Morality as Self-governance: Has it a Future?

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In *The Invention of Autonomy*, Schneewind argues that a main development in early modern ethical thought is the transition from a conception of morality as obedience to a conception of morality as self-governance. I consider the presuppositions implicit in the latter conception and ask whether they can be maintained.

I

In his superb study, *The Invention of Autonomy*, Jerry Schneewind argues that a major development in early modern ethical thought is the transition from a conception of morality as *obedience* to a conception of morality as *self-governance*. He describes the conception of morality as self-governance as follows:

> The new outlook that emerged by the end of the eighteenth century centred on the belief that all normal individuals are equally able to live together in a morality of self-governance. All of us, on this view, have an equal ability to see for ourselves what morality calls for and are in principle equally able to move ourselves to act accordingly . . . These two points have come to be widely accepted – so widely that most moral philosophy now starts by assuming them. In daily life they give us the working assumption that the people we live with are capable of understanding and acknowledging in practice the reasons for the moral constraints we all mutually expect ourselves and others to respect. We assume, in short, that people are equally competent as moral agents unless shown to be otherwise. There are many substantive points on which modern moral views differ from what was widely accepted at the beginning of the seventeenth century, but our assumption of prima facie equal moral competence is the deepest and most pervasive difference.[1]

Morality as obedience also has two components.

> [The first is that] As created beings we are required to show deference and gratitude as we obey our Creator's commands, which cover morality as well as religious worship. The other concerns human moral abilities. Most people are unable to think well enough to give themselves adequate moral guidance; most people are also too weak-willed and too strongly driven by their desires and passions to behave decently without credible threats of punishment for transgression and promises of reward for compliance. The majority, therefore,

[1] *The Invention of Autonomy* (Cambridge 1998), p. 4.

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must defer to the exceptional few whom God has enabled to understand, follow, and teach his moral orders.[2]

As Schneewind is well aware, there are deep difficulties in establishing a satisfactory ground for the conception of morality as self-governance. This is especially so if one wants to advance that conception a priori – rather than taking it to be grounded, with greater or less security, on the empirical facts about what human beings are like and what moral capacities they have. The philosopher who, *par excellence*, attempts this project, in Schneewind's view, is Kant. We are all, Kant thinks, equally capable – absolutely capable – of telling for ourselves what our moral duties are. Kant's attempt to find an a priori grounding for this view is the main theme of the two chapters on Kant which come at the end of Schneewind's book.

Kant's solution consists, in Schneewind's own words, in the invention of autonomy. 'Invention', I take it, is not what *Kant* takes himself to have done: Schneewind describes Kant's solution as invention because he does not believe, as Kant believes, that we can be thought to have transcendental freedom as 'members of a noumenal realm'.[3] Kant's account of autonomy, as Schneewind says,

> presupposes that we are rational agents whose transcendental freedom takes us out of the domain of natural causation. . . . Through it each person has a compass that enables 'common human reason' to tell what is consistent with duty and what is inconsistent. . . . Because [our moral capacities] are anchored in our transcendental freedom, we cannot lose them, no matter how corrupt we become. Kant sees his theory as the only way to defend the conviction Rousseau gave him of the importance of honoring the common moral understanding.[4]

But if Kant is right about that, and Schneewind is right in thinking that autonomy is an invention, what does that say for morality as self-governance? There were plenty of others after Kant who thought that autonomy was an invention – Nietzsche for example. For Nietzsche, however, that was part and parcel of recognizing morality itself as an invention. Rejecting 'autonomy', in Kant's sense, was for him rejecting morality.[5]

In general one can say that while the conception of morality as self-governance is an important part of ethical thought, especially since Kant, criticism of its coherence is also an important part. If morality

[2] Ibid., p. 509.
[3] Ibid., p. 3.
[4] Ibid., p. 515.
[5] He had his own sense of the word: but in that sense, he thought, '"autonomous" and "moral" are mutually exclusive' (*Genealogy of Morals* (Oxford, 1996), Second Essay, §2, p. 41).

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comes to be thought of as *defined* by this conception, then the criticism becomes a criticism of the idea of morality as such. The early modern story of the emergence of morality as self-governance becomes the late modern story of the critique of morality.

As Schneewind suggests, the self-governance conception of morality is deeply attractive. However, we are also powerfully persuaded by ideas which are hard to reconcile with it. And we are not, by and large, attracted to transcendental idealism. Can we still maintain, then, the moral egalitarianism to which Kant was so deeply committed and which he and Schneewind associate with the idea of self-governance? Does this conception of morality have a future in the post-modern era, as well as having a great history in the modern age?

