

Kantian Duties to the Self, Explained and Defended

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§ 1. In the wake of Mill and Sidgwick, moral philosophy today revolves around our relations with others. In utilitarian and other consequentialist theories the agent's own person is not strictly morally irrelevant, but it pales into insignificance compared to the interests of six thousand million other human beings and countless non-human sentient creatures.¹ The *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, which as far as I can see is representative, characterises morality as 'an informal public system applying to all rational persons, governing behavior that affects others, having the lessening of evil or harm as its goal, and including what are commonly known as the moral rules, moral ideals, and moral virtues'.² This definition reflects the widely-held view that acts of altruism are the paradigms of morally good action. In fact, we are so accustomed to the idea that morality is fundamentally interpersonal and other-regarding that, as professional moral philosophers, we rarely reflect on the scope of morality. If this other-regarding conception of morality were correct, Kant would seem to be guilty of a trivial conceptual confusion: by definition, there could be no such thing as a 'moral duty to the self'.

In this paper, I shall argue that duties to the self deserve more attention than moral philosophers often assume, but I shall not try directly to justify them as claims of morality. My aim is a more modest one. I wish to give a coherent account of Kantian duties to one's own self, and to argue that certain central aspects of morality can be understood, let alone defended, only if duties to the self are accorded their rightful place. Moreover, duties to the self are not as alien to every-day moral thought as is often assumed. Bernard Williams was right when he wrote that the philosopher 'who has

¹ Similarly, contractualist ethical theories rest on a social conception of morality, their Kantian pedigree notwithstanding. Even Kant scholars sometimes consider duties to the self as at best optional, at worst an embarrassment (e.g., Dieter Henrich, *cf.* his 'Ethik der Autonomie', 24 f.).

² Bernard Gert, 'Morality', 586. The definition is, of course, also essentially teleological. I shall ignore this complication.

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given the purest, deepest, and most thorough representation of morality is Kant'.³ It is impossible to make sense of 'morality' without duties to the self, whether we like this peculiar institution or not.

§ 2. What, then, is a 'duty to one's own self'? The first thing to note is that a duty to the self cannot simply be an obligation that concerns the agent. Any moral imperative is bound to do that. Rather, it must be a duty that refers to, and essentially involves, the moral subject alone. It typically also has implications for the subject's well-being, and it may affect other moral agents, but neither is essential. If there are duties to the self, they are exclusively directed at the agent's own person.

Let us clarify the distinction between duties to oneself and duties to others.⁴ There are duties *involving* the agent's own person that derive from the rights or welfare of other human beings. In order to perform a morally worthy action, he may accidentally incur a certain obligation with regard to his own person, but such 'indirect' duties *regarding* the self are not duties *to* the self. For instance, there is an 'indirect' duty to stay sober if you are the pilot of an aeroplane, or to take regular exercise as a member of the general public health service. Yet these duties are duties *towards others* that merely happen to have implications for your conduct towards yourself. Staying fit is something you owe *to* all the other members of the health service. They can hardly be expected to pay for treatment if an illness can easily be avoided. Similarly, as a pilot you owe staying sober *to* the passengers of your plane.⁵

³ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 174.

⁴ 'Duties'—or 'norms', 'virtues', 'reasons', 'values' etc. In what follows, I shall use the language of 'duty', as suggested by the Kantian background of the question and the 'morality system'. However, the broader question of whether the domain of the moral or ethical should be construed along interpersonal or other-regarding lines, or whether it extends to our own person, also arises in other types of moral theory.

⁵ In Kantian terms, these are 'indirect' duties concerning one's own person, not to be confused with imperfect or wide duties, which are genuinely moral and direct. It is a duty to do what 'indirect' duties command, but they are not duties *sui generis*. Direct duties generate 'indirect' duties when actions that are as such morally neutral become a matter of moral obligation by virtue of being required as a means to a moral end. 'Indirect' duties are generated by technical rules in conjunction with an obligatory end, not by the categorical moral imperative. For instance, when as an act of beneficence you fill in a cheque to Oxfam you do not obey a 'duty to fill in a cheque'. Sending a cheque to

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Note that there is no suggestion as yet that one ought to adopt maxims of pursuing fitness or sobriety, or that getting thoroughly drunk or seriously unfit might be morally problematic as such. It has merely been established that proper regard for other people—which is obligatory on any plausible account of morality—is likely to have normative implications for actions regarding our own selves. Note also that duties to the self must be distinguished from commands of prudence, even if both recommend the same course of action. It is on the whole imprudent to get horribly drunk, not least if you are in charge of an aeroplane. It is clearly imprudent to neglect the long-term health of your body. But lack of prudence does not by itself contradict the laws of morality; and someone who takes care of his own long-term interest is not as such a virtuous person. As Kant puts it in his lectures on moral philosophy, duties to the self ‘do not at all relate to well-being and to our temporal happiness’⁶ (*Collins*, XXVII:341).⁷ Those who wish to defend the notion of a duty to oneself must therefore show that such duties cannot be reduced to what Kant calls ‘counsels of prudence’, but rather share the universality and necessity that defines any moral duty.

Consequently, those who claim that there are genuine moral duties to the self hold a view that is as distinctive as it is controversial. Such duties must constitute a special class of duty

Oxfam, you rightly believe, is an appropriate way of being charitable, which is your duty. Sending a cheque is one means of fulfilling it. The connection between the end commanded by duty and the means is merely contingent. You could have given cash or paid by credit card. Even if sending a cheque were by chance the only way of doing one’s duty it would not be *inherently* morally good but still just a *means* towards helping others. Similarly, duties to others often affect the manner someone leads his or her own life and give rise to ‘indirect’ duties to the self that on closer inspection turn out to be duties to others. For a full account of ‘indirect’ duty, cf. my ‘Kant on Conscience, “Indirect” Duty and Moral Error’.

⁶ Kant carefully restricts the lack of influence of duties to the self to ‘temporal happiness’ (*zeitliche Glückseligkeit*) because—prominently in the lectures—like all duty they are likely to affect our happiness in the afterlife.

⁷ Citations of Kant’s works refer to volume and page numbers of the Academy text (*Kant’s gesammelte Schriften*, Berlin: G. Reimer/W. de Gruyter, 1902). Translations are either adapted from the Cambridge edition of Kant’s works or my own.

