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Four Conceptions of Conscience

Controversies about the nature, reliability, and importance of conscience have a long history. Diverse opinions reflect not only differences in theological beliefs and political context but also deep divisions in moral theory. Some scholars hold that relying on conscience is a sure path to morally correct, or at least blameless, conduct and that the imperative to follow one's conscience is unconditional, taking precedence over all other authorities. Making moral decisions conscientiously and sticking by them are widely thought to be essential ingredients of integrity, and some would add that they also affirm one's autonomy and individuality.

This sanguine view of individual conscience has not been shared by all, however. Many traditional moralists place more confidence in church and state authority than in private conscience, arguing that those authorities have better access to moral truth or that, practically, giving precedence to individual conscience is a recipe for anarchy. Observing that those people who rely on conscience often approve of radically different practices, including some that may seem outrageous, many reflective people understandably come to doubt that conscience is each individual's unerring access to moral truth. Recalling how often cruel and destructive conduct has been excused in the name of conscience, they naturally question as well even the more modest doctrine that following one's conscience guarantees a *blameless* life.

These controversies provide the background for my discussion, although I shall not address them directly. My more modest aim is to highlight, as a preliminary aid to understanding the larger issues, some of the similarities and differences among four important conceptions of conscience. In particular, I want to call attention to the various ways in which these conceptions interpret the origin, function, and reliability of conscience. How one conceives conscience makes a significant difference regarding one's attitude toward one's own conscience and the (alleged) conscientious judgments of others. So, in contrasting the four conceptions of conscience, I also call attention to the implications of each conception regarding whether and (if so) why one should respect

conscience in oneself and in others. More specifically, for each conception, I address the following question: If one conceives conscience in this way, and confidently so, then to what extent and why should one (1) treat the apparent promptings of one's own conscience as one's authoritative guide and (2) respectfully tolerate the conduct of others when they are apparently guided by conscience?[1]

Here I differentiate between various particular 'conceptions' of conscience and a general 'concept' of conscience in a way analogous to John Rawls's distinction between the general concept of justice and various particular conceptions of justice.[2] That is, the several *conceptions* of conscience are specific interpretations, or more detailed understandings, of a general *concept*, or core idea, of conscience. The core idea that they have in common is, roughly, the idea of a capacity, commonly attributed to most human beings, to sense or immediately discern that what he or she has done, is doing, or is about to do (or not do) is wrong, bad, and worthy of disapproval.[3] Moreover, the general concept, I assume, includes the idea that a person's conscience, whatever else it may be, is something that apparently influences (but rarely, if ever, completely controls) that person's conduct. It also is something that, when disregarded, tends to result in mental discomfort and lowered self-esteem.

This general idea leaves open further questions about how conscience is acquired and developed, how it operates, what it purports to 'say,'

[1] What do the various conceptions imply, for example, about whether we should endorse and protect other people's reliance on conscience? Which conceptions, if any, imply that the voices of conscience in others are relevant data for our own moral decision making? Do they imply that we must tolerate the conscientious acts of others even when we are convinced that their judgments are mistaken and harmful and, if so, within what limits?

[2] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 5 ff. The concept of justice, according to Rawls, is specified by the role that different particular conceptions are supposed to have in common. It is, roughly, the idea of publicly affirmed principles that assign basic rights and duties and determine a proper distribution of benefits and burdens in a cooperative scheme. By contrast, the particular 'conceptions of justice' characterized by justice as fairness, utilitarianism, and perfectionism are different ways of specifying what the principles are that should play the general social role of a concept of justice.

[3] Roughly, to say that conscience is a capacity to 'sense or immediately discern' is to say that it is a way of arriving at the relevant moral beliefs about our acts by means of feeling, instinct, or personal judgment. Becoming convinced by conscience that our conduct is immoral is supposed to be distinct from reaching that conclusion by explicitly appealing to external authorities or by engaging in discussion with others, although perhaps most people would grant that public opinion and authoritative pronouncements tend to influence the development of consciences and so may indirectly affect what conscience 'says' on particular occasions.

how trustworthy it is as a moral guide, whether it is universal or found only in certain cultures, what purposes it serves individuals and society, and even whether saying 'her conscience tells her to' is a purely descriptive statement or one that also expresses the speaker's attitudes or moral beliefs. These particular conceptions of conscience are the various ways in which questions such as these are addressed in moral theories, in systems of theology, and also in less articulated, popular ways of thinking that extend (and sometimes distort) religious and scientific ideas prevalent in a culture.

Although it will become evident where my sympathies lie, it is not my aim to argue that one or another of these conceptions is correct or even—all things considered—superior to the others. I do not pretend to be neutral regarding the merits of the various conceptions under discussion, but my primary purpose here is merely to sketch the different conceptions, note significant variations, and draw out some of their practical implications.

Besides this, I have another aim that leads me to make some more explicitly evaluative remarks. The context is my ongoing project to develop a moral theory in the Kantian tradition that is as plausible as possible. This gives me a reason to examine and call attention to the merits and weaknesses of various conceptions of conscience from this perspective. The point is to consider how a reasonable, modified Kantian ethics should interpret conscience and why it should reject other interpretations.[4] Although Kant's own account of conscience is one of the four conceptions to be considered, it is not necessarily the best conception, even for my purposes, simply because Kant proposed it. The reason is that developing a plausible 'Kantian' moral theory requires selectively endorsing some of Kant's claims and rejecting others, according to one's best judgment as to what is both sustainable and most fundamental to the theory. Since a full exposition and defense of such a theory is obviously impossible here, my evaluative remarks should be understood for now as tentative and hypothetical, suggesting reasons that if one adopts certain basic features of a Kantian ethics, it is preferable to interpret conscience in a certain way and not in others.

The four conceptions of conscience, briefly described, are the following: first, a popular religious view that bases a strong confidence in an instinctual conscience on theological beliefs about its origin and

[4] I describe features of a Kantian ethical theory that I regard as most plausible—as distinct from aspects of Kant's own view that I regard as untenable—in my previous essays, some of which are collected in *Dignity and Practical Reason*. Others include chs. 1, 2, and 5 in my *Respect, Pluralism, and Justice*, and Chs. 3 and 9 of this volume.

purpose; second, a deflationary cultural relativism that regards conscience as nothing but an unreflective response to the socially instilled values of one's culture, no matter what these happen to be; third, Joseph Butler's idea of conscience as reason, making moral judgments by reflecting 'in a cool hour' on what conduct is morally appropriate, given human nature and the facts of one's situation; and fourth, Kant's narrower, metaphorical conception of conscience as 'an inner judge' that condemns (or acquits) one for inadequate (or adequate) effort to live according to one's best possible, though fallible, judgments about what (objectively) one ought to do.[5]

My comments on the relations of the first three conceptions are too diverse to summarize briefly, but my main suggestions regarding the Kantian perspective are the following: First, Kant's conception of conscience makes room for some central ideas in each of the other conceptions while avoiding aspects of them that, at least from the basic Kantian perspective, are problematic. Furthermore, Kant's own account of conscience does fit coherently with the basic features of his moral theory, even though it might seem at first that 'conscience' should have no place in rationalistic moral theories such as Kant's.

In the Kantian view, we must treat basic moral beliefs as known, or to be determined, through *reason*.[6] When we deliberately try to apply general principles to particular kinds of problems, we use *judgment*, and whether we act on our moral beliefs depends on the strength and goodness of our *wills*. *Conscience*, however, is not the same as reason, judgment, or will. In fact, Kant assigns conscience a limited role in his moral theory. It is not a moral expert with an intuition of moral truth or a moral legislator that makes moral laws or a moral arbitrator that settles perplexing cases. Rather, the role of conscience is restricted to that of an 'inner judge' who scrutinizes our conduct and then imposes sentence on us as guilty or else acquits us of either of two charges: (1) that we

[5] 'Adequate effort' here is meant to cover 'due care' in forming judgments about what one ought to do as well as firmness of will in following these judgments. It is intended to cover both of Kant's somewhat different accounts of conscience, which I describe later. The first account is in MM, 26–7 [6: 234–5], 156 [6: 399], and 188–9 [6: 438–40]. The second is in R, 178–9 [6: 185–6].

[6] It is important to note that from the Kantian point of view, reason is not regarded as a faculty of intuition by which we can 'see' certain moral norms as 'self-evident.' However, to say something is determined by reason also does not mean that it is provable in any formal way. Practical reason is not simply instrumental, determining efficient means to our ends. Rather, it is supposed to be a shared capacity of moral agents to think from a common point of view that respects and takes into account the interests of all.

contravened our own (reason-based) judgment about what is morally right or (2) that we failed to exercise due care and diligence in forming the particular moral opinions on which we acted. Presupposing rather than providing our basic understanding of morality, conscience brings into focus a sometimes painful awareness, not that our action is 'objectively' wrong but that we are not even making a proper effort to guide ourselves by our own deepest moral beliefs.

For general moral guidance, especially in perplexing cases, Kant agrees with Butler that we should not rely on instinct but on reason in deliberate reflection. Kant granted that conscience (narrowly construed) should be considered authoritative within its limited sphere, but he also believed a further point that others (such as Butler) might describe as 'respecting the authority of conscience' because they work with a broader conception of conscience. That is, Kant's moral theory holds that each of us must, in the end, treat our own (final) moral judgments as authoritative, even though they are fallible. When others disagree, we must listen to them and take into account their reasons; and when civil authorities demand conformity, we must give due regard to the moral reasons for obeying such authorities. Having taken all this into account, however, each of us must carefully make and rigorously follow our own best moral judgment.[7] To do so, in Kant's view, enables us to live with a clear conscience, but it does not guarantee that our acts are objectively right (since our moral judgment may be misguided).