II

There are two elements in the first passage I quoted from Schneewind, cutting across, I mean, the separation into two points he makes himself.

(1) There is what I will refer to as the *principle of personal moral insight*, or the 'insight principle' for short, and
(2) there is the moral egalitarianism, which says that we are all equally, indeed on some Kantian views absolutely, morally competent.

The principle of personal moral insight can be put as follows:

> Everyone can have full and complete knowledge, through personal insight (i.e. not just by being told by others), of *all* their moral obligations.

More succinctly, one can also put it thus:

> Anyone who has a moral obligation can tell for themselves that they have.

Now if this is the first element, does not the second thesis, moral egalitarianism, follow? Not quite. You need a *lemma*:

> Human beings all have the same moral obligations.

When this is combined with the principle of personal moral insight, it implies that all human beings have the same moral competence. But one need not accept the lemma. Perhaps some human beings have greater moral obligations than others. Perhaps they have greater moral obligations precisely *because* they have greater moral insight: More can be expected of them. In short, it is possible to accept the principle of personal moral insight without accepting moral egalitarianism. However, the principle of personal moral insight can itself look

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disconcerting. If we contrapose it, what it says is that if you cannot tell that you have a moral obligation then you do not have it. Now suppose that some people *cannot* tell for themselves that they have some moral obligations. Consider Tom, for example, who is utterly blind to the obligations of gratitude. The capacity to see that he ought to be grateful when someone does him an important good turn out of sheer good will is a moral competence he simply fails to have. He is quite ineducable on that matter. If we want to say that he nevertheless has moral obligations of gratitude to people who do him good – for example, an obligation at least to say thank you – then we must give up the principle of personal moral insight or the lemma. Either he has a moral obligation which he cannot tell that he has, or he fails to have a moral obligation which the rest of us do have. But many of us, it seems, want to hold on to both the principle and the lemma. In that case we must deny the possibility envisaged in this example. It just cannot be the case that Tom is simply blind to the obligations of gratitude. In other words, in so far as we want to hold on to both the principle of moral insight and the lemma, we have a strong motive to endorse moral egalitarianism, irrespective of the empirical evidence that may pile up against it.

III

Let us look more closely at the principle of personal moral insight. What restrictions apply to the slogan I used to express it: If you have a moral obligation you can tell that you have? Here are three possible restrictions: If you have a moral obligation you can tell that you have

(1) unless you lack relevant factual information;
(2) unless you lack the moral insight to tell that you have;
(3) unless you lack the time, in context, to work it out.

If we accept the first restriction, we give up the attractive intuitive core of morality as self-governance. The attractive idea behind this conception is that moral agents are self-determining – and hence in particular, as one may say, self-auditing. That is, they can reflectively ask themselves, whatever epistemic state they find themselves in, what it is that they have a moral obligation to do, and come up with the answer. In this respect, moral obligation is rather like the epistemic notion of warrant, in that internalist sense of warrant in which I can tell, just by reflecting on whatever epistemic state I am in, what it is that I am warranted in believing. In the epistemic case I carry out the audit to see whether I need to do some more inquiring before I form a belief on a matter that interests me; in the moral case I carry it out to give myself the law – to determine my obligations and act on them.

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So if we hold to morality as self-governance, we should reject the first restriction. It is not possible for you to have a moral obligation which you cannot know that you have for lack of relevant factual information. For if that were to be the case, then even if you could stop the clock and think as well and as hard as you could, your moral obligations might be shrouded from you behind a veil of ignorance of the relevant facts. But the possibility of moral self-audit involved in the idea of giving yourself the law implies, on the contrary, that your moral obligations in a given context are relative to the state of your information in that context. (You may of course have had an anterior duty, which you failed to fulfil, to improve your information, but that is another matter.)

What about the second restriction? It too would take the content out of the principle of personal moral insight. Presumably, if you have a moral obligation in a given epistemic state then *someone* could tell that you have. In other words, if such an adviser was informed about your epistemic state, and gave some thought to it, they could advise you what your moral obligations were. But that is not *personal* moral insight. It is knowledge based on the advice of others.

This point need not be read too individualistically. It is quite compatible with accepting that discussion with others is often the best or even the only route to acquiring personal moral insight. Nonetheless the *end* of the route, according to morality as self-governance, must be a *first-person* understanding of one's moral obligation: grasping for oneself what one's obligation is and why one has it.

