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The Judge in the Mirror: Kant on Conscience

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Abstract

Kant's conception of conscience has been relatively neglected by Kant scholars and the secondary literature offers no explanation of whether (and if so, how) his treatments of conscience fit together. To achieve a fuller understanding of Kant's general position on conscience, I question the widespread assumption that conscience is a feeling and account for the nature of conscience and its multiple functions. On my reading, conscience is 'the internal judge' whose verdict triggers certain emotional reactions. Through the moral self-evaluative activities of this inner judge, we come to know our character better. In the judgements of conscience, we take account of various psychological conditions while judging both whether these conditions stand in the way of our establishing moral maxims and whether we hold ourselves accountable for our actions. By arousing certain feelings, these judgements also move us to moral action.

Keywords: conscience, Kant, moral self-appraisal, guilt, imputation, maxim, subjective conditions of moral receptivity

1. Introduction

There is barely any discussion of conscience in the contemporary literature on philosophy and moral psychology: it is either dismissed as a part of theological tradition, mentioned in passing with regard to children's moral development, or identified with moral sense and consequently seen as unworthy of independent treatment.[1] An intriguing exception is the exploration of conscience within discussions in which the underdeveloped (or absent) conscience of psychopaths is understood in terms of their lack of feelings of guilt, remorse for wrongdoing and responsibility. What seems to be missing, however, is an account of what precisely is meant by conscience and how it is related to the feelings of guilt and the ascription of responsibility.

In this paper, I highlight Kant's view on the intimate connection between conscience, certain self-evaluative emotions and personal accountability.[2] Kant's account of conscience has been neglected not only by contemporary moral philosophers but also by Kant scholars; insofar as they discuss it at all, there are, as I discuss in detail below, major disagreements among them. Moreover, even when closer attention is paid to conscience, it is often addressed marginally or incompletely. To my knowledge, the available German and English-language secondary literature offers no explanation of how Kant's various treatments of conscience can be fitted together into a consistent whole.[3] For all these reasons it is still a puzzle to define conscience and its multiple functions. This may also be due at least in part to the fact that the texts concerning conscience which Kant offers us can easily be read as inconsistent.

My aim is to achieve a fuller understanding of Kant's general position on conscience. I would like to show that conscience plays a crucial role in Kant's moral theory and that it deserves more scholarly and philosophical attention. In order to clarify the meaning and the function of conscience in Kant's works, I first sketch the puzzle itself in section 2 by specifying what makes it difficult to combine some of his points regarding conscience. Section 3 concerns the relation of Kantian conscience to both special moral sense and self-evaluative feelings of guilt and relief. I attempt to show why Kant's conception of conscience should not be identified with different kinds of feelings. In section 4, I focus on the main point of disagreement among Kant scholars, i.e. on the difficulty of understanding and interpreting conscience as one of the four 'aesthetic, subjective conditions' addressed in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. I will explicate both why conscience is one of the conditions of our moral agency and why Kant singles out conscience as different from the other three conditions. In light of the conclusions reached in the previous sections, section 5 provides an analysis of the activities of conscience as a specific manifestation of practical reason.

The predominant picture in Kant's account of conscience is that of the judge looking at himself in the mirror. I argue that Kantian conscience is a kind of moral self-assessment that involves cognizing and judging our own character. Without this morally relevant self-cognition, we would be incapable of both holding ourselves accountable for our actions and reconsidering our maxims in order to check their moral worth. In addition, even though conscience itself is not a moral motive, it still has an inescapable role to play in the process of our motivation to act morally.

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2. Why is Kant's Account of Conscience a Puzzle?

Just as every puzzle presupposes an awareness of the difficulties of putting seemingly, or actually, inconsistent parts together, so too the puzzle of conscience in Kant's works requires the awareness of the various segments of Kant's account of conscience that are difficult, or even impossible to combine. In this section I introduce Kant's points concerning conscience which pose difficulties for Kant scholars, outline the disagreements about them that are found in the secondary literature and sketch my own view of how we are to cope with these difficulties.

First, Kantian conscience can be understood in several ways: as an 'aesthetic' or an intellectual predisposition, or as a predisposition that is both 'aesthetic' and intellectual. Kant does not make it easy to choose one of these options. His texts concerning conscience seem contradictory or ambiguous. In *Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason* Kant claims that conscience is 'the moral faculty of judgement, passing judgement upon itself' (1996: 203; *R* 6: 185).[4] At times he also suggests that judgements of conscience should not be confused with the judgements of understanding and reason (Kant 1996: 203; *R* 6: 186; 1996: 34; *MT* 8: 267–8; 1997: 362; *LE* 27: 619). Yet, in the *Metaphysics of Morals* Kant mentions that conscience is an 'original intellectual and (since it is the thought of duty) moral predisposition' (1996: 560; *MS* 6: 438), arguing that it is 'practical reason holding the human being's duty before him for his acquittal or condemnation in every case that comes under a law' (1996: 529; *MS* 6: 400). This last quotation is to be found in the same section from the *Metaphysics of Morals* in which he addresses conscience, together with 'moral feeling', 'love of human beings' and 'self-respect', as one of four 'aesthetic' conditions of 'the mind's receptivity to concepts of duty' (Kant 1966: 528; *MS* 6: 399). It is especially this section that causes trouble for interpreters who wish to determine precisely what the term conscience is meant to signify in Kant's moral theory. The underlying problems are, of course, how we are to understand the nature of those 'aesthetic' conditions and whether conscience stands out as different in nature from the others. On the one hand, Kant's decision to treat conscience as one of these 'aesthetic' conditions implies its determination in terms of affection and receptivity and this can be taken to mean that conscience, like the other three conditions, is also a feeling – both in the sense of a capacity and in the sense of a particular feeling. On the other hand, even though Kant does specify that the other three conditions are feelings, he does not state that conscience is a feeling.[5]

Should we then still read Kantian conscience as a feeling? If conscience is not a feeling, then what kind of capacity is it? If it is simply

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practical reason, then why bother to address it separately?[6] Finally, if we take conscience to be a specific manifestation of practical reason, then what is its distinguishing character? Which specific functions does it perform? Or, on the other hand, if conscience is a feeling and if its judgements are not to be confused with the judgements of understanding and reason, then what kind of judgements make up our conscience?

In all likelihood, Kant's decision to address conscience under the same heading as the other three conditions has led most Kant scholars to take for granted the idea that conscience is a kind of judgement that is also a mode of feeling. Without explicitly questioning this assumption, these commentators focus their attention on some other aspects of Kant's theory of conscience; usually on his metaphor of the inner court and his claim that an erring conscience is an absurdity.[7] H. J. Paton (1979: 241) writes that Kant is not inconsistent when he suggests that conscience consists of an emotional and an intellectual component, because practical reason, unlike its theoretical counterpart, 'may contain volitional and even emotional elements within itself'. Allen Wood (2008: 183) seems to hold a similar view when he discusses conscience as feeling. Thomas Hill (2002: 301) also believes that Kantian conscience has an emotional and an intellectual aspect.

