is morally required to do, and yet does not have corresponding motivations even though he is practically rational (cf. Smith, 1997, pp. 110-1). Now all motive internalists seem to hold that if one is practically rational, she is always motivated by her judgment. This logically conflicts with the implication of the existence of amoralists. Or at least, amoralists are conceivable and possible, while motive internalists hold that principled amoralists cannot exist. Thus he concludes that we cannot hold motive internalism.

Against Brink, Smith tries to show that amoralists actually do not have judgments about what they are morally required to do. For Smith, amoralists do not actually grasp some important component of moral concepts and thus fail to have moral judgments. To show that, Smith suggests that color blind people are analogous to amoralists since they do not have proper color concepts. According to Christopher Peacocke, visual and tactual experiences are essentially distinct (Peacocke, 1983, pp. 27-8). For example, even though we can see and touch a green apple at the same time and these representational contents overlap, any reduction of visual experience is impossible in terms of tactual. Smith agrees with Peacocke, and argues that people cannot have color concepts only through tactual experiences.

2. Brink's Criticisms

After reading *The Moral Problem*, Brink still defended his view against Smith by rejecting the analogy. In his paper 'Moral Motivation,' Brink argues that color blind people are not analogous to amoralists.⁽³⁾ One of Brink's most interesting objections is that if the analogy suggests that both color and moral judgments involve some noncognitive states, then it is not plausible, since it is problematic to claim that moral judgments involve such states.⁽⁴⁾

Finally, I must confess some confusion about how the analogy between colors and morals could support an antiexternalist conclusion. Let us concede, at least for the sake of argument, that certain kinds of visual experiences are partly constitutive of the possession of color concepts and the capacity to make color judgments. How does this help show that motivation is partly constitutive of the possession of moral concepts and the capacity to make moral judgments? Visual experience is not motivation. If, as one might think, visual experiences are themselves cognitive states, then the analogy between colors and morals would apparently suggest that certain cognitive states are partly constitutive of representational judgments with moral content. I don't see how this helps establish the internalist thesis that motivation is partly constitutive of

moral judgment. Perhaps it might be claimed that visual experience is itself a precognitive or noncognitive state on which representational judgments are based. If so, the analogy between colors and morals might then seem to imply that moral concepts and judgments essentially involve noncognitive states. But this line of reasoning would be problematic... (Brink, 1997, pp. 25-6)

In fact, Brink is suspicious about whether color judgments require visual experiences. But Brink's point is that even if color concepts must have noncognitive components and therefore color judgments be impossible without visual (and noncognitive) experiences, Smith's analogy still does not work well. If Smith claims that color blind people do not have color concepts completely, since these concepts involve noncognitive components, *and therefore* they are analogous to amoralists, then Smith seems to imply that amoralists do not have moral concepts since these concepts also involve noncognitive components. For Brink, this implication is problematic, since moral concepts seem not to involve these components. Furthermore, Smith himself might hold that moral concepts do not involve noncognitive components. It should be noted that Smith opposes to a noncognitivist account of morality, especially to emotivism according to which "moral judgments express certain non-cognitive attitudes: desires, preferences, or pro- ad con- attitudes of some other kinds" (Smith, 1994, p. 17). For Smith, this emotivism implies that moral judgments cannot be attained through rational means, which is implausible. To be sure, Smith's rejection of emotivism may entail the rejection only of a certain *kind* of noncognitive content, and not a rejection of noncognitive content altogether. Or perhaps Smith's opposition to emotivism only entails a rejection of the claim that moral judgments are made up *exclusively* of a particular kind of noncognitive content. But if Smith supposes that moral concepts don't involve any noncognitive components, this clearly contradicts the previous implication that amoralists do not have moral concepts since these concepts involve noncognitive components. If moral judgments don't involve noncognitive component, the following argument against the analogy is possible:

- (1) Color judgments involve noncognitive component. (Premise)
- (2) Moral judgments do not involve noncognitive component. (Premise)
- (3) If A involves X while B does not involve X, then the analogy between A and B fails with respect to X. (Premise)
- (4) The analogy between color and moral judgments fails with respect to noncognitive

component. (from (1), (2) and (3))