I think there is a pressure in modern moral thought towards rejecting even the third restriction. Does not what *you* had a moral obligation to do depend solely on what *you* could have come to see for *yourself* in the time available? Aren't you self-governing, however much time you have? There is pressure, in short, to accept as unrestricted a version of the principle of personal moral insight as one can find.[6]

IV

If the conception of morality as self-governance has this feature it is not surprising to find that two connected questions become important for those moral thinkers after Kant who are influenced by it. The questions are: Is conscience infallible? And is morality subjective? Both

[6] With all these three putative restrictions there is the possibility, prima facie, of detaching questions of moral obligation from questions of blameworthiness. And certainly on any view the connection between moral transgression and moral blameworthiness must be mediated by some account of extenuating circumstances. Nonetheless, conceptions of morality as self-governance must draw the connection much tighter than would, say, 'institutional' conceptions of morality which give moral obligations a status more like that of positive laws. See also n. 10 below.

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questions, for example, are extensively discussed by Hegel in the part of the *Philosophy of Right* which deals with *Moralität*.[7] There he accepts that 'the right of the subjective will', as he calls it,[8] or in my terms the principle of personal moral insight, is an essential component of modern moral thought. But he is clearly worried about the possible perversions of conscience to which this may lead, and worried about how to reconcile this right of the subjective will with the objectivity of moral principles and their immanence in a communal tradition.[9]

We can distinguish these two questions by distinguishing two theses:

(A) It is morally wrong for me to X if and only if were I conscientiously (i.e. sincerely, with full attention, without self-deception, or whatever) to reflect, it would seem to me to be morally wrong to X.
(B) What *makes* it morally wrong for me to X is that were I conscientiously to reflect, it would seem to me to be morally wrong to X.

Thesis A is the insight principle stated in biconditional form: If X is morally wrong then I can tell that it is, and if I can tell that X is morally wrong then it is. Thesis B is subjectivism. Now clearly A can be stronger or weaker, depending on what one has to say about the conditions of conscientiousness. It is quite possible, and quite realistic, to emphasize that although people can always in principle recognize their moral obligations, human frailty nevertheless makes it very easy to mistake them. In this sense – to make an old-fashioned distinction – although conscience as a *cognitive faculty* may be infallible, the *human beings* who exercise it are not.[10]

[7] That is, morality conceived as an exercise of individual conscience, or individual reason.

[8] *Philosophy of Right*, §§102, 137, 215. (My quotations are from the Cambridge edition (1991), translated by H. B. Nisbet with introduction by Allen Wood.) Cf. *The Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, §503.

[9] See his discussion of Kant, Fichte and Fries, *Philosophy of Right*, §§135–40.

[10] This must mean that a person who reflects on his or her duty conscientiously always comes up with the right answer; but that it is very easy to fall short of the conditions of conscientious reflection (and to be unsure whether or not one has fallen short). It seems then that I ought to do what I conscientiously believe I ought to do. Fichte accepts this, holding that moral error results from the 'darkening' of conscience. Kant and Fries both have some difficulty defending it. In the *Metaphysics of Morals* (Doctrine of Virtue), though not in the *Groundwork*, Kant acknowledges that a conscientious conviction of one's duty can be mistaken. Although he still claims to accept that conscience cannot err, his point is only that in cases of this kind the agent is absolved of blame. (It is hard to see how such weakening can be squared with his transcendental theory of practical reason, or as I suggested in the previous footnote, with the self-governance conception as such.) Fries is bolder: 'what it would be wrong to do according to correct conviction can for the individual be precisely what accords with duty' (quoted by Allen Wood, *Hegel's Ethical Thought* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 179). Duty follows conscientious, not correct, conviction. Hegel, finally, operates with a distinction between true conscience, which he identifies

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Correspondingly, B can be stronger or weaker, depending on what one has to say about those conditions of conscientiousness. Subjectivism as I understand it here is not the simple doctrine that what makes a thing right is that it seems right, full stop. It is the doctrine that what makes a thing right is that it seems right when one has reflected in accordance with certain conditions which one always has the ability to meet.[11] Perhaps then subjectivism is the wrong word. A clumsier but more accurate description would be 'individualistic constructivism'.

Furthermore, A clearly does not entail B, since B is the stronger thesis. Nevertheless, it is a puzzle how A can be true if B is false. How can my faculty of conscience be infallible, unless what *makes it true* that X is morally wrong is that when I sincerely and conscientiously reflect, it seems to me to be wrong? The epistemological question, in short, is whether one can explain how conscience is to be infallible unless individualistic constructivism is true.