1. INSTINCTIVE ACCESS TO MORAL TRUTH

Let us begin with a popular religious conception—conscience as God-given instinctual access to moral truth. There are many variations, but for contrast, I shall describe an extreme version. Here are the main themes.

1. Each human being is born with a latent conscience, which (barring certain tragic interferences) emerges into its full working capacity in youth or young adulthood. It is a capacity to identify, among one's own acts, motives, intentions, and aims, those that are morally wrong and

[7] It is significant that despite Kant's rigorous condemnation of participating in revolutionary activities, he granted that one must refuse to obey state orders to do what one judges wrong in itself. See MM, 98 [6: 322] and 136 [6: 371]; also Hans Reiss, 'Postscript', in Hans Reiss (ed.), *Kant: Political Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 267–8; and R, 153n [6: 154].

those that are permissible (i.e., not wrong). Conscience, however, does not identify acts and motives as morally admirable and praiseworthy. At best, conscience is 'clear' or 'clean,' not self-congratulating.

2. That certain acts, such as murder and adultery, are morally wrong is a matter of objective fact, independent of our consciences. That is, what makes such acts wrong is not just that they are, or would be, disapproved of by the agent's conscience or even the consciences of everyone. However, once our conscience has persuaded us that to perform a certain act would be wrong, there arises the possibility of doing a second wrong, namely, violating our conscience. Since this is intentionally doing what we believe to be morally wrong, it is generally regarded as wrong, independently of whether our initial moral belief is correct.[8]

3. In acknowledging the wrongness of an act, our conscience gives us a sense that we cannot comfortably view that act as something that was, is, or will be optional, to be pursued or not according to our interests. It imposes painful feelings of self-disapproval when it recognizes the wrongs of our past or ongoing activities, and it threatens the same when we entertain future plans that it would condemn.

4. Conscience originates as God's gift to human beings, a special access to moral truth that can work independently of church authority and rational reflection.[9] Its authority, moreover, stems from the fact that its content is part of God's own knowledge and/or will. That is, it stems from the part that God chose to make accessible to us, for our guidance, in this special way.[10]

[8] The possibility of this second wrong, in regard to our moral beliefs, is the source of a number of traditional puzzles and controversies about conscience. For example, if we 'conscientiously' believe an act to be a duty when it is 'objectively wrong,' then it seems, paradoxically, that we must inevitably do wrong, no matter what we do: either we (unknowingly) do what is objectively wrong or else (intentionally) do what we believe is wrong, which is a wrong of another kind. Philosophers have responded to this puzzle in various ways, depending on whether they grant that conscience can 'err,' whether they believe that there are 'objective wrongs' defined independently of the agent's intention, and whether they judge the source of moral error to be culpable or inculpable in origin. See Alan Donagan, 'Conscience', in Lawrence and Charlotte Becker (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics*, 2nd edn. (New York: Garland Press, 1992), i. 297–9.

[9] Note that the 'natural law' tradition in Western religious ethics, unlike the popular conception, emphasizes individuals' reason as their mode of access to moral truth. This makes the view more similar to Kant's, which is why, for starker contrast, I selected the 'popular' view.

[10] According to some, conformity or nonconformity to God's commands is what constitutes objective right and wrong. According to others, objective features of the acts are what make them wrong. But either way, all who accept the popular religious conception agree that God in fact forbids and disapproves of wrong acts while commanding and approving conformity to duty. All agree that it is generally wrong to act contrary to conscience, but this is not because it is thought that the objective wrongness of acts in general consists simply of their being against the agent's conscience. Rather, acts against conscience are typically wrong because, given that conscience is our God-given means of access to the truth about what is objectively right and wrong, the acts that conscience warns us against are truly wrong (independently of that warning).

When I say that the wrongness of acts against conscience is not in general constituted by their being against conscience, the qualification is important. In those special cases in which, owing to error of conscience, the acts (described independently of the agents' beliefs and conscience) are not in fact wrong (even though the agents think they are), the agents still would be doing something wrong (namely, 'intentionally doing what they believe wrong') by acting against conscience. In this special case, the wrongness does consist entirely of the acts being violations of conscience.

5. Appealing to conscience is not the same as using rational, reflective judgment to resolve moral questions. Conscience may be partly shaped and informed by such judgments, as well as by public debates, religious education, and the like, but it is pictured as operating not so much like an intellectual moral adviser as like an instinct-governed, internal 'voice' or sign that 'tells' us what we must or must not do, warns us when tempted, and prods us to reform when guilty.[11]

6. Once we have correctly identified and heard its 'voice,' conscience is a reliable source of knowledge of our own moral responsibilities in particular contexts. The story is that God gave each of us a conscience as a guide for our own conduct, not for judging or goading others. Each of us is commanded to follow our conscience and is directly accountable to God for having done so or not. Judging that an act is wrong for us means that it is wrong for everyone unless there is a relevant difference between the cases, but others' cases may differ in so many ways that we have no practical license to make extensive generalizations from what we 'learn' from our own conscience.

A more modest thesis might say that following our conscience is a reliable guide to living a blameless life and not necessarily a guarantee that we will do what is morally correct in every instance. The popular conception I have in mind, however, holds the stronger thesis that the voice of our conscience coincides with what is objectively right or wrong for us to do, that is, what it is correct, on the basis of the known facts, to judge as right or wrong.

Even this strong thesis, however, inevitably leaves a loophole for error. Whether or not we believe that conscience itself is infallible, we must still acknowledge that we can make mistakes about whether what we

[11] Typically our conscience is pictured not as judging the moral quality of particular acts from first principles but, rather, as identifying a limited class of (our own) wrong acts by means of the characteristic painful feelings aroused in contemplating them. This is a feature of several conceptions of conscience that fits well the metaphor of conscience as a warning, nagging, and reprimanding Jiminy Cricket or a tiny angel that follows us through tempting times. Butler's view is a partial exception.

take to be dictates of conscience are authentic. Wishful thinking, fear, childhood prejudices, and indoctrination in false ideologies can imitate or distort the voice of conscience, especially if we have dulled that voice by frequently disregarding it. So in effect, the doctrine that conscience is very reliable, even infallible, with regard to objective right and wrong is subject to practical qualifications. As with some marvelous technologies thought to be virtually 100 percent reliable if used properly by flawless operators under ideal conditions, errors of application occur but are blamed on the user, not the equipment.

What are the implications of this popular conception of conscience with regard to how we should treat it? First, what should our attitude be toward our own conscience? Since by hypothesis, conscience provides reliable access to both moral truth and subjective rightness, we would have good (moral) reason to avoid 'dulling' our conscience, to 'listen' carefully for its signals, and in general to be cautiously guided by what apparently it tells us to do. Several factors, however, can combine to recommend caution even to the firm believer in the popular conception. For example, although conscience is supposed to be a reliable signal of moral truth, it is not necessarily the only, or the most direct, means of determining what we ought to do. When secular and religious authorities, together with the professed conscientious judgments of others, all stand opposed to what we initially took to be the voice of conscience, then these facts should raise doubts. Even assuming that genuine pronouncements of conscience are infallible, we may not be infallible in distinguishing these from our wishes or fears or the echoes of past mentors. In effect, we may need to check our supposed instinctual access to moral truth by reviewing more directly the relevant evidence and arguments, for example, concerning intended benefits and harms, promises fulfilled or broken, and the responsibilities of our social role. To confirm that our instinctive response is a reflection of 'true conscience' rather than a morally irrelevant feeling, we would need to consult other sources, for example, to see whether the response coincides with reflective moral judgment, based on a careful review of pertinent facts in consultation with others.

Without such a check, there is no way to be confident that the instinct on which we are about to rely is 'conscience' rather than some baser instinct. By analogy, suppose that we believe we have an intuitive sense that somehow regularly signals dishonesty in job applicants when this 'sense' is properly identified and used under ideal conditions. Although the suspicions we formed by consulting this intuitive sense might serve as useful warning signs, they would not be a substitute for investigating the candidates' records and seeking direct evidence of dishonest conduct. Only an examination of the relevant facts could ascertain whether what we suppose is an accurate intuitive signal really is so.

Second, how should we regard the consciences of others? Here, again, it is clear that the popular conception, if true, would give us some reason to encourage others to develop and listen to their consciences and to tolerate their conscientious acts within limits. However, we should be cautious in trusting the appearance of conscience, for others are presumably just as subject as we are to self-deception in identifying conscience, and besides, they may intentionally deceive us about what they really believe. Again, when opinions differ, a check seems needed, for how can we reasonably believe another's claim that what he or she is following is really an instinctual 'sense' of moral right and wrong, rather than an instinct of another kind, unless the person can give plausible moral reasons for thinking that what 'the voice' recommends is right?

From a Kantian perspective, the popular religious conception is untenable for several reasons. First, it draws conclusions about ethics from theology, whereas Kant insisted that whatever reasonable beliefs we can have about God must be based on prior moral knowledge, not the reverse. Second, the popular view of conscience as instinctual access to God's mind or will omits (what the Kantian takes to be) the prior and indispensable roles of reason and judgment in determining what we ought to do. For Kantians, what is morally required is ultimately a matter of what free and reasonable people, with a proper respect for one another, would agree to accept as a constraint on the pursuit of self-interest and other goals. That is not the sort of thing that we could claim to know directly 'by instinct.' Once we have a basic grasp of the reasons for moral principles and acknowledge their authority because of this, our respect for the principles may be signaled by unbidden 'pangs' and 'proddings' that feel like instinctual responses. But from the Kantian perspective, what should make us count these as signs of conscience is the plausibility of seeing the feelings as due to the agent's internal acceptance of what he or she judges to be reasonable moral principles.

