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Saving morality: Why we cannot, and why we must

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Saving morality: Why we cannot, and why we must

by

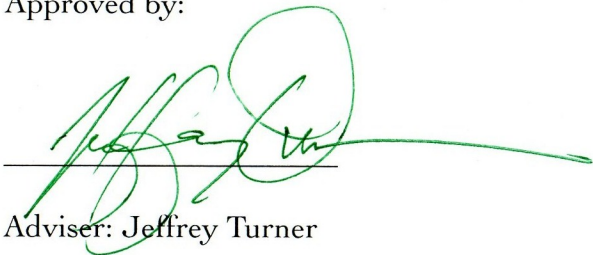
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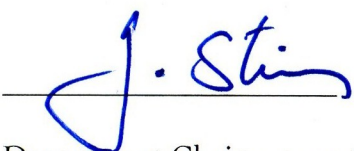
For Honors in Philosophy

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Abstract

Philosophers and laymen alike have often used morality to invite misconceptions of human life into ethics, and also of ethics into human life. The Kant/Williams discourse provides a rich backdrop on which to consider these misconceptions. But the misconceptions of morality involved are just as numerous and just as serious. One thing that the Kant/Williams discourse shows is this: that ethics can be neither contained by nor cultivated without morality. Though much of Williams' critique of *Kantian* morality is quite astute, the philosophical and ethical wisdoms of morality abound in spite of these. Morality understands the fundamental condition of moral loss, and the sometimes irreducible quandaries that this condition places human beings in. It understands the nature of the moral law, and the intricacies that the levels of letter and spirit invite into human life. Perhaps more importantly, it understands the uncompromising relationship between moral loss and moral law, and how the human navigation of this relationship leads into the ethical realm via giving rise to ethical conviction. Finally, for all of its pressures, morality abounds in valuable wisdoms for the one discovering that the human soul occupies a place of ethical significance in the world. It is responsible for pointing out, grounding and providing a framework for some of the most fundamental truths about the world and human beings; and these are essential to any viable ethical theory and sensible conception of human life.

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Preface

In the preface to the Canto Edition of his *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics*, Bernard Williams supposes in hindsight that he got the title wrong, and that it should rather be “Ethics: An Introduction to Morality.”¹ He meant this pseudo-revision to emphasize how ethics might illustrate the problems and limitations of morality. The essential claim of this work is that he got it quite right the first time: morality is the introduction to ethics.

Williams was at the forefront of ethical philosophy nearing the end of the 20th century. During his career, he presented some of the most influential criticisms to date of Kantianism and Utilitarianism, and of moral philosophy in general. This work brings together over a year of immersion in Williams’ ethical texts, in particular his work on the morality/ethics relationship. This preface will serve primarily as a rough roadmap of what follows, and also as a sort of glossary of some notions that may require explanation before they are met in the text.

Though Williams continues to develop his own ethical theory after his very important *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, that work brings together over a decade of Williams’ thoughts on morality. He levies his case against morality primarily by way of a heavy critique of Utilitarian and Kantian morality. The discourse with Kant is more relevant to this work, and is the subject of the first chapter. The first section of the chapter attempts to lay out Williams’ criticisms of Kant as straightforwardly as possible. Williams’ critique of Kantianism is here parsed into six main issues, although it is acknowledged that it might have been done a

number of other ways. When Williams has weighed over a decade of critique, he considers morality to be an unfortunate variety of ethics which we would be better off without.²

The second section continues by posing two main questions, the first of which is how pertinent Williams' criticisms of Kantian morality really are. This involves getting to the heart of Kantian morality, and getting clear on notions such as the good will, duty, reason, obligation, freedom and lawfulness. This work acknowledges, without much reservation, the effectiveness of Williams' criticisms of Kant. Ultimately, it seems Williams understands Kant's insufficiencies quite well, and most of the criticisms probably stand, if only in a weakened form. While the Kant/Williams discourse provides a very rich backdrop on which to consider the morality/ethics relationship, it is not a major objective of this work to adjudicate any greater debate between these two philosophers (or their followers). The second, more important question of the section is whether Williams' criticisms really warrant throwing morality out of human ethical life altogether - to which the response here will be negative. The misfirings by Williams against Kant will be important to this work, and they hint at some ways that an alternative view of morality (namely, morality as an introduction) might survive Williams' criticisms. In particular, there is a small opening for morality left even by Williams, in that morality does offer *one* point of entry into ethics, one way of approaching ethical life (if only a poor one).

The second chapter builds on dual suspicions from the first chapter that Williams' criticisms against Kant might not do away with morality completely: because Williams leaves Kantian morality alive, and because Kant might not be representative of all morality. The most

fundamental question of the chapter is the essence of morality, and the most fundamental position of the chapter is that it is a much simpler institution than normally supposed.

Whereas the first chapter weighs Kant and Williams mostly against each other, the second chapter weighs both of their conceptions of morality against what is here presented as the essence of morality. The ultimate suggestion of the chapter is that both Kant and Williams ignore some very crucial elements of morality, and attempt to (respectively) prop it up and tear it down based on these misconceptions. According to this view, Kant ironically limits too much the reach of morality in ethics, while Williams gives it too great a reach; but both suggest an impartiality and impersonality that are not essential to morality. This argument involves some notions that ought to be introduced before they are met head on in the body of the work: moral loss, moral law, the letter of the moral law, and the spirit of the moral law.

Moral loss and moral law will be initially presented as basic human intuitions, and this is an early place of divergence from the Kantian conception of moral law. The notion of *moral loss* has to do with the intuition that the world, and the institutions and human beings in it, are imperfect or at least incomplete. A basic expression of the notion is the simple intuition that all is not as it should be. There is room in this intuition for very serious issues, such as death, natural disasters and political injustice; but it also has room for more ordinary issues, such as one disrupting the order of a retail line, dissatisfaction with one's material possessions, or things simply being contrary to one's preferences.³ These intuitions are of course contrasted with equally varied intuitions concerning how things ought to be, and these can be ideals, standards, customs, habits or mere preferences.