V

There is a second, and fundamental, challenge to the principle of personal moral insight. Much ethical thought since the Enlightenment has been strongly teleological. Teleological ethics assumes that doctrines of moral obligation can be questioned from the standpoint of some theory of the good. But the goodness of our actions and their consequences can quite plainly fall beyond anything we can know. If the right is *determined* by the good, and the good is beyond my ken, how can I have personal moral insight into what is right for me to do? The question is especially stark if we do not believe that duty is known to us by means of a cognitive faculty implanted in us by a benevolent God. It is brusquely answered by G. E. Moore, according to whom

with the 'ethical disposition' of an individual integrated into rational ethical life, and the 'formal' conscience, which is all that the standpoint of *Moralität* can attain. One can read this as adding an anti-individualist condition to the conditions of conscientious conviction; it remains the case on this reading that 'true' conscience cannot err, but in a way that underestimates the shift. Hegel can equally be seen as giving up the doctrine of the infallibility of conscience – since what he means by 'formal conscience' is what is ordinarily meant by conscience. Note, finally, that if my duty is to do what I conscientiously believe is my duty, and conscientious convictions can differ, then we must give up what I called the lemma. And in fact in those cases in which we agree that they can differ, we do.

[11] On the Hegelian view mentioned in the previous note one must live in the right kind of society to have this ability. There are social circumstances in which settled ethical life cannot exist. An individual in such circumstances does not have the ability to meet the conditions of 'true' conscience.

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'right' does and can mean nothing but 'cause of a good result,' and is thus identical with 'useful'; whence it follows that the end always will justify the means, and that no action which is not justified by its results can be right.[12]

He draws the consequence that: 'we never have any reason to suppose that an action is our duty: we can never be sure that any action will produce the greatest value possible'.[13]

This has some characteristic Moorean exaggerations. However, any teleological ethics which seeks to *deduce* a system of moral obligations from some theory of the good together with empirical data will raise the same challenge for the insight principle. For example, some consequentialists may argue that a person's moral obligation in a concrete situation is whatever some ideal code would require in that situation.[14] Quite obviously, that raises a question about how I know what my moral obligation in a concrete situation is. How, on their view, could I possibly have personal insight into this? It looks as though personal insight into moral principles is exactly what we could not have. We must know them instead by the testimony of experts. The question of what our moral obligations are must apparently become one for moral philosophers with specialist knowledge of social science to answer. It is for them to evolve an ideal ethical code fit for our time, which they can then promulgate to the rest of us. Does this not return us to a command model of morality, command in this case being by ethics committees rather than by God?

It seems to me that there is great tension in the attitudes of many contemporary moral philosophers on this point. On the one hand, they idealize morality as self-governance, and abominate the idea that some specialists should be telling us what our moral duties are. They believe fervently in what Hegel calls the right of the subjective will. On the other hand, they cannot see how, in a purely naturalistic perspective, morality can be founded on anything other than some theory of the good. And that seems to subvert the principle of personal moral insight.

VI

How can one avoid these two difficulties? Well, a view that avoids them consists in, first, adopting individualistic constructivism as an account of the ontology of morality, and second, taking a firmly non-teleological view of morality's content. That of course looks pretty close to Kant. However, neither of these responses amounts yet to transcendental

[12] G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, 2nd edn., ed. Thomas Baldwin (Cambridge, 1993), p. 196.
[13] Ibid., p. 199.
[14] I borrow the term 'ideal code' from Brad Hooker, *Ideal Code, Real World* (Oxford, 2000).

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idealism. So how does transcendental idealism get onto the moral scene?

As we know, Kant thinks that transcendental idealism answers many apparently distinct philosophical problems, not all of them connected with ethics. But I think Schneewind is right to highlight the way in which it also gives Kant a basis for something which he cares passionately about: namely, the moral equality of human beings, in the specific sense of their *equal competence as moral agents*. On the very last page of his book, Schneewind hints that he shares this passion:

> if we share [Kant's] passionate conviction concerning the equal moral capacity of all normal human beings and their equal dignity, we may well think that something like his basic moral principle is more likely to yield an adequate solution to our problems than any other principle yet invented.[15]

