

MORAL CRITICISM AND INTEGRITY: EXPLAINING THE IMMORALITY OF MORALISM

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Abstract: Usually moralist behaviour and attitude are defined in terms of a very demanding obedience to moral principles or obligations, a kind of intransigence towards abiding by the moral rules and sternness of the moral condemnations. From an ethical point of view, moralism is considered a flaw or distortion in making moral considerations, in relation to precedence of moral aspects or to the appropriate moral scope. In this paper, assuming the possibility of a positive moralism, I criticize the limitations of the negative conception, and present a more comprehensive conception. According to this conception, moralism is described as a moral perspective based on the value integrity. I defend this conception can explain many characteristics we associate with both negative and positive moralism. Since moral criticism involves asking for justification and opening to excuses, I suggest the negative moralism is an objectionable moral attitude or behaviour, precisely, because it blocks or hinders the possibility of moral justification and excuse.

Keywords: Moral criticism, Moralism, Moral integrity, Blameworthy, Excuse.

Resumo: Geralmente, o comportamento e a atitude moralistas são definidos em termos de uma exigência de obediência estrita aos princípios e obrigações morais, um tipo de intransigência quanto ao cumprimento de regras morais e uma severidade nas condenações. De um ponto de vista ético, o moralismo é considerado uma falha ou distorção no modo como formulamos as nossas considerações morais, especificamente, quanto à precedência dos aspectos morais sobre os demais aspectos relevantes da conduta ou quanto ao escopo apropriado da moralidade. Neste artigo, assumindo a possibilidade de uma forma positiva de moralismo, eu critico as limitações de uma concepção estritamente negativa e apresento uma concepção mais abrangente. De acordo com essa concepção, o moralismo é descrito com uma perspectiva moral centrada no valor da integridade. Eu defendo que essa concepção pode explicar muitas das características que nós associamos ao moralismo, tanto à forma negativa quanto à forma positiva. Dado que a crítica moral envolve uma demanda por justificação e uma abertura para a possibilidade de desculpas, eu sugiro que o moralismo negativo é um comportamento, ou atitude, moralmente reprovável exatamente porque ele bloqueia a possibilidade de justificação e desculpas.

Palavras-chave: Moralismo, Integridade, Justificação, Censura, Desculpa.

Introduction

Moralism is used with at least four distinct meanings. The term can refer to a kind of behaviour or attitude which confers an absolute or unconditional character to the moral rules or other aspects of conduct

(DRIVER, 2005). Sometimes it is used to describe a doctrine that assumes the moral aspects of conduct as essential to any correct and sound judgment of human behaviour and intentions (COADY, 2005). Not rarely, the term is used to refer to an improper or wrongful moral judgement and also to an insensitive, merciless moral criticism (FULLINWIDER, 2005; TAYLOR, 2012). Sometimes, it is applied to a merely formal acceptance of moral rules or principles (DRIVER, 2005).

As noticed by Craig Taylor (2012), the moralist attitude and behaviour are seen as a kind of arrogance and presumption. Usually, the moralist behaviour, in a negative sense, appears associated with an inappropriate formulation of moral demands and judgement. Such inappropriateness manifests itself in various forms: as a very demanding level of commitment with moral principles; as an intransigence over the compliance of moral rules; or, as an excess of rigour in moral criticism or concerning a severity of sanctions. In fact, usually, we consider moralistic a kind of moral judgment or criticism that attempts to overstate the moral aspects, facts, or qualities (TAYLOR, 2012; DRIVER, 2005; COADY, 2005). We also interpret as a type of moralism the attempt to attribute an excessive moral weight to facts, aspects or qualities that are, in reality, morally irrelevant. In the same way, we classify a behavior or attitude as moralistic when, morally evaluating a conduct, we identify a tendency to overestimate the moral dimension in relation to other aspects of the context that, in principle, are equally relevant (TAYLOR, 2012, p. 57-81).

Sometimes, moralistic behaviour is interpreted as a failure or distortion in formulating moral considerations and evaluations, which implies a kind of unreasonable excess or unjustified exorbitance (TAYLOR, 2012, ch. 4). This exorbitance concerning the proper scope of morals manifests itself as the attempt to assume as "moral" some elements that do not belong to the moral dominion. However, it may also manifest as an attempt to confer precedence or priority to moral aspects of conduct over other relevant aspects (TAYLOR, 2012, ch. 4).

The moralist exorbitance seems to explain a large amount of discussion and polemics concerning moralism in many areas of knowledge, such as Aesthetics, Law, Education, Politics. However, in this paper, moralism is discussed from the point of view of Ethics.¹ Since aspects concerning the structure, delimitation and nature of morality and moral criticism are also

¹ Here, I am following the debate concerning the immorality of the moralism that appeared in a special volume of the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* in 2005 (v. 22, n. 2), most of them republished in *What's wrong with moralism* (COADY, 2006).

examined, the discussion extends itself to Meta-ethics (TAYLOR, 2012). As suggested by Jauss (2008), despite the efforts trying to give us a clear concept and some attempts to propose typologies, the debate around the immorality of moralism reveals some *consensus* about some elements but almost none about the defining aspects that make the moralism an immoral attitude or behaviour.