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whose sole object is the agent him or herself. They cannot be established on the grounds of our moral interaction with others, which precludes characterising morality as a purely social or other-regarding phenomenon. Nor can they be reduced to considerations of the agent's own long-term well-being. Either strategy rests on a category mistake. Duties to the self cannot be explained in terms of any other kind of normative consideration.⁸ To put it somewhat paradoxically: they are 'desert-island duties' that still apply even if the agent were to remain forever isolated from the rest of humanity. It is this kind of Kantian duty that I wish to explain, defend against common objections, and render philosophically more acceptable.

I. The Primacy of Duties to the Self

§ 3. Duties to the self ought to be particularly dear to Kantian moral philosophers, if only because Kant himself emphasises their fundamental importance throughout his ethical writings. In his lectures, he argues that duties to the self are not—as even some of his predecessors and contemporaries suppose—mere supplements to duty; rather, they 'take first rank and are the most important duties of all [*sie haben vielmehr den ersten Rang, und sind unter allen die wichtigsten*]' (Collins, XXVII:341). Moreover, duties to the self occupy the left-hand side of the familiar classificatory scheme of types of moral obligation in the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*: there are duties to the self and duties to others as well as perfect or strict and imperfect or wide duties; and they are mentioned first within the respective categories of strict and wide duty (cf. IV:421–4, IV:429–430). The formulations of the categorical imperative are, perhaps, more easily applied to duties to others, but the central place that duties towards oneself quite naturally occupy in Kant's ethical system should suffice as a *prima facie* warning not to dismiss or ignore them altogether. Even by purely quantitative criteria, doing without duties to the self leaves a large gap in Kant's ethical framework.

The foundational role of duties to the self is even more explicit in the late *Metaphysics of Morals*, where they are declared to be the

⁸ The example Kant gives in the lectures is that of a drunkard, who is an object of moral disapproval even if he 'does nobody any harm', and 'if he has a strong constitution he does no harm even to himself' (Collins, XXVII:341).

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precondition of all obligation, even obligation to others.⁹ At the beginning of the section in question, Kant mentions a puzzle about the possibility of duties to the self: Does the self not have to be both active and passive at the same time, which is impossible? And if the ‘one imposing obligation (*auctor obligationis*)’ and ‘the one put under obligation (*subiectum obligationis*)’ were identical, could not the former always release the latter—we ourselves—from an obligation (VI:417)? Then he argues that, like the paralogism and the antinomy of pure reason, this apparent difficulty rests on an illusion produced in the human mind by the assumption of transcendental realism. (The puzzle is later resolved, by transcendental idealist means, with reference to the distinction between the authoritative ‘noumenal’ and the subjected ‘phenomenal’ self, a distinction not available to the transcendental realist.¹⁰ Thus the subject and the object of duties to one’s self, though both part of the same human being, turn out not to be identical after all.) At present Kant simply asserts that ‘nevertheless, a human being has duties to himself’—and in support of this assertion invokes the following consideration:

For suppose there were no such duties: then there would be no duties whatsoever, not even external duties [*so würde es überall gar keine, auch keine äußere Pflichten geben*]. (VI:417).

The argument is clearly intended as a *reductio* of the thesis that there are no duties to the self. If there were no duties to the self, there would be no duties at all; but there are duties; therefore there are duties to the self. What follows is offered to establish their philosophical primacy:

For I cannot recognise myself to be under an obligation to others unless [*ich kann mich gegen andere nicht für verbunden erkennen, als nur so fern*] I at the same time put myself under an obligation [*ich zugleich mich selbst verbinde*]: since the law by virtue of which

⁹ One recent moral philosopher who agrees with Kant is Warner Wick. In his reply to M. G. Singer’s attack on duties to oneself, he argues for the position defended here both exegetically and systematically that the internal aspect of *moral* duty always concerns the self, and that it is in this way that duties to the self are morally fundamental. Cf. also Nelson Potter, ‘Duties to Oneself, Motivational Internalism, and Self-Deception in Kant’s Ethics’. The dispute between Singer, Wick, Kading, Mothersill and Knight, in *Ethics* (1958–63) is highly recommended.

¹⁰ Cf. Friedo Ricken’s discussion in ‘Homo noumenon und homo phaenomenon’.

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I regard myself as being under an obligation proceeds in every case from my own practical reason; and in being constrained by my own reason, I am also the one constraining myself. (VI:417–18)

This argument is as obscure as it is philosophically ambitious. Marcus George Singer, one of Kant's harshest critics, calls it a 'blatant non-sequitur'.¹¹ Even sympathetic interpreters struggle to make philosophical sense of it. How can duties to the self be as fundamental as the above quotation suggests?

§ 4. Let us review four possible interpretations of the 'primacy thesis'. First, the conceptual interpretation. A natural thought might be that because any of my duties is essentially *my* duty it must therefore also be a duty *to myself*. The problem with this argument is that the conclusion does not follow from the premise in any non-trivial sense. It is therefore insufficient to establish the thesis that all duties rest on duties to the self in the sense outlined in §3 above. It is reminiscent of the argument of the naïve psychological egoist that because all actions are *my* actions they must be essentially *selfish*. Neither the existence of duties to the self, nor psychological egoism, nor any other substantive philosophical thesis can be established by means of conceptual analysis. Moreover, the strategy would blur the distinction between duties to the self and duties to others. It is difficult to see how on this model there could be duties to others at all. The proposed inference would be philosophically disastrous. We must reject it on Kant's behalf.

Secondly, the temporal reading. Maybe Kant's 'primacy thesis' is meant to suggest that we should always discharge duties towards ourselves first, before we proceed to do our duty towards other human beings.¹² This interpretation runs into theoretical as well as ethical difficulties. First, it makes little sense to say that negative strict duties to the self must be prior in a temporal sense to equally negative strict duties to others.¹³ It would be odd if we first had to refrain from throwing away our lives and then from stealing. The 'primacy thesis' would thus at most establish the priority of wide duty to the self over wide duty to others. Moreover, it is difficult to see how this could help us to establish the existence of duties towards the self by means of the *reductio* outlined above. Secondly,

¹¹ Marcus Singer, 'Duties and duties to oneself', 138.

¹² M. Paton toys with this idea: 'A Reconsideration of Kant's Treatment of Duties to Oneself', 228–9.

¹³ Unless, perhaps, we are required first to check whether an action we are tempted to perform violates a strict duty to the self.

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Kantian ethics seems sufficiently altruistic to rule out even the temporal priority of wide duty to the self over wide duty to others; and again, we still have to make sense of the details of the argument for the priority thesis quoted from the *Metaphysics of Morals* above.