It does not matter so much where these ideals come from or what they rest on; rather what matters is that human beings have them and value them. This is, on one level, the presence of the moral law in what is here called the *law/loss* relationship, which is nothing more substantial than what has just been presented: that human beings have ideals that are disappointed in reality. The second chapter first deals primarily with this law/loss distinction and a few important suggestions it involves. The first of these is that moral conflicts are just particular expressions of the fundamental condition of moral loss. The second is that moral loss makes it incredibly difficult for human beings to fulfill the moral law. Third, that morality is present in ordinary human life, even in ways seemingly independent of reason and obligation. Ultimately, these combine to suggest that morality might have a much broader and deeper ethical scope than it is usually granted.

The aspect of the moral law involves a further relationship, that between the letter of the law and the spirit of it (which is here called the “letter/spirit” distinction). It of course must be acknowledged that Kant makes a (nominally) similar distinction, which brings out the difference between a mere outward conformity to the moral law in one’s actions, and a sincere reverence for it in one’s soul.⁴ This work for the most part holds this Kantian distinction to be a useful one, but also insufficient for representing the whole of the moral law. The *letter/spirit* distinction developed in this work is between utterable maxims of law which constitute its *letter* (for example, “one should not murder”), and more ethereal values of law (for example, the value of human life) which constitute its *spirit*. This letter/spirit distinction will involve a few suggestions of its own, which cannot fully be explained here. The first of these is that the difficulties which human beings experience in conforming to the letter of the law do not

necessarily compromise the spirit of the law, and therefore should not, as Williams supposes, translate to a lack of practicality in morality. The second is that generally it is the spirit of the law which should be favored by moral agents. Third, that the viability of moral law ultimately rests on what I will identify as an internal integrity of the letter/spirit distinction. What these two relationships - law/loss and letter/spirit - show about morality is that it might be a more untidy institution than philosophers usually believe. Finally, the chapter will proceed to suggest that despite all of this, morality is a simple institution, in that it requires only lawfulness directed at the good will.

The third chapter brings together the work of the first two chapters by showing that human beings must navigate the law/loss and letter/spirit tensions of ethical life. It is argued that the primary navigation tool for such tensions is *conviction*, and that this is a notion that makes an essential connection between morality and ethics. Though it is a notion which is in part borrowed (and expanded) from Williams,⁵ it is an open-ended question of this work what conviction is really comprised of. Nonetheless, the final suggestion of the third chapter will be that morality is most properly conceived as an introduction to ethics in that its most essential notions teach ethical conviction.

Underlying this argument is of course the contemporary *morality/ethics* relationship. In the first chapter, the word “morality” is generally used to discuss Kant’s practical philosophy, because though Williams makes the morality/ethics distinction, it is probably anachronistic to attribute any such distinction to Kant. This work generally treats morality as the rule-based institution of ethics. As for ethics itself, this work treats it as Williams does, as the institution

that addresses the Socratic question of how human beings should live.⁶ This work puts much more effort into defining morality than it does ethics, and there are a few reasons for this.

First, ethics is never clearly defined by Williams; and I have not found it necessary to do so in response to him. Second, the focus of this work is on what morality is, rather than what ethics is, or even how morality compares to ethics. Third, whatever ethics is, it surely will have conviction as a central feature.⁷ What is finally most important to this work is that morality cultivates conviction (and perhaps other notions), without which it would be unclear what sort of ethics could be developed.

So the three basic claims of this work should be found quite simple: first, that Williams' criticisms of morality do not actually eliminate it; second, that morality is a simple rule-based institution consisting in lawfulness aimed at the good will; and third, that morality is inherent in ethics due to its development of conviction. Much else of this work is left open-ended, and the postscript of this work points in some directions that these open-ended issues may head.

Morality and why we cannot save it

It is perhaps true, as Williams supposes, that Kant offers the purest representation of morality⁸ - so if one wants to critique morality, one might sensibly turn to Kant. Despite the efforts of contemporary moral philosophers, morality (the rule-based ethical institution) is supposed by Williams to be obsolete. It has allegedly suffered too many fatal blows to be salvaged. It has failed to provide human beings with adequate ethical direction, and should thus be cast aside to make room for something more apt. Williams is perhaps the strongest recent advocate of such a position, and his ethical philosophy has synthesized much of the case against morality in a devastating case against Kant. But this case perhaps deserves reopening, reexamining, and re-adjudicating: whether morality is really beyond saving. This chapter will lay out and weigh Williams' case against Kantian morality. Though it is certainly a question on the surface whether Williams succeeds against Kantian morality, the deeper consideration in this chapter is whether *any* variety of morality could survive Williams' criticisms.

Kant and Williams: for and against

Near the end of his *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, Williams brings together his long-developed criticisms of Kantian morality with the claim that "morality makes people think that, without its very special obligation, there is only inclination."⁹ This idea attacks six pillars of Kantian morality.¹⁰ First, that morality is fundamentally a practical institution. Second, that that particular moral obligations must be backed by general moral obligations. Third, that

morality is pure in that it is immune to luck. Fourth, that the moral obligation is supreme, both in kind and in compulsion. Fifth, that morality is impersonal; and sixth, that the morality system misunderstands and misuses blame and guilt. These six elements of Kantian morality make it unacceptable to Williams, and he thus concludes that morality is a variety of ethics that we would be better off without. While it is a good question whether morality is something that ethics *can* be without, the present inquiry is whether Williams is correct about Kant, and (granted that Kant is correct about morality) what this would mean for ethics.