In the next section, I discuss the limits of the attempts to describe moralism as intrinsically wrong form of moral criticism, in opposition to a proper one. I argue this approach fails to point out the distinctive immorality of moralism and does not take seriously the possibility of a positive moralism. In the third section, I present a conception of moralism in terms of a reductive view of morality centred on the value of integrity; a reductive view of morality that confers to the value of integrity both centrality and precedence over all other aspect of conduct and behaviour, moral or non-moral. Despite being a reductive view, this conception is comprehensive in the sense that moralism can be both morally appropriate and acceptable (positive) or morally inappropriate and unacceptable (negative). I defend this description can accommodate the main characteristics usually associated to the moralist attitude and behaviour. In the fourth section, I return to the problem of the distinction between positive and negative moralism. Assuming the possibility of justification and excuse as a distinctive feature of moral criticism, I defend that negative moralism is morally objectionable, precisely, because it blocks or hinders this possibility to the person who is the target of the criticism.

1. Looking for the error: moralism vs. fitting moral criticism

The tendency to analyze moralism in terms of an excess and severity as well as in terms of an exorbitance concerning the precedence and the proper scope of morality can be illustrated by two recent attempts to classify the most important forms of moralism. The typology proposed by C. A. J. Coady (2005) is an attempt to differentiate five types of moralism: (i) Moralism of scope is a form of moralism which basically involves “seeing things as moral issues that aren’t, and thereby overmoralising the universe” (COADY, 2005, p. 125). This form of moralism raises “[...] acute questions about the boundaries of morality and morality’s claims to dominance and comprehensiveness” (COADY, 2005, p. 126). (ii) Moralism of imposition or interference describes the willingness to demand or insist that others “conform to what may well be valid moral judgments” assuming that a moral judgment which is valid for certain moral subjects can be legitimately imposed on others; an attitude that involves some degree of force, coercion or disrespect for autonomy (COADY, 2005, p. 128). (iii) Moralism of abstraction manifests as a tendency to formulate moral criticism or discourse at a very high level of abstraction, in a

way too unrealistic to be well succeeded in inducing the intended commitment at the practical level (COADY, 2005, p. 129). (iv) Absolutist moralism is described “in terms of inflexibility or rigorism in the application of moral categories” (COADY, 2005, p. 131). (v) Moralism of inappropriate explicitness involves being too overt about the moral lessons or messages in a piece of speech or literary work at the cost of other relevant aspects, insisting on the mere declamation of morals (COADY, 2005, p. 131).

Julia Driver (2005) suggests a typology a little different from that proposed by Coady. Driver proposes a distinction among four types of moralism. (i) perfectionist moralism “consists in the excessive demandingness, [...] but as a demand against others”; “[...] it involves an attempt to impose additional burdens on others” that the moralizers themselves “do not recognize as legitimate” (DRIVER, 2005, p. 139). This is “[...] one form of moralism which views the moral reasons one has for acting as being the most important — of treating moral concerns as so important as to exclude other competing projects” (DRIVER, 2005, p. 141). (ii) Absolutist moralism is “the view that there are certain moral rules or principles that are binding on us absolutely — that is, allowing for no exceptions” (DRIVER, 2005, p. 145). The problem with that type of moralism is the “excessive adherence to the rules” in a way that admits no exception. However, in general, rules should “more properly be viewed as rules of thumb rather than absolutely binding guides to action” (DRIVER, 2005, p. 145). (iii) Moralism by framing issues in moral terms and providing moralistic explanations refers to a form of moralism highlighted by a tendency to present the description of different situations as regards the moral issues or to give a moral explanation for the behaviour, when there is another, more plausible (DRIVER, 2005, p. 149).

As noted by Steven A. Jauss (2008), the differences between these two attempts to offer a typology for moralism indicate that, in principle, until now, there is no defined set of ideas in terms of which the flaw of moralism can be described; none of these attempts gives us a clear indication of what constitutes the immorality of moralism.

However, with different emphasis, Coady (2005), Driver (2005), and, as we will see, Craig Taylor (2005 and 2012), Robert Fullinwider (2005), Benjamin Lovett (2005) and Marco Azevedo (2013), seemingly agree that the excess of moralism is tied, at least, to the following aspects: (i) the severity or rigorism concerning the compliance of the moral rules, (ii) the exorbitance concerning the proper scope of morality, and (iii) the precedence of moral elements over other relevant aspects of conduct.

The problem is that these aspects are not enough to characterize moralism as an immoral behaviour because, in principle, there is nothing

intrinsically immoral about being strict, rigorous, austere, demanding or severe in formulating moral considerations and criticism. The same applies to a certain moralizing attitudes and behaviours, such as (iv) giving a greater weight to the moral dimension of conduct, drawing attention to, or insisting on the compliance of the moral rules, or (v) moralizing elements or aspects that most people do not take into account as relevant issues.