Third, the popular religious conception regards the voice of conscience—when it has been identified as authentic—to be a completely reliable, even infallible, reflection of moral truth, but Kantian ethics (rightly, I think) rejects the idea that there is any way we can infallibly judge the morality of particular acts. Although Kant himself had confidence that reason could provide certainty regarding basic principles and

many substantive duties, the basic Kantian view of moral deliberation and judgment, as I understand it, leaves more room for uncertainty and error than Kant allowed regarding specific moral questions. The reason is that in the Kantian view, moral deliberation and judgment are processes by which we try to identify choices that we could justify to all other reasonable persons, and the processes require subtle application of fundamental moral principles to empirical circumstances that are often uncertain and only partially understood.[12]

II. MERE INTERNALIZED SOCIAL NORMS

Those who cannot accept theological accounts of the origin and function of conscience often adopt an extreme cultural relativist conception, perhaps because they assume this to be the only secular alternative.[13] The term *relativism* is, of course, used loosely to refer to many different ideas, but what I mean by 'an extreme cultural relativist conception' of conscience (or ECR, for short) sees the promptings of conscience as nothing but feelings (1) that reflect our internalization of whatever choice-guiding, cultural norms we have internalized and (2) that serve to promote social cohesion by disposing individuals to conform to group standards. This conception replaces the theological story about the origin and function of conscience with a contemporary sociological hypothesis, but more radically, it goes beyond this empirical hypothesis by claiming that conscience reflects 'nothing but' whatever cultural choice-guiding norms we have internalized. That is, ECR is actually a combination of (1) a widely accepted causal explanation of the genesis and social function of the feelings ascribed to 'conscience' and (2) the controversial philosophical thesis that what is called *conscience* is not, even in the best case, a mode of access to moral truth, knowledge, or objectively justifiable moral beliefs.

What I call *conceptions* of conscience are complexes of beliefs

[12] Kant, as we shall see, does at one point claim conscience to be infallible, but there is a catch. It is not an infallible guide to objective moral truth, but only an (allegedly) infallible judgment that we violated our own principles or failed to exercise due care and diligence in moral judgment.

[13] Types of relativism are usefully distinguished in Richard Brandt, *Ethical Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959), ch. 11, pp. 271–94; William Frankena, *Ethics*, 2nd edn. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1973), ch. 6, esp. 109–10; and James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1986), 12–24. See also John Ladd (ed.), *Relativism* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1973); and David Wong, *Moral Relativity* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984).

about how feelings of conscience come about, what purpose they serve, and how reliable they are as a guide to moral truth or well-justified moral belief. Accordingly, what I call ECR is not merely a view of the origin of conscience but also a view of its social function and reliability as a moral guide. Regarding origin, ECR explains the 'conscientious' person's feelings of constraint as due to a learning process by which he inwardly accepts local cultural norms as his standard of self-approval. Regarding function, ECR sees the development of conscience as a way by which social groups secure a measure of conformity to their standards without relying entirely on external rewards and punishments. Regarding reliability, ECR holds that although conscience reliably reflects the local norms that we have taken up from our environment, there is no objective standard by which we can ever determine that some cultural norms, but not others, are morally 'true' or 'justified.'

To avoid misunderstanding, I must stress that this second conception of conscience, the ECR, is not merely the scientist's refusal, as a matter of methodology, to include moral judgments and metaethical doctrines as a part of scientific theory. That attitude, in fact, is one that advocates of other conceptions of conscience may well applaud. Also, ECR is much more than an empirical hypothesis about the origin and social function of feelings attributed to conscience. If it were just that, it would be compatible with a variety of theories about moral justification and truth, including contemporary Kantian theories that disassociate themselves from certain aspects of Kant's metaphysics.[14]

Moral theory is not science, of course, but any moral theory that is worthy of contemporary support should, in my opinion, at least be compatible with empirical explanations regarded as well established in the current scientific community. What especially distinguishes ECR from the other three conceptions reviewed here is its deflationary stance regarding the nature and justifiability of moral beliefs, which is a

[14] It is not obvious whether Kant himself could have consistently accepted the particular empirical account that I attribute to ECR, although it is clear that he rejected its 'nothing but' thesis. Kant was deeply committed to the idea that all 'phenomena,' including those associated with human thought and action, are in principle subject to empirical causal explanations when viewed as natural occurrences from a scientific point of view. He also insisted that the same, or corresponding, phenomena related to human action can be 'thought' under practical 'ideas' of free will, rational justification, and so forth when one considers them from an irreducibly different perspective needed to make sense of morality. Many, if not most, contemporary Kantian moral theorists, I think, accept the validity of both the empirical and the practical perspectives but want to reconcile them without Kant's 'transcendental idealism.'

position reached only by a giant step beyond empirical explanation into an area of perennial philosophical controversy.

Returning now to the main task of describing the ECR and its implications, I should note that like my first (theological) conception, the ECR also treats conscience as something experienced as an instinctual feeling rather than as a deliberate judgment about how basic moral principles apply to particular circumstances.[15] Briefly, the picture is something like the following: The origin of conscience is largely early socialization, resulting in cultural norms being so deeply internalized that we respond to them for the most part without thinking about them. The 'voice' of conscience is a felt discomfort, analogous to 'cognitive dissonance,' generated by a conflict between our (perhaps unarticulated) awareness of what we are doing and a cultural norm that we have internalized.[16] The discomfort is a signal not that an objectively true moral principle has been violated or threatened but merely that we are about to step across some line that early influences have deeply etched on our personality. As cultures differ, then, we expect variations in what consciences disapprove. And even when we find uniformities, we regard them merely as signs that different cultures have some common social needs and processes, not that we have discovered universal moral truths.[17]

What are the implications of ECR regarding the attitude we should take toward our own conscience? If ECR is true, virtually everyone will spontaneously feel that certain acts are 'bad' and 'worthy of disapproval,' but how should an informed and reflective person who accepts ECR regard these feelings and respond to them? Clearly, these feelings should be seen for just what they are (according to ECR), namely, a fairly reliable sign that some past, present, or anticipated action of our own violates some cultural norm that we have internalized. The result is that we can expect to experience further internal discomfort and to incur the disapproval of others if we continue acting as before (or as planned). These expectations give a prudent person a self-interested

[15] It shows itself in a 'sense,' often painful, that something that one has done, is doing, or is about to do is wrong and blameworthy; it has motivational force; and people are inclined, at least initially, to treat their own consciences as authoritative, a reliable sign of something deeper and more important than mere customs or personal preferences.

[16] See Gilbert Ryle, 'Conscience', *Analysis*, 7 (1940), 31–9. This is reprinted with other discussions of conscience in John Donnelly and Leonard Lyons (eds.), *Conscience* (New York: Alba House, 1973), 25–34.

[17] Virtually all complex societies consist of various subcultures, which may instill somewhat different norms in their participants. This accounts for variations and conflicts of conscience, but it does not alter the fundamental story.

reason to 'heed conscience.' And if a person's culture's norms serve socially useful purposes, that person would have some altruistic reason to obey the promptings of 'conscience.' On the other side, however, those who accept ECR also have reason to try to 'see through,' dispel, or discount the feeling that to violate conscience would be 'wrong,' 'immoral,' or 'unreasonable' by any objective, culturally independent standard. Moreover, when the rewards of acting against conscience outweigh the unpleasantness of residual guilt feelings and predictable social disapproval, then the smart thing to do, believing ECR, would presumably be to stifle conscience or, if need be, simply tolerate the discomfort it causes in order to gain the greater rewards.

If we accept ECR, how are we to view the consciences of others? Since a person with a conscience is liable to suffer inwardly when contravening it and this normally serves as a deterrent, we have a self-interested reason to be pleased when others' consciences discourage behavior that we dislike. Moreover, insofar as we are concerned for the others, we should be glad when their consciences prompt social conformity that is useful to them, but otherwise we should merely pity them for their unnecessary inhibitions and needless suffering.[18]

Kantians obviously reject some features of ECR, but not necessarily all. It is important not to mislocate the major disagreement. Despite what some might suppose, it is arguable that the ECR's empirical hypothesis about the development of conscience, or some similar empirical account, should pose no special problem for the Kantian perspective.[19] The main deep point of disagreement concerns ECR's denial of objective standards of moral reasoning and judgment. This denial is often mistakenly thought to be a logical consequence of the empirical hypothesis, but as the philosophical literature on relativism repeatedly points out, the empirical observations that cultural standards differ and that people tend to internalize their local standards do not, by themselves, prove anything about objectivity in morals or any other field.

[18] If obedience to conscience is essential to our sense of integrity and self-respect, then, other things being equal, we should no doubt want to encourage them to act conscientiously. But according to ECR, conscience is not something to be especially treasured, protected, and tolerated, at least not for the reasons suggested by the popular conception—that conscience is God-given, that it signals moral truth and motivates moral conduct, and that even if mistaken, those who try to follow it are obeying a divine/moral imperative (to follow their conscience to the best of their ability).

[19] Contemporary Kantians who reject certain aspects of Kant's metaphysics should expect that the development of conscience can be explained empirically, and in my opinion, there is no need to deny that conscience requires certain cultural contexts in which to develop.