Thirdly, what one might call the pragmatic argument: the idea that for us to be in a position to discharge our duties towards others certain duties to the self, such as moderation and self-discipline, must be given priority.¹⁴ Kant himself may seem to suggest this view in the lectures. He says that the person who violates duties to the self ‘throws away his humanity, and is no longer in a position to perform duties to others’ (*Collins*, XXVII:341).¹⁵ But whereas it is not difficult to see how properly taking care of our duties towards ourselves can help us with our duties to other moral subjects, this line of argument hardly warrants the extremely strong conclusion that duties to the self are a precondition of all duty. The reason for this is implicit in the above distinction between direct and ‘indirect’ duty. Like avoiding the temptations of poverty (*cf. Groundwork*, IV:399, *Metaphysics of Morals*, VI:388) or cultivating benevolent sentiments (*cf. VI:457*), such ‘indirect’ duties to the self are a matter of taking the proper means to discharging one’s duties to other human beings. Their value is instrumental, they do not as such carry moral weight. We are again running the risk of explaining duties to the self away by reducing them to duties to others. ‘Indirect’ duties to the self cannot be the precondition of all duty as such.

Fourthly, the argument from autonomy. According to this interpretation, Kant tries to make use of his notion of autonomy to show that there are duties to the self. Yet it would be surprising if these two key notions of Kant’s ethical theory turned out to be identical. Autonomous lawgiving does on occasion ground duties to the self, if indeed there are such duties; but at other times autonomy must concern our relationship with others, who cannot directly impose duties on us. Any duty must be autonomously legislated. Nevertheless, autonomy—as legislation by the self to the self—puts us on the right track to solving the riddle of the primacy of duties to the self as set out in the *Metaphysics of Morals*.

¹⁴ Robert Louden defends the ‘pragmatic’ view in ‘Moralische Stärke: Tugend als eine Pflicht gegen sich selbst’.

¹⁵ The ‘and’ is not explicative, i.e., someone who violates his duty to himself throws away his humanity, and then is no longer able to perform certain duties to others. It is the former element that makes violating duties to the self *directly* immoral.

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§ 5. The correct reconstruction of the ‘primacy thesis’ must start with the idea of moral duties ‘to oneself’ in a purely literal sense. As noted above, it is the defining characteristic of such duties that they refer to the agent’s own rational self, rather than the rational selves of other persons. The agent’s self is not just the *subject* that has to comply with duty. It is also the *object*, defined as the authority to which the duty is owed. If in Kant’s ethics of moral autonomy I see myself as bound or under an obligation, I realise that the source of this obligation, *qua* obligation, is my own self, my own faculty of reason. I would be a mere animal without it, and as such not subject to any rational command, moral or prudential. But pure practical rationality is not just a necessary condition of my standing under moral laws. It is also sufficient. Moral commands originate in my rational self, which as the origin of autonomous legislation is endowed with dignity and authority. To this the lower part of me must subject itself: my elective will or *Willkür*, which is in charge of making choices. That is why, in part, *all* ethical duties are literally duties ‘to the self’¹⁶—not because they are duties with which I, the agent, must comply, but because it is my own rational self that issues all duties. My self is not only the source, but also the object of the moral obligation that binds the subject in charge of acting accordingly.¹⁷

Following Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, Kant occasionally calls this aspect of duty ‘internal’ duty (*innere Pflicht*), and associates it with one’s moral attitude, in opposition to ‘external’ duty (*äußere Pflicht*)—duty of performance, directed at someone outside the self, i.e., to others.¹⁸ Thus the very formulation of the *reductio* at VI:417 provides us with the key to its correct interpretation. There could be not even be ‘external’ duty—no

¹⁶ In her recent comprehensive study of Kantian duties to the self, Lara Denis grants that duties to others are relevant to self-respect and integrity, but does not quite seem to be prepared to conclude that all duty contains an element of duties to the self. Cf. *Moral Self-Regard*, 160.

¹⁷ Kant seems to assume that a duty is owed to the lawgiver. As *my* own rational faculty is the law-giver, I therefore owe any duty to myself. Duties to others are, of course, owed to others, at least duties of the strict or perfect kind; but they are owed to others *in addition* to being owed to oneself. Others have a right to my fulfilling a strict duty towards them. One could also say that if there was no autonomous obligating self there would be no duties to the self nor duties to others.

¹⁸ Cf. e. g. R 7038 (XIX:232) and A. G. Baumgarten’s *Initia*, §§ 61–66 (XIX:32–33). According to Baumgarten there are also ‘passive’ internal duties to the universal legislator (God), but they are marginalised by

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absolute command to perform certain acts directed at others—if there was no ‘internal’ duty, i.e., if the human will was not autonomous.¹⁹ This must be so because in an autonomous moral theory other agents cannot bind me directly. They cannot subject my self to a moral law—that would render the theory heteronomous. Moral agents other than myself have to go, so to say, ‘via’ my own autonomous rational faculty for a moral duty towards others to arise. Our faculty of reason makes us recognise our duty to creatures like us because such creatures, like ourselves, possess a special moral dignity as ‘ends in themselves’.

Duties to oneself in the sense of internal duty can thus be said to coincide with any genuinely moral duty. In this sense, ‘I cannot’—as Kant puts it—‘recognise myself to be under an obligation to others unless I at the same time put myself under an obligation’. The obligated self is the subject of a duty to the obligating self—the one cannot exist without the other. Duty to the self as internal duty is not the same as autonomy; but it is a corollary of an autonomous ethics.²⁰ As I recognise that my

Kant. What remains, according to R 7038, are duties of debt (*Schuldigkeit*) and of merit (*Verdienst*) to others as well as duties of decency (*Anständigkeit*) to the self.

¹⁹ Kant should have distinguished three layers of duty: (i) abstract ‘internal’ duty to the self, as a corollary of autonomy; (ii) substantive moral duty to the self or to others, which—*qua* moral—always involves internal duty; and (iii) ‘external’ duty to others, which is confined to performing a certain act for whatever reason, e. g. legal duty. Note that the initial distinction between duties ‘to’ a person and duties that merely ‘involve’ a person is now all the more important. For there are duties to the self—duties to others viewed as internal duties—which are essentially other-involving, e. g. lying. Cf. Kant’s footnote in the essay on ‘a presumed right to lie’, VIII:426.