3. How Smith Can Respond Brink's Criticism

Now we are in a position to examine the argument. It may be possible to refute Brink's argument by rejecting (1) or (2). But Smith seems to accept (1). Smith holds that visual experiences are necessary for having color judgments. On the other hand, it is not clear whether Smith accepts (2). As we have seen in the previous section, though Smith's rejection of an emotivism may suggest that moral judgments are not constituted exclusively by noncognitive components, we cannot immediately conclude that moral judgments completely lack noncognitive components. But if Smith commits this stronger view, then he has to deal with the formulated argument seriously, because he cannot refute Brink's criticism by rejecting (1) or (2).

However, Smith has another option. Smith can point out a problem concerning the conclusion (4). Even when we accept (4), we can still claim that the analogy between color and moral judgments can be established in another way: Though they are not analogous in that both of them have noncognitive components, they may have something (other than noncognitive components) in common. As their common feature, I suggest that both amoralists and color blind people do not have an internal point of view, in that they always need another's (or an external) point of view to use the terms (color or moral). Smith introduces the concept of "internal point of view" in his discussion of institutional facts and requirements of etiquette (Smith, 1994, pp. 80-4). The concept of institutional fact is at first introduced by H. L. A. Hart. According to Hart, a system of institutional norms needs to be accepted at least by some members of the community "from an internal point of view" (Hart, 1961, pp. 97-107). This does not mean that all the members of the community accept the norms with an internal point of view. Some people may just observe them without accepting them. Utilizing Hart's theory, Philippa Foot claims that a moral fact is a kind of institutional fact (Foot, 1972). This implies that even morally good people (or moralists) do not always accept norms from an internal point of view, which is implausible for Smith (Smith, 1994, pp. 83-4). Smith argues that moralists must hold *de re* beliefs concerning what they should do, while amoralists only hold *de dicto* beliefs, which explains why moralists have internal points of view whereas amoralists do not.

Following Hart, Smith admits that in order for there to be institutional facts, some people must hold an internal point of view regarding those facts. Further, Smith accepts the necessary conditions for the existence of institutional facts proposed by Hart. First, the system by which institutional facts take place must be "picked out by a supreme rule of recognition" (Hart, 1961, pp. 97-107: Smith,

1994, p. 81). “The existence of a supreme rule of recognition” is “constituted by a pattern of activity amongst a sub-group of those to whom the system of rules as a whole applies, those responsible for formulating the rules, implementing them and enforcing them” (Smith, 1994, p. 81). So, if a community has a system of rules, at least a proper subset of that community must accept the system as justified and authoritative. Also, these people must accept the rules as being applied to themselves and related to their own activities. That is to say, these people must accept “the system of rules as a whole from an internal point of view.”

Using Hart’s concept of an institutional fact, Foot argues that moral facts are among institutional facts. On the one hand, her institutional account of morality implies that there are at least some people who accept the codes or rules of morality from their internal points of view. In other words, these people believe in their moral obligations without a mediation of other people’s beliefs. On the other hand, her account implies that it is not necessarily the case that all members of an “institution of morality” accept the moral rules from an internal point of view. That is, some members (though they belong to the moral institution and thus can be regarded as “moralists”) may not observe the rules with internal points of view. There is no necessary connection between moralists and having internal points of view.

Against Foot’s institutional account of morality, Smith argues that there is a necessary connection between moralists and having internal points of view. Moralists have to accept the rules from an internal point of view, as holding not only for others, but for themselves. Now, the institutional fact only requires a sub-group of the whole community to accept it from an internal point of view. So if a moral fact is institutional, it is entirely possible for a person not to accept that moral fact from an internal point of view, and thus not be *directly* motivated to act in accordance with the institutional norms though she knows that they require her to do so. Nonetheless, these people are also members of the moral community, and can be regarded as “moralists.” For Smith, this result conflicts the appropriate explanation of what good people are (Smith, 1994, pp. 83-4). Smith argues that an institutional account implies that even morally good people are externally motivated when they make moral judgments (Smith, 1994, p. 83). According to an institutional account, even good people are not directly motivated by their moral judgments as such (Smith, 1994, pp. 74-5). However, for Smith morally good people or moralists are not motivated to do what is right in general, but motivated to do something in accordance with their particular moral judgments (to help poor people in their cities etc.). Smith argues that moralists must satisfy “the practicality requirement” which is stated as the following:

