

H. A. Prichard ist in dem Aufsatz „Beruht die Moralphilosophie auf einem Irrtum?“ der Auffassung, daß die Richtigkeit einer Handlung und das Motiv für die Handlung voneinander unabhängig sind. Das heißt insbesondere, daß die Richtigkeit einer Handlung nicht vom Motiv der Handlung abhängt. Das Motiv einer Handlung bestimmt niemals, ob die Handlung richtig oder falsch ist. (Dieser Auffassung sind neben Prichard z. B. auch C. D. Broad, W. K. Frankena, J. St. Mill, G. E. Moore und W. D. Ross.)

Es gibt jedoch auch Philosophen, die der Meinung sind, daß Motiv und Richtigkeit einer Handlung nicht *immer* voneinander unabhängig sind. Das Motiv einer Handlung bestimmt manchmal, ob die Handlung richtig oder falsch ist. Diese Ansicht ist richtig, wenn gilt:

Es gibt Fälle, in denen das Motiv einer Handlung genügt, um die Handlung von einem deontischen Status (geboten, verboten, erlaubt) in einen anderen zu bringen:

Das Motiv einer Handlung kann eine ansonsten verbotene Handlung zu einer erlaubten Handlung machen.

Das Motiv einer Handlung kann eine ansonsten erlaubte Handlung zu einer obligatorischen Handlung machen.

Steven Sverdlik führt in dem Aufsatz „Motive and Rightness“ (*Ethics* 106 (1996), S. 327–49) vier Beispiele an, in denen – seiner Ansicht nach – das Motiv einer Handlung Einfluß auf deren Richtigkeit hat:

1. The first motive I will mention is the desire for money. Mill says that an agent who saves someone from drowning “does what is right” even if her motive is “the hope of being paid” for her trouble. This may be so. But I think that many people would say that if someone had sex with someone else “in the hope of being paid,” the agent would be acting wrongly. On the other hand, if this same agent had sex with another person because he loved the other one, the act would not be wrong. If so, it is the motive that differentiates the two agents and has the effect of making one agent act wrongly and the other permissibly. There seem to be other acts besides having sex with someone that also seem to mix badly with the desire for money. A related one would be marrying someone. A third would seem to be putting a child up for adoption.
2. A second kind of motive I will call “trifling.” It seems that with some matters that are fraught with moral significance, many people find that acting for trifling motives will make an otherwise permissible act wrong. I hesitate, again, to use a controversial example, but it does seem that a number of people want to say that having an abortion for convenience is wrong, while having one for certain other reasons is permissible. But here, too, there are other examples of the same idea at work. Suppose that a close friend has invited Jane to her wedding. And suppose that Jane declines the invitation so that she can watch the All-Star game on TV. I think this would strike many people as wrong. (How wrong is, of course, another matter.) Now someone might respond by saying that this only shows that morality is overriding and that we cannot neglect moral obligations for trivial reasons of self-interest. But the example is not meant to be one of an obligatory act which is neglected. We are to picture Jane’s friend as genuinely

extending an invitation which Jane is morally free to decline. Still, if Jane were to decline for such a trifling reason, there are many people who would say that she would be acting wrongly.

3. A third motive widely regarded as affecting the deontic status of actions is cruelty, the desire to hurt or kill a living thing for the sake of hurting or killing. The best examples concern our relations to the natural world. Suppose one person goes into the woods and kills many birds for the sheer fun of it. In contrast, another person in similar circumstances could kill the same number of birds in the same way as a measure to insure a proper population of them. There would be cases of the same contrast in the treatment of persons, but they are harder to find. This is because certain kinds of acts such as whipping or shooting a person are normally wrong no matter what the motive.
4. Fourth, there are the motives of racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, and so on. The clearest examples of, say, racism where it corresponds to a motive would involve, I think, a sort of racially based cruelty, or desire to do ill to members of a particular race. It also typically is characterized by certain feelings of loathing or revulsion. [...] Here again we cannot cite cases where, say, one person beats another because the latter is black. Such an act would be wrong even if racism weren't the motive for it. Racism acts here as an aggravating circumstance, but it is not what makes the act wrong. We can find cases, however, where an otherwise permissible act is made wrong when motivated by racism. For example, a person may refuse to sell another her house because the latter is black. The very same act of refusal would be permissible if it were done from fear stemming from doubts about the buyer's credit worthiness. Or, to pick another case that avoids questions arising about omissions, if a teacher gives a student the smallest piece of cake because the latter is Jewish, the teacher would be acting wrongly. If she gives the student the same piece of cake because that is how a random ordering came out, the teacher would be acting permissibly. Notice that saying that the motive of racism, for example, can affect an act's rightness is not to say that the character trait of racism as such has this consequence. While racists are often moved by racist motives of some sort, these kinds of desire can also move people who are usually free of them. If a normally unprejudiced person acts out of character and rejects a prospective buyer because he is black, the seller has acted wrongly on this occasion.