²⁰ Andrews Reath considers the idea that all duties might be duties to the self but comes to the conclusion that this is ‘clearly wrong’ (‘Self-Legislation and Duties to the Self’, 114). He does not seriously entertain the idea that duties to the self can coincide with duties to others. (Of course, *specific* duties to the self like the duty not to throw away one’s life are duties to which there are no corresponding duties to others; but as we saw above, duties to others may yet contain a self-referential element.) Accordingly, Reath also thinks that it is a mistake to identify the ‘source position’ with the ‘legislative position’ (114). He is right in that it is not the source aspect alone that grounds ‘internal’ duties. Rather, these duties concern (i) that which is the source which (ii) *qua* free and rational possesses a certain kind of dignity. Both aspects are necessary to show the

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obligation proceeds from my very own faculty of reason, I put myself under the obligation—there is an evocative German phrase: *ich nehme mich selbst in die Pflicht*—to obey as a matter of ethical duty. Without due respect to one's own faculty of reason moral autonomy as self-legislation would be null and void.

§ 6. The fact that all moral duties are also always duties to the self is confirmed by the following considerations.²¹ First, in the case of external duty towards others, what the other person can expect as a matter of right is the performance of a certain act, not the moral attitude the act ought to spring from. Other people have a right to be treated decently; but whether we are really decent persons is something they can at best hope for. (I can expect to be treated honestly by the proverbial Kantian shopkeeper; he has done his external duty to me if he does not overcharge me; I may hope that he is an honest man.) The subjective personal principles of our actions—in Kant's terminology: 'maxims'—are primarily a matter of one's own dealings with oneself. Whereas it is a strict external duty to others not to make false promises, it is a moral duty to the self to do so for moral reasons.

A second (and related) point is worth noting. What is owed to others can be enforced as well as demanded. We can force anyone to perform certain actions by making the alternative options sufficiently unpleasant. This is the principle on which our legal system operates by trying to convey to every potential offender that crime does not pay. By contrast, the *morality* of an action, rather than its mere conformity with law, can never be externally enforced. It lies solely within the agent's responsibility. What I ought to do, morally, goes well beyond what I owe to others, or even what others can with reason expect of me. If I did not bind myself to do my moral duty *from duty*, there would be no *moral* duty at all. All we would be left with is legality for reasons of prudence.

connection between autonomy and internal duty. Our higher self is both the lawgiver and, as pure practical reason, the source of value. By contrast, Warner Wick rightly suggests that all moral duties as such concern one's dealings with oneself, and that the moral aspect of an action can neither be demanded by others nor externally enforced ('More on duties to the self', 161). See also Robert Louden, *Morality and Moral Theory*, 15–16, and Nelson Potter, 'Duties to Oneself, Motivational Internalism, and Self-Deception in Kant's Ethics', who ascribes to Kant the idea that 'all duties are partially duties to oneself' (376).

²¹ Cf. Kant's preparatory notes for the *Metaphysics of Morals*, XXIII:251.

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Thirdly, the idea that all moral duty involves a self-referring element is confirmed by the link between free will, morality and duty to the self explicit in the lectures on moral philosophy. Duties to the self are said to be ‘the supreme condition and principle of all morality, for the worth of the person constitutes moral worth’. Socrates is said to have been ‘in a sorry state, which had no value at all’, but his person ‘was of the greatest worth’; for ‘even if all the amenities of life are sacrificed, maintenance of the worth of humanity makes up for the loss of them all, and sustains approbation, and if all else is lost we still have an inner worth’ (XXVII:344–5). And:

Under this worth of humanity alone can we perform our other duties. It is the basis for all the rest. He who has no inner worth has thrown away his person and can no longer perform any duty. (XXVII:344–5)

In what follows, Kant explains that any exercise of moral duty depends on freedom, i.e., on being able to restrain one’s inclinations and to bring them in line with reason. Without this self-restraint—which is what above was identified as the ‘internal’ duty to the self that is part of all moral duty, we would not be in charge of our actions, which is tantamount to evading all duty. Crucially, self-control is not just a means to executing moral commands; it is essentially morality itself.²²

This result is hardly surprising. After all, freedom of will and morality meet in the Kantian notion of *autonomy*. On the interpretation sketched above the actual formulation of the ‘primacy thesis’ in the *Metaphysics of Morals* can be read as the natural conclusion of the more elaborate arguments in the earlier lectures on moral philosophy.

II. Puzzles about Duties to the Self

§ 7. Perhaps the most striking objection to the very idea of a duty to the self is the allegation that if the self *qua* legislator and the obligated self are one and the same, an agent could always release him or herself, which would render duty null and void. As we have already seen, Kant declares this difficulty to be the kind of objection transcendental realists might have because they lack the philosophical imagination clearly to distinguish the binding self

²² Cf. Loudon, ‘Moralische Stärke’.

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and the bound. They are not identical after all. In more recent times, Marcus George Singer has dismissed duties to the self in a similar fashion. For him, they are ultimately ‘an appeal to self-interest, disguised in the language of duty’.²³

However, we need not invoke the ‘primacy thesis’ or the separation of phenomenal and noumenal self to see that Singer’s challenge does not constitute a serious objection after all.²⁴ In fact, it begs the question. For it is hardly obvious that you *can* release yourself from any obligation that you impose on to yourself. *If* there are duties to the self, you cannot. This should not of course be taken to be an argument *in favour of* duties to oneself. It is merely the rejection of a common argument to the—alleged—effect that there are no such duties. Whoever argues against duties to oneself on the grounds that the self could always release itself presupposes the very thesis that the argument purports to establish: that there are no duties to the self. Even if—in some sense that is rarely specified by Kant’s critics—you ‘could’ release yourself, there remains the further question of whether you would be morally justified in doing so, i.e., whether the act of release is a *moral possibility*.²⁵

Let us return to the parallel case of being released from a duty to others. *Qua* source of obligation, other agents, it is argued, can always relieve you of your duty towards them. Duties are upheld *because* they decide not to release you. However, this line of argument assumes that considerations that lead to others’ releasing the subject of an obligation are arbitrary, or perhaps governed by convenience, rather than morality. It assumes that the other person can release you from your duty if he or she so pleases. This, again, is far from obvious. It may be true in the case of a trivial

²³ ‘On duties to oneself’, 203.

²⁴ I.e.: we do not need transcendental idealism to show that the objection falters. We may or may not need the theory to show that duties to the self are possible, as Kant alleges.

²⁵ One should always bear in mind that even autonomous legislation—being ‘a law unto oneself’—is a matter of reason. The rational self is the author of the moral law, and moral commands do not stem from any heteronomous source such as nature, society or God’s will; but autonomy does lead to arbitrariness. Trivial promises can be arbitrary, and a trivial promiser can easily release the promisee, but this possibility is much less obvious in other cases.