If an agent judges that it is right for her to do ϕ in circumstances C, then either she is motivated to ϕ in C or she is practically irrational. (Smith, 1994, p. 61)

It is a canonical truth that a moralist is motivated by her judgment as far as she is practically rational when she thinks that it is right to do something. Given that the institutional account of morality denies that this is an essential feature of moralists, for Smith it is simply false. Smith's argument can be formulated as the following:

- (1') The institutional account of moral requirements entails that moral judgments are not subject to the practicality requirement. (Premise)
- (2') If an account of moral requirements entails that moral judgments are not subject to the practicality requirement, it also entails that some moralists are not motivated by their judgments *de re*. (Premise)
- (3') The institutional account of moral requirements entails that some moralists are not motivated by their judgments *de re*. (From (1') and (2'))
- (4') All moralists are motivated by their judgments *de re*. (Premise)
- (5') The institutional account of moral requirements is false. (From (3') and (4'))

Thus, Smith rejects the institutional account of morality. For Smith, if we accept the institutional account, we have to conclude that people can be regarded as "morally good" even when they are not motivated by their judgments as such, but externally motivated by what is considered to be good by others, which is absurd. For Smith, taking an internal point of view for a moral judgment is a "requirement" of that judgment.

Smith's rejection of the institutional account also shows how amoralists can be analogous to color blind people. In short, color blind people do not have "an internal point of view." Basically, color blind people use a color term as referring to something sighted people are talking about. First, if as Brink suggests they just learned how to use color terms from sighted people, then they use the expression "blue thing" as referring to some object which sighted people have some kind of qualia when they see it without any substantial grasp. Second, if a color blind person "has been hooked up with a machine from birth that allows her to feel, through her skin, when an object has the appropriate surface reflectance properties" (Smith, 1994, p. 69), then she just associates her tactual

experience with the visual experience of other people. She does not, of course, have the visual experience as such. Furthermore as Peacocke suggests, “sensational properties of visual and tactual experience are *toto caelo* distinct; in this sense no ideas are common to touch and sight” (Peacocke, 1983, pp. 27-8). She does not have any comprehension of the content of the visual experience itself. Thus, she is using a color term to refer to something sighted people perceive. We can see that for Smith color blind people and amoralists have something in common. Amoralists use a moral term as referring to something good people are taking as right. We might be able to introduce how to understand the term “right.” If someone judge that it is “right” to do ϕ , it is necessary for her to accept the rule from an internal point of view. She needs to accept it as holding for her own action. With this definition of “right,” we can conclude that amoralists do not have a judgment that it is right to do ϕ .

In brief, both amoralists and color blind people need to rely on other people to tell them what is right, and in that sense, their comprehension is not internalized.

4. Doesn't Smith Beg a Question against Externalists?

So far, we have seen how Smith could respond to Brink's criticisms raised in 1997. For Smith, we can at least point out one common feature of amoralists and color blind people: Both of them lack an internal point of view. So let us evaluate whether this response is plausible or not. One problem is that Brink already notes that Smith seems to beg a question against externalists:

Finally, if we did think that color concepts and judgments essentially involved noncognitive, practical states, then we might wonder whether the analogy between colors and morals doesn't beg the question against the externalist. For if color judgments, unlike many other sorts of judgments, essentially involve some kind of noncognitive component, then it is not clear why we should assume that moral judgments are especially like color judgments unless we have already accepted internalism. (Brink, 1997, p. 26).