Schneewind does not explain, however, how Kant's basic moral principle, by which I take it he means the categorical imperative, is going to sustain this passionate conviction – unless it is fortified by a belief in the noumenal status and causality of reason. For the idea that there is some naturalized version of the categorical imperative that can provide a simple enough moral compass to give everyone equal competence in moral decisions, whatever their empirical cognitive abilities and moral sensibilities are, and however hard the decisions may be, is, to be frank, grossly utopian. You only have to look at the various attempts to reconstruct that principle as a criterion of moral obligation. They are extraordinarily elusive and hard to apply. And if they are at all plausible they depend on arcane assessment of consequences. So even if something of this kind could after all work, it would not be the easy tool for ordinary people that Kant envisages. The naturalized Kantians, just like those who take morality to have teleological content, are going to end up with moral principles that are evolved by specialists. If conscience is what tells us our duty on the specific occasion, neither group can plausibly claim to explain its authority.

VII

Where does this leave the conception of morality as self-governance? Let's first ask on what it is based. For Kant, our autonomy is a transcendental truth about us, or at least a transcendental possibility which he has shown to be coherent. But what can be said for self-governance if we do not follow this transcendental path?

First, it is a feature of human beings as we know them that they do have strong and particular moral convictions which they hold on the

[15] *Invention*, p. 554.

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basis of what they take to be personal insight. People are often very certain about what they ought or ought not to do, without having to ask any alleged experts, and these convictions powerfully shape their actions.

Second, looking at this fact from a teleological standpoint, say that of impartially considered general welfare, it appears as a useful rather than a harmful fact about us. In other words, our personal moral convictions are not so badly aligned with general welfare that it would be better if they did not exist. Far from it. Our actual, inherited patterns of moral intuition, with their internal disciplines of conscience and guilt, clearly have virtues which no attempt to regulate behaviour by external social control alone could have.

And third, the conception of ourselves as bound by principles which we ourselves can acknowledge and apply, as morally free agents, is the basis of an ideal that many people find inspiring and wish to live up to.

In short, morality as self-governance is a modern conception which on the one hand it is pretty unwise to seek to undermine, and which on the other appeals very powerfully to some rightly influential ideals of what it is to live freely. If it is an ideology it is an ideology that it is good to hold on to.

But how then do we respond to the challenges I have pointed out? I think we can do so realistically only by some crucial modifications that will shift us from the conception Kant sought to defend. I think they shift us towards Hegel's idea of moral agency and moral community, but I shall not pursue that historical point. Instead I want to consider the challenges as such, taking them in reverse order.

First, then, the question of equal moral competence. Kant is surely right that a certain distinctive attitude, *respect*, is appropriate towards the person who sees his duty for himself and acts upon it. A person may earn respect in a more general sense, as a deadly striker of the ball, or as an excellent mathematician; but only righteousness, conscientiousness, or virtue – good moral agency – earns him or her respect 'as a human being'. Moreover, this is a fundamental, existential, sort of respect. To value footballing or mathematical skills more highly than good moral agency is to pervert the proper hierarchy of value.[16]

But if moral respect is so fundamental, is it not hard to face up to a non-transcendental, empirically based and pessimistic view according to which some people have greater moral competence than others? Does this not imply that some deserve less respect as human beings than others – and through no fault of their own?

[16] There are questions to be examined about what 'value more highly' means, but I take it as evident that we do in some sense subscribe to such a hierarchy.

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This question goes to the heart of one of our deepest modern imperatives, which is to regard everyone with equal respect. So a short answer is unlikely to convince. Nonetheless, I think, in short, that this particular worry rests on a mistake. It is wrong to think that differential moral competence entails differential moral respect. Respect of this most fundamental kind is due to the person who sincerely and conscientiously thinks about her moral obligations, and acts on her conclusions. Anyone who has a capacity of moral insight at all can do that, whatever its degree. Take Tom, who is just *unable* to grasp obligations of gratitude. By the insight principle he *has* no such obligations. But he can still conscientiously think about what his moral obligations are and sincerely attempt to act upon them. If he does that, he deserves respect. Moral worth consists in acting from duty. Tom will not, it is true, get the admiration we reserve for people of great moral imagination and sensibility, but that is another matter.

The second problem I mentioned arises if one accepts some constitutive element of teleology in one's account of moral obligation. If what *makes* an action morally obligatory is some fact concerning its connection to good consequences, then how can one have personal moral insight into one's moral obligations?