The practicality of the morality system may be seen as having two levels: possibility and internal harmony.¹¹ The level of possibility states that all moral demands on an individual can be satisfied. Accordingly, the level of internal harmony is that moral demands cannot conflict.¹² The consequence of such a philosophy, Williams supposes, is that if moral deliberation concludes with an impossible or bifurcated course of action, then the deliberation has gone awry.¹³ Williams seems to take issue with this pillar of Kantian morality via questioning on the level of internal harmony. He observes that real, legitimate, irreducible moral conflicts exist.¹⁴ For Williams, this ultimately compromises any supposed idea of internal harmony for morality. It is important to Williams that these conflicts be understood as conflicts that *go all the way down*,¹⁵ that they cannot be rationalized away as some sort of logical inconsistency. The classic example that Williams raises in support is that of Agamemnon, who resolved to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia in order to gain the favor of the god Artemis in war against the Trojans.¹⁶ Agamemnon faces a situation of real moral conflict because there seems to be no morally preferable course of action for him to follow. The fact and depth of this

conflict is supported by the ineliminable regret that Agamemnon feels afterwards.¹⁷ According to Williams, this regret cannot and should not be rationalized away; and this shows the irreducibility of the conflict.¹⁸ If Williams is correct, this seems a powerful argument against the internal harmony of the morality system. If the internal harmony of morality is compromised, so must the possibility of morality. If two moral demands can genuinely conflict all the way down, then they cannot both be completed, and it must be acknowledged that there are impossible demands placed on the individual by morality. Williams thereby argues that morality cannot be essentially practical as it claims.

The essential practicality of morality brings with it a second pillar – what Williams refers to as the *obligation-out obligation-in principle* – the apparent moral pressure to support particular obligations to action with more general obligations of principle.¹⁹ In this view, morality presents particular obligations as mere occurrences of general obligations; and there is the thought that if one must fulfill an obligation in this moment, it is because all like individuals must fulfill this obligation in like moments. Kant aims to show that this conception of goodness is sensible, and points out in his opening considerations of the good will that there are many reasons that human beings might do one thing or another. It seems a characteristic of the concept of duty that it carries with it overriding or higher reasons to heed the good will. If one is guilty of a crime, one has incentive to deceive in the courtroom so as to avoid punishment; but the general duty to truthfulness should override and instruct one to remain truthful in the midst of counterincentives.²⁰ A crucial role of duty might be seen here, to work to bind an individual to the good will so as to foster one's moral worth; and duty does this via

a higher kind of reason. This is such that individuals have duties insofar as they are rational agents, capable of acting for reasons; and accordingly, whether an action counts as the performance of a duty depends on the reason for which it is done.

In this way morality presents itself as essentially practical - a beautiful interwoven fabric of obligations that all rest on the harmony of its most general and universal principles. But this method of justification presupposes that a systematic account of morality is correct; and of course, Williams has rejected the essential practicality on which any such system must rest. There appears, though, to be another problem more specific to the obligation-out obligation-in principle: it is not at all obvious why one should find comfort in the backing general obligation if one has not already found comfort in the particular obligation. This position against the obligation-out obligation-in principle may be expressed by Williams' phrase, "one thought too many."²¹ Williams considers the situation in which one is confronted with the choice of saving either one's spouse or a stranger, when both are in equal peril. It should be justification enough in this situation to save one's spouse *because it is one's spouse*. Morality, Williams thinks, demands that the individual provide an additional thought, "that in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's [spouse]."²² This thought is one too many, and seems to convolute what the individual certainly would and should be experiencing: that one's life and relationships can rightly encourage one to favor certain courses of action over others. The moral pressure for impartiality would not approve of this. So it seems that morality might not even be relevant here in a way that makes sense of human life, and if given jurisdiction, robs the action of its real significance.²³

The essential practicality and flawless systematizing of morality are a part of an important spirit of morality, in Williams view: that it is pure in that it is immune to luck.²⁴ The purity of morality takes the essential practicality of morality one step further on the level of possibility. Possibility states that all moral obligations are realizable by the individual they are placed on; purity holds that individuals are held morally responsible only for what falls under the umbrella of possibility.²⁵ That is, moral responsibility applies only to the voluntary. One way this threatens Kantian morality is with a direct challenge to the idea that individuals are in a relation of freedom to the moral law. At the heart of Kant's morality is an autonomous will, understood by the concept of freedom.²⁶ At one point, Kant even claims that ethics is the science of the laws of freedom,²⁷ perhaps in that freedom is the property of the will that characterizes its efficacy independent of external forces.²⁸ It is a very important detail about Kant's project, that he does not intend to prove the possibility of freedom. Though reason must be free from external causes if it is to create a will that is good in itself,²⁹ for reason to try to prove its own possibility would oversteps the bounds of reason.³⁰

What seems more important for Kant's morality is the relationship between freedom and the moral law, and this is indeed a complicated subject. There are two main points to bring out for the purposes here: that the moral law presupposes freedom for rational and conscious beings, and that the existence and workings of freedom are revealed through the moral law.³¹ When it comes to Kantian morality, it has been said that there is a general sense in which ought implies can.³² But for Kant, this seems to have to do less with the actual feasibility of a moral demand, and more with the thought that things done under compulsion are not free acts and therefore not lawful.³³ So when freedom and morality come together, this

consists not so much in freedom with respect to obedience to the law (though this is indeed important), but rather in freedom to live under laws that are self-imposed.³⁴ This is where freedom as a presupposition really surfaces, where a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same.³⁵ For a will that acts on reasons, the union of causality as freedom is established by the moral law.³⁶ So freedom is a presupposition of morality for rational beings.³⁷ Further, the concepts of freedom and morality are reciprocal.³⁸ Kant seems to simply take for granted that human beings conceive of themselves as having free will, and therefore also conceive of right and wrong ways of conduct.³⁹ Still, freedom as it is the basis of morality cannot be comprehended, and therefore cannot serve as the human foundation of morality.⁴⁰ For human beings, it seems it is the apprehension of the moral law that leads to the concept of freedom, although it is ultimately freedom that is metaphysically presupposed by the moral law.⁴¹

Here we have great insight into the expression and workings of Kantian duty, that true freedom manifests in duty. One way that Kant begins to support his conception of duty as intuitive is through everyday practices - particularly those of moral esteem and censure, which Kant believes are done in accordance with a more common conception of duty. Two shopkeepers might charge the same price for their merchandise, and charge the same price to all customers. But suppose that one sets the price simply because it is good business, while the other sets the price out of honesty and fairness. Certainly, Kant supposes, while we appreciate and recognize the price from both businessmen, we morally esteem the latter in a way which we do not the former.⁴² The individual who acts out of duty to the moral law garners higher

moral esteem (or perhaps a higher kind) than the one who simply acts in conformity with the law.⁴³

These Kantian presuppositions⁴⁴ do seem crucial to morality, but Williams takes the plain fact of moral luck to be in direct contradiction to them⁴⁵. More importantly than the existence of moral luck, though, is the observation that human beings are typically quite comfortable having the institutions of blame and regret be affected by moral luck. That is, it is commonplace for human beings to assign moral responsibility to the involuntary; and Williams asserts it is justified that we do so as human beings. Beyond even this, though, Williams makes a further point: that even mere skepticism about the purity of morality is enough to disturb the concept of moral order and law and leave in its place a less important concept, since “one thing that is particularly important... is how important [morality] is taken to be.”⁴⁶ It seems that any conception of morality that does not have an answer to the issue of moral luck may not survive Williams’ criticisms. Much of the compelling nature of morality, Williams rightfully thinks, rests on the view given it as important; and any lowering of this importance may prove problematic for the important fourth pillar of morality: its supremacy.