Objectivity, whether in normative or descriptive matters, is not constituted simply by de facto agreement. By the same token, objectivity is not necessarily undermined by de facto disagreement.[20] The issues are more complicated than that and obviously cannot be resolved here, one way or the other. The point of mentioning the issue now is just to stress that although there remains an unresolved disagreement between ECR and the Kantian perspective, the main point at issue is a long-standing, many-sided controversy about moral objectivity (truth, justification, etc.). It is not a debate about whether the feelings attributed to conscience are empirically explicable and tend to reflect social influences that vary from culture to culture.

There is another, more minor difference between ECR and the other conceptions of conscience, including Kant's. This has to do with terminology. ECR, as presented here, treats 'conscience' as a broad descriptive term, covering felt responses to any action-guiding standard internalized in a culture. Having such a broad, evaluatively neutral term to refer to similar phenomena in different cultures is probably useful, for example, as a term of art in comparative anthropological studies. However, I suspect that the term *conscience* is commonly used more narrowly than this. At least the cultural norms attributed to conscience are usually assumed to be 'moral' norms, in a broad sense of 'moral' that contrasts with the norms attributed only to a society's laws, customs, religious rites, or code of etiquette or to specific club rules, gang taboos, prudential maxims, and the like.[21] This point could be accommodated in a more sophisticated cultural relativist (SCR) conception of conscience simply by stipulating that 'conscience' refers to our felt responses to the moral (as opposed to merely legal, customary, etc.) norms that we have internalized from our culture. To call norms 'moral' in this (weak) sense does not imply that the norms are 'true,'

[20] It should be noted, to avoid misunderstanding, that the Kantian perspective that I sketch is concerned not with actual, or *de facto*, agreement in the moral opinions of people across the world and history but, rather, with the regulative ideal of what free, reasonable, and mutually respectful people (defined in a certain way) would agree to if they were 'legislating' moral principles (under certain ideal conditions). This theory is subject to many objections, but not that it reduces objectivity to actual contingent agreement in people's moral opinions.

[21] For example, see the distinctions drawn by H. L. A. Hart, *Concept of Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), 163–80; and Kurt Baier, *The Moral Point of View* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1958). To say that the concepts of a group's 'custom,' 'law,' and so on differ from the concept of the group's 'moral' beliefs is not, of course, to deny either that the same prohibitions may belong to several categories or that the borders between categories are often fuzzy.

'correct,' or 'objectively justifiable,' and so a kind of neutrality would be maintained, even though the cases attributed to 'conscience' would be somewhat limited.

I conjecture, however, that even this broad, neutral sense of 'conscience' (SCR) differs in another respect from the narrower, more normative senses of conscience found in ordinary discourse and the other conceptions. If so, this is not in itself an objection to SCR, but to avoid confusion, the difference should be noted. What I suspect is that apart from social science, the term *conscience* is typically used in a partially laudatory sense or tone, implying or expressing the speaker's limited endorsement of the source, if not the content, of the beliefs he or she attributes to conscience. My speculation here can be put in either cognitivist or expressivist terms. That is, when we attribute a person's reluctance to act in a certain way to that person's 'conscience,' then typically either (1) we express an (endorsing) belief about the source of that person's reluctance—that is, that it is generally a reliable sign of what is objectively wrong for that person to do—or (2) we express an (endorsing) attitude toward the source—that is, approval of treating it as a guide generally to be followed. If so, the partial approval (commonly) expressed when we speak of a person's 'conscience' would explain why it sounds a bit odd (or not intended literally) when someone, outside anthropology class, says that Himmler's conscience told him to keep gassing Jews despite his momentary sympathy for them. If, as I suspect, Himmler's norms were fundamentally vicious, self-serving, and subversive of morality, then any bad feelings he may have had when thinking about violating them do not deserve to be called *pangs of conscience* in the usual (partially laudatory) sense.

Similarly, I suspect that Mark Twain had his tongue in his cheek when he attributed to 'conscience' Huck Finn's 'guilty' feelings about helping the slave, Jim, to escape. If it seems odd to say that Huck's conscience made him feel guilty for helping Jim, this may be because we suppose Huck was moved by a genuine (but not articulated) moral reason for helping him. By contrast, we suppose that Huck's reluctance to help Jim reflected no comparable moral commitment, only his having been socialized in an evil system.[22] Given the ways the word *conscience* commonly

[22] It is important to distinguish Huck Finn from others who may have had sophisticated, though gravely misguided, moral defenses of the slave system. Huck is described as going through the motions of considering 'reasons' and feeling (painfully) that the reasons would show that he 'should' in some sense not help Jim escape, but I still see it as more plausible to suppose that young Huck internalized his culture's attitudes without

expresses approval, the description of Huck seems paradoxical; it is as if we are told that the 'good' source of moral feelings in Huck is condemning him for doing what his (genuinely good) sense of humanity impels him to do. The oddity reflects the fact that we take the feelings we attribute to conscience as more worthy of attention than the feelings we would describe as merely responses to social upbringing. As perhaps the author intended, the paradox reminds us that far from being a sure sign of wrongdoing, the discomfort experienced in violating cultural norms may be nothing but an unfortunate side effect of doing what is really only decent and humane.

The endorsing function of the word *conscience* should not be exaggerated, however, for in many cases we acknowledge that others' 'consciences' prompt them to do what they think is morally right but what we consider extremely wrong. For example, I might say this of the Inquisitors who ordered heretics burned at the stake if their reasons and motives were convincingly 'moral' ones (e.g., saving the heretics from eternal torture) but applied in conjunction with false empirical and theological beliefs (e.g., burning them was necessary to that end). Alan Donagan believed that utilitarianism was deeply misguided, but he did not deny that people could sincerely follow consciences shaped ('corrupted') by utilitarian standards. Generally, given the common core concept of conscience, those who accept any of our four particular conceptions of conscience should be able to understand much of what others are saying when they speak of conscience.

Still, those who accept a particular normative conception of conscience tend to hold back the usual endorsing connotations of the term, or to cancel them partially, when describing others whom they suspect are making grave moral mistakes. That is, when we suppose that others are sincerely following their moral beliefs but doing what (we believe) is grossly immoral, we are inclined to say 'it was false (corrupt, not genuine) conscience that told him to do that.' Alternatively, we may say, 'You might describe them as conscientious in a sense, but those crimes couldn't have been prompted by conscience as I understand it.'[23]

much thought and that his more humane, moral sense was awakening through his friendship with Jim. Huck had to lie and cross the wishes of his elders to help Jim, but his history did not reveal him as someone with a deep commitment to moral ideals of truth-telling and obedience to adult rules.

For a different view of the 'consciences' of both Huck Finn and Heinrich Himmler, see Jonathan Bennett's challenging essay, 'The Conscience of Huckleberry Finn', *Philosophy*, 49 (1974), 123–34.

[23] These remarks about how those who have a particular normative conception of 'conscience' may speak of those who do not share their conception are in response to

III. REASON REFLECTING IN A COOL HOUR

In his *Fifteen Sermons* (1651) Joseph Butler articulated a conception of conscience as reflective moral judgment. Although as an Anglican bishop, Butler had theological beliefs that he thought supported his conception of conscience, in the *Sermons* he explicitly set himself the task of developing ethics from an empirical understanding of human nature.[24] Human nature, he argued, consists of several faculties, which have an organizing 'constitution' that determines their proper functions and relations.[25] The main aspects of human nature are particular passions, self-love, benevolence, and conscience. *Particular passions* are desires and aversions, loves and hates, for particular objects or events.[26] *Self-love* is a more sophisticated, higher-order desire for the satisfaction of a set of other desires, conceived as our 'happiness.' *Benevolence*, too, involves the desire to satisfy other desires, for it is the disposition to care about the happiness of others.[27]

the worry expressed by my commentators that, by my initial account, Kantians would have to say that only Kantians can have consciences. To say this would be a mistake. Clearly, using the broad core concept, we can be quite inclusive in attributing conscience, and those who hold one conception (e.g., Kantian) can acknowledge that anyone who lacks a conscience as Kantians conceive it may still have 'a conscience' as conceived in some other way. As long as we specify what we mean to attribute, we can understand one another, and there is no profit for moral theorists to haggle over who has exclusive title to the honorific term.

[24] From this perspective, he argued that observation of human conduct, properly described in plain English, was in conflict with the cynical views of human motivation expressed by Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville. Self-love is not, and indeed conceptually could not be, the only concern that moves us. Benevolence, conscience, and particular passions influence and sometimes override self-love. Other British moralists, Butler thought, underestimated the moral significance of self-love and too readily concluded that moral concern is simply concern for the general welfare. See Joseph Butler, *Five Sermons*, ed. Stephen L. Darwall (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1983).

[25] Butler did not pretend to describe human nature in evaluatively neutral terms. More like Plato than Hume, he freely speaks of the purposes for which faculties are 'designed,' always with the assumption that we thrive better as individuals and as a community when each faculty serves its function in a way judged by reason to be appropriate to the whole.

[26] Some are intrinsic, such as to solve a puzzle, to taste a cookie, or to help an injured bird, and some derivative, such as desires for tools, money, or medicine. Particular passions may be good or bad, inner-directed or outer-directed.

[27] These basic dispositions exist in different people to different degrees, Butler thought. How to express them suitably may, to some extent, differ according to this and other contextual features. Although all our basic dispositions are good, unless properly supervised they may pull us in different directions and result in immoral and destructive behavior.