Jason Howard (2004: 624–5), by contrast, goes so far as to argue that conscience, as 'the evaluative capacity' (which occurs 'completely outside my immediate control') should be completely separated from 'practical reason (as self-conscious implementation of the moral law)'. On his reading, conscience is 'the emotional facticity' – it is *only* a feeling, but it is more than mere subjective feeling, e.g. sympathy (Howard 2004: 627).

Finally, Kant's ambiguous treatment of conscience also leaves room to disagree with all the above interpretations and to argue that conscience is not a feeling at all. Paul Guyer (2010: 143) and Jens Timmermann (2006: 297) maintain that conscience itself is not a feeling, because it causes or 'affects' moral feeling.[8] I believe it is indeed most important to question the widespread assumption that Kantian conscience is (also) a feeling. Understanding conscience only as an emotional predisposition neither puts us in a position to comprehend the multiple functions Kant attributes to conscience, nor in one to realize how these functions would be in keeping with this interpretation. For example, it is unclear how this view would accommodate the self-reflective judging activity of conscience

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through which we cognize, blame and acquit ourselves. Admittedly, the view that conscience is intellectual and 'emotional' fares better in this regard, but when it comes to pinpointing the complex activity of conscience, this reading faces more difficulties than the third possible option of understanding Kantian conscience. For instance, it might become hard to explain why Kant only states that conscience is an intellectual moral predisposition. Furthermore, if we follow Wood (2008: 183) in interpreting conscience as 'a morally motivating feeling', then we seem to lose the possibility of understanding how conscience participates in the process of moral motivation without itself being the moral motive.

I argue that conscience is not a mode of feeling. Hence, I question the assumption that conscience is emotional and intellectual by adding my voice to Guyer's and Timmermann's. Yet my argument is not primarily based on Kant's assertion that it affects moral feeling (1996: 529; *MS* 6: 400). I offer more textual evidence for the claim that conscience is only intellectual and approach the problem of the interpretation of conscience as one of the subjective conditions of moral receptivity differently. My main intention is to pinpoint the multiple functions of conscience and to show that these functions are consistent with Kant's remarks regarding the nature of conscience.[9] In order to explain why Kantian conscience should not be construed as a feeling, I first pay closer attention to the relationship between *conscience*, *special moral sense* and *feelings of guilt* and *relief,* and I use this discussion as the starting point for solving the puzzle concerning conscience. This relationship has not been thoroughly examined hitherto. A detailed analysis of Kant's description of the relation between conscience, moral sense and these self-evaluative feelings shows that conscience is not a special moral sense and that it is not the same as guilt or relief.[10] This analysis also leads to a well-elaborated account of the activities of conscience. By stating that conscience is a kind of *self-appraisal* that causes feelings, I specify both the nature of this *self-assessment* and its role in our moral lives. To be able to capture the precise meaning and function that Kant ascribes to conscience, it is also necessary to carefully analyse some remarks Kant occasionally makes regarding the link between *conscience* and *self-cognition*, *imputation*, *truthfulness*, *sincerity* and *certainty*.[11] It is only by bearing this link in mind that the complexity of the function Kant ascribes to conscience becomes entirely visible: conscience is required for self-cognition, which is needed for self-imputation, adoption of moral maxims and our motivation to act morally.[12] Finally, all this opens up an opportunity to join together Kant's views about the nature and the activities of conscience into one coherent account.

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3. Kantian Conscience, Special Moral Sense, Guilt and Relief

Conscience: felt clue or special moral sense?

In contrast to one widespread contemporary conception of conscience, Kant does not understand conscience as a special moral sense.[13] In fact, he denies the very possibility of the existence of the latter; we do not have a special moral sense just as we do not have its analogue for truth (Kant 1996: 529; *MS* 6: 400). Kant holds that we are incapable of knowing intuitively or through our feelings whether a particular action is morally right or wrong. For this reason, he criticizes those who maintain that we can rely on a special moral sense and that this sense precedes reason or even replaces it. Actions are not morally right because they please us and morally wrong because they displease us, but the other way around: one can feel satisfaction or unease on the basis of previously acquired moral judgement.

This is in line with the general endeavour of Kant's moral theory to account for the universal validity of moral claims. To accept the authority of an individual, inner voice that dictates dos and don'ts would be inconsistent with Kant's overall aim. He uses Socrates's daimon to illustrate the misuse of moral sense in 'a visionary way', which occurs when moral sense is taken to precede and replace reason's judgement (Kant 1996: 519; *MS* 6: 387). In the *Metaphysik Dohna*, Kant claims that senses cannot judge (1997: 375; *LM* 28: 673).[14] Accepting the wrong presumption that the judgements about right and wrong that seem to be 'directly dictated by sense' are made by our 'inner sense' and always correct is, in Kant's eyes, a 'sheer enthusiasm' that mistakes sensations (*Empfindungen*) for judgements (2007: 258; *A* 7: 145). Hence, these judgements, like all other judgements, stem from understanding and reflection. The only difference, according to Kant, is that an obscure reflection is at play in the judgements that seem to be provided by the senses. An unacceptable aspect of moral sense theory, therefore, is its claim that moral sense is the source of our moral knowledge.

Although Kant argues that we do not have moral sense, he does claim that we have moral feeling instead (1996: 529; *MS* 6: 400). However, moral feeling, as one of the four 'aesthetic' conditions, is for Kant 'something merely subjective' (1996: 529; *MS* 6: 400); it should not be used as 'the standard for our moral appraisal' (Kant 1996: 106; *GR* 4: 460). Unlike special moral sense, moral feeling is therefore neither meant to yield knowledge nor to be used as a tool for the purpose of gaining knowledge. It is nothing more than 'the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure' from the very awareness of the moral or immoral character of our actions (Kant 1996: 528; *MS* 6: 399).

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This distinction is directly relevant to Kant's view of conscience. If there is no room for something like a moral sense within his moral theory, then Kantian conscience cannot be a mysterious voice or source meant to provide us with normative moral knowledge; it should not be understood as a special moral sense or felt clue.[15]

Conscience and the self-evaluative sentiments

Are we then to identify Kantian conscience with self-evaluative sentiments such as guilt, relief, regret, remorse, satisfaction and joy, or to hold that conscience consists of them? Before answering this question, we need to determine which of the aforementioned feelings are, in Kant's view, closely related to conscience. The following quote from the *Metaphysics of Morals* is of great help here:

> It should be noted that when conscience acquits him [namely, an agent] it can never decide on a *reward* (*praemium*), something gained that was not his before, but can bring with it only *rejoicing* at having escaped the danger of being found punishable. Hence the blessedness found in the comforting encouragement of one's conscience is not *positive* (joy) but merely *negative* (relief from preceding anxiety) … (Kant 1996: 562; *MS* 6: 440)

Feelings of joy or other 'rewards' or merits should not be connected with Kantian conscience because it does not 'decide' about them. Just as the judge does not reward us after finding us innocent, so, too, does conscience give rise merely to relief after acquitting us. We feel relieved when we have managed to escape guilty feelings. Conscience decides whether or not we have to deal with feelings of guilt. Feelings of relief and guilt are therefore intimately related to Kantian conscience.