It is one thing to illustrate that ordinary human understanding of moral worth necessarily involves a certain notion of freedom; but it is quite another to show that such an understanding contains an absolutely binding principle for all rational beings. Here the closeness of duty and obligation⁴⁷ becomes important for Kant. Obligation is, in a way, a form of understanding duty. Whatever an individual has a duty to do is an obligation, and vice-versa. But Kant’s discussion of obligation deepens the concept of duty in a few ways, being

“the necessity of a free action under a categorical imperative of reason.”⁴⁸ First, an obligation is only truly present in actions where the ends are inexplicably and intrinsically good.⁴⁹ Second, the concept of obligation helps to make certain distinctions which the concept of duty alone cannot make.⁵⁰ Third, obligation carries with it a notion of freedom without which it is necessary to conceive of human beings as subject only to the laws of nature.⁵¹ Last, the concept of obligation connects moral reasons to other kinds of practical concepts in a way that the concept of duty cannot.⁵² All of these amount to a notion that, in connection with reason, might serve to bring all human beings under a common ethics. Considering this elevated status given to Kant in his moral philosophy, it is understandable why Williams would aim some of his harshest criticisms at this notion.

The supremacy of the moral obligation for Williams seems to include three levels. First, there is the idea that moral obligation is inescapable. The inescapability of moral obligation takes form first in the idea that the moral obligation applies even to those who see themselves as outside the system, and to those who do not want to be inside the system for whatever reason.⁵³ Second, there is the idea that moral considerations are the most important kind of considerations, and therefore matters of real practical importance should be represented as moral obligations. The consequence here seems to be that in deliberations, moral considerations ought to be given more weight than amoral considerations. Third, there is the idea that “only an obligation can beat an obligation.”⁵⁴ This is a logical consequent of the other factors: because the moral obligation always applies, and is always the most weighty, one can only be steered away from one moral obligation if one favors another moral

obligation. In these three ways, Williams asserts, morality tries to establish itself as the supreme institution by claiming its center to be this very special obligation.

Williams challenges the supremacy of morality with his own notion of importance. This challenge may be wrapped up in his thought that “ethical life is itself important, but it can see that things other than itself are important.”⁵⁵ This is ultimately grounded in a long-held view of Williams’ that all persons have their own projects that give meaning to their own lives. Granted that each individual has these meaningful projects, what is important becomes what is needed and wanted to realize these projects.⁵⁶ Out of practical necessity, one might either make use of or completely ignore moral obligations in projects. This seems commonsensical, but it has significant consequences for the supremacy of moral obligation. First, the brute fact that one might not comply with (or even consider) moral obligations in achieving one’s projects shows in some sense that the moral obligation is not, in fact, inescapable. Rather, it is a fact of human experience that it is constantly (and rightfully) escaped, because there are human projects outside of moral obligation. There is an implication for a second consequence here: that if moral obligations are not found most useful in accomplishing one’s projects, then one should not regard them as the highest kind of consideration. There is no point, then, in attempting to reduce one’s projects down to a set of obligations; rather, one’s projects can be of utmost importance and meaning without the use of obligation. From this, a third consequence: obligations can, do, and should, in fact, lose out to considerations that are not obligations. So it seems that the three crucial levels of the supremacy of moral obligation (and therefore of morality) are quite questionable in the face of the notion of importance. It is a serious question in acknowledging these observations with

Williams, whether any morality - and especially one that relies heavily on obligation - could be truly useful to human beings. The basic incriminating thought here seems to be that the use of the moral obligation is ultimately grounded in something other than its own supremacy; rather, it relies for its implementation on another notion, of *importance*. If this is so, then moral considerations cannot themselves be the most important kind of consideration, as they rely on another kind of consideration for their own importance.⁵⁷

Williams' Gaugin illustrates why we ought to be grateful that the world we must live in is not a place where the moral obligation reigns supreme.⁵⁸ For Gaugin, that the moral obligation is not supreme seems to rest on the mere fact that Gaugin does not wish it were. He can escape moral obligations because they do not go all the way down for him, while his desire to devote his life to painting does. That the morality system seems to pay no regard to the projects of human beings is a point of much significance for Williams, and it sheds light on why he takes issue with the impersonality he sees in the morality system. That Kantian morality is impersonal (or perhaps inhuman) is one way of tying together the real crux of Williams' criticisms, especially his finalizing words that morality's errors amount to a "deeply rooted" and "powerful misconception of life."⁵⁹ The notion contains in it the problem of real irreducible moral conflict, the need for practical necessity to go all the way down, the problem of the one thought too many, and the problem of moral luck. For Agamemnon, to claim that his obligation to his daughter simply did not constitute a real moral obligation does not seem to capture the active deliberative struggle that he must have experienced. For the man encountering the simultaneous peril of his spouse and a stranger, it seems inhuman to suggest

that he might flip a coin or perhaps calculate survival chances in order to decide who to attempt to save. “The lorry driver who, through no fault of his own, runs over a child,” will surely be blamed as a murderer, and also feel like one;⁶⁰ in these circumstances luck seems impossible to keep out of morality. By betraying the deep attachments to persons and character, it seems that morality makes nonsense out of many significant human actions, feelings, and deliberations.⁶¹

At this point, one might start searching for an alternative morality that does not rely so heavily on obligation⁶², or even for an ethics that does not bother with morality at all. Kantian morality does not abstract from the identity of persons as Utilitarian morality does, with an abstraction from the separateness of persons.⁶³ But Kantian morality does abstract from identity in a different way, and is thereby still impersonal. The impersonality is found in the drive for individuals to act according to universal standards. The notion that all individuals, without exception, ought to act in a certain way in certain circumstances, seems to take away from the importance of *who* performed the action, though in a different way than Utilitarianism. In this way Kantianism can be seen as violating Williams’ integrity objection⁶⁴, and it is shown here how we would want a morality that pays attention to the various projects of individuals. Ultimately, it might seem that the meaningfulness of human life and the real justifications⁶⁵ for human conduct have nothing to do with the impersonal standards of the morality system, and this is a fatal criticism for an institution that supposes itself to be guiding human beings through life. Indeed, human experience might run too deep and be too messy for the canon of moral obligation to account for; and it is becoming clearer how Kantian morality might overstep its proper boundaries.