The supervisory faculty, Butler says, is *conscience*.[28] He refers here to our capacity to deliberate reasonably before acting and taking proper account of our nature, circumstances, options, estimated consequences, and certain (supposedly obvious) deontological constraints. Such deliberation requires a time of 'calm,' 'cool' reflection, and the result—our deliberative judgment—is neither purely intellectual nor purely sentimental but, rather, 'a sentiment of the understanding' and 'a perception of the heart.'[29] Conscience has a limited motivational power, but its authority is unchallenged.[30] The reason is that its verdicts are conceived as, all things considered, deliberative judgments of our own reason, a faculty whose natural role is to supervise our conduct and direct us to a life that gives appropriate expression to all our basic natural dispositions. Based on this assumption, Butler argued that the recommendations of conscience, reasonable self-love, and reasonable benevolence coincide, even though they are conceptually distinct.[31]

In sum, Butler holds the following: (1) Conscience is in fact God-given but is recognizable as authoritative without its theological backing. (2) The voice of conscience is not a mysterious signal passively received ('heard') but, rather, is the verdict of our own active, reason-guided

[28] This is also described as 'the principle of reflection,' 'the moral faculty,' and 'reason.'

[29] Butler, *Five Sermons*, 69.

[30] That is, human nature is so constituted that anyone with a conscience is disposed to follow it, although sometimes we let other motives overpower it, and human beings with conscience take its judgments to reflect what they ought to do, all things considered, even when its demands are to give up some immediately pressing concern.

[31] More important to my present purposes, in arguing for this conclusion, Butler treats conscience as neither a power of pure 'rational intuition' nor the ability to deduce particular moral conclusions from abstract necessary 'principles of reason.' Admittedly, Butler does suggest that we have an unexplained (intuition-like?) grasp of deontological principles against deception, injustice, and unprovoked violence (*Five Sermons*, 70). But unlike those who identify moral judgment with rational intuition regarding particular cases, Butler seems to think that for the most part with conscience, we make reasoned judgments from a basic moral standard derived from natural teleology. The standard, admittedly vague but not empty, is that we should always do what is appropriate to the constitution of our human nature. That is, we must do what is 'fitting' for human beings, whose (empirically discerned) basic faculties have natural purposes and are related to one another in a structure that, if properly respected, leads to individual happiness and social harmony. Rationalistic natural law theorists agree with Butler that in moral judgment, reason applies general standards, but Butler's position also differs from theirs. For unlike classic natural lawyers, Butler is skeptical about the project of articulating necessary rational first principles of morals so that individuals need only apply them, more or less deductively, to their particular circumstances. When he keeps his theology to the side, Butler offers his basic moral standard as empirical, and he is under no illusion that it can be applied merely by subsuming particular cases under fully determinative general principles. Although Butler articulated this conception of conscience more thoroughly than anyone else I know of, certain main features of his idea, I think, are still widely shared.

judgment, accompanied by corresponding feeling. (3) Conscience does not simply deduce its conclusions from given determinate principles but, rather, is guided by the vague standard of whether our acts are 'fitting' or 'appropriate' to the situation, given our human nature as rational, desiring, self-loving, and yet also benevolent persons. (4) Conscience often motivates us and ought never to be contravened, but at times particular passions, self-love, and even love of others overpower it. (5) Because even small variations in the capacities and specific situations of individuals can matter, what conscience rightly tells one person may differ from what it rightly tells another who seems similarly situated. (6) Each person's conscience is a highly reliable, if not perfect, guide to what is morally required of him or her.[32] (7) Finally, conscience's approval or disapproval is not what makes acts objectively right or wrong, but it provides the agent with an (internally acknowledged) reason, as well as a motive, to do what he or she thinks right, and this is an important part of his or her sense of moral obligation.[33]

If we were to accept this Butlerian conception, what should our attitude be toward our own conscience? Obviously, we would have good reason to cultivate, inform, and guide our conduct by conscience, for conscience would be accepted as a reliable access to moral requirements, a reflection of our own best, reasonable judgment, and a liability to self-loathing if we flouted it. It represents our own reflective conviction about what is 'fitting' to do in the light of a realistic view of our situation and our nature as human beings.

The preceding two conceptions, seeing conscience as an instinctual or conditioned response, left their advocates room for doubts that called for independent, reasoned moral reflection. But in Butler's account, the voice of conscience is already the conclusion of our best, reasoned reflection. If other individuals or state or church authorities disagree with our

[32] Butler typically writes as if conscience is perfectly reliable, although he warns that his methodology is to describe the predominant tendencies of human nature, suggesting that allowing a few exceptions would not be incompatible with his main claims (*Five Sermons*, 32). He allows that we can corrupt our nature and then perhaps might live with vice without 'real self-dislike' (p. 18). We might take this to mean that conscience can lose its power to motivate, rather than its ability to distinguish right and wrong correctly. Whether conscience is a 'reliable guide' may also depend on how determined we are to consult it, for Butler often stresses our liability to self-deception, a tendency to 'avert the eyes of the mind' from what we could see if we were willing to look. What is clear is that Butler thought that at least for all practical purposes, we can and should treat our conscience, if consulted honestly and diligently, as a reliable guide to moral requirements.

[33] See Stephen Darwall, *The British Moralists and the Internal 'Ought'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 244–83, esp. 282–3.

initial judgment, then this is new information that may call for new reflection; but it remains information to be conscientiously reflected on, not a verdict that any person of conscience can blindly accept. From the point of view of a deliberating conscientious agent, the knowledge that others disagree with our initial moral judgments then becomes part of the description of the next problem we face, and the question is what we should do now. Others' disagreement may be a sign that our initial judgment was based on a self-deceptive picture of the facts or that we were too hasty or emotionally distracted in our initial deliberation. In either case, however, the check is a new use of conscience, not a decision to accept the authority of someone else's judgment over our own.

Perhaps certain public officials do have legitimate authority, in a sense, over an area of our conduct. In Butler's view, however, for us to have grounds to acknowledge their authority, we would have to conclude, in our own conscientious reflection, that given the particular situation (including their social role and their particular pronouncements), it is right for us to do what they command. Far from being a limitation on the moral authority of our conscience, this amounts to treating individual conscience as the ultimate source of the right of public authorities to expect obedience.

What, then, does Butler's account prescribe as a proper attitude toward the consciences of others? Insofar as we want others to conduct themselves morally, we should, other things being equal, favor whatever promotes the cultivation, protection, and employment of informed conscience by others. Although Butler does not discuss political matters, the point does have obvious political implications. He concedes, however, that anyone who claims to make a conscientious judgment may be self-deceived, and obviously others may try to deceive us by claiming to follow their consciences when they know this is not so. Therefore, we can find ourselves in situations in which our best conscientious judgment is that we must hinder, even by force, what another claims to be a conscientious act.[34] Each case of this sort must be judged in its own context.[35]

[34] In theory it could even be that one person's conscience tells her to thwart another's opportunity to follow his conscience, even though the second person *correctly* judged his instructions of conscience. Since what we ought to do, all things considered, can depend, among other things, on our social role and past commitments, there is no guarantee that two people, each acting correctly by conscience, will not oppose each other, even after each adequately understands the position of the other. In Butler's view, contrary to what some philosophers have maintained, 'A has a duty to X' does not entail for all others 'it is wrong to prevent A from X-ing.'

[35] Again, as suggested earlier, the fact that the conscientious judgments of other sincere and honest people sharply differ from our own should be grounds for self-doubt and reconsideration. Such conflicts call for review of the relevant facts, for self-scrutiny to identify bias, for effort to counteract self-deception and wishful thinking; but in the end, after due reflection, we must rely on our own best judgment. Others may continue to disagree and may punish us for our conscientious act, but acting conscientiously, and only this, in Butler's view, is acting 'according to our nature' and in a way that warrants self-approval.

From the Kantian perspective, a good feature of Butler's conception of conscience, compared with the previous ones, is that Butler's account promises to preserve the good name of conscience even among those who reject its theological supports.[36] It does so, however, primarily by identifying conscience with a natural capacity to determine our moral responsibilities in a reason-governed, reflective manner and to guide our conduct by these judgments. Conceiving of conscience in this way broadens its secular appeal, but it abandons some of the connotations that Kant and others accept as associated with conscience and as expressed in the familiar metaphors used to describe it.

What I have in mind is the notion that conscience is, in some ways, more like an immediate, instinctive response than the product of a long, careful, process of rational deliberation.[37] We are 'struck' by pangs of conscience; we 'find' ourselves suffering from a guilty conscience; and even when we are reluctant to engage in a moral assessment of our acts, it 'speaks,' 'demands,' 'warns,' 'prods,' 'forbids,' 'rebels,' and at times 'is revolted.' Explicit reflection and judgment seem neither necessary nor sufficient for us to experience the promptings of conscience. Often, it seems, we simply feel its inner demands or reprimands. In stressing this familiar aspect of conscience, Kant's conception, the popular religious conception, and the cultural relativist conception all seem more in line with common thinking than Butler's is.[38]

[36] I am not arguing here that a theory that 'preserves the good name of conscience' independently of theology is necessarily better than one that does not, for I have not attempted to refute ECR, SCR, or the alleged theological underpinnings of the religious conception. Some may accept the various implications I have noted and yet hold that the claims of conscience should be deflated or, alternatively, that they should be retained in a religious context; and I have not argued otherwise.