Some criteria has been pointed out as the distinctive aspect of the negative moralism: public judgmentalism, disrespectful criticism, insensible judgment, etc. According to Jauss (2008), the insufficiency of these aspects to determine the immoral or negative aspect of the moralistic attitude seems to be particularly evident in cases in which a person imposes high moral standards, demands, and goals upon himself. As Julia Driver (2005, p. 142) and Benjamin Lovett (2005, p. 162) acknowledge, the criticism implied in moralism apparently has a public sense; it is a vice that only arises in the delivery of moral judgments upon others. In fact, a morally scrupulous person can be, in a certain way, a kind of “moralist” about himself (DRIVER, 2005; COADY, 2005, p.126). The problem with conceiving moralism exclusively in a negative way is that it does not seem reasonable always to consider someone blameworthy just for behaving in this way “moralistically self-oriented”, overestimating the moral aspects of his own conduct.² Similarly, someone who defends the precedence of the moral dimension of his own conduct or seeks to confer moral weight to some aspects which, in general, people don’t take into account in their moral assessments, does not seem intrinsically reprehensible.

One way to circumvent the insufficiency of the negative conception of moralism is to restrict it assuming that in some way the negative or pejorative element is linked to or determined by the public character of the moralistic criticism and by a certain imbalance or asymmetry in the way we ponder self/other relationship (DRIVER, 2005, p. 138; FULLINWIDER, 2005, p. 108-115). In the diagnosis of Fullinwider (2005), to emphasize that the failure of moralistic criticism lies in its public character, and in an asymmetrical treatment of the self/other relationship, basically means to say that moralistic criticism is wrong because: (i) it is invariably done in public aiming at the public exposition of the faults of the one to whom it is directed (FULLINWIDER, 2005, p. 109); and (ii) the moralist assumes or sees himself as entitled to moral authority or superiority over the criticized one (FULLINWIDER, 2005, p. 112-113). Still according to Fullinwider, these two

² I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer for call my attention to the fact that some form of self-perfectionism can be morally objectionable (See BENN, 2018).

aspects define a central characteristic of moralism, which he called judgmentalism: “the habit of uncharitably and officiously passing judgment on other people” (FULLINWIDER, 2005, p. 109).

The emphasis on these two aspects has brought moralism closer to a kind of distortion of moral character, a vice (FULLINWIDER, 2005; DRIVER, 2005; TAYLOR, 2012). People can agree, there is something praiseworthy in criticizing the moral behaviour of other, however the proper judgment and sentencing involves admitting that there is someone who is invested and able to play the role of a moral judge hence someone who is authorized to judge and to sentence morally. According to Fullinwider:

[...] a judge is one who holds an office authorizing the act of passing judgment. The connection is quite obvious in many special roles such as parent, teacher, magistrate, and community leader. Even in less formalized settings, however, the idea of office hovers as a ghostly background to judgment-making (2005, p.112).

That particular condition includes certain responsibilities, such as “just bring someone to the bar just for good reasons” and “bring himself, firstly”. According to Fullinwider, these are precisely the limits in judging that the moralist tends to ignore. Even this rule of “being authorized to be a moral judge” admits exception; the author acknowledges, some offices or social roles confer a license to the exercise of the moral criticism and judgment, publically and privately; some others confer a restricted or limited license or imply rights of mutual judgment (FULLINWIDER, 2005, p. 111-112). Besides the prerogatives, there is another limit: the moral criticism is conditioned by the epistemic deficit of those who criticize; it means a deficiency in relation to the real motives or intentions of the agent. For this reason, defends Fullinwider, to respect this fact of the deficit seems to be a “substantive dimension of morality”; this would be “a standard for deciding when people’s judgments toward others exceed proper bounds and when the contents of their judgments look inappropriate” (FULLINWIDER, 2005, p. 117). Briefly, Fullinwider defends the moralistic criticism is made in public, aims at the public exposition of the flaws of the one who is reproached, and is based on an asymmetrical epistemic treatment of the self/other relation. The moralist, ignoring his own deficit of knowledge about the real motivation, assumes or intends to have a superiority and authority over the one who is criticized.

According to Fullinwider (2005) and Taylor (2012) an acceptable and proper moral criticism is that one which is restricted to these limits mentioned above; the moralist error consists in not respecting them. This conception of moralism as an intrinsically inappropriate treatment of morals can be defended by arguing that being invested in the office of judge is a necessary condition.

However, this condition is not sufficient to distinguish a proper moral criticism (in a sense of a critique, i.e., a reflected and well balanced moral judgment) from an improper one, a mere criticism or opinion. The main problem with this position is the fact that, in certain situations, a severe moral criticism gains importance exactly because it is pronounced by whom apparently would not be invested with the credentials that authorize the criticism; for instance, when a child criticizes his parents due to a reproachable behaviour.