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promise²⁶—but what about an obligation that has more weight? What if the well-being of a third party is at stake? And can you arbitrarily relieve me, for instance, of the duty not to mutilate or enslave you? The same problem emerges as in the case of specific duties to the self. Even if other agents *can* release you in some sense—perhaps to the effect that, in the eyes of the legislator, you are no longer guilty if you do what previously was prohibited—there is always the further question of whether they would be morally right to do so. Moreover, the ability to release the other person might in some cases rest on the premise that the object of one's duty does not have a duty to him or herself. Thus the ability or permissibility to release oneself or others rests on the person's being justified in doing so. Release could turn out to be morally impossible *if* there are duties to the self. There is now a further sense in which it is possible for duties to the self to underlie duties to others—even if it is doubtful whether Kant had this in mind when he formulated his 'primacy thesis'.

If, for example, I have a duty not to mutilate myself I can hardly be justified in relieving you of your obligation not to mutilate me. Similarly, on the Kantian view, I am not entitled to allow you to enslave me, quite apart from the paradox involved in a supposedly rational decision to give up all rational deciding.²⁷ My duty to myself makes it morally illegitimate. In the 'Lectures', Kant distinguishes between doing as we wish (*disponieren*) with what *belongs* to our own person or things, which is morally permissible, and doing as we wish with *our person* itself, which is not, because it violates our humanity (*Collins*, XXVII:343). Kant's theory of duties to the self might thus offer one possible way out of the riddle of the 'fanatic' that plagued R. M. Hare in *Freedom and Reason*.²⁸

§ 8. We must now return to the issue of the 'dual self' that was broached in our discussion of the 'primacy thesis' in §§ 3–5 above. Anyone who believes in Kantian autonomy is committed to the view that the binding self and the bound are in some sense distinct. The one has to obey the commands of the other; and alas can spectacularly fail to do so. This is reflected in Kant's well-known

²⁶ Similarly, Alison Hills argues that the common rejection of duties to oneself often depends on the misleading analogy with promises ('Duties and Duties to the Self', 131).

²⁷ Cf. Kant's argument in *Theory and Practice*, VIII:282.

²⁸ In terms of the second variant of the categorical imperative, I have a duty not to degrade myself to the status of a mere means to other agents' arbitrary purposes.

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distinction between *Wille* (*voluntas*) and *Willkür* (*arbitrium*), the legislative and the elective functions of our practical faculty, the ‘will’ in an all-inclusive sense of the term. In fact, a unitary account of the human will leads directly to the Socratic denial of the possibility of acting contrary to our own better judgement, or *akrasia*, and the ethical intellectualism associated with it. According to this view, we always act in line with what our single self judges to be best. Moral failure is due to ignorance.

Kant’s model of the will is un-Socratic. He is a dualist. On the one hand, there are his frequent warnings about the ‘dear self’ that is scheming to obstruct the judgement of reason in favour of inclination (e.g. *Groundwork*, IV:407). Violations of duty are associated with giving in to this kind of self. It appears that one can even kill oneself from self-love (IV:422). On the other hand, we learn about duties to ‘the self’, identified with our rational capacities. *This* self, however, is identified with a person’s ‘real’ or ‘proper’ self (e.g. IV:458); and it is in this sense that freedom—or autonomy!—is spontaneity, or ‘activity of the self’ (*Selbsttätigkeit*). These two selves cannot be the same: to name but the most apparent difference, acting in accordance with our particular ‘dear self’ is, in a meaningful sense, ‘selfish’. It happens at the expense of the claims of another self: the ‘rational self’ of either oneself or other rational beings. There is, by contrast, nothing individual or selfish about the ‘higher’ rational self, a paragon of impartiality in all its judgements and actions.

Quite generally, the distinction between a higher and a subordinate self is less awkward than one might at first expect.²⁹ It is always at work when we judge ourselves, i.e., when the ‘lower’ self in charge of acting is judged by the ‘higher’ self that applies—and in autonomous ethics makes—the rules.³⁰ The elective self must subject itself to the standards of the rational self,

²⁹ I shall bracket the notoriously difficult question of whether it commits us to a full-blown Kantian theory of a ‘phenomenal’ and a ‘noumenal’ self, and what such a theory would look like. As we saw above (§ 3), Kant is worried that transcendental realism is insufficient to allow of any meaningful distinction between two kinds of selves, presumably because any self would ultimately be an object of experience and as such subject to the laws of nature. Any ‘two selves’ would essentially be the same kind of thing. If so, autonomy as self-legislation independent of the laws of nature would indeed be impossible.

³⁰ The distinct functions of the two selves in judgement are quite explicit in Kant’s account of conscience in the lectures, *Collins*, XXVII:351.

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whose authority commands respect. We *respect* the better side of our own humanity, and the humanity of others. Even if we disregard the worry that a single self might always release itself, it cannot be the case that the same self that is the binder and the bound.

§ 9. The fact that duties to the self do not concern anyone other than the agent himself is borne out by the fact that the first and third illustrations of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork*—relating to the prohibition of self-murder and the obligation to develop one’s talents—do not rest on ‘universalisation’ in the standard sense (‘what would happen if everybody adopted my maxim’), as the other two illustrations do. Rather, the examples revolve around the question of whether the agent can consistently will the maxim to be valid *at all times*.

Temporal universality (atemporality) is a rational requirement just like universality across rational agents. Laws would not be universal if there was the possibility of arbitrary change in the course of the world’s history. Making exceptions ‘for oneself’ and ‘just this once’ are kindred varieties of irrationality.³¹ Maxims guilty of these flaws are similarly self-defeating when subjected to the universalisation procedure of the categorical imperative. In fact, atemporality is required to show that the universality of a maxim would make it impossible for an agent to act on it as the maxim had been in place throughout human history. All duties rest on the timelessness of universal laws³², just as all moral duties are ‘internal’ duties to the self; and some duties—those *also* involving universalisation in the standard sense (across all agents)—are *in addition* duties to others. Yet the desire to make an ‘exception’ is the common reason for the moral wrongness of an action, just as all moral duties have a common element that can be singled out formally as a duty the object of which is the agent’s own rational self. The categorical imperative is not just a principle of run-of-the-mill ‘universalisation’ ranging over different agents. It also implies atemporality, sometimes exclusively so, as in the case of specific duties towards one’s own self.