[37] I am reminded of a story once related by Gilbert Ryle. A professor of mathematics was laying out a proof and, moving from one step to another, remarked, 'It's obvious that this follows.' A student put his hand up and asked, 'Excuse me, sir, but is it obvious?' The professor then set about to check his move and in the process covered two more boards with an elaborate proof and then at the end remarked. 'Yes, see, it is obvious.' In some ways, 'my conscience tells me' is like 'it is obvious'; it makes a claim to justifiability but is not itself the product of a process of deliberate justification. (If the story is funny, it is because although the professor established the truth of the proposition that he had said was obvious, his elaborate proof could not show that 'it is obvious.' Similarly, by means of moral argument, one can back up a claim regarding the voice of conscience, but the argument does not show that 'conscience said so.')

[38] Reflecting the ordinary sense of our moral terms, I take it, is a prima facie, but by no means decisive, consideration for including a particular conception (e.g., of

From a contemporary (modified) Kantian perspective, there are other problems with Butler's account. For example, it rests on the foundational assumption that as a matter of natural teleology, our particular passions, self-love, benevolence, and reason are structured in a normative hierarchy that assigns to each a place and a function.[39] Again, like Plato and Aristotle, Butler is more inspiring than convincing in his teleological argument that human nature is so constituted that reasonable self-love never recommends injustice. Few would dispute Butler's ideas that moral judgment, at its best, requires the use of reason in wide-ranging, honest reflection 'in a cool hour' and that it should take into account human nature, our individual capacities, and the facts of our situation. But to distinguish moral from other forms of deliberation and perhaps to reach any definite conclusions at all, we need a fuller account of what we are deliberating about, what we are looking for, and what criteria or constraints in such deliberation make its outcome morally binding.

IV. A JUDGE IN AN INNER COURT

Let us turn now to Kant's idea of conscience as judicial self-appraisal.[40] Butler identified *conscience* as the faculty by which we make moral judgments, but what Kant calls *conscience* is something distinct that can come into play only after one has made, or accepted, a moral judgment.[41] Moral judgments are simply applications of basic moral requirements (the 'moral law') to more specific circumstances. These basic requirements, articulated in the forms of the Categorical Imperative, are supposed to be part of the rational knowledge of all ordinary moral agents, even though nonphilosophers may not be able to articulate them in their pure abstract form.[42]

conscience) in our moral theory. An entirely revisionary moral theory is unlikely even to get a hearing, but there are many possible considerations for not automatically adopting current (or even persistent) 'common sense.' For example, it may presuppose what is contrary to (not just beyond) our best scientific knowledge.

[39] Readers will recall that Kant, too, often appeals to (dubious) teleological claims in applying his fundamental principles, but the basic argument for the Categorical Imperative does not rest on these assumptions. It would be contrary to his idea of autonomy to suppose that at the basic level, one might argue for morality from natural teleology.

[40] I assume some basic points, including the following: The principal elements of human nature relevant to moral judgment are *sensuous inclinations*, *reason*, and *will*. The first category includes all ordinary desires and aversions, second-order (e.g., the desire for happiness) as well as first-order ('particular passions'), self-regarding (self-love) as well as other-regarding (benevolence), cultivated desires for pleasures of the mind as well as instinctual cravings for pleasures of the body. Such inclinations are passive, given facts, not the sort of thing we can control at will, and so in themselves are neither good nor bad. Their value neutrality, I think, is Kant's dominant view, despite some unfortunate passages, reminiscent of Plato, about how rational beings wish to be rid of them. Viewed from a practical standpoint, they are presumed to incline but not determine our behavior. *Will*, in one sense, is a power of choice, enabling us to deliberate and 'freely' choose which inclinations, if any, to incorporate into our maxims. *Will* in another sense is the same as *practical reason*. This includes our capacity and disposition, to follow hypothetical imperatives in taking means to our ends, and to recognize and follow categorical imperatives in morally significant situations. Practical reason is a broad term that sometimes includes the functions of conscience, namely, passing judgment on ourselves for acting against our judgment as to what is right (or without sufficient effort to determine what was right) or 'acquitting' ourselves from self-accusations of such guilt.

Kant treats practical reason not merely as a source of abstract truths but as a set of dispositions to govern ourselves in accord with certain norms of decision making. To have practical reason is to be predisposed to deliberate and choose our courses of action in accord with the rational norms expressed in the Categorical Imperative (various forms) and the Hypothetical Imperative (the general principle behind reasoning to particular hypothetical imperatives, namely, 'If one wills an end and finds certain means to that end necessary and available, then one ought to take [will] those means or abandon the end.'). I discuss this general principle in *Dignity and Practical Reason*, chs. 1 and 7.

This is not a stipulative definition of 'practical reason' for Kant, nor does he think it is 'analytic' that practically rational wills accept the forms of the Categorical Imperative. Nonetheless he thinks the point can be argued, at least that it can be shown to be a presupposition of our belief that we have moral duties that we are committed to the Categorical Imperative (in all its forms) and to viewing this as a 'command of reason.' These basic 'rational' dispositions are unavoidable, demanding, and sometimes painful to live by. They are not seen as something unfortunate, alien, or to be resisted but, rather, as basic self-defining norms and so, as it were, imposed on ourselves by ourselves (our 'better self' perhaps). Although not an empirically attributed desire or set of inclinations, practical reason (like these) is a constant and potentially effective element of human motivation. It is attributed to moral agents a priori because analysis (supposedly) reveals it to be a necessary precondition of having duties and obligations, and even of making moral judgments. Moral feelings, such as respect for moral law, are analyzed as the consequences of recognition of how this basic moral/rational disposition can conflict with our inclinations. We can, of course, question Kant's claim that the norms expressed in the Categorical Imperative are necessary principles of reason, but the fact that we are committed to them as authoritative is the essential background assumption that enables us to think of conscience and conscientious judgment as having motivating force.

[41] 'Judgment' is ambiguous in many of the passages on conscience. In one sense it refers simply to drawing more specific conclusions from general moral principles, that is, 'applying' them as when we conclude that 'one mustn't spit in another's face' from 'one ought to respect every person.' In *Lectures on Ethics*, tr. Louis Infield (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 129, Kant refers to this as 'the logical sense,' as opposed to the 'judicial sense.' The latter is the sort of judgment made by a legal judge who 'condemns or acquits,' sentences, and 'gives legal effect to his judgment.' See also R, 178–9 [6: 185–6].

[42] Intermediate-level principles, articulated in Kant's *The Metaphysics of Morals*, are supposed to be derivable from the basic requirements, together with some general empirical facts about the human condition. The rational capacity to apply the Categorical Imperative and intermediate principles to specific cases, which is judgment (in one sense),

According to Kant, ordinary people normally judge quite well whether their acts are right or wrong, and they do so without much conscious, explicit reflection. However, if subject to strong temptations and confused by philosophical sophistries, they are apt to try to make self-serving exceptions to rules that they generally acknowledge as universal.[43] The result is that although every moral agent is presumed to have an adequate grasp of the fundamentals of the moral point of view, errors of judgment are possible. Obviously, errors of fact, culpable or not, can lead us to a judgment that we would not make if we had a correct, realistic view of our circumstance. But this is not the only source of mistake. Inattention, wishful thinking, and self-deceptive special pleading all can result in misapplications of moral principles that, in the abstract, we know well enough. Presumably, too, we might come to have unjustifiable moral opinions without making any direct judgments of our own, for example, by simply accepting the prevailing standards in our culture or placing complete reliance on the moral judgment of some other person.[44]

These errors of moral judgment, however, do not amount to an erring conscience. In fact, conscience has yet to enter the picture. What, then, is conscience? There are puzzling features about Kant's remarks on conscience, and there seem to be some changes among Kant's several works, but we can summarize the main points as follows:[45]

is not some mysterious special access to moral truth but simply an ability to interpret the principles, perceive relevant features of one's particular circumstances, and arrive at a specific directive by subsuming the case at hand under the principles.

See G, 71–2 [4: 404]. Kant here treats 'judgment' in moral matters as analogous to judgment regarding science and ordinary matters of fact, that is, as the capacity to apply general principles and concepts to more specific circumstances. In writing about conscience as the inner 'judge,' however, the sense is different, the model being a legal judge passing sentence on an accused or acquitting him or her.

[43] Ibid.

[44] We can distinguish, then, these possible sources of mistaken moral beliefs: (a) one makes no moral judgments for oneself but blindly takes on the mistakes of one's adviser or one's culture; (b) one judges badly, or misjudges, what follows from the basic moral law because one is inattentive, careless, and/or self-serving in the process of judgment (implicit or explicit); and (c) one misperceives, or fails to consider as relevant, facts about one's situation that are in fact morally important. Like most moral philosophers in his tradition, Kant did not acknowledge radical ignorance or misunderstanding of the basic moral law as a further source of mistaken moral belief. The errors here are presumably failures to exercise due care in self-scrutiny. Consider, for example, MM, 191 [6: 441]. His theory can allow (even if Kant himself did not) that there might be adult, functioning members of our species who do not know or understand what Kant calls the moral law, but then their norms, if any, would be amoral and their applications of them not erroneous moral judgments but, rather, judgments of some other kind.

[45] Notably there are shifts from Kant's *Lectures on Ethics*, to *The Metaphysics of Morals*, to *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*. See MM, 160–1 [6: 400–1], 188–91 [6: 438–40], and R, 178–9 [6: 185–6]. There are places where Kant seems to use 'conscience' broadly, like Butler, for our capacity to determine whether our acts are right or wrong by applying the basic moral law to them. See, for example, G, 79 [4: 411–12] and 89–90 [4: 422–3].

1. All moral agents have consciences. The belief that this is so is not based simply, or mainly, on observation. Rather, that someone has a conscience is a presupposition of his or her being a moral agent. Moral agency also presupposes practical reason, but practical reason is a broader concept. It includes our capacity and disposition to acknowledge the moral law and to apply the moral law through 'judgment.' But neither of these is identical with conscience.