However, for Taylor (2005, p. 113), the negative essence of moralism is beyond the judgementalism and public exposition; it is specific in tending to condemn a person morally in an disrespectful way, and that is what makes moralism an improper form of criticism, a flaw of character, a moral vice. To be accused of moralism is “being accused of an excessive or otherwise unreasonable tendency in one’s moral thoughts and/or judgments about people or events.” (TAYLOR, 2012, p. 2). It means that moralism involves a flaw in morally judging others by not responding to or not considering their sentiment and dignity properly. What it is wrong with being a moralist in a negative sense is not merely the severity, the public exposition or the unreasonable condemnation implied in this kind of behaviour, but the whole process over which the judgment is formulated, the way we elaborate the judgment and formulate the moral sentence (TAYLOR, 2012, p. 2-3). In turn, what makes a moral criticism a proper one is the fact that it is underpinned by a set of dispositions such as good sense, sensitivity to the context, certain feelings and emotions related to the condition of the person who is the target of the criticism. A proper moral criticism also requires some knowledge and a certain degree of competence by the judge to use moral terms and concepts properly as well as to express concern; in other words, a proper moral criticism requires a proper response to the condition of the person who is being criticized (TAYLOR, 2012, p. 33-35). Responses that include manifestations of certain moral sentiments such as compassion, empathy, friendship and kindness (TAYLOR, 2012, p. 83-88).

Before I start to discuss moralism as a view of morality based on integrity, allow me to make a brief commentary on other recent work on moralism. In his paper entitled *On the moral distinction between morality and moralism* (2013), Marco Azevedo assumes a point of view that insists in that same contrast between morality, in a positive sense, and moralism, in a negative sense.³ According to Azevedo, a way to understand the problem of moralism is to assume it is a position based on false moral beliefs. He says: “since legitimate beliefs are true beliefs, moral beliefs are true moral beliefs;

³ I am in debt with Marco Antonio Azevedo for the opportunity to discuss the ideas of this paper.

moralistic beliefs nevertheless cannot be true beliefs. They are beliefs that express mere opinions, not moral knowledge” (Azevedo, 2013, p. 3). According to him, moralism seems to be “opposite to morality” in the analogue sense that scientism is opposite [...] to science” (AZEVEDO, 2012, p. 8). However, having to deal with the epistemological problem of the distinction between false and true moral beliefs, Azevedo decides to explore the problem in a different way. He goes back to the semantic aspects involving the concept of morality.

Working on Leonard Nelson’s view of morality, Azevedo tries to make clear the distinction between moralit vs. moralism appealing to the idea of duty. If duty is “presumably the core notion of any social positive morality”, since the function of duty is to “regulate social behavior”, then “all duties, in effect, coincide in its range and meaning with (and only with) the requirements of positive justice”. And, if we accept this idea of social positive morality, then moralism seems to be “the attitude of extending duties beyond positive justice” (AZEVEDO, 2013, p. 11).

Azevedo correctly identifies that moralism has positive effects, but he also recognizes that moralism is a kind of exorbitance, and points out that moralism tends to an absolutist position about moral obligations, fulfillment or violation. Thus, he still maintains that moralism is intrinsically negative, something by definition opposite to morality, hence morally wrong or reproachable.

These different approaches to negative moralism proposed by Taylor, Fullinwider, Driver, Coady and Azevedo grasp some important aspects of the moralistic behaviour and attitude; however, they do not fit well in certain critical situations. It is possible, for instance, that a person invested with the credentials to criticize makes use of his prerogatives to do that, being extremely severe and rigorous, and still does it in such a way that this person cannot be blamed for being ruthless, non-charitable, or insensitive. For example, it may be that a mourner, after a reasonable period, refuses to abandon the mourning and to reassume his commitments, obligations and responsibilities. A close friend can morally press her and demand she returns to the routine tasks, and her commitments, obligations and responsibilities. In that case, the friend’s moral criticism, we admit, can be severe and strict, his demands can be expressed in an absolutist tone, etc; even so, it would not seem correct to say that there is something morally wrong in this friend’s attitude. A similar situation occurs when a parent becomes increasingly severe and strict with a child who insists on misconduct even after being warned and reprimanded. We would not say that is a moralist attitude in a negative, in a morally reproachable sense; we assume that parents are doing what they are

expected to do.

Situations like the self-imposition of strict rules, the moral criticism from a child to her parents, and the criticism from a friend to a mourner show us that the attempts to characterize moralism in general as an intrinsically wrong, a behaviour or attitude that always implies a violation of some requirements of morality is, at least, a problematic approach. The intended opposition, between moral as a proper and moralism as improper kind of moral criticism, does not just face difficulties to point out the central aspects that make moralism a morally wrong and reproachable behaviour, it also does not take seriously the possibility of a positive moralism. A better description of moralism seems to require that we consider including this possibility. To put it differently, we tend to associate the term ‘moralism’ with a intrinsically distorted view of morality; however, the possibility of a positive type of moralism presses us to consider a more comprehensive conception from what, may be, we would be able to identify what this failure, which we tend to associate with the negative moralism, consists of.

If moralism is not necessarily negative, if we are talking about a certain kind of moralizing behaviour and attitude that can be compatible with morality, we need a more comprehensive conception. I would like to suggest that the correct emphasis should not rest upon on a view according to which moralism is by definition an inappropriate type of moral judgment, hence intrinsically wrong, but upon the idea of moralism as a particular view of morality that can be wrong or right, positive or negative.