For Brink, when Smith examines the case of amoralists he seems to presuppose his motive internalism though the case itself was raised to criticize motive internalism. Indeed, it seems that for Smith, amoralists are those who do not take the moral rules to be applied to themselves. Then, it seems that by the very definition of amoralist, they lack the moral judgment. For Brink, Smith seems to exclude the possibility of those who have moral judgments and yet are not motivated by them,

when he defines an amoralist. At the very beginning, Smith seems to assume that amoralists do not have moral judgments because if they have, they must be motivated by them. This is begging a question against motive externalists. We can formulate an argument following the line of Brink:

- (i) When one examines whether X is a counterexample to Y, he should not presuppose Y in his discussion of X. (Premise)
- (ii) Smith examines whether an amoralist is a counterexample to motive internalism. (Premise)
- (iii) Smith should not presuppose motive internalism in his discussion of an amoralist. (from (i) and (ii))

Now, if we take this argument to be plausible, then it is a serious problem if Smith violates the normative claim (iii). The following set of statements which include a contradiction can be introduced to see how Brink understands Smith's discussion of amoralists:

- (I) If one judges that she should do X, she is motivated accordingly without practical irrationality. (Premise from motive internalism)
- (II) An amoralist is not motivated to do X without practical irrationality. (Premise)
- (III) If an amoralist has judges that she should do X, then she is motivated accordingly without practical irrationality. (from (I))
- (IV) An amoralist judges that she should do X. (Premise)
- (V) An amoralist is motivated to do X without practical irrationality. (from (III) and (IV))

(V) contradicts (II). This is meant to show that at least one of the premises is false (and in this case, (IV) is supposed to be false). So, the conclusion is that an amoralist doesn't judge that she should do X. Clearly, this conclusion logically depends upon (I). This argument uses the principle of motive internalism. If it aims at refuting a criticism against motive internalism (and actually it does), certainly it begs a question against motive externalism. Another argument is needed to deal with Brink's criticism.

However, *pace* Brink, Smith may not have presupposed motive internalism in his discussion of amoralists. The following fact suggests that Smith does not presuppose his motive internalism in his discussion of morally good people. Smith claims that morally good people have to be motivated by their judgment as such, which should be accepted even by motive externalists. For Smith, the basic

understanding of morally good people is so fundamental that it does not presuppose any position concerning the motive internalism and externalism debate. For example, Smith states that both Brink and David Copp would accept the following claim about moralists:

The Claim about Moralists: If a moralist judges it right to do something then she is motivated accordingly, at least absent practical irrationality. (Smith, 1997, p. 111)

This claim is supposed to be neutral to internalists and externalists. Some externalists may approve this claim, while they hold that even if an amoralist judges it is right to do something she is not motivated accordingly. As far as it is neutral, Smith can use it in his discussion of amoralists.

Smith can deduce an important proposition from the Claim about Moralists. That is, to have a moral judgment from an internal point of view is the essence of being a moralist. The Claim about Moralists implies that if one has a judgment with an internal point of view and she is motivated by the judgment, she is directly (internally, immediately, non-derivatively or non-externally) motivated by it. So, if one has an internal point of view concerning morality, her motivation is internal or non-derivative, and vice versa. As far as the Claim about Moralists holds, then having an internal point of view concerning morality is constitutive of being a moralist. Thus, if one is an amoralist, then naturally she doesn't have an internal point of view of morality, or a *de re* moral belief. She at most has a *de dicto* belief concerning what she should do. Considering that one is a moralist iff she has a *de re* moral belief, the following argument is possible:

- (I') One is a moralist iff she has a *de re* moral belief. (Premise)
- (II') If one is not a moralist, she doesn't have a *de re* moral belief. (from (I'))
- (III') An amoralist doesn't have a *de re* moral belief. In other words, she doesn't have an internal point of view. (from (II'))

This argument logically establishes that an amoralist doesn't have an internal point of view. Indeed, Premise (I') is required for this argument to establish the conclusion. But Premise (I') is introduced in Smith's discussion of moralists and his refutation of Foot's view, not in his discussions of Brink's criticism. It is not an ad hoc assumption for the purpose of rejecting Brink's criticism.

In summary, Smith can propose an argument to conclude that an amoralist doesn't have an internal point of view without using the principle of motive internalism. To that extent, Smith doesn't

beg a question against externalists.