³¹ Cf. my commentary on the *Grundlegung*, 120–123. This line of reasoning has recently been developed by Joshua Glasgow. Cf. his ‘Expanding the Limits of Universalization’.

³² Cf. my discussion note on reconstructing the example of the deposit in the *Critique of Practical Reason* and *Theory and Practice* (‘Depositum’).

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Kant frequently links immorality with the agent's desire to be special, to make an exception from what is otherwise a generally valid rule, most prominently in a passage that directly follows the four illustrations of the law-of-nature formula of the categorical imperative:

If we now pay attention to ourselves in any transgression of a duty, we find that we do not really will that our maxim should become a universal law, for that is impossible for us; rather the opposite of it shall generally remain a law, only we take the liberty of making an *exception* from it for ourselves or (just this once) to the advantage of our inclination. (IV:424)

There appear to be two different ways in which we may wish to make an immoral exception from what at the same time we want to remain a generally observed or valid law: we wish to make the exception to the advantage of our inclination, for just this once, *and/or* for ourselves, as opposed to other people. Even though it may seem rational to sacrifice the development of one's talents for the sake of instant pleasure at any given time I can hardly will that these talents remain undeveloped at all times. Similarly, it may make sense to prefer the pleasure of a single cigarette at any given moment because the pleasure gained outweighs the minute health risk it poses, but I cannot will a universal law that at all times I act on this principle, leading to my own destruction rather than a gain of net pleasure. In the most extreme case, Kant might be prepared to argue that a maxim of throwing away one's life for the sake of a positive balance of pleasure is self-defeating because if the agent had adopted *that* maxim *throughout* his life, chances are that if life had been hard on him earlier on he would not now be in a position to act on this principle. He would be dead already.

III. Further Worries about Duties to the Self

§ 10. There are various reasons why duties to the self have for some time been unfashionable in moral philosophy. One influential factor is clearly the fact that Kant's specific duties to the self are often concerned with sexual morality. Their details rest on 18th century prejudice and no longer reflect the moral consensus of our modern world.³³ However, the fact that we dismiss specific duties to one's own self that Kant advocates does not count against the notion of

³³ Cf. Andrea Esser, *Eine Ethik für Endliche*, 357–59.

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duties to the self as such. If, as I shall argue below, moral philosophers would be well advised to broaden their conception of morality by reviving the idea of duties to the self, we should cast aside those of Kant's examples that command little or no assent today, and look for new paradigm cases of duties to the self.

Secondly, there are fears that a commitment to duties to the self might have unpalatable implications for society and the state.³⁴ But these fears rest on a confusion. We need to distinguish the following two questions: (i) Should a state *legislate* against certain acts that concern individual citizens and the use they make of their freedom? (ii) Are these acts *morally* bad? Liberal principles concern the former but not the latter. The distinction between the morally unacceptable and the legally prohibited, which has so often been violated in the history of humanity, today runs risk of being undermined by consequentialist pressures once again. Many people seem to subscribe to the thesis that anyone who behaves immorally towards another should face legal sanctions; or, conversely, that anything not prohibited by the laws of the state is permissible *tout court*, legally as well as morally.³⁵ By contrast, Kant wishes to keep separate what is right by law and what is morally good. External legal duty, it is true, becomes a moral obligation from an ethical point of view; but the reverse does not hold. Those who wish to defend moral duties to the self do not *ipso facto* advocate that society or an illiberal state should get involved in people's private matters. In fact, they try to defend this distinction.

J. S. Mill is a prime example of someone who was worried about the illiberal implications that duties to the self might have. However, on closer inspection even he might not be as hostile to these duties as is commonly assumed:

What are called duties to ourselves are not socially obligatory, unless circumstances render them at the same time duties to others. The term duty to oneself, when it means anything more than prudence, means self-respect or self-development; and for none of these is any one accountable to his fellow creatures, because for none of them is it for the good of mankind that he be held accountable to them. (*On Liberty*, IV.6)

³⁴ See also Lara Denis' convincing refutation of the allegation that duties to the self entail paternalism, *Moral Self-Regard*, 225–230, cf. 4–5.

³⁵ This confusion also affects duties to others, i.e., the performance of actions that others might with good reason expect me to do without having a right to my doing it.

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Mill's argument is obviously confused: he has been misled by his allegiance to a social conception of morality. He is right when he says that duties to the self are not *socially* obligatory. In that case these duties would be duties to others, not to the self. Even Mill allows for cases in which self-regarding behaviour may, under certain circumstances, be rendered 'at the same time duties to others'. Also, it is perfectly true that with regard to possible duties to the self one is not accountable to one's 'fellow-creatures'—one is accountable solely to oneself—and there are duties to others that neither Mill nor any other liberal would want to make a matter of official legislation.³⁶ There is no sound argumentative route from moral duties to the self to totalitarian laws or paternalism; on the contrary, these can be rejected on principled grounds if duties to the self are taken seriously.³⁷

³⁶ Mill could, on the one hand, easily allow for moral duties to the self within his general utilitarian outlook because the Greatest Happiness Principle singles no one out and treats everybody equally. (For such a suggestion see Daniel Kading, 'Are there really "no duties to oneself"?', 156. Alison Hills also advocates duties to the self on what appear to be consequentialist grounds, *cf.* 'Duties and Duties to the Self', 135.) On the other hand, it is notoriously difficult to see how in a utilitarian framework there could be duties to individuals at all, rather than general utility; and *a fortiori* how there could be duties to the self.

³⁷ Andrews Reath has recently tried to reconcile duties to the self and a social conception of morality ('Self-Legislation and Duties to the Self', esp. 120–122). According to Reath, moral principles are 'jointly willed principles generated by a process of co-deliberation in which all agents have a share', and this is said to be true of moral principles concerning others as well as principles solely concerning the agent's own self. In both cases, this seems an unduly narrow account of moral autonomy in the Kantian tradition. Concerning duties to others, common deliberation cannot add anything of moral substance that the—universally shared—faculty of reason of the individual deliberator and agent could not have discovered on its own. It is true that moral principles need to be applied, and that common deliberation and expertise can help with that, but that makes application, not morality, a social project. The ends of action are essentially a matter of each agent's maxims, morally regulated by the categorical imperative. The details must be supplied by rules of skill. We need to be skilful to be moral, to be good to others, especially when wide duty is concerned, but finding out about the right means to help others is *not* as such a moral matter. It is a matter of 'indirect' duty, and the resulting kind of value is strictly instrumental. For a critical discussion of Reath's approach *cf.* Stephen Engstrom's reply.