One is also contented or discontented with oneself for being sufficiently prudent or for not being prudent enough, but this is not the result of the activity of conscience. Consider Kant's example of the criminal who ended up in jail and who is dissatisfied with himself merely because of that. If he had been fortunate or prudent enough to avoid prison, he would not have regretted his misdeeds at all (Kant 1997: 131; *LE* 27: 352). He would perhaps have felt relieved or even proud of himself for being so clever as to avoid punishment. One more example would be someone who blames himself merely because he has ruined his reputation by acting immorally. Prudence therefore includes blaming or praising ourselves merely on the basis of the consequences arising from our deeds and not because of the nature of our deeds. According to Kant,

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this kind of blaming and praising of ourselves is not the activity performed by conscience.

Kant's students recorded him saying that people are often liable to mistakenly confuse the *tribunal* of *prudence* with that of *conscience* (1997: 131; *LE* 27: 352). Hence, even if we act prudently, achieve everything we want and escape the reproach of others, our conscience (if it functions properly) might still bother us. As a kind of *internal control or sanction,* conscience reminds us that choosing to act immorally would still be impermissible. It is for this reason that Kant needs to draw a distinction between *the judgements of conscience* and *the judgements of prudence* and consequently also a distinction between being contented (or discontented) with oneself 'ethically' and 'pragmatically' (1997: 47; *LE* 27: 251). Guilt, regret, remorse and relief are thus closely related to Kantian conscience only when blaming or acquitting ourselves occurs regardless of both the possible consequences of our actions and approval or disapproval of others.

All this, however, still does not imply that conscience consists merely of these self-evaluative sentiments or that these feelings are constituent parts of conscience. Below I argue that there are certain reasons why these implications would be unacceptable for Kant's theory of conscience. As indicated in section 2, at least one scholar holds that conscience is merely a feeling, whereas most assume that Kantian conscience has both an intellectual and an emotional aspect. Nevertheless, I believe we should even call this latter assumption into question. We should not go so far as Wood (2008: 188–9) does, for example, when he states that 'to feel guilty is to judge ourselves punishable'. Even though Wood is willing to ascribe an intellectual aspect to conscience, on his reading judgements of conscience are equated with the feelings of guilt (as if judging consists in these feelings). What might be noticed first is that this kind of reading is not in line with Kant's portrayal of the relationship between the judgements that conscience passes and the corresponding feelings that follow these judgements. I believe the way Kant describes the relation between conscience and feelings of guilt or relief does not allow for the identification of the judgements of conscience with the feelings that they arouse. Even less does it allow for the reduction of conscience to a kind of emotional self-assessment.

Kant portrays *conscience* as the 'inner judge of all free actions' (1996: 561; *MS* 6: 439) and states that this 'internal judge, as a person *having power*, pronounces the sentence of happiness and misery as the moral

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results of the deed' (1996: 561; *MS* 6: 438n.). According to Kant, our conscience thus judges whether we are guilty or not and decides what we deserve as a result – to experience unpleasant feelings of guilt or not. Through its *verdict*, that is, through condemnation or acquittal, conscience *connects* 'the rightful result with the action'.[16] For instance, our conscience even connects repentance as a painful feeling with some of our misdeeds committed a long time ago (Kant 1996: 219; *C2* 5: 99). Through the way of *linking a particular feeling with the action* which one attributes to oneself, one's conscience, as one of Kant's students noted, 'conveys an inner pain at evil actions, and an inner joy at good ones' (1997: 88; *LE* 27: 297).[17]

This happens, of course, only if conscience functions optimally. Kant believed that not all of us heed its voice equally and 'use every means to obtain a hearing from it' (1996: 530; *MS* 6: 401) – not all of us develop our power of conscience by exercising it properly. Some of us are better than others at finding and employing different strategies to silence our conscience with the aim of avoiding feelings of guilt even before we undertake an action. Probably, Kant would label this kind of conscience as bad: 'If *conscience* is silent before the deed, or if it *grumbles* ineffectually, it is a bad conscience, and in the latter case a pedant that fails to restrain, and yet plagues us' (1997: 19; *LE* 27: 43). On the other hand, some people are better at rationalizing or making convincing excuses for themselves after they have acted immorally. As Kant notes: one might persuade oneself that one is not guilty, i.e. that one has fulfilled one's duty, even when this is actually not so, or one can deceive oneself into believing that an intentional transgression was merely an instance of weakness (2007: 265; *A* 7: 153). Some of us might also seem to have a sort of conscience which makes us feel guilty all the time (even when there is no preceding violation of duty). Such a conscience would correspond to a 'morbid conscience', in Kant's terminology (1997: 135; *LE* 27: 356).

Kant holds that our conscience judges before, after and during an act (1997: 19; *LE* 27: 43). In each case, self-evaluative emotions *follow* its verdict. Painful or not, these feelings are caused by the activity of conscience, or by 'the reproach and censure' that one casts upon oneself (Kant 1996: 219; *C2* 5: 98). Moral remorse, for example, is 'the first outcome of the legally binding judicial verdict' that conscience pronounces (1997: 132; *LE* 27: 353). There is one more quotation which is particularly helpful here:

> Although the *pain* one feels from the pangs of conscience (*Gewissensbissen*) has a moral source it is still a natural effect,

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> like grief, fear, or any other state of suffering (*krankhafte Zustand*). (Kant 1996: 524; *MS* 6: 394)

Conscience, according to Kant, is therefore not pain itself. Rather, it arouses a painful emotion. Even though, in this case, pain does not come about through sensation and is not what we call physical pain, it is still a 'natural effect' of self-reflection. As 'a moral source', conscience elicits feelings through its *activity* of blaming or acquitting. It judges whether we ought to refuse the pain and enjoyment or 'to give ourselves over' to them (Kant 2007: 340; *A* 7: 237). This means not that we are always passive concerning our feelings in the sense that they simply overcome us, but rather that sometimes, through self-assessment, we also influence the way we feel. To refer to such feelings nowadays, we use the term of self-conscious emotions or self-evaluative sentiments.

In sum, conscience is to be identified neither with a felt clue or special moral sense nor with certain self-evaluative sentiments; rather, it is a kind of moral self-appraisal that triggers emotional responses. However, for more decisive textual evidence that speaks against the claim that conscience is itself both affective and intellectual, we have to turn to the section in which Kant discusses the four conditions of moral receptivity.

4. Conscience as one of the Conditions of Moral Receptivity

As indicated in section 2, there is much disagreement among Kant scholars about the proper interpretation of section 12 of the Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue. In this section, Kant examines 'aesthetic', 'natural predispositions of the mind for being affected by concepts of duty' (*natürliche Gemütsanlagen (praedispositio) durch Pflichtbegriffe afficiert zu werden*): moral feeling, conscience, love of human beings and self-respect (1996: 528; *MS* 6: 399). These are also described as the four 'subjective conditions of *receptiveness* to the concept of duty' (*subjektive Bedingungen der Empfänglichkeit für den Pflichtbegriff*). Kant believes that these conditions lie at the basis of morality and that it is due to them that we 'can be put under obligation' (1996: 528; *MS* 6: 399).