Notes

(1) Though Smith accepts the Humean view that an agent is motivated only with a mediation of desire (Smith, 1987; 1994, p. 93), he is among motive internalists in that he supposes there is a necessary connection between desire and *rational* motivation (Smith, 1994, p. 91). The debate of motive internalists and externalists has a long historical background. The following are examples of the relevant discussions of influential philosophers. First, Plato explained the relationship among the rational, spiritual and appetitive parts of a soul, and Aristotle introduced the weakness of will and discussed the connection of knowledge and action (Phaedrus 246a-b; EN 1145b-46b, 1147b13-7). Second, Locke also accepted the weakness of will by claiming that desire is not determined by a rational judgment but by some psychological state with a causal power called “uneasiness,” while Leibniz suggested that as far as a judgment is distinct enough, an agent is certainly motivated by that judgment (Essay 2.21.39; NE 2.21.35, 47). Third, Hume argued that though reason can direct judgments, it does not have any influence on actions, while Kant suggested that a feeling of respect for the moral law is produced by an intellectual ground, and this feeling will motivate an agent so that he will act in accordance with these laws (T 2.3.3; Ak 5: 73-5).

(3) In fact, Brink presents four points as objections. But I think the first, second and third are relatively minor. First, Brink states visual experience may not be constitutive of color concepts since for him color blind people seem to make proper color judgments (Brink, 1997, p. 23). Smith can rely upon Peacocke on this issue, and Brink seems not to address Peacocke’s idea completely. As the second point, Brink states that “it seems most plausible to deny the blind person color judgments if the person is completely blind from birth” (Brink, 1997, p. 24). Similarly, as the third point, Brink states that “it seems most plausible to deny that the blind person makes color judgments if her visual disability is quite general, namely, if she is blind or at least generally color-blind” (Brink, 1997, p. 24). Against these objections, Smith could suggest the existence of people who can use color terms in a sophisticated manner. For the purpose of focusing upon the main issues, I will not discuss them further in this paper.

(4) Brink suggested three points. First, visual experience may not be a noncognitive state. Second, even if we suppose that visual experience is a noncognitive state, it may not be “practical states, such as desires and other pro-attitudes“ (Brink, 1997, p. 26). If moral judgments involve such a practical state, then they seem not to be analogous to color judgments involving visual experiences. Third, even if we suppose that visual experience is a practical state, the analogy between colors and morals still may not work. In this paper, I focus upon the third point.

References

[Abbreviations]

- Ak *Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*. 27 vols. Ed. by the Königlichen Preussischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften. Berlin: Reimer (later de Gruyter), 1900-
- EN Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. with an English translation by H. Rackham. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968.
- Essay John Locke. *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Cited by Book, Chapter and Section.
- NE G. W. Leibniz. *Nouveaux Essais*. Cited by Book, Chapter and Section.
- Phaedrus Plato. *Phaedrus*. In *Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Phaedo, Phaedrus*. with an English translation by H. N.

- Fowler. MA: Harvard University Press, 1914.
- T David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Cited by Book, Part and Section.
- Brink, D. O. (1986). 'Externalist Moral Realism' *Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 24, (Suppl.1), 23-42.
——— (1989). *Moral Realism and the Foundation of Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
——— (1997). 'Moral Motivations' *Ethics*, 108, 4-32.
- Foot, P. (1972). 'Morality as a System of Hypothetical Imperatives' reprinted in Foot(1978), (pp. 157-73).
——— (1978). *Virtues and Vices*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Hart, H. L. A. (1961). *The Concept of Law*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Peacocke, C. (1983). *Sense and Content*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, M. (1987). 'The Humean Theory of Motivation.' *Mind*, 96, 36-61.
——— (1994). *The Moral Problem*. Oxford: Blackwell.
——— (1997). 'In Defense of "The Moral Problem": A Reply to Brink, Copp, and Sayre-McCord' *Ethics*, 108, 84-119.
- Tawil, N. (1987). *Reference and Intentionality*. Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton University.

[ヒューストンコミュニティーカレッジ非常勤講師／ライス大学大学院博士課程・哲学]