The answer is that one cannot. If the principle of personal moral insight is correct, then we must give up the idea that what *makes* an action morally obligatory is some fact concerning its connection to the good. However, even if teleology cannot enter into the constitution of moral obligations it can have a role to play in their epistemology. Considerations coming from a theory of the good can *defeat* my moral intuitions concerning the permissibility or otherwise of a type of act. In the absence of such defeating information, those intuitions about duty on their own provide moral knowledge of duty. In its presence they no longer do. I am not interested here in when and how this happens, specifically – just in the possibility as such. The point to note is that it does not affect the principle of personal moral insight, which says that one can tell, in any state of information, what one's moral obligations are – if we allow that one's moral obligations (as against the question of what it was in fact best to do) are relative to what one knows about the facts. Thus the infallibility of conscience, of my insight into my moral obligations, is not undermined by allowing that what I have warrant to believe about consequences enters into determining those obligations.[17]

There remains the question of the authority, as against the fallibility, of conscience. How can it provide moral knowledge, in the absence

[17] The infallibility of conscience, on this account, is parallel to the 'infallibility' of epistemic warrant. In both cases it arises from the idea that it must be possible for me to tell what I am warranted in doing, or believing.

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of some individualist and constructivist story about the ontology of moral obligation? It is a question of how to reconcile the authority of personal moral intuition with a reasonable account of moral knowledge, in particular, with proper acknowledgement of the role that discussion with others plays in acquiring it. We do not want that discussion to be a one-way consultation with experts. That would be morality as obedience not morality as self-governance. In the end you must be able to see for yourself, to your own satisfaction, what your moral obligations are. But discussion with others must somehow be able to come into it before you reach the end.

So where does all this leave morality as self-governance? In the Kantian version its central principle, that of personal moral insight, is absolutely individualistic, absolutely egalitarian, and absolutely indefeasible.[18] Without the noumenal character of reason, none of these absolutisms can be sustained. Morality as self-governance must be more down-to-earth, more collectively constituted, and by the same token messier and more complicated. Even then, one can wonder how widely influential this ideal – even in a realistic reinterpretation – can be. Over and above the philosophical questions I have raised for it, and which I think are answerable, there is the question of what appeal it can have, and to whom. Our culture is interested in many things to do with the self – self-expression, self-emancipation, self-empowerment, personal choice, living your life your own way, and the like. The ideal to which it adheres, one could say, is 'spontaneity of consciousness' rather than 'strictness of conscience'.[19] This is good in many vital ways. However, in this prevailing culture of the self, how widely or deeply felt can be an idea of moral obligation as a summons from the innermost self – the internalization of morality into self-identity that is implicit in, or at least strongly invited by, the ideal of morality as self-governance?[20]

Here are two eloquent statements of the idea I am raising my question about:

(1) Conscience . . . is that deepest inner solitude within oneself in which all externals and all limitation have disappeared – it is a total withdrawal into the self. As conscience, the human being is no longer bound by the ends of particularity, so that conscience represents an exalted point of view, a point of view of the modern world, which has for the first time attained this consciousness, this descent into the self. Earlier and more sensuous ages have

[18] Although, as mentioned in n. 10, in the Doctrine of Virtue Kant seems to allow that conscientious conviction may be mistaken.

[19] I say a bit more about this in 'Liberty's Hollow Triumph', in my *Ethical Explorations* (Oxford, 2000). They both have their degenerate forms.

[20] I am putting this vaguely, because how the idea of morality as self-identity is connected to the more everyday ideal of morality as self-governance seems to me a complex question.

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before them something external and given, whether this be religion or right; but [my] conscience knows itself as thought, and that this thought of mine is my sole source of obligation.[21]

(2) The call of conscience has the character of an appeal to Dasein by calling it to its ownmost potentiality-for-Being-its-Self . . . Conscience summons Dasein's Self from its lostness in the 'they' . . . *In conscience Dasein calls itself* . . . The call comes *from* me and yet *from beyond me* . . . [22]

Conscience, then, is withdrawal from 'particularity' and from 'lostness in the "they"'; it is also withdrawal *into* the self, which therefore lies beyond these, at least in some ultimate way, arrived at by total withdrawal or deepest descent – the call comes from me and yet from beyond me. The question about this idea of interiority-as-universality, it seems to me, is not so much whether we understand it. I think we do. It is whether it can still be credible, inspiring, or compelling as a way of finding value in one's life – or whether we belong to a more 'sensuous', or just a more prosaic, age.

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[21] *Philosophy of Right*, §136 Addition (H).
[22] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John MacQuarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford, 1962). The quotations are assembled from pp. 314, 319 and 320.

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