2. Conscience is mostly described in metaphorical terms, but the metaphors can be unpacked. Conscience is 'an inner judge' that issues verdicts of acquittal or condemnation. Like a trial judge, who is not legislating or merely informing others about the law, conscience 'imputes,' 'reproaches,' and passes 'sentence.' If it judges us to be guilty, we are made to suffer, and at times the result can be torment. The verdict of acquittal brings relief but not happiness. Although the inner 'forum' of conscience is not a real court, we must think of ourselves as playing several roles: that of accuser, defender, and finally a judge who yields a verdict and passes sentence. The metaphor requires that we think of ourselves from different perspectives, but it is important that it also be the same person who accuses and who stands accused. We can also think of conscience as demanding accountability to God, but this is a 'subjective' construal rather than an essential feature of conscience.[46]

3. Although the metaphors suggest that the moral agent is active in the operations of conscience, Kant also describes conscience as like an 'instinct,' as something that we 'find' in ourselves, something that we 'hear' even when we try to run away, and something that 'speaks involuntarily and inevitably.'[47] The point, I think, is to distinguish conscience—as the often painful self-accusation, guilty verdict, and consequent suffering—from the general activities of moral deliberation, reasoning, and judgment. Conscience presupposes and makes use of these activities and thus is not (as in the popular conception) a mere felt clue or symptom that we have done wrong or are about to.

Like a well-grounded judicial verdict and sentence, the 'voice' of conscience imposes a painful awareness of two distinguishable things: (1) that what we have done (or intend to do) is at odds with what, even in

[46] Carrying the metaphor to an extreme, Kant writes, 'Only the descent into the hell of self-knowledge can prepare the way for godliness' (MM, 191 [6: 441] and 188–9 [6: 438]).

[47] See Kant, *Lectures* (tr. Infield), 129; MM, 65–6 [6: 282–3] and 26–7 [6: 234].

our own judgment, is wrong in the circumstances and (2) that the act is fully imputable to ourselves as a free agent.[48]

In effect, conscience presupposes and uses the results of our general reasoning and judgment in answer to the question 'What sorts of acts, in what circumstances, are morally permissible, and what sorts are morally forbidden?' When we 'compare' or 'hold up' our past (or projected) acts (as we perceive these) to these answers (our general judgments about what is permissible and what is forbidden) and also realize that those acts are (or will be) imputable to ourselves as their 'free cause' (without excuse), then conscience imposes (or threatens) 'sentence,' that is, makes us (as the guilty party) feel bad and yet (as the sentencing judge) feel that the pain is warranted. Here we see that conscience, although working more like an instinct than a capacity for reasoned moral judgment, is not a mere instinct because it depends crucially on that basic capacity.

In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, when discussing 'the guide of conscience in matters of religious faith,' Kant introduces what seems to be a slight variation on this main theme. He first states a strict 'postulate of conscience' about prospective acts, namely, 'concerning the act I propose to perform I must not only judge and form an opinion, but I must be sure that it is not wrong.' This is a special, but quite broad, duty of due care; that is, we must undertake and diligently carry out a moral appraisal of our projected acts (presumably unless we are already sure, from previous appraisal, that the acts are permissible). Metaphorically speaking, 'judgment$_1$' (one sense of 'judgment') is what is responsible for appraising the act diligently, and 'conscience' then 'passes judgment$_2$' (a second sense of 'judgment') on judgment$_1$ as to whether it has fulfilled that responsibility. Paradoxically, then, conscience is 'judgment passing judgment upon itself.'[49] Thus the particular offense of which conscience accuses us is the failure to undertake seriously and carry out diligently a moral appraisal of our acts, a violation of the special duty of due care in making sure that one 'venture nothing where there is danger that it might be wrong.'[50]

[48] Also C2, 81–3 [5: 97–9]. See also Kant on imputation, MM, 16 [6: 223] and 19 [6: 227]. In German law, apparently, the two phases of determining whether an agent's act is a legal offense ('objective' guilt) and determining whether the act is 'imputable' to the agent (culpability) are more separate than in our legal system. See Joachim Hruschka, 'Imputation', *Brigham Young University Law Review* (1986), 669–710. A series of articles on imputation, particularly in Kant and in German law, appeared in *Jahrbuch für Recht und Ethik*, 2 (1994), ed. B. Sharon Byrd, Joachim Hruschka, and Jan C. Joerden (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1994).

[49] R, 179 [6: 186].

[50] R, 178–9 [6: 185]. A puzzling passage in *The Metaphysics of Morals* also suggests that what conscience judges is simply 'whether I have submitted [my act] to my practical reason (here in its role as judge) for such a judgment' (MM, 160–1 [6: 400–1]). My best effort to untangle what Kant means there is that the relevance of 'whether I have submitted' is not literally that this is what conscience judges but that it is a background fact that one knows unmistakably and that is part of the suggested argument that conscience cannot err.

Roughly, that argument might be reconstructed as follows: If on the one hand, we did scrutinize our act by our moral standards, we would have known this easily by introspection, and if so, conscience would have 'involuntarily' reached its verdict and (if appropriate) imposed its sentence. Mistakes here are apparently assumed to be impossible because what we compare is all 'internal': our conception of our act and our moral judgment regarding its rightness or wrongness. But if we did not submit our act to our moral standards, we did not make any prior moral judgment on the particular act, and so our conscience (which presupposes such judgments) never operated and so cannot have yielded a false verdict. Mistakes due to bad memory of our past acts and/or deliberations, misjudgments of objective duty, self-deceived conceptions of our acts, and the like are not counted as errors of conscience but as failures antecedent to its operation.

The Metaphysics of Morals also includes something like this duty of due care, a duty to try to 'know (scrutinize, fathom) yourself.' This 'First Command of All Duties to oneself,' Kant says, requires impartiality in appraising ourselves 'in comparison with the law' and sincerity in acknowledging our 'inner worth or lack thereof.[51]

In the light of this, we can perhaps put the two accounts of conscience together as follows: Conscience is an involuntary response to the recognition that what we have done, are doing, or are about to do is contrary to the moral judgments that we have made (by applying moral law to different types of circumstances). Prominent among the many moral judgments that persons of conscience will have made is that they have the special, second-order duty to submit their acts to the 'inner court' of conscience, scrutinizing them diligently, impartially, and sincerely. Once they submit their acts to appraisal, conscience gives its verdict and 'passes sentence' automatically, for this is just a metaphor for the painful awareness of wrongdoing that such sincere appraisal causes in a person with the basic dispositions of 'practical reason.' Combining Kant's two accounts, we can say that conscience can acquit or condemn with regard to accusations of both violations of first-order duties (e.g., truth telling) and failures to fulfill the second-order duty of due care in scrutinizing and appraising our acts diligently (by 'holding them up' to our judgment of the first-order duties). In both cases, conscience presupposes but is not the same as 'moral judgment' in the sense of 'drawing from the moral law a more determinate specification of our duties.'[52]

[51] MM, 191 [6: 441].

[52] Presumably it is rare that we have a clean conscience with respect to due care but a guilty conscience with respect to first-order duties, for that would mean that despite the most diligent effort to ensure that our projected acts are not wrong, we nevertheless acted in a way that was wrong even in our own judgment. In other words, we weakly or perversely ignored the conclusion of our diligent search. Assuming this to be rare, we

4. Our judgment about whether certain acts are 'really' right or wrong can be mistaken, and so presumably our consciences may at times be working from mistaken premises regarding this. However, Kant claims that in a sense, conscience itself does not err.[53] Why he thinks this is not entirely clear, but perhaps the basic thought is that conscience is not liable to common 'external' sources of error that may infect ordinary moral judgment. For example, mistakes about the facts of our situation can lead us to make mistakes about what is objectively permissible, but they cannot cause us to err in regard to whether our act as we conceived it was contrary to our judgment about what is right. Mistaking a lost hiker for a moving target on a firing range can lead to the erroneous judgment that shooting at what we see is permissible, but this same misidentification does not mean that the act as intended (e.g., shooting at the target here) was contrary to our moral judgment about it (e.g., that shooting at the target here is permissible). Errors of conscience, if there were any, would have to be a matter of failing, even after we raised the question, to recognize either the fact that what we intentionally did was (or was not) against our best moral judgment or the fact that we had (or had not) exercised due care to determine whether our act was right. Perhaps, despite Kant, errors are possible even in these 'subjective' judgments, but the important point remains that in Kant's sense, even an unerring conscience is in no way a guarantee that what we believe is right is really so.

The implications of the Kantian conception regarding our attitude toward our own conscience should now be clear. Conscience is no substitute for moral reasoning and judgment but in fact presupposes these. A clear conscience is no guarantee that we acted in an objectively right way, and so it is no ground for self-righteous pride or presumption that our moral judgment is superior to that of those who conscientiously disagree. However, insofar as the warnings and pangs of conscience actually reflect our diligent efforts to hold our acts up to our best moral

can suppose that satisfying conscience in the *Religion* sense (due care) typically leads us to satisfy it in the prior sense of *The Metaphysics of Morals* (imputation and judicial judgment of first-order duty violations).