This raises many questions: How we are to understand these predispositions? In what sense are they natural and aesthetic? What does the 'receptiveness to the concept of duty' really mean? Are these predispositions affective, motivational or/and intellectual? Should we understand them as 'pure' feelings? Is conscience then one of these four feelings? If not, why does Kant discuss it under the same heading as the other three subjective conditions, which he explicitly characterizes as feelings?

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And finally, in what way are these conditions necessary for us to act morally? These queries are discussed in the remainder of this section, taking the following question as a guide: does conscience stand out as different in nature from the other three conditions? Before answering this question, we first need to outline what conscience has in common with the other three conditions.

As *natural* predispositions of the mind, these conditions are the innate and necessary elements of the human constitution which ought to be developed. It is, however, more difficult to answer the question why all these conditions are called *aesthetic*. Kant's use of the term *ästhetisch* in section 12, which Mary Gregor translates as 'on the part of feeling', might easily be misleading. We should bear in mind that Kant uses the word 'aesthetic' here analogously to its use in the domain of theoretical reason in the first *Critique*; in both cases he uses the word to refer to sensibility, but sensibility as conceived in the domain of practical reason pertains to feelings. It is therefore not meant as the capacity for intuition as in the first *Critique*. But by describing these conditions as *aesthetic*, Kant still determines them in terms of the two main traits of sensibility: *affection* and *receptivity*. He argues that it is due to these predispositions that we are capable of both being 'affected' by concepts of duty and 'receiving' them (Kant 1966: 528; *MS* 6: 399). It is, however, far from clear what this entails. For this reason, the question how to account for the inevitable role which these conditions play in our moral lives remains open, too.

To be in a position to spell out what the state of being 'affected' by 'concepts of duty' and 'receiving' them involves, we need first to understand why we need these concepts at all. To paraphrase Kant's words: we need the concept of duty to lead us to the ends that we *ought to* adopt in the process of establishing our maxims (1966: 515; *MS* 6: 382). It is in accordance with this concept that we ought to set our ends. What comes under the concept of duty cannot be something that we want anyway, such as our own happiness. This end, together with all other merely 'subjective' and self-seeking ends, should be distinguished from duty, which, as 'an objective end', necessarily involves *constraint* (Kant 1966: 519; *MS* 6: 388). Unlike the adoption of self-seeking ends, the adoption of an end that is at the same time a duty, and the constraints it brings with itself, occurs with reluctance and requires effort. From a Kantian perspective, without this ability to constrain ourselves to adopt morally obligatory ends, all of us would be amoral egoists. Kant suggests that moral feeling, as one of the four aesthetic conditions, makes 'us aware

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of the constraint (*Nötigung*)' present in the concept of duty (1996: 528; *MS* 6: 399).

It is, however, not yet clear what is meant by the state of being 'affected' by the concept of duty and 'receiving' it. First, what may be noted here is that this state should not be equated with the state of being aware of the moral law. It presupposes consciousness of the moral law.[18] Second, being aware of the moral law is not tantamount to the act of incorporating the law into the maxims upon which we act. One might be aware of the moral law without taking it up in one's maxim as the primary motive and without following its commands. The will of a person is evil when he incorporates into his maxim deviation from the law in spite of the fact that he is conscious of the law (Kant 1996:79; *R* 6: 32). Furthermore, our formation of 'purely moral' maxims is also hindered by the widespread human tendency 'to make no rigorous judgements of themselves' (Kant 1997: 360; *LE* 27: 616). It seems that our moral judgements of other people's actions (prospective or retrospective) are much more likely to be condemnatory than our self-judgements. Both types of judgements presuppose awareness of what is morally right or wrong, but in the first case – when we judge whether or not someone else has lived up to certain moral requirements – it is usually easier to play the role of *a just* and *impartial judg*e. Playing this role in the process of self-judgement, on the other hand, requires much more effort, because we seem to be prone to *self-deception*. Interestingly, Kant thought that nature, in order to lead us to virtue, has implanted in us a tendency to willingly allow ourselves to be deceived (2007: 264; *A* 7: 152). We can choose not to delude ourselves under the influence of self-love, but we still have a deep-seated tendency to be deceived by the illusion of the good in ourselves (Kant 2007: 264; *A* 7: 153). We are inclined to colour and conceal our moral defects when we reflect upon the application of a rule to ourselves (Kant 2007: 324; *A* 7: 219).

Only when one really *applies* the moral law to oneself or properly incorporates it as an incentive into one's maxim does one *feel the constraints* that the moral law, as the categorical imperative, brings with it. I would like to suggest that 'receiving' the concepts of duty and being 'affected' by them may be understood as applying the law to ourselves. More precisely, this might be understood in terms of our *responsiveness* to the *constraints* that this application requires. The conditions that make us susceptible to this application are called 'aesthetic' because they are both *affected* by the consciousness of the law and *receptive* to the constraints of reason. Without them, we would be capable of knowing what is right or wrong in general, but we would not be capable of accepting

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that constraints of reason hold for us (as well as for other people). The 'aesthetic conditions' make us *responsive to the constraining power of the law*, capable of *self-constraint*. In this way, they also facilitate the execution of moral actions. Since Kant holds that for us, as human beings, moral laws which are 'objectively necessitating' are not at the same time also 'subjectively necessitating', he also has to explain how it is possible to *compel ourselves* to fulfil the demands of the moral law.[19] In order to explain how we compel ourselves to act morally and to be virtuous, he turns to these four conditions.

As one of the 'subjective' conditions, conscience enables us to apply the moral law to ourselves and to follow its commands. From the position of the judge, it provides us with incentives for our actions by approving or disapproving them (Kant 1997: 267; *LM* 29: 900). Put differently, conscience adjudicates which motive ought to be the determining ground of our maxims. As will become apparent in the next section, in Kant's moral theory, conscience is meant to play the role of a just judge in the process of close self-examination and to facilitate in this way the process of forming and adopting moral maxims.[20] Through its inner reproach and its consequences, or emotional reactions, conscience enables self-constraint in one's end-setting (or self-mastery) and 'strengthens' the fulfilment of our obligations (Kant 1997: 327; *LE* 27: 575).

Like the other three conditions, conscience is 'affected' by the awareness of the moral law. This, together with Kant's point that we cannot help hearing the voice of conscience (1996: 560; *MS* 6: 438), may be taken to mean that conscience, like the other three conditions, is a kind of feeling; but conscience rather *makes us feel* unpleasant. Whenever this happens, we do not really want to hear its blaming voice and possibly change our self-image for the worse. Usually, however, once we have judged ourselves to be guilty – have become aware of the inconsistency between, on the one hand, our action and our effort to act morally, and on the other, the requirements of the moral law – we cannot avoid hearing this voice of our inner judge that might affect our self-image and then we do have a kind of incentive to act morally in order to eradicate the unpleasant state in which we find ourselves. This state, which moves us to action, is pain (Kant 2007: 338; *A* 7: 235). As should be clear by now, Kantian conscience is not something that is passive and non-reflective or pre-reflective. This point helps us see how conscience stands out as different in nature among the subjective conditions.

Yet many Kant scholars do not attach importance to this distinctive nature of conscience and read all of the four conditions as feelings.