In Williams' view, the problem of the impersonality of morality surfaces in its reliance on blame and guilt. As has been pointed out, a problem with the institution of blame in morality is that it supposes responsibility to be attributable only to the voluntary. The accounts of blame, guilt, praise, regret, and other notions are all tainted by a supposed purity within morality. The purity of morality gives a narrowness to these notions, when perhaps a wider understanding of them might be more useful and true to human experience. To comfort Agamemnon, the husband in shipwreck, or the lorry driver via suggestions that these tragedies were not their fault (or perhaps not their intention), does not do justice to the situation - and there will probably not be much comfort found in therein. For "there is an authority by what one has done, and not merely by what one has intentionally done."⁶⁶ So there is a complication with the strange way that morality accounts for these phenomena. Perhaps it would not be a key fault of morality, though, if these notions (particularly blame and guilt) were not the characteristic reactions of the institution.⁶⁷ Indeed, any institution that engrains such tainted notions into human beings should not be welcome in ethical life. But blame has to do with reasons, just as the Kantian good will does: blame in morality treats an individual as one who had overriding reason to do the right thing and yet did not do it.⁶⁸ There stands before the institution an individual who spits in the face of the good will. If there are none outside morality, then it may be correct in treating individuals accordingly. But if moral standards are contractual, and therefore optional in their adherence, then the moral obligation and the blame attributed to the individual who fails to fulfill it, will prove escapable.

Morality: the conversation

It has often been said that Kantian morality is centered around the ideas of obligation and reason. But it is interesting that this is not where Kant begins his inquiry, nor what he aims it at, nor where it ends; rather, Kant's moral philosophy begins and ends with a consideration of the good will.⁶⁹ This is an important concept to which Kant continually returns throughout his practical philosophy. He starts from the postulate that the good will is the only thing that is limitless in its goodness, and therefore is the only thing that is unconditionally valued by human beings. Human beings would not sacrifice their moral goodness for some other object; and if the good will is the only intrinsic good, and therefore necessary for moral worth, then it merits highest human esteem.

Ultimately, it might be found that the Kantian good will is simply that will which deliberates on the basis of and in favor of the moral law. The good will issues only actions of moral esteem, because moral considerations are taken to be the highest and most conclusive of all considerations.⁷⁰ Actions and persons, therefore, are good just in case they possess and heed such a will.⁷¹ To further clarify what the good will might be, Kant moves quickly to the concept of duty.⁷² Here, Kant seems far more interested in the nature of this concept - and its relation to the good will - than in what specific obligations might fill it out. Still, the significance of the notion of obligation really is an important question for all moral philosophy. In Kant's working definition of obligation,⁷³ the second component sets the parameters for obligations: they must be under a categorical imperative of reason. Early in the *Groundwork*, Kant supposes the purpose of reason to be to produce a will that is good in itself.⁷⁴ This may be why the good will appeals to the concept of duty: because duty consists in necessities given

by reason - that is, duty provides an individual with reasons for action - which are in accordance with the moral law. For the good will, which is unconditionally good in itself, these are obligations given by reason, absolutely necessary in themselves. It is perhaps in this way that reason "cannot err: every force is assigned its track."⁷⁵ For in practical use, reason performs its deepest service not to obligations, but rather to the good will. Reason wields its fullest force to determine the grounds of the will, and this is its final cause.⁷⁶

Kant's chief concern, then, is not aimed at obligation or rationality, but rather at what will here be called *lawfulness*. The formulations, including the controversial first formulation, result not in any specific law, but in lawfulness itself. To be sure, a morally practical law is a proposition that contains a categorical imperative or command.⁷⁷ But the human relation to the moral law is one of freedom, which cannot be limited by reason.⁷⁸ The moral law carries command only via reverence; the necessity of duty is out of reverence for law.⁷⁹ Here enters the importance of the lawgiving form, of lawfulness: when everything is stripped away, and freedom is found, there is also found "the mere form of the law" to which analytically and linguistically driven philosophy probably cannot do justice.⁸⁰ So then, morality for Kant might just be the spirit of the law (lawfulness) in our dispositions,⁸¹ and while this does not leave morality open to just any interpretation, it is certainly a much wider notion than Kant is normally granted via his notion of obligation.

It should at the same time be granted, however, that Immanuel Kant is narrow-minded. At least, his philosophical inquiry into ethics is narrow - and purposefully so. In the preface of his *Groundwork*, Kant lays out of many of the intentions, aims, and methods of his

project. The foundations⁸² a philosopher builds on, the questions that one asks, and then the manner in which one attempts to answer them are important before the actual answers one gives. When philosophers enter into a conversation with each other, these details deserve some attention. While many of Williams' criticisms of Kant are astute and damaging, Williams seems at points to have missed the heart of morality and moral philosophy. Any such disconnect may be responsible for the impotence of some of Williams' most important criticisms. To retain relevance, philosophers must keep in view the questions that begin the inquiries, and the way in which the inquirer goes about trying to satisfy the curiosities. Kant asked what a pure moral philosophy might hold,⁸³ what might be the source of practical laws,⁸⁴ what makes a duty a duty.⁸⁵ In line with his interest in lawfulness, the questions that captivated Kant were much more about the source, nature, and workings of morality than of any specific moral demands that could be derived from these things. In his conclusive assessment of Kantian morality, Williams discredits the philosophy chiefly as a failure to win the game of the Archimedean Point.⁸⁶ This is the attempt to build morality "from the ground up,"⁸⁷ to find the point of leverage into a particular moral canon for the amoralist and moralist alike. Williams takes it for granted that this is Kant's project, but it is an important question what this game must entail, whether this is really the game Kant is playing (and if he is, how much so), and to what extent this is the game morality must play.