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IV. The Case for Duties to the Self

§ 11. The purpose of this paper has so far been limited to dispelling some common philosophical worries about Kantian duties to the self. Yet the fact that objections can be resolved, or a concept entertained without contradiction, does not count in favour of there being something that corresponds to the concept. This is a sound Kantian principle if ever there was one. If philosophical analysis reveals that I can think of God, causality, unicorns, bachelors and a free will without contradiction, this does not, alas, count in favour of the existence of freewill, bachelors, unicorns, causality or indeed God. To justify our applying a non-empirical concept, a different kind of argument is required. In Kantian terminology: we need a *deduction*.

In what follows, my argument will not, however, amount to a strict proof that there are duties to the self—if only because it is difficult enough to prove the validity of any categorical command, whether it relates to others or to oneself, as even a cursory reading of *Groundwork* III reveals. I shall also set aside the above argument that duties to others presuppose duties to the self, which would at best establish the existence of ‘internal’ duties, and rest on the contentious assumption that categorical moral duties to others exists. Rather, I intend to show that—certain tendencies in moral philosophy notwithstanding—duties to oneself are still part of our shared conception of morality. We can make good sense of the idea that morality concerns all rational beings, oneself included. Moreover, certain predicates widely ascribed to moral norms, judgements, etc. lose all plausibility unless duties to the self are given their due weight. If so, one might say that we have as much or as little reason to doubt the existence of duties to the self as we have reason to doubt the existence of obligations to our fellow human beings. A conclusion to this effect—however provisional—would be progress.

§ 12. One good reason why it would be unwise to try to limit the scope of morality to things interpersonal is that such a restriction makes nonsense of received features of morality like ‘overridingness’³⁸ or ‘categoricity’³⁹. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that moral

³⁸ For a brief and intriguing argument of how the overridingness of ‘duty’ over ‘interest’ must be considered an argument for duties to the self see Jack W. Meiland, ‘Duty and Interest’, and the subsequent joint contribution by George I. Mavrodes, Jan Narveson and Meiland. As the discussion with Narveson shows, a mere right cannot as such outweigh a

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philosophers today should struggle with these traditional attributes of moral commands. The thesis that morality always trumps—or even silences—conflicting non-moral considerations dates back to a time when duties to one’s rational self were an uncontroversial element of morality and moral theory. It is still often associated with Kant. What philosophers tend to overlook is the fact that since the late 18th century morality has largely been *re-defined*. If the notion of overridingness seems increasingly implausible, it is largely—though not exclusively⁴⁰—because of the comparatively recent identification of morality with other-regarding action.

The central question regarding the overridingness of moral commands is that of what it is exactly that morality is supposed to trump. In the lectures on moral philosophy, Kant illustrates the kind of priority envisaged for moral as opposed to non-moral claims as follows. There are two sources or grounds (*Gründe*) of human actions: ‘inclinations’, which belong to the ‘lower’ animal side of our nature, and ‘humanity’, which inclinations must be subjected to (*Collins*, XXVII:347).⁴¹ Duties to the self restrict our

(seeming) duty to others. In terms of Meiland’s example (‘Duty and Interest’, 106), a person who cannot swim may not just be under no obligation himself to rescue a swimmer in distress—because in the example chosen he cannot help, and ought implies can—but may have a duty to the self not to throw away his life. He does not just have a right not to throw away his life. That he surely does, but we need the stronger conclusion that he ought not to. While duties presuppose rights (permissions), rights (permissions) as such do not determine their use; and as Meiland notes, it seems ‘quite plausible that in these cases rights are founded on duties’ (‘Duties to oneself’, 171). It is *by virtue* of having a duty to the self not to throw away your life that you have a right not to try to save the swimmer.

³⁹ It is worth noting that Kantian ‘categoricity’ is a vastly stronger thesis than mere ‘overridingness’. The latter concept suggests a weighing of reasons, in which morality wins; the former implies that anything contrary to morality does not just lose out against moral commands, but is devoid of all rational value altogether. Morality completely ‘silences’ opposing claims. *Cf.* my ‘Good but not required? Assessing the demands of Kantian ethics’, 12–15. I shall not defend this claim here.

⁴⁰ Worries about the psychological dominance of ‘overriding’ morality would persist even on a more balanced notion—*cf.* the closing remarks of this § below.

⁴¹ This is, of course, just a variation on the theme of the—controversial—dualism of sensibility and reason that pervades Kant’s philosophy, theoretical and practical.

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freedom regarding our inclinations. This is the task of morality in general. If so, it is also apparent why all virtue or morality should involve internal duties, and why the two are very closely linked in the lectures.

In other words, the thesis that moral commands are ‘overriding’ does not properly concern the supremacy of (allegedly good) other-regarding reasons over (supposedly bad) self-regarding ones, but rather the priority of rational, universal, timeless principles of action over the questionable claims of the non-rational elements of human nature. What needs to be restrained and brought in line with reason is not only action at the expense of others, but rather action contrary to reason quite in general, whether in our own person or in that of other beings like ourselves. Traditional epithets like ‘overridingness’ and ‘categoricity’—currently mostly employed in purely other-regarding moral theories—can be rescued only if standards exclusively concerning one’s own rational self are given their proper moral weight.

Such a morality would still be pervasive—at least in the sense that agents must always pay attention to the voice of reason, and follow inclination only within the limits of the morally permissible. It would also be highly demanding. Yet a moral system that gives the rational self its due weight no longer amounts to self-denial if self-denial is equated with altruism. As Bernard Williams quite rightly points out, an obligation can only be countered by an obligation.⁴² But duties to the self were not, as Williams suspects, invented to counteract the effects of an overly demanding moral code. Rather, the claims of morality became increasingly grotesque as the social and interpersonal model gained acceptance in philosophical circles. We need to re-introduce duties to the self in order to restore some balance to an otherwise outrageously one-sided ethical theory.⁴³

⁴² To be precise, a *ground* of obligation can only be countered by another such ground, as ‘obligation’ seems to imply an all-things-considered judgement of moral necessity, at least for Kant; cf. *Metaphysics of Morals*, VI:224.