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Wood (2008: 183), for example, reads conscience as one of the four pure feelings that arise from pure reason and argues that conscience is a feeling of pleasure or displeasure associated with oneself, adding that it is 'a morally motivating feeling'. This reading may easily be seen as the solution that fits well with Kant's choice to subsume conscience under the same general heading as moral feeling, love of human beings and self-respect. Nevertheless, although Kant explicitly characterizes the other three conditions as feelings, he does not state that conscience is a feeling or a moral motive; probably because conscience, as a specific manifestation of practical reason, is meant to trigger certain emotional responses. This last point is in keeping with both Kant's claim that conscience is an intellectual moral predisposition and his treatment of conscience in other works. To my knowledge, there is no place in his writings where he defines conscience as a feeling of pleasure and displeasure.

Moreover, as has been pointed out by Guyer and Timmermann, what Kant suggests regarding the connection between conscience and moral feeling is that conscience 'affects' moral feeling by its act. Kant states that moral feeling is 'the susceptibility to feel pleasure or displeasure merely from being aware that our actions are consistent with or contrary to the law of duty' (1996: 528; *MS* 6: 399). The kind of moral self-awareness that is hereby presupposed is actually the moral self-awareness of conscience.[21] When we are aware that some of *our* actions are morally right or wrong, we feel pleasure or displeasure associated with given actions. Activity of our conscience stimulates these motivating feelings of pleasure and displeasure. Unlike the other conditions of moral receptivity, conscience has the ability to 'affect' certain emotional states.

Finally, as my analysis in the next section proves, conscience plays an essential role in the process of self-cognition. It is through the *self-reflective judgements of conscience* that we cognize ourselves, whereas moral feeling, as we have seen, is not meant to yield any kind of cognition. This self-reflective process points to the specific character of conscience:

> Now, this original intellectual and (since it is the thought of duty) moral predisposition called *conscience* is peculiar in that, although its business is a business of a human being with himself, one constrained by his reason sees himself constrained to carry it on as at the bidding *of another person*. For the affair here is that of trying a case before a court. (Kant 1996: 560; *MS* 6: 438)

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While trying our own case before our inner court, we ought to do our best to be as *impartial* as possible in judging our own character. As if someone else is the judge of our actions, dispositions and our own way of forming and adopting maxims, we compare the lawgiving aspect of ourselves with the executive one; we compare what we ought to do with what we have done (or are to do). Through this comparison we pass judgement on ourselves and come to know ourselves better. This reflective or judging activity of conscience is something that Kant does not ascribe to the other three subjective conditions. He neither mentions any judgements of moral feeling, love of human beings and self-respect, nor says that these subjective conditions are necessary for self-imputation. Love of human beings, for instance, does not give 'verdicts' that make us feel guilty or relieved; it is, for Kant, just delight or pleasure in the perfection of others.[22] In contrast, Kant speaks of the judgements of conscience and argues that conscience is required for morally acquitting or reproaching ourselves.

The activity of conscience is indispensable for moral agency. Conscience makes it possible to have the states of mind in which we react emotionally to *our* violation of duties or *our* compliance with them: either guilt and relief or moral feelings. By making us feel the constraining power of reason, conscience facilitates our self-constraining activities, which are necessary for acting morally. Once we become aware of the inconsistency between our actions and the moral requirements, we can hardly choose not to hear the voice of conscience and escape unpleasant emotional reactions. This might be the reason why Kant discusses conscience together with other conditions, but stating that conscience, as one of the *aesthetic* conditions, makes us susceptible to receiving or experiencing constraints of reason does not necessarily imply that conscience is a mode of feeling. Being thus an *intellectual* (rather than an emotional) *predisposition*, conscience is therefore one of those 'subjective conditions of receptiveness to the concept of duty'. This is how conscience stands out as different in nature from the other subjective, 'aesthetic' conditions that Kant discusses. It is then also not surprising that Kant singles out conscience as 'the condition of all duties as such' (1996: 534; *MS* 6: 407).

5. Conscience as Practical Reason and its Multiple Functions

The role that conscience plays in Kant's moral theory is, however, not yet completely clarified. It has to be precisely determined what kind of self-evaluation is at work in the judgements of conscience and in what sense these judgements differ from the judgements of understanding

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and reason. My aim here is to examine what conscience is, as the specific manifestation of practical reason – I want to pinpoint its function once more, but now in light of the analysis of two additional definitions of conscience Kant offers us.

Before doing so, I would like to add one clarification. Kant sometimes says that conscience is a capacity. For example, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, he mentions 'the judicial sentences of that wonderful capacity in us which we call conscience' (Kant 1996: 218; *C2* 5: 98). Since he argues that conscience is practical reason (Kant 1996: 529; *MS* 6: 400), I do not take this to mean that conscience is a separate faculty. On the contrary, I take Kantian conscience to be the capacity of practical reason in performing a specific function.

Kant provides the following definition of conscience:

> Conscience is: 1. the capacity to become conscious of the rightfulness or wrongfulness of all of one's actions. 2. The inner standing of the capacity for judging, as a judge, to give an account of the authorizations of our actions. (2005: 354; *NF* 18: 579)

In the *Metaphysics of Morals* he explains the role of the judge:

> The (natural or moral) person that is authorized to impute with rightful force is called a *judge* or a court (*iudex s. forum*). (Kant 1996: 382; *MS* 6: 227)

Given the first qualification of conscience, it is obvious that Kantian *conscience* is a kind of *moral self-awareness*. This claim is supported by the following citation which can be found in the notes taken by Vigilantius: '*Conscientia*, taken generally is the consciousness of ourselves, like *apperceptio*; *in specie* it involves consciousness of my will, my disposition to do right' (1997: 357; *LE* 27: 613). Moreover, if we recall the conclusions in the section on the comparison of conscience and moral sense, it becomes clear that the moral self-awareness of conscience cannot be the source of our moral knowledge of right and wrong. There must be prior moral knowledge if conscience is to judge.[23] Without conscience we would thus be able to know which actions are right and wrong *in general* and perhaps even to judge whether or not any given action falls under the universal law, but we would still not be capable of becoming aware that *our own* actions are moral or immoral. To put it more generally, it is due to conscience that we are able to assess the moral worth of *our own* actions and dispositions.

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Kant, however, thought that the definition of conscience should be more specific and added the second qualification of conscience to his definition. When we become aware that one of our actions (either actual or possible) is right or wrong, we are in *a position to judge* whether or not we ought to *hold ourselves accountable* for the action in question.[24] Most of the time, conscience plays the role of this *inner judge* in Kant's texts. As the second quote states, the judge is the one who is 'authorized to impute'. This dignified or respectable position of judge, or that 'inner standing' mentioned in the first quotation, suggests to us what is specific about conscience: it is practical reason in its *specific reflective function of carrying out self-assessment*.[25] As Kant defines it in the *Religion*: conscience is 'the moral faculty of judgement, passing judgement upon itself' (1996: 203; *R* 6: 185).