2. Moralism as a moral perspective centred on integrity

Benjamin Lovett is one of those who defend the idea that moralism can be positive. According to him, the negative view just reveals that we are more sensitive to the criticism we disagree with than to that we agree with. For him, we bring to mind examples of unsuccessful moralization because “successful moralization is not likely to be recognized as such — it is designed to be unobtrusive, so as to make targets internalize the moral views without ever realizing that they are being influenced by others” (LOVETT, 2005, p. 165).

From a negative perspective, the moralist austerity can be interpreted as excess, insensitivity, inflexibility, exorbitance, unreasonable resistance, lack of good sense, and flaw of character. However, this austerity can also be interpreted in a non-pejorative sense, as an expression of a primary concern or as a special care with certain aspects of the character and behaviour morally desirable or which are just assumed as paramount. That is an important aspect revealed by Lovett. Admitting that moralism includes “the public judgment of

others' actions as morally wrong", also that moralizing can be wrong even when it is successful in changing the behaviour of the one who is the target, Lovett insists that the moralizing behaviour can be positive (LOVETT, 2005, p. 169). If conducted with caution and care, he says, "moralizing can hold others to their own standards and also encourage them to raise the bar for themselves, without causing the side-effects that have sullied the name of moralism" (LOVETT, 2005, p. 169). Still according to Lovett, moralizing has a positive effect as a persuasion strategy and as a punishment ahead of the time; and that is why there is a morally appropriate or positive form of moralism we should take into account. Moralism can be positive because "it calls attention to the possible punishing consequences ahead of time" (LOVETT, 2005, p. 164) and "activates the consistency motive, a basic desire to keep one's beliefs consistent with other beliefs, and to act in accordance with those beliefs" (LOVETT, 2005, p. 162). It can "remedy problems of moral ignorance (that is, ignorance of consequences, inconsistency between different beliefs) and weakness of will (inconsistency between belief and action)," and provide the "social pressure that motivates the will to act in accordance with our own best moral judgments" (LOVETT, 2005, p. 163). It can also "provide the moral knowledge to those who are either morally self-contradictory, or simply do not have sufficient empathic attentiveness" (LOVETT, 2005, p. 163).

Summarizing, Lovett call attention to the fact that moralism can promote aspects of moral behaviour which are valuable and desirable, specially: (i) the coherence of beliefs, motives and values; (ii) the consistency between beliefs, professed convictions and actions; (iii) the agent's commitment to his self-image as a moral person; and (iv) the pressure for a conduct in accordance with the best judgement.

These aspects mentioned by Lovett are the elements of a basic set of features in terms of which the notion of integrity has been described and discussed. I would like to explore the possibility of a conception of moralism as a reductive view of morality centred on the value of integrity – a view that can be morally appropriate and acceptable (positive) or morally inappropriate and unacceptable (negative). Here the expression "view of morality" means a certain moral perspective, a particular way whereby someone, in a given context, selects, interprets, and evaluates what is morally relevant and formulates or conceives his moral considerations, criticisms and judgments. This suggested reductive view of morality confers to the value of integrity both centrality and precedence over all other aspect of conduct and behaviour, moral or non-moral. In this sense, moralism refers to the behaviour, attitude and disposition which is proper to the person who reduces moral considerations to a problem concerning to the centrality and precedence of

integrity and insists on demanding very high level of moral integrity from others and himself. A description of moralism in these terms gives us, I hope to show, a better understanding of how moralists appraise and formulate moral judgements and why negative moralism is described in terms of those negative features we mention before.

Despite the current controversies regarding the concept of integrity, it is possible to identify a set of characteristics that authorizes us to assume moralism as a moral perspective centred in the value of integrity, as presented above. Among the proponents of many different conceptions of integrity, there are those who associate integrity with the idea of personal identity and the idea of an “integrated self”. According to this conception, having integrity requires “a clear, stable and coherent understanding of who and why we are who we are” (SCHERKOSKE, 2013b, p. 30-31). This view is also called “integrity as coherence” because it is associated with the requirement of coherence among the principles, commitments and values that a person defends as her own. Being understood on that base, integrity reflects the person’s commitment with herself to keep and maintain certain values and convictions as genuinely hers, especially in the face of difficulties and contrary pressure (MILLER, 2013; BIGELOW; PARGETTER, 2007). The idea is that keeping a morally meaningful life demands commitment to, and defense of, a set of in-depth convictions, those that are very dear to us. A person of complete integrity in this sense would probably resist abandoning her beliefs merely by suggestion, external influence or seduction (COX; LA CAZE; LAVINE, 2013; MCFALL, 1987, p. 6-9). Sometimes this connection between integrity and coherence is presented as strength of will (MILLER, 2013; BIGELOW; PARGETTER, 2007). Other similar conception is “integrity as clean hands”. According to this conception, moral integrity is connected with an adherence to certain moral principles, values and convictions considered crucial and inviolable. Keeping firmness of such convictions means, to some extent, resisting in the sense of not easily giving them up and not letting oneself be seduced by other possibilities (CALHOUN, 1995, p. 250). Being committed to the defense of the integrity of a moral life requires taking some moral positions and convictions as non-negotiable and inviolable. In addition, it requires a disposition both to defend them in public, making sure that there are good reasons, and to review them where and when appropriate and justifiable (SCHERKOSKE, 2010, p. 353; CALHOUN, 1995, p. 260). Personal integrity demands subscription to a set of principles, a dedicated and consistent pursuit of them, and, in facing temptations and challenges, also the disposition to keep them firmly (MCFALL, 1987, p. 8).