It is safe to say that Kant is at least addressing those who agree with him on basic ideas of God, freedom, immortality, duty, moral law, good will, and evil. Kant admittedly does not attempt to prove God or immortality, deems a proof of freedom nonessential to his philosophy after he fails to find one, and takes notions of duty, law, good and evil to be common to all

reasonable human beings. And perhaps he must, if he is after a truly *pure* moral philosophy. Archimedes claimed *if* he were given one solid point and a long enough lever, he could lift the Earth. It is the same with Kant: given the foundations of God, freedom, immortality and the other common notions as a solid point, and perhaps reason as his lever, he claims to lift morality. In this way, Kant surely does not build a foundation, but perhaps finds one; he cares not about convincing the amoralist, but rather about explaining to the moralist. Kant does seem to join in the game of the Archimedean Point in his determination to remove oneself from the object of study, as is evident in his arrival at the idea of mere lawfulness. Whether he succeeds in this is questionable, but given the proper foundation and lever, his arrival at mere lawfulness seems promising.

Perhaps Kant buys in to the game of the Archimedean Point, but certainly not in some of the ways that are often most attacked and criticized. His foundation is discovered rather than built, and this provides an alternative conception of objective leveraging: as a mere entry point. This raises questions about how damaging Williams' criticisms of morality really are, and how easily he can cast aside this supposedly obsolete variety of ethics. To Williams' own admission, "morality is not an invention of philosophers."⁸⁸ If the parts of Kant that really are essential to morality suffer devastating blows from Williams, then morality seems beyond saving. Even here, the death of morality relies on the death of some very important notions which the survival of ethics might rely on. If, on the other hand, Williams seems to have misfired so as to leave these essential parts unscathed, morality seems still beyond our saving - but that will be either because what is in no danger requires no salvation, or human beings shall not prove capable of such salvation.

Re-viewing morality, a simple institution

I hope that I have aroused some suspicion that the Kant-Williams debate might be less straightforward than one is initially encouraged to believe. There is also the suspicion that some parts of this debate might not be so much a debate, but more like two closely related monologues. The Kant-Williams debate, to be of real importance, must of course run deeper than one philosopher's critique of another philosopher's thoughts. The questions here are, as Williams states, not trivial, as we are talking about how human beings should live⁸⁹; and we are talking about the place that the institution of morality should have in human life and in the ethical discourse that concerns it. This chapter aims to take another look at the morality that both Kant and Williams conceive, and also provide an alternative conception of morality that might not fall prey to Williams' criticisms but also remain recognizable. That view will hold that morality, as an introduction to ethics, is a simple institution which rests on a few simple notions that invite many complexities into human life. So far what is involved in this conception of morality as an introduction is just that morality provides a leveraging into ethics in that it provides the point of entry. Kant may, in this view, set up morality to be too far-reaching into ethics, while Williams cuts off its reach far too early. Both of these result in certain perversions of morality that make it unhelpful to human beings in their ethical lives.

What is morality really about?

Part of what will help to settle the Kant-Williams debate might be different set of lenses through which to view the issues that they discuss. This section will present three in particular: whether the moral law is compatible with what will here be called "moral loss,"

whether the moral law can in abstraction from human beings overcome the difficulties presented by moral loss, and how human beings can make sense of these tensions. These notions are taken to be basic and easily apprehensible, and as such give morality much of its positioning as an introduction to ethics. The questions raised herein concern relationships, and the challenges to integrity that are posed in each relationship - between moral law and moral loss, between the moral law and itself (in letter and spirit), and between the moral law and human beings. These questions are in many ways related to the six pillars of morality identified and critiqued by Williams. It will finally be suggested that morality introduces human beings to a notion which Williams himself develops (although not enough), called “conviction,” and that this notion can help point toward some responses to these challenges.

First must be addressed a primary distinction of this work, concerning a significant divergence from Kant. It was hinted at in the previous chapter that, in light of Kant’s conception of the good will, morality might really be mere lawfulness. So an inquiry into the nature of the moral law seems necessary to see if Williams’ criticisms against morality are good. At the beginning of the “Doctrine of Method,” there is a statement containing two contrasting ideas for Kant’s moral philosophy: “The letter of the law (legality) would be found in our actions, but the spirit of it in our dispositions (morality) would not be found at all.”⁹⁰ Here we might find Kant’s brief answer to what morality is really about. While this work acknowledges and in many ways agrees with Kant’s distinction, it will develop throughout this chapter its own distinction between the letter and spirit of the law. It makes an additional separation in the moral law which Kant does not, between the utterable maxims of the law and the immaterial spirit of it. The issues of codification, conformity, self-legislation and conviction are at play here; and it is a question of this section whether Kant or Williams has

proper understanding of these ways in which the moral law works. In an early consideration of moral loss, the question was raised unaddressed, whether moral luck compromises any sensible notion of moral law (or ethical ideal, for that matter). There will here be an attempt to show that a proper distinction between the letter and spirit of the law provides a not only an answer to moral loss, but a compatible framework for incorporating it into ethical life.

Moral luck or moral loss?

It is at this point necessary for foundation to involve a wider discussion of the nature of the moral law and the human condition in relation. Human beings hold two battling sets of basic intuitions. The first⁹¹ are concerning how things ought to be, and the subsequent intuitions concerning what might be called decent behavior. These intuitions, at their weakest, are preferences. At their strongest, they are more than preferences; indeed, we often times suppose them to be absolute standards, both internally and externally, individually and communally.⁹² What is more, we feel at times that these moral absolutes are thrust upon us, both from the inside and the outside, and we have a sense that this is the case for other human beings as well. Two persons quarreling about a place in line⁹³ have no business quarreling unless they share some intuitions about right and wrong order. The man who says, "I was here first," is not just saying that the other person's behavior merely does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some standard of decent behavior that he assumes is shared. The other person will seldom reply, "I do not care about your standard;" and if he does, it is not likely to be found a morally reasonable response. Rather, the other person will likely try to justify his position in line, explaining either why his actions do not really go against the standard, or that he somehow deserves to be an exception (perhaps he is in a hurry) to the standard. Without

these intuitions of moral standard, human beings perhaps could fight like savages, but they would never reach what we consider a humane level of quarreling.