What happens in the judgements of conscience, if we make use of Kant's metaphor to explain this last point, is a trial in which our *way of judging* whether an *action* is right or wrong is assessed before our inner court. This is not to say that conscience excludes a close examination and judgement of our actions.[26] In fact, our starting point here must be the examination of a particular action and judging whether we ought to hold ourselves responsible for that action. It is through this examination that we test the *impartiality* of our judging, or do 'quibbling tricks' with our conscience before pronouncing ourselves guilty or innocent (Kant 1996: 59; *GR* 4: 404). As if we were in court, playing various roles of accuser, advocate, witness and, most of all, the role of the judge (who also observes everything that happens in his court), we accuse, defend, witness and finally judge ourselves.[27] In particular, we judge the way we have formed (or are to form) maxims for our actions. It is a kind of *check of our maxim-formation and adoption*.[28] A closer look at the process of the construction and adoption of our maxims might, for example, help us realize that, in the process of maxim-formation, we have made an exception for ourselves (perhaps even unintentionally) in order to please ourselves and avoid disadvantage. Or – as we have seen in the previous section – one more look at maxim-formation might help us become aware of the *constraints* that we have to accept to be able to establish moral maxims and act in accordance with them.

Our conscience judges whether we have really, in all diligence, examined whether our actions are morally right or wrong. What we judge here is actually whether or not we are or have been careful and diligent enough in our examination; more specifically, whether we have *honestly* taken into consideration all relevant *subjective*, *psychological conditions* under

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which our judgement concerning the rightfulness or wrongfulness of our action is exercised. Since we have a tendency to delude ourselves under the influence of self-love and to let our maxims be grounded on these subjective conditions, paying closer attention to them is crucial for the formation of moral maxims. These conditions, which arise from the peculiar psychological constitution of each of us (as empirical subjects, in Kant's terminology), may include: inclinations, habits, prejudices or interests that influence our judging. What is in question here, therefore, is the state of mind of the subject who examines himself.

The underlying idea is that it is still possible to reduce the influence of some of the psychological conditions of our judging by undertaking *careful self-examination*. Through the judgements of conscience, we come to know ourselves better. According to Kant, to know yourself is to know whether 'your heart' is good or evil, 'whether the source of your action is pure or impure' and 'what can be imputed to you' (1996: 562; *MS* 6: 441). The following will show how these three aspects of *self-cognition* are related to *conscience*.

Since the link between conscience and knowing whether the source of our actions is pure or impure has already been outlined, it is easiest to begin with the second aspect of moral self-cognition. Taking account of all psychological conditions that influence our judgements, such as our inclinations for example, is actually to become aware of the *impure incentives* of our actions and to try to distinguish them from the *pure* or moral ones.[29] As Kant notes, reason gives us incentives, because our conscience 'approves or disapproves' them (1997: 267; *LM* 29: 900). The example of introducing an exception for ourselves might be used to illustrate an action determined by an impure source. In such a case, our maxim-formation and consequently our way of acting would be determined by our inclination to please ourselves. This instance of self-cognition therefore consists in the examination of our own way of establishing maxims. It involves reflecting upon our way of thinking (*Denkungsart*), which is, for Kant, an essential aspect of our moral character.[30]

The first aspect of self-knowledge, namely, 'to know your heart', also requires the judging function of conscience. Having a good heart, in Kant's view, means to have 'an impulse toward the practical good, even if it is not exercised according to principles' (2007: 384; *A* 7: 286). We judge, in this case, whether we are good-hearted or hard-hearted. Again, this is reflecting upon our own character, but this time it is directed

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at our natural or sensible character. Kant also sometimes speaks of *sincerity* of the heart as related to conscience.[31] As I read it, this is about being honest with ourselves, as far as possible, concerning our underlying intentions, or about our readiness to admit to ourselves what we are doing when we intentionally act against our better judgement. Doing our best in being honest with ourselves is in Kant's theory intimately related to the operations of conscience and at the same time very important because of the human tendency towards *self-deception*.

Additionally, Kant argues that for one to undertake an action, it does not suffice to judge and to be of the opinion that the action in question is right; one also has to be *certain* (*gewiß sein*) that it is not wrong. In his view, conscience requires more than mere opinion that an action 'may well be right' (Kant 1996: 203; *R* 6: 186). At the very least, it requires that something be taken to be true with the consciousness that it is 'subjectively sufficient' – having a *belief* instead of having an opinion. As Kant puts it, this 'subjective sufficiency is called *conviction* (for myself)' (1998: 686; *C1* A822/B850). To be certain here therefore means to form a firm belief or to become convinced that an action that we plan to undertake is not wrong, instead of just accepting prescribed rules which can lead us only to a legally correct action. As Kant suggests: 'dishonesty in not screening incentives (even those of well-intentioned actions) in accordance with the moral guide' leads only to seeing 'the conformity of these incentives to the law, not whether they have been derived from the latter itself, i.e. from it as the sole incentive' (1996: 84; *R* 6: 37). These two last points might be illustrated by Kant's example of an inquisitor 'who has to pass judgement upon a so-called heretic' (1996: 203; *R* 6: 186). If the inquisitor condemns this person to death, he just follows the rules of the 'historical and phenomenal faith'. It is, however, unconscientious to act upon a conviction that 'has no other grounds of proof except historical ones', since it could easily be the case that the revelation the inquisitor has reached through the intermediary of human beings and their interpretation is wrong; he would then 'risk the danger of doing something which would be to the highest degree wrong' (Kant 1996: 204; *R* 6: 187). By passively accepting something that, at that time, would be justified before the 'civil court' and thus allowed, the inquisitor would still fail to use his capacity for conscience, that is, also to check whether or not his action would be approved before his *inner court*. In other words, the inquisitor does not do everything in his power to reconsider his maxim in order to reach the state of certainty that his action is not morally wrong. His conscience does not, or does not properly, approve or disapprove incentives and his actions are thus not strictly speaking moral.

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Conscience leads us to differently grounded convictions from those of the inquisitor. It is concerned with honesty or *sincerity* with ourselves; through the judgements of conscience we question the *truthfulness of our own declarations* – whether we really hold something to be true and not merely pretend to do so and lie to ourselves. There is no room for error here, whereas we can be mistaken in our judgements as to whether something is true or not (Kant 1996: 34; *MT* 8: 268). As Kant notes: 'there can perhaps be truth in what is believed, yet at the same time untruthfulness in the belief (or even in the purely inward profession of it), and this is in itself damnable' (1966: 204; *R* 6: 187). Even if truth and truthfulness of the same belief can be separated, the judgements of conscience still have an inescapable role to play in the fulfilment of our duties. Conscience examines whether we really believe that something is true rather than whether something is true or not.[32] What we check through the judgements of conscience is the degree of the subjective validity of our judgements.