There is another resembling conception of integrity that points out the

connection between integrity and the constitution of the self; it is the idea of integrity as identity, proposed by Bernard Williams (2012). According to this conception, people have a set of desires, concerns and commitments that are constitutive parts of their character and these elements are, in a way, what give meaning to their lives. Such desires and concerns are a kind of “ground projects”, that is, they are assumed as defining aspects of person’s identity. They are those elements from which “the motivating force that drives a person to the future” come and give them their reasons for living (WILLIAMS, p. 1982, p. 12). Integrity in this sense is very close to things that confer an identity to the person herself; it is related to, for example, what a person recognizes as ethically needed and she takes as a worthwhile life (SCHERKOSKE, 2013a, p. 43). This conception of integrity is connected to the idea of coherence, but also to the idea of consistency, because affecting and damaging those “ground projects”, in a certain way, means losing the self-identity (SCHERKOSKE, 2103a, p. 31).

All these different conceptions of integrity have a common ground: the idea of commitment and the person’s disposition to publicly defend her own moral *status*. This means, they reveal that integrity is related to moral competence and, at some level, it demands the commitment of the person to avoiding kinds of conduct that can affect or can result in some damage to her own moral *status* (COX; LA CASE; LEVINE, 2013). According to Calhoun (1995, p. 253):

Acting with integrity, that is, on one’s own judgment, is thus intimately tied to protecting the boundaries of the self – to protecting it against disintegration, against loss of self-identity, and against pollution by evil. Acting without integrity undermines the boundaries of the self, whether that be accomplished through the abandonment of one’s autonomy, the betrayal of one’s deepest commitments, or the contamination of one’s agency through association with evil.

Putting it in other words, integrity involves to being disposed to resist to those things that can affect one’s ability to evaluate, adjust and remedy his desires, convictions and objectives. According to Scherkoske, it includes a proper evaluation; it is about “having both a proper esteem for one’s judgment and a standing commitment to having the sort of judgment worth standing for”; and it “involves an abiding set of dispositions to responsible formation and revision of a person’s convictions, as well as a reliable sense of her competence to judge” (SCHERKORSKE, 2010, p. 356-357)

There are currently many controversies about the notions of integrity and moral integrity; some of these conceptions strongly link integrity to morality, some others take moral integrity as a further example among

different possible types of integrity. Here, we do not need to deal with these conceptual disputes because we are not linking moralism to a specific conception of integrity. For our purposes, it is enough to admit that a person is a moralist or has a moralist attitude if she guides herself by a reductive view of morality which is centred on the value of moral integrity, including at least some of those characteristics of the conceptions of integrity presented. The conception of moral integrity I intend to present as the central aspect of moralism can be a *minimum* one. It can include just a set of basic moral positions and convictions for which the moralist assumes commitment and demands coherence, consistency and strength of will. This notion of moral integrity can involve defending an ideal of moral life, and, at a more complex form, can encompass other elements, including the “ground projects” as defining elements of the person’s own identity, proposed by Williams.

Having made this observation, we can return to our conception of moralism to notice that those aspects of the positive moralism highlighted by Lovett are, in fact, aspects of the notions of moral integrity, namely: (i) the demand for coherence among beliefs, between desires and beliefs, and between desires and actions; (ii) the demand for consistency of the conduct concerning the motivation to act; (iii) oneself’s commitment to his self-image and to the defense of his moral status; (iv) oneself’s disposition to maintain and to defend a set of basic moral positions that underpinnes his convictions; and (v) oneself’s disposition to guide his behaviour based on his own best possible judgement. A positive moralist, as described by Lovett, would agree with the importance of all these aspects mentioned above; however, a successful exam of moralism as a reductive view of morality centred on the integrity should also comprise some other aspects that we can take as morally neutral, such as: (vi) the precedence of morality; (vii) the exorbitance concerning the scope of morals; (viii) the severity, austerity and stiffness; (ix) the absolutism and unconditionality of rules; (x) non-leniency and non-connivance. Since we are looking for a more comprehensive conception, which is intended to go beyond the negative form and to include the positive moralism, it does not make sense to assume those negative characteristics as constitutive elements of our comprehensive conception. We have rejected (xi) the public non-authorized criticism as a determinant feature. Other features in terms of which the negative moralism are described, such as (xii) the self/other asymmetry and (xiii) the violation of others’ dignity and the disrespect for their condition, are also compromised as determinant features because our comprehensive conception admits the possibility of both the positive form of moralism (which includes the self-imposed moralism) and the negative one.