[53] Kant's remarks on this are puzzling. One crucial passage denying 'erring conscience' is MM, 161 [6: 401]. But in the much earlier *Lectures on Ethics*, 132–3, Kant acknowledges 'errors of conscience,' based on errors of fact or errors of law, some culpable, some not. Conscience can be 'natural' or 'instructed' (and apparently at times 'misinstructed'); the natural conscience takes precedence in cases that conflict. Again, however, Kant reaffirms that there can be no nonculpable errors about the basic moral law, that one can mistake something else (e.g., prudence) for conscience but cannot 'deceive' or 'escape' it.

judgments, conscience may be a reliable subjective sign of whether we are doing well relative to our moral beliefs. Conformity to conscience is necessary and sufficient for morally blameless conduct, in Kant's view, even though it cannot ensure correctness.[54] Thus as Kant says, conscience ought to be 'cultivated' and 'sharpened' as well as heeded. Our impartial moral judgments (about what anyone in various situations should do) will not affect our conduct unless they are applied to our own case and the acts in question are imaginatively 'imputed' to ourselves, which is a function of conscience. Again, past misdeeds often call for restorative acts in the present (apology, compensation, etc.), but it is conscience that makes us feel the force of our wrongdoing and thus presumably aids in the recognition of these duties.

How, then, should we view the consciences of others? Many of the same points apply, but there are some asymmetries. Although in moral debate, my appeal to conscience weighs no more than anyone else's, in the end I must heed my own conscience, not that of others. This is not to deny that the conscientious disagreement of others gives us grounds for questioning, listening to their reasons, consulting more widely, and rethinking our initial moral judgment. Also, knowing that others conscientiously disagree may itself be a reason for altering our judgment about what, all things considered, we should do, even if we are fully convinced that these others are mistaken. Here the fact of disagreement serves as new relevant information rather than grounds to suspect our earlier process of judgment. The same would apply if our initial moral judgment turned out to be contrary to legal authority. But in all these cases, our final responsibility is to heed our own consciences, which are based on our diligent effort to judge, all things considered, what is right.

Another asymmetry follows from Kant's view that the basic ends of a virtuous person are his own perfection and the happiness of others. Practical concern for others' happiness, not worries about their souls, should motivate us to avoid tempting others into activities that would cause them to suffer agonies of conscience. But concern for making ourselves morally more perfect, not concern for our own happiness, is what should move us to keep our own consciences clean.[55]

So far I have avoided discussing the content of Kant's moral law, but given more time, I would argue that Kant's idea of the moral law itself gives deep and compelling reasons for taking seriously the moral judgments of others, especially those who use their 'consciences' in sincere

[54] 'But if someone is aware that he has acted in accordance with his conscience, then as far as guilt or innocence is concerned nothing more can be required of him' (MM, 161 [6: 401]).

[55] See MM, 151–2 [6: 388].

and diligent self-appraisal. The main idea here is that Kant's basic moral point of view, expressed by the combination of forms of the Categorical Imperative, holds that moral standards are found by analyzing (rational) human willing. They are not perceived in Plato's heaven of Forms or derived from God's will or identifiable with any empirical facts (e.g., about human sympathies). Rather, they are constituted by what reasonable, autonomous persons ideally would 'legislate' for themselves, subject to certain constraints (conceptually) built into the idea of moral reflection. A crucial constraint is that all legislation must respect the value of humanity as an end in itself. This places a priority on our concerns as rational beings, forbids our thinking of human beings as exchangeable commodities, and, especially, puts forward an ideal that policies should be morally justifiable to all.

Kant, I think, had too much confidence that all who take up the moral perspective would reach agreement on moral principles. But in the face of disagreement about matters of vital moral importance, it is clear that his theory implies that the best each of us can do is, first, to make our own moral judgments about what we can sincerely recommend as reasonable to others who will take up the moral legislative point of view and, then, after duly consulting with others and giving due weight to their concerns, to act according to these judgments faithfully but with humility. Universal agreement would be a regulative ideal, perhaps constituting 'correctness' about what is 'objectively' right, but in practice this would only be an aim and a hope.

Given even this brief sketch, it should now be clear that consulting with others and taking into account their reasons for the moral judgments must be an important part of the Kantian process of moral deliberation. This speaks in favor of treating the moral judgments of others respectfully and also of creating the social conditions in which sincere and diligent efforts to make and apply moral judgments are encouraged. It does not support an absolute ban on coercing someone against his or her conscience, but it does urge respect for conscientious resistance even when we believe it is mistaken.

It was no accident, apparently, that Kant developed his special conception of conscience rather than simply incorporating one of the previous conceptions into his moral theory. To review, Kant's special conception fits his basic moral theory in several respects better than other conceptions would.

First, the Kantian conception, unlike the popular religious conception, is not based on theology, and so it is compatible with Kant's doctrine that ethics must precede religion. Moreover, the Kantian

conscience reflects Kant's idea that only the use of reason can determine what is moral, for it denies the (popular) view that conscience is a mysterious, instinct-like access to truth about what is morally forbidden.

Second, as opposed to the relativistic conceptions, ECR and SCR, Kant's conception does not deny, but in fact presupposes, the possibility of objective moral judgments, which is a central tenet of Kant's moral theory. Also, ECR and SCR treat *conscience* as a descriptive, or evaluatively neutral, term, but Kantian moral theory would encourage the common practice of speaking of conscience in a partially laudatory way. The reason is that in the Kantian conception, pangs of conscience, unlike most pains, stem from a morally respect-worthy source, a deeply rooted disposition of moral agents to hold up their own conduct to the same moral judgments that they make for others in comparable situations.

Third, as opposed to Butler, Kant clearly avoids making natural teleology foundational for ethics and so avoids making what Kant regarded the mistake of founding morals on 'heteronomy.' Arguably, too, Kant has a more plausible and determinate idea of the standards that should guide reasonable moral reflection. Butler sees conscience as making rational, reflective judgments, but he gives very little hint of the premises from which we are to reason. In addition, Kant's conception of conscience is closer to common sense and ordinary language than Butler's, in that Kant treats conscience not as our general capacity to reflect morally regarding our acts but, rather, as a special disposition to 'find' ourselves involuntarily warning, accusing, and judging ourselves when we compare our acts (as we conceived them) with our moral judgments about the sorts of acts that are right and wrong.

Finally, the special Kantian conception of conscience promises to highlight and give a deep sense to the idea that a person who consistently follows her conscience is a person of integrity. Integrity has been viewed in different ways, of course, but in any sense, I suggest, persons who follow their conscience as understood in the previous conceptions may nonetheless lack a kind of integrity. For example, a person who followed the popular religious conception of conscience would, given his premisses, be wise and prudent to do so because conscience is a sign of divinely sanctioned standards, but this seems no guarantee of genuine integrity. The latter presupposes not simply reliable, responsible public behavior but also self-governance by principles that one knowingly affirms for good reasons. One who regularly follows the mysterious 'inner voice' of popular conscience may do so from fear and with little understanding.

Similarly, those who follow conscience in the ECR or SCR sense would reveal a steady disposition to be governed by cultural norms internalized early in life, and this might lead to many of the patterns of public behavior and the freedom from inner conflict that we associate with persons of integrity. But unless they are to some degree critically reflective and selective regarding the local norms they endorse as adults, something important would be missing. They may rest content with cultural norms that encourage deception and manipulation of a sort incompatible with integrity, as commonly understood. And even if their internalized principles happen to be morally decent, they continue to hold them as blind conformists, with too little appreciation of the principles' grounds to qualify them for the virtue of integrity.

Finally, Butler's account of conscience relies so heavily on the alleged facts of natural teleology that even though Butler claims that a person following conscience is a 'a law to himself,' one might argue that his or her ultimate guide is the given 'constitution of human nature,' whose normativity seems to be accepted as a given natural fact, independently of the person's reflective, reasonable endorsement of it. Although this is sufficient for some sorts of integrity, arguably there is a deeper notion of integrity attributable to persons faithful to the Kantian conscience. The latter not only strive to make good moral judgments and govern themselves by their best moral judgments, but they also are supposed to follow a moral law that is itself a reflection of their own autonomous, rational will, not an acceptance of standards found 'in nature.' These notions obviously need interpretation and are subject to doubt, but they are suggestive. Insofar as 'integrity' has to do with being a principled, self-governed person, Kant's account of the conscientious person tries to carry this a step further than even Butler does.

A last caveat may help forestall misunderstanding. Although I have compared different conceptions of conscience partly to show the merits from a broadly Kantian perspective of the special conception that Kant adopted, I do not mean to deny or minimize the many problems with Kant's ethics that are not addressed here. Kant's conception of conscience is a part of his larger moral theory and so is not immune to familiar doubts about, for example, the adequacy of his formulas of the moral law, their alleged status as universal rational principles, and their apparent neglect of animals. Moreover, there are special doubts that one may raise about Kant's account of conscience. For example, even if Kant's metaphors of the accuser, defender, and judge reflect the phenomenology of moral experience for many of us, we may question whether the images stem from excessive preoccupation with legal models that are not essential to, or best for, understanding morality.

In our age we can hardly help but doubt Kant's faith in the universality of conscience. His best defense might be that analysis of 'common rational knowledge of morality' reveals possession of conscience (as Kant conceives it) as a precondition of full moral agency, that is, of being subject to duties conceived as categorical imperatives. But this analytic claim, too, may be doubted. Finally, Kant's ethics is most plausible when seen as a less comprehensive account of morality than he thought. Despite Kant's later work on virtue, his main focus from the beginning is on duty, or what one morally must do, and its presuppositions of freedom, respect for humanity, and the like. However, there are moral values and ideals not readily expressible in this framework, and so it seems there must be more to ethics than Kant acknowledged. Whether these values and ideals are incompatible with the basic Kantian theory has yet, in my opinion, to be worked out.