The third aspect of self-knowledge Kant mentions concerns the question of what can be *imputed* to us. Conscience is also indispensable to this form of self-cognition. If we now recall Kant's second qualification of conscience as 'the inner standing of the capacity for judging, as a judge, to give an account of the authorizations of our actions', and his assertion that the judge is the one who is 'authorized to impute', together with his reference to freedom when he uses the terms 'author' and 'authorization', we may infer that it is in the judgements of conscience that we put ourselves in the position of the one who judges which of our actions are free and thus *imputable* to ourselves.[33]

Conscience judges which actions one ought to blame oneself for. By appraising both what does lie in his control and what does not (i.e. what is not causally determined for him and belongs to his 'intelligible character' and what is determined and belongs to his 'empirical character'), an agent also judges whether or not he is 'the author (*causa libera*)' of his action (Kant 1996: 382; *MS* 6: 227). For instance, Kant argues that a state of agitation or cool deliberation makes a difference for the actual imputation of an action (1996: 382; *MS* 6: 228). When one is in an affective state of anger, for instance, one has no control over oneself (Kant 2007: 277; *A* 7: 166). Once an agent thinks he is the author of his action or once he regards himself as free or as the one who intentionally causes a change by his act, he is also in the position to attribute an action to himself as blameworthy or blameless. Hence, if he considers himself free, his conscience *imputes* to himself his act and its consequences (Kant 1996: 378; *MS* 6: 223).

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Kant held that *conscience is the ability to impute one's own free actions to oneself* (1997: 327; *LE* 27: 575; 1996: 561; *MS* 6: 439). When one analyses oneself closely and when one is ready to attribute an action and its consequences to oneself, one is *conscientious*. Blame-shifting is done by an unconscientious person. If we now recall the example of the inquisitor, we might notice that it would be much easier for him than for a conscientious person to shift the blame to the spiritual authority whose laws he has accepted without any closer examination of the grounds of his own convictions and beliefs.

Through the judgements of conscience, we thus also appraise whether we hold ourselves blameworthy or not. More precisely, we assess the degree to which an action can be imputed to us 'subjectively', that is, in regard to our psychological states, such as being aware of our effort to compel ourselves to act in a morally permissible way. If we come to the conclusion in a given case that we have done everything that lies in our power to form a morally worthy maxim and to act in accordance with it, then we tend to evaluate our own moral character as good. If this is not the case, then our moral character appears to us as evil. To have a good character or to truly have a character in Kant's view involves both forming morally right maxims and acting on them consistently.

From *the position of the judge*, we therefore *reflect* upon the moral quality of our own *character* and this is what the judgements of conscience are about. Hence, conscience does not judge whether an action is right or wrong *in general*, for that is something that understanding does (Kant 1996: 203; *R* 6: 186; 1997: 362; *LE* 27: 619; 1996: 34; *MT* 8: 267). This kind of knowledge is already presupposed within the moral self-awareness of conscience.[34] Nor does it judge, at least not directly, whether an action can be subsumed under the moral law, because that is something that reason does (Kant 1996: 203; *R* 6: 186). Kant is of the opinion that these distinctions must not be overlooked and this seems to be the reason why he is not willing to accept Alexander Baumgarten's definition of conscience without hesitation. Defining conscience merely as the 'subsumption of our doings under the law' (1997: 359; *LE* 27: 616) might tell us whether an action is right or wrong, but not whether an agent has done everything that lies in his control to act morally.[35] This definition would suffice to explain whether the action of the inquisitor who condemns a heretic to death is right or wrong, but it would still not suffice to ascertain whether he has actually been engaged in careful self-examination and done his best to avoid adopting morally unworthy maxims.

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In conclusion, the function of conscience is not to decide whether an action is right or wrong, or to decide what would be the best thing to do in given circumstances; rather, its function is to guide and judge our moral decisions by providing indispensable knowledge about our subjective conditions as agents. As we saw, this knowledge gives us answers to the question whether we are being honest with ourselves, and it also includes knowledge concerning the subjective factors that influence our maxim-formation and adoption. In this way, conscience plays an indispensable role in the *application of the law to ourselves* and in the *fulfilment of our duties*. Finally, it is due to the specific character of the judgements of conscience that we come to know whether we have done (or are doing) everything that is in our power to act morally.

6. Conclusion

The problem discussed in this paper is how to solve the puzzle of the nature and the function of conscience in Kant's works by coming to the one picture that would represent different segments of his account as a consistent whole. Although conscience is often conceived as a kind of felt clue or special moral sense and identified with the feelings of guilt or relief, Kant's conception of conscience is importantly different. Conscience, on Kant's account, is rather *the internal judge* whose verdict triggers certain emotional reactions. This inner judge already has moral knowledge of what is right and wrong. However, he is only allowed to use this knowledge to assess the moral worth of his own actions and dispositions. What happens in the judgements of conscience is *moral self-evaluation*. We put ourselves in the dignified position of the judge and, as if we were the impartial spectators who look at themselves in the mirror, we then observe, examine and judge ourselves as moral agents.

In this picture, Kantian conscience is the self-reflective judging capacity of moral self-appraisal; it is a necessary condition of our moral self-cognition. Through its judgements, we reflect on our own character. At the same time, we judge our way of appraising actions and our way of acting. During the judging, we pay closer attention to various psychological conditions. In this way, we want to check whether some of these conditions, as 'impure' incentives, lie at the basis of our maxim-formation. Put differently, we try to constrain ourselves by removing different obstacles standing in the way of our establishing morally correct maxims. Moreover, in the subjective judgements of conscience we take account of these psychological conditions and judge whether we hold ourselves accountable for an action. If we come to the conclusion that we have not done everything that lies in our control to form a morally

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worthy maxim and to act in accordance with it, then we feel guilty because of that. Without conscience we would not be able to impute an action and its consequences to ourselves. It is this account of the link between conscience, feelings of guilt and the personal ascriptions of responsibility that Kant's theory has to offer us.

Through its judgements, conscience makes us feel guilty or relieved and the violation of moral norms or compliance with them affects us in an emotional way. Furthermore, as one of the conditions of moral receptivity, conscience stimulates moral feeling which makes us aware of the constraint that duty involves and enables us to *constrain ourselves* to adopt morally obligatory ends.

Because we tend to deceive ourselves and to judge others more harshly than ourselves, we do need a judge who attempts to be just, who reveals various excuses and rationalizations, and who does not let the advocate of self-love win without a convincing defence. When Kantian conscience is read as the inner judge, then its multiple functions become fully visible: we need conscience to cognize ourselves, to appraise the moral worth of our own character and actions, to impute an action to ourselves, to monitor the process of establishing maxims and to move us to moral actions. Without moral self-assessment, we would not be ready to see ourselves as the targets of the moral law; acting morally and being virtuous would be impossible. In other words, the proposed reading makes it clear that conscience plays a crucial role in Kant's moral theory.[36]

Notes

1 In all three volumes of *Moral Psychology* edited by Walter Sinnott-Armstrong (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), for instance, conscience is mentioned only a few times in passing as a characteristic of one of the stages in children's moral development. Paul Thagard and Tracy Finn (2011) define conscience as moral sense.

2 There is a dispute in the literature on emotions and feelings as to whether these two terms should be identified or not and there seems to be no consensus over their employment. I use these terms interchangeably in this paper.

3 For an attempt at uniting different aspects of Kant's theory of conscience into one consistent account, see Heubült (1980). My concern regarding this reading, however, is that, both by introducing the notion of *Urgewissen* and by ascribing a very broad function to Kantian conscience, it does not do justice to the original texts.