Moralism refers to a reductive view of morality that confers to the

moral integrity both centrality and precedence over any other aspects of conduct. In this sense, the moralist behaviour or attitude is concerned the way a person makes her moral considerations; she assumes the centrality and precedence of integrity and insists on demanding high level of moral integrity from others and himself. As someone who tends to foster a specific view of morality based on integrity, the moralist tends to see himself as authorized to claim and to demand from others and himself behaviours, attitudes and stances, which express coherence and consistency and that are in accordance with a set of certain positions and convictions; also, which assumes the precedence of the moral sphere over other human spheres of activity.

As we have seen, a prominent aspect of the moralist criticism is the request of coherence and consistency. On our conception, the moralist appraisal of someone's integrity involves checking the coherence of his positions and examining the consistency of the connection between motives and actions. And that can explain why, usually, a moralist is viewed as someone interested in criticizing, appraising and pointing out incoherencies and inconsistencies in others' and in his own behaviour. For someone who tends to link moral *status* and integrity closely, it is important to evaluate if, and how much, someone's conduct favours or jeopardizes the moral integrity. Finding any minor evidence, the moralist believes he is authorized criticizing others from his reductive moral point of view, demanding correction and trying to impair their integrity.

From a moralist reductive point of view, each aspect of conduct can be taken into account as evidence that can potentially affect the integrity of the person who is the target; that is why the moralist tends to cast doubt on and oversee all details of the target's conduct. Also, that is why a moralist tends to oversee each particular action, as well as all the psychological components of the action (such as motives, interests, intentions, preferences, and convictions), searching for incoherencies or inconsistencies; especially those that can count as evidence of moral error, flaw or blemish. This moralist's excessive worry for integrity helps us to understand not just the moralist's inquisitive and critical attitude, but also his judgementalism, and his exorbitance with respect to the precedence and scope of the moral sphere.

The focus of the moralist criticism is the moral *status* of the one that is his target; he tries to undermine it overseeing the aspects, searching for incoherencies and inconsistencies that can affect the target's integrity. Doing so, the moralist connects his judgement about the person's moral *status* to an assessment of the level of integrity that person manifests in his conduct. What is at stake in his criticism is which aspects of the person's conduct are morally vulnerable to the point of affecting the person's moral integrity. He is

interested in how much those different components of the conduct reveal about the person's integrity. A moralist vests himself with the office of advocate and promoter of integrity. In a way, for him, the integrity of the conduct is a measure of the degree of the person's commitment to the priority and precedence of morals; his moral appraisals are based on which measure the person's conduct promotes or undermines his own integrity. That is why a moralist is always interested in moral worthiness of conduct. In a way, it helps us to understand how the precedence of moral integrity results in the exorbitance concerning the scope, and the judgementalism that accompanies the negative moralism.

This view of moralism as a reductive view of morality centred on the value of integrity may involve a form of perfectionism. From a moralist point of view, there are some reasons to think this way: the commitment to moral perfection is worthier than a partial commitment and integrity is assumed by him as an indicator of the agent's moral *status*. The integrity of a person is evaluated in terms of her commitment with a set of moral positions and values; and in terms of the degree of coherence and consistency with which this commitment is supported. In turns, this degree of coherence and consistency is evaluated by the compliance with moral rules; rules that are justified by that same basic set of moral commitments. A moralist, the one that prioritizes integrity, can demand a strict adherence to and compliance with rules, and this is, in a sense, a kind of absolutism about rules. For the same reason, the moralist attitudes can be equated with non-leniency and non-connivance. In addition, on the eyes of the moralist, the compliance with moral rules and the commitment required by integrity, both can be admitted as indicators of the level of reliability or trust – the most important requirement to a moral community.

Finally, moralism as a view of morality centred on integrity sheds light on aspects of moralism not sufficiently considered by the negative view. I have in mind especially the cases in which people fail to achieve some demanding self-imposed moral standards. It does not seem reasonable always to reproach or condemn a person just because she was morally exacting herself; on the contrary, we tend to approve and to praise that kind of moral ambition if it is a reasonable one. In relations involving asymmetric distribution of power, authority and responsibilities we, usually, do not blame the inferior nor judge an eventual failure of the subordinated to respond to demanding goals as a moral flaw. On the contrary, we usually expect the superior to use common sense and to retain the responsibility for the unsuccessful effort of his subordinated.

3. What is morally wrong with negative moralism

Moralism understood as reductive view of morality centred on the priority or precedence of moral integrity goes beyond the attempt to describe moralism as a intrinsically negative attitude and behaviour, opposing its features with the features of the proper moral criticism. The refinements introduced by Fullinwider and Taylor, though bringing a better understanding of the error of the negative moralism, apparently, without justification, put aside the positive moralism.