The second set of intuitions suggests that the world is in a state of what will here be called *moral loss* - it is part of the nature of the world and human beings which makes the human relation to the moral law difficult. Human beings are surrounded by and participate in circumstances that fall far short of their ideals. Few are the times when human beings look around the world and feel that all is as it should be; and this seems to be the fault of no particular person or circumstance, but rather a metaphysical fact about the world. Human beings often find themselves in situations that are simply bad; and what is more, they also often find themselves compelled to act in ways that contradict their moral ideals. The one confronted at home by an armed robber does not seem to have a morally acceptable choice available, for he will either let harm be done to his family or do harm to the intruder. The man in a hurry at the store agrees with moral intuitions concerning order, but in his rush feels compelled to disregard them. This is the torn canvas on which our ideas of the moral law are painted: the ideal of moral perfection is not fulfilled in the reality of moral loss. Our intuitions about the moral law represent an ideal that we are (at least sometimes) aware constantly goes unmet. It is a real question whether the reality of moral loss compromises the ideal of moral perfection. The moral law is a fit tool for governing a perfect world, but it is unclear that it should reign supreme for human beings, who might find other things more important. Out of these two sets of simple intuitions arise implications for Williams' concepts of moral conflicts, moral luck and the supremacy of morality.

There is an acknowledgment of irreducible moral conflict in the concept of moral loss that is, in a way, quite straightforward. To see that the world and the people in it are under the condition of moral loss includes an admission that there are situations in which, as Williams describes, there is no better thing to be done. The reality of moral loss in some ways might just be the recognition of ubiquitous moral conflict. But what is important here is that the moral law is not blind to this reality, and in fact the moral law (and the human condition of being under it) often times is the very thing that informs human beings of this reality. There are many points to be drawn out from this observation, but I will here address only two. They both rely on the positioning of morality as an introduction to ethics. The first has to do with moral worth. If moral loss is true, then in every ethical situation, for every human being the point of entry is in some sense a handicapped one. The man confronted by the armed robber does not enter his quandary on level ground; on the contrary, the ethical game board is tilted against him from the start. But if morality is an introduction to ethics, then it is not clear that making *morally* praiseworthy⁹⁴ choices is ultimately what ethical beings aim for, though they may begin there. To claim that this man makes a morally unpraiseworthy choice, then, is simply to say that he has not improved the status quo; and this is quite different from suggesting that this man comes out of the conflict with an ethically worse character than he entered it.

The man facing the armed robber has been confronted with, victimized by and a participant in the condition of moral loss. That the moral law does not govern ignorant of such realities brings up a second point that is something of a reiteration of the initial observation itself. The moral law recognizes as it must the *fact* of moral conflict, but this is not to say that it recognizes a *problem* which it subsequently seeks to eliminate or mitigate. If the moral law is

indeed an ethical ideal of practice, it would be a perversion to suppose that the moral law is naive (or arrogant) enough to aim to change the fundamental facts of the world. Rather, the notions of moral law and moral loss serve as compliments to each other in their being attended to by human beings, and their relationship is nothing much more substantial than this. An awareness of the ubiquitousness of moral loss should lead to an awareness of a similar nature in the moral law, and vice versa. Moral loss certainly is problematic for the world and the human beings in it, but that does not necessitate that it is likewise problematic for the integrity of the moral law that seeks to govern the world.

Of course, the fact of irreducible moral conflict is not the only serious threat to the purity of morality pointed out by Williams. There is also the fact of moral luck. While it is worth pointing out that Williams does not provide much argumentation for the truth of moral luck, it is not necessary here to debate its existence, as a much more interesting picture of moral loss is painted if moral luck is granted. Moral conflicts challenge the essential practicality of morality on the level of possibility, but moral luck challenges the purity of morality on the level of responsibility. One understanding of morality - if Kant suggested that the aspect of real importance is the motive behind moral action - is to view the moral law as only applicable to the voluntary. But this gets the scope of morality as an introduction wrong; if moral loss is true, this understanding of morality⁹⁵ may be too narrow. If moral loss is something of a universal constant, then so is the moral law. The issues of voluntarism and free agency raise difficulties in questioning how it is possible for the moral law to uphold simultaneously its standards of justice and holiness, and all the while demanding that it must remain relevant to human life. If it is really the moral law that is held in view, then by definition none of these can be sacrificed; but it seems to be questioned on the issue of moral

luck why the moral law does not make exceptions, especially to its standard of holiness. From the perspective of the moral law, a transgression by whatever means and to whatever end, must be counted as a transgression⁹⁶, and that is a plain fact. Though he may be pardoned, the lorry driver who runs over a child will be charged under the law prohibiting the killing of human beings, irrespective of the correctness of his driving or the child's behavior. Legal occurrences such as these are not strange, and they are similarly not alien or unmanageable for the moral law. They are rather made quite familiar via the relationship that the moral law has with moral loss. A consequence of this fact is that the moral law can and must exercise equal jurisdiction in the arenas of the voluntary and involuntary; and a conclusion here is that any supposed presence of luck does not necessarily carry with it the absence of morality.

The issue of voluntarism aside, there is something of greater interest here that has to do with the usefulness of the respective philosophical notions in question. We often seem eager to invoke the notion of luck only in situations of tragedy; but our intuitions of moral loss are familiar, and their occurrences ordinary. Most ethical quandaries, as humans register, are not tragedies in the typical sense: good and services are overpriced, two people exchange indecent words, a jealous neighbor carries malice in his heart. While issues of moral luck seem to involve a suggestion that there was no good moral reason for things to happen as they did, intuitions of moral loss can help the moral law speak into issues that are not often thought of as having to do with reasons at all. It has just been shown that morality must be more apt to speak to issues of the involuntary than is often accredited; and now it is seen that morality, via the relationship between law and loss, is able to speak into the ordinary - a realm where the notion of luck does not much aid the human navigation of ethical situations. Morality, as an introduction, here shows this: that though there is certainly "no need of irrational gods, to give

rise to tragic situations,"⁹⁷ there is no greater need of tragic situations to give rise to ethical significance. If ethics is searching for a lens through which to make sense of human life, the notion of moral loss may have a much richer ability than moral luck.