4 References are to: *Kants gesammelte Schriften*. Ausgabe der Preussischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: Georg Reimer, subsequently Walter de Gruyter, 1900–). Translations are taken from the *Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991–). Abbreviated references to Kant's works are as follows. *A*: *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (2007); *C1*: *Critique of Pure Reason* (1998); *C2*: *Critique of Practical Reason* (1996); *GR*: *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of*

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Morals (1996); *LE*: *Lectures on Ethics* (1997); *LM*: *Lectures on Metaphysics* (1997); *MS*: *Metaphysics of Morals* (1996); *MT*: *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* (1996); *R*: *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* (1996); NF: *Notes and Fragments* (2005).

5 In §12 of the Introduction to the Doctrine of Virtue, Kant neither says that conscience is *Gefühl* (as he does for moral feeling), nor that it is *Empfindung* (as he does for the love of human beings).

6 Perhaps it is needed because Kant warns against confusing judgements of conscience with the judgements of understanding and the judgements of reason. However, at times Kant also suggests that conscience and practical reason should not be distinguished, for instance, when he states that conscience is practical reason. Moreover, in his metaphorical descriptions of conscience as a judge, Kant uses the terms conscience and practical reason interchangeably: it is sometimes conscience that pronounces the verdict 'guilty' or 'innocent' (1996: 562; *MS* 6: 440) and sometimes it is practical reason (1996: 560; *MS* 6: 438).

7 I will not be seeking to give a detailed account of the last point. For useful discussions about Kant's claim regarding an erring conscience see: Wood (2008: 189–92) and Kahn (forthcoming).

8 Although implicitly Timmermann (2006: 297) suggests that conscience is not a feeling, explaining that it might be called 'aesthetic' because it affects the faculty of moral feeling by its act.

9 The title of Guyer's paper (2010) in which he addresses conscience indicates that he focuses on discussing moral feelings in the *Metaphysics of Morals*. Timmermann (2006) accounts for conscience, 'indirect' duty and moral error in his paper.

10 In spite of the fact that Kant does not aim to distinguish between conscience and moral sense, I find it important to delineate this distinction. It puts us in a better position to understand his conception of conscience because the ordinary view of conscience seems to presuppose the identity of conscience and moral sense, whereas Kant in his works from the 1780s and 1790s denies the very existence of special moral sense.

11 An example of this is Kant's remark concerning a servant whose conscience *imputes* to him the results of his lie (1996: 554; *MS* 6: 431). Kant accounts for the link between conscience, truthfulness, sincerity and certainty in *Religion Within the Boundaries of Pure Reason* (1793) and in his essay *On the Miscarriage of all Philosophical Trials in Theodicy* (1791).

12 The link between conscience and imputation is particularly neglected in the available secondary literature.

13 To my knowledge, there are very few contemporary discussions regarding conscience. As a rule, conscience is seen as a kind of the inner voice which intuitively knows what is right or wrong. Consider e.g. Thagard and Finn's (2011: 150) claim that conscience is 'a kind of moral intuition', or Hare's (1993) view of conscience.

14 Compare Kant 2007: 258; *A* 7: 146.

15 As will be explained in sections 4 and 5, conscience presupposes knowledge of what is morally right or wrong, but unlike moral feeling and the other two subjective conditions, conscience has a certain cognitive function to perform, namely, to provide us with self-knowledge.

16 I combine here two of Kant's insights (1996: 562, 560; *MS* 6: 440, 438). In the first one, Kant speaks of the 'verdict of conscience' and implies in this way that conscience pronounces the verdict, whereas at 6: 438 he equates the verdict with the conclusion of reason. For our present purposes, it will suffice to assume that there is no contradiction here. This assumption will be affirmed in the next section of the paper where I argue that conscience is a specific manifestation of practical reason.

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17 This quotation, in which conscience is said to convey an inner joy, together with the quotation that states that conscience pronounces the sentence of happiness (1996: 561; 6: 438n.), might suggest that Kant has not been so rigid in denying a close relationship between conscience and joy, as he appears to be on the basis of the previously discussed passage from the *Metaphysics of Morals* (1996: 562; *MS* 6: 440). But even if we choose to charge Kant with inconsistency or, on the other hand, choose to believe that he uses the terms 'inner joy' and 'happiness' only to denote a negative kind of 'blessedness', this does not affect the argument in this section.

18 See Kant 1996: 518–19, 528; *MS* 6: 387, 399.

19 Compare Kant 1997: 72; *ML* 28: 258; 1996: 375, 376; *MS* 6: 214, 221.

20 The point that conscience is closely related to maxim-formation is also hinted at by Guyer (2010: 144) and Timmermann (2006: 303–4), but its full development lies outside the scopes of their respective papers.

21 This moral self-awareness might be taken to correspond to the first qualification of conscience that Kant gives in his definition when he asserts that conscience is 'the capacity to become conscious of the rightfulness or wrongfulness of all of one's actions' (2005: 354; *NF* 18: 579). At this stage, the agent only knows that his action is morally right or wrong, but not yet whether he should hold himself responsible for the action in question – whether he should feel guilty or relieved. I give a more detailed reading of this definition of conscience in the following section.

22 Compare Kant 1996: 569; *MS* 6: 449; 1996: 531; *MS* 6: 402.

23 See Kant 1997: 328; *LE* 27: 576.

24 As indicated earlier, conscience judges not only after the deed has been done, but also before and during an act.

25 This claim is also made in Munzel (1999: 221) and in Makkreel (2002: 216–19) but without further discussion about what this self-assessment involves.

26 See e.g. Kant 1997: 360; *LE* 27: 617. On the basis of this difference between judging our way of acting and judging our way of appraising the rightfulness or wrongfulness of our actions, Kahn (forthcoming) draws a distinction between two different functions of conscience: 'duty function' and 'moral reflexivity function'. I also believe that it is important and useful to be aware of this distinction, but I doubt the correctness of characterizing these two functions as *duty* and *reflection*. Checking whether we have fulfilled our duty is also a kind of self-reflection and we have a duty to reflect upon our way of judging actions.

27 Identifying conscience with the judge who not only judges but also is aware of everything that happens in his courtroom is in keeping with Kant's point that conscience is 'consciousness of the *internal court* in the human being' (1996: 560; *MS* 6: 438).

28 Just like the appraising of one's own *actions*, the appraising of one's own *maxims* also might happen before, after or during the act.

29 To refer to a pure incentive, in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant would rather use the term motive (*Bewegungsgründe*).

30 Moral imitators, for instance, do not have character, according to Kant, because they lack originality in their way of thinking. In other words, they do not form their own maxims (2007: 390; *A* 7: 293).

31 See for instance Kant 1996: 32; *MT* 8: 265.

32 At times Kant raises doubts about the credibility of self-knowledge, e.g. when he states that we can never get to know our real incentives (1996: 61; *GR* 4: 407). Some have taken this to be a weak point of Kant's theory of conscience, but Kant could reply that the crucial idea here is that, irrespective of the 'real truth' concerning our incentives, we still *ought to give our best* to be honest with ourselves and be diligent enough during the process of self-examination.

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33 See Kant 1996: 378, 381; *MS* 6: 223, 227.
34 Timmermann (2006: 303–4) emphasizes that conscience is not the source of objective moral norms.
35 For a different reading of Kant's disagreement with Baumgarten on this point, see Hoffmann (2002: 435).
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