The problem now is that the comprehensive conception of moralism we formulate does not give us any clue on how to deal with the problem of defining the line that sets apart the positive and the negative forms of the moralism. Until now, we can just assume that the negative moralist fails and the positive moralist is successful in defending the priority or precedence of the moral integrity. While this comprehensive conception comprises the positive moralism, we need to go back to the problem of decoupling the two forms and show what makes negative moralism reproachable, that is, immoral.

A possible way to deal with decoupling the two forms of moralism comes from the idea that, from a moral perspective, evidences for breaking rules and violations authorize us to exam the reasons and the motives of the agent, to oversee the context and details of his conduct, to ask for justification, to blame or appraise, and, eventually, to punish or excuse him. What comes in the end of this process of moral judgement depends on what we call justification and excuses.

The idea that moral behaviour demands reasons or justification seems to be a platitude. Thomas Scanlon (2000, p. 4) suggests that: “When I ask myself what reason the fact that an action would be wrong provides me with not to do it, my answer is that such an action would be one that I could not justify to others on grounds I could expect them to accept”. Therefore, for Scanlon, right and wrong is about guides of conduct based on “principles that can not be reasonably rejected”. Similarly, Peter Singer (2011, p. 9) maintains: “those who hold [...] ethical beliefs are [...] living according to ethical standards if they believe, for some reason, that it is right to do as they are doing”. Expressing it more clearly, Singer (2011, p. 9) adds:

The notion of living according to ethical standards is tied up with the notion of defending the way one is living, of giving a reason for it, of justifying it. Thus, people may do all kinds of things we regard as wrong, yet still be living according to ethical standards if they are prepared to defend and justify what they do.

According to H. L. A. Hart, an important characteristic of morality is

the possibility of “an excuse from moral blame” (1961, p. 173). He wrote:

If a person whose action, judged *ab extra*, has offended against moral rules or principles, succeeds in establishing that he did this unintentionally and in spite of every precaution that it was possible for him to take, he is excused from moral responsibility, and to blame him in these circumstances would itself be considered morally objectionable. Moral blame is therefore excluded because he has done all that he could do. (HART, 1961, p. 173)

The point here is that, along the process of moral judgement or criticism, it is morally objectionable to ignore reasonable justifications and excuses. Moral questioning and criticism of offences against moral rules or principles, in a way, involves asking for justification as well opening to excuses. We can assume the lack of these possibilities makes the moral judgment and criticism themselves morally objectionable. In this way, assuming the possibility of justification and excuse as a defining aspect of a proper (or, at least, a non-objectionable) moral criticism, we can deal with the problem of decoupling positive and negative moralism. Roughly, we can say that a moral criticism, including a moralist demand, becomes morally wrong or immoral, when, intending to be moral, it removes, blocks or hinders these possibilities of justifying or offering excuses.

From this point of view, the flaw of the negative moralist is to adopt standards or to impose demands that suppress any possibility to justify or to excuse a violation of a moral standard. A way whereby a moralist can remove or block the possibility of justifying is to impose very demanding standards, to the point of excluding any possibility of exception and error. In this case, the negative moralist flaw consists in taking a moral rule, principle or standard as unconditionally valid because it *a priori* excludes any possibility of justification. Other way the negative moralist can block the possibility of justification is to assume the value of integrity as an unconditionally valid moral criterion, assuming its priority but not being able to justify why integrity ought to figure as an unconditional and absolute value in all of our moral evaluations.

Additionally, the negative moralist can remove or block the possibility of justifying by imposing moral demands or standards that appeal to non-moral or morally irrelevant aspects. In trying to moralize non-moral or morally irrelevant aspects, the negative moralist apparently keeps the possibility of justifying, but, in fact, he makes any attempt of justification ineffective or invalid. The effectiveness and the validity of a justification can be neutralized when there is nothing to which a person who is the target can appeal to justify her conduct, except to refuse the standards applied as invalid or to point out their impertinence. When the negative moralist judges the goodness of a person’s character or person’s moral *status* based, for example, on etiquette

standards or on colour of skin, he is appealing to standards and moralizing aspects that are not morally relevant. Being a target of moral criticism by standards like these ones, there is nothing that this person can present as a justification or excuse against the moral criticism. She can just refuse these standards, which implies the annulment of the demand, making any justification meaningless.

Conclusion

As we have seen, the attempts to point out what is precisely negative about moralism have found some difficulties in doing that in an uncontroversial way and at the expense of omitting the possibility of the positive moralism. Bearing in mind that moralism promotes some behaviours and attitudes that are valuable, praiseworthy, and desirable, I have presented a comprehensive conception that comprises both forms of the moralism, positive and negative. This more enlarged conception describes moralism as a view of morality centred in the value of moral integrity pointing out some of its main elements, especially, the coherence among beliefs, the consistency of the motives for actions, the commitment of the agent with a self-image as a moral person and the pressure for behaviour according to the best judgement.

For decoupling the positive and the negative form of the moralism, we appeal to the idea that fitting moral criticism involves preserve possibilities of justification and excuse. We have defended the idea that the immorality of moralism consists in supressing these possibilities of justification and excuse, moralizing aspects that cannot be moralized, or that are morally irrelevant, or defending the unconditionality of the moral rules and principles.

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