⁴³ If it is true that the narrowed scope of morality is largely due to the utilitarian tradition, it is somewhat ironical that it was so successful that even the greatest critic of utilitarianism, Bernard Williams, should accept it. He calls duties to the self ‘fraudulent items’ (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 182); and in an earlier passage he writes: ‘Duties to oneself serve a number of functions in that economy. One is to encourage long-term investment as against consumption; another is merely to launder the currency of desire’ (50). Prudence might be thought to be the

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§ 13. The concept of duties to the self is not only philosophically more fruitful than initially assumed. Moralising about the self is still ingrained in ordinary speech and judgement. Not as much as formerly, perhaps, but it is still there, and only those whose moral vocabulary has been shaped by philosophical preconceptions will find fault with it. We still talk about self-respect, about letting oneself down etc., and we know quite well what these expressions mean; there are things we wish to prove to ourselves; we can forgive ourselves as we can forgive others, and in both cases sometimes we do not.

Blame, not implausibly considered ‘the characteristic reaction of the moral system’,⁴⁴ is equally applied both to oneself and to others. This is yet further confirmation that all moral actions are, in a thin and formal sense, directed at one’s own rational self. Interestingly, beyond that we *blame* ourselves for actions that have no bearing on the well-being or the rights of others; and this seems to presuppose something like obligations we bear exclusively towards our own rational self. We appear to stand in a moral relation with ourselves. Crucially, attributions of self-blame go beyond prudence.⁴⁵ If Kant was right and a ‘groundwork’ for moral philosophy should start with an analysis of ordinary moral thought, why not take duties to the self on board?

There may be a deeper reason for this linguistic custom. It is the same qualities—called ‘virtues’ and ‘vices’ by some very old-fashioned people as well as some exceedingly modern philosophers—that are manifested in both: letting other people

appropriate, and only, normative concept covering an agent’s dealings with him or herself. One may well wonder whether Williams’ criticism of ‘morality’ would have been as harsh as it was if its remit had been broader.

⁴⁴ Cf. e.g. Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 177.

⁴⁵ At the end of his comprehensive study of the foundations of Kantian Ethics, David Brink introduces demands of, as he calls it, ‘categorical prudence’, ‘requirements concerned with my own agency that apply to me just in so far as I am a particular rational agent, independently of my contingent interests and desires’ (‘Kantian Rationalism’, 288). He correctly distinguishes his conception of ‘categorical prudence’ from hypothetical imperatives but oddly does not identify it with Kant’s notion of duties to the self. This is perhaps because he is ambivalent as to whether a potential—*prima facie*?—conflict between self-regarding categorical constraints and impartial, other-regarding categorical constraints should count as a conflict within morality (in a broad sense) or a conflict between the self and impartiality.

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down and letting oneself down does not, *mutatis mutandis*, seem to be all that different if you look at it from the point of view of character—or, indeed, Kant would say the principle that ought to shape character, the categorical imperative.

§ 14. It would be good if in conclusion we could identify an action or maxim that obviously accords with or violates a specific, substantive duty to the self; i.e., if we could show that there is at least *one* such duty. There are five criteria. We would have to agree that an act or maxim is (i) good or bad, (ii) that corresponding rules of conduct go beyond long-term self-interest or prudence, (iii) that such an act or maxim does not directly affect others, i.e., is not good or bad *because* others are affected, and (iv) that it is generally and plausibly classed among things moral. Moreover, any such duty must (v) not give the appearance that it has been invented merely to counterbalance the rigour of duties to others.

The most promising candidate is neither original or surprising: ‘crawling servility’,⁴⁶ as a violation of self-respect, which was common in Kant’s time and still is in our own. Servile behaviour is generally considered to be morally distasteful. We do not, however, think it wrong because the person treated in a servile manner is wronged, or in any way adversely affected; and the judgment that somebody ought not to degrade himself in this manner clearly goes beyond commending the competent pursuit of one’s self-interest. It may even be in the agent’s long-term self-interest to be servile. We still think that there is something fundamentally wrong about it. Kant says that a servile person ‘dishonours his own person’ and ‘surrenders his humanity’ (*Collins*, XXVII:341). Thomas Hill cites the example of someone who laughs with others about his own deeply held convictions. (Imagine someone making a joke about Kantian ethics ...) This makes us cringe.⁴⁷ We say that he ought not to behave in this cowardly manner. This, it seems to me, is as moral a judgement as any.

V. Perspectives: What makes a Kantian Life Go Best?

§ 15. A final note on the philosophical utility of duties to the self within the framework of contemporary ethics. Kant’s notion of happiness has recently come under attack for being unduly narrow.

⁴⁶ *Collins*, XXVII:341, *Metaphysics of Morals*, VI:434–437; cf. Esser, *Eine Ethik für Endliche*, 366–370.

⁴⁷ ‘Servility and Self-Respect’, 14.

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Compared to ancient *eudaimonia*, the idea that happiness consists in the satisfaction of all of one's inclinations, or perhaps the agreeable experiences that result, must seem inadequate. It is hardly surprising that Kantian happiness is incapable of sustaining moral norms, and that it becomes sidelined in his ethical writings.

This as an analysis of Kantian *Glückseligkeit* is, I believe, essentially correct. However, reflecting on the fundamental role of 'internal' duties to the self reminds us that even for Kantians there is more to a 'good life' than 'happiness', narrowly construed. Duties to the self can help to supplement Kant's experientialist conception of happiness with a strong and articulate conception of what makes a distinctly human, rational life go best.

Such a Kantian theory of the 'good human life' would be moralistic, in accordance with the broad sense of 'moral' used throughout this paper. It would be highly objectivist, not the kind of good life that is desired by the agent, but rather: the good life of the 'better' self, according with the activity of his rational faculty. There is nothing individual or personal about this ideal. Crucially, a Kantian theory of the good life cannot serve the function assigned to its predecessor theories in eudaimonist ethical systems: it is not the foundation of morality—which would render moral norms heteronomous. Rather, a Kantian theory of *eudaimonia* would itself be grounded in the pure and formal moral law of reason. Indeed, those who criticise Kantian 'happiness' might be well advised to look to the conception of the Highest Good in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which combines good activity of the rational self and temporal reward.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ I am indebted to audiences at the University of Hanover, the Munich Hochschule für Philosophie and the University of Stirling, as well as Carolyn Benson, Heather Collister, Bettina Schöne-Seifert, Ralf Bader, Fred Miller, Robert Louden and Thomas Pogge for critical comments on earlier drafts of this paper. I should like to thank the participants of the St Andrews colloquium on 'The History of Ethics in Ethics' and the Beijing symposium on 'Kant's Moral Philosophy in Contemporary Perspectives' for their questions and suggestions. I gratefully acknowledge the support of the Royal Society of Edinburgh in making my visit to China possible.

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