Perhaps the accusations that morality claims for itself an unmerited practicality and purity are not quite as well founded as was originally supposed. There is still recourse, though, to the thoughts that for Williams the most important pillar to weaken is the pillar of supremacy: morality's claim to absolute deliberative priority for human beings because it has as its center the very privileged moral obligation. The privileged status of Kant's moral obligation, according to Williams, rests on contentious ideas of inescapability, importance, and hierarchy. More work is required before the issue of supremacy can be faced head on, but there are a few points that can begin to color the discussion given this discourse on morality, law and loss. The fact that the moral law holds in full view the condition of moral loss indicates that the position of self-proclaimed supremacy by the moral law is perhaps a bit more sobered than usually supposed. The moral law is not a delusion but rather an ideal, and it is not surprised when it is escaped, disordered, and demoted by human beings. For the moral law, in light of moral loss, must be prepared for its reign to not always be revered by human beings as supreme. Morality, as an introduction, will have definitive words on many ethical issues, but few of them will be final. Plainly, if the law/loss relationship is truly integral to morality, and shows that morality is an introductory institution, then the criticism of the supremacy of morality will have to rely on something more than a false supposition that morality gives no consideration to matters of human importance outside its own law.

The moral law: letter and spirit

The question remains how the two conditions of moral loss and moral law can workably be reconciled for human beings. It seems that the moral law should be in constant conflict with the reality moral loss, which indeed is a kind of law in its own right. Behind both of these notions then is a conception of law, which is itself a notion of great importance to Kant.⁹⁸ Of particular interest here should be the internal consistency of the concept of law in morality, and of particular aid here will be not the distinction that Kant makes between the letter and spirit of the moral law, but an alternative one which has already begun its development in this work. To see whether internal harmony of the moral law is possible and present - especially given the notion of moral loss - the issues of codification, conformity, self-legislation, and conviction will be addressed. The issues will be used to explain the letter/spirit distinction, and this distinction will illustrate some implications for the place of morality as an introduction to ethics.

Williams approaches the moral law as any other codification, as an essentially practical set of supreme general principles developing into increasingly specific (yet universal) rules. As far as the letter of the law, it does seem to be the case that the moral law cannot be truly humanly practical. The moral demands in letter do at times conflict irreducibly in practice; and there are also circumstances that lead one to feel that the letter of the law must be transgressed. The one who answers the door to find Kant's murderer is faced with a host of moral quandaries as far as legality is concerned. But if the moral law is to be treated as a codification - which seems appropriate on the level of the letter - then it must be remembered that as a human codification, it is as much of a failure as any other human institution.⁹⁹ Given

the notion of moral loss, one might wonder whether that is a problem of the law, or a fact about the world in which the law is implemented. If morality is indeed about standards of behavior, and the letter of the law therein representative of the ideal of moral perfection, then it might seem a mistake to find the law invalid on grounds that its letter goes unfulfilled in a world of moral loss. This is buttressed by the distinction of letter and spirit, in that the moral law is not wholly captured for human beings by the letter. Every codification brings along with it a spirit which the letter attempts to express. Morality is no different, and the spirit of the law is able to fill in many of the parts of morality that are left unsatisfied by the letter.¹⁰⁰ If the whole story of the moral law were one of letter, then it would be nonsensical of Kant to even conceive of the moral law as being “within me.”¹⁰¹ But there is a further point, that morality, as an introduction, should not be expected to provide the full story of ethics.

So it is not clear that to compromise in abstraction the legality of the law is also to compromise the morality of the law, and this works itself out in practical application on the issue of conformity. That the man confronted with the murderer at his door cannot conform to the letter of the law in actions does not necessitate that he also cannot agree with the spirit of the law in dispositions.¹⁰² If the moral law is indeed a representation of the moral ideal of perfection, then any lack of conformity to the letter will indeed be troubling as Williams supposes; moral loss does not absolve human beings from their duty to the letter of the law. However, it is important to give morality the proper scope and flexibility due to it: situations of conflict on the legal level can actually provide great opportunities to adhere to and embody the spirit of the law; and also that situations of harmony on the level of legality can be transgressions of the spirit of the law. So it seems that, if to be understood properly as a

codification which primarily introduces broader ethical ideals, the letter of the moral law must be taken comprehensively and systematically to point toward a certain spirit of the law.¹⁰³

It is not taken lightly that this presents great difficulties when it comes to moral self-legislation, the arena in which these complexities concerning codification and conformity must work themselves out, or perhaps *be* worked out by the people who face them. Two things, autonomy and lawfulness, seem necessary for self-legislation in Kant's view: one must legislate out of a relation of freedom to the moral law, and the legislation must have the form of law. There is a notion of conviction¹⁰⁴ that may be of help in understanding how one can self-legislate in a world of moral loss given the distinction between letter and spirit. We discussed earlier intuitions of decent behavior, ranging from preferences to absolutes. This is one crucial way that morality introduces human beings to ethical life, that its problems demand the development of ethical conviction. Conviction might be considered the mechanism for mediation between these two, as it helps in the moment of deliberation to decide what preferences are allowed to fall by the wayside, and which absolutes must not be forfeited. Likewise conviction helps to mediate between the pull to conform to the letter of the law and the sometimes conflicting pull to follow the spirit of the law. Conviction carries with it the resolve of confidence needed to act, and also the full assurance needed to live with the consequences of the action. It is the force of the soul that informs what one is willing to live and die for, and a proper view of morality is crucial to a proper understanding of this notion which is perhaps the most important in all of ethics.

If morality is just an introduction, it might be wondered whether the basic notions of moral loss and the letter/spirit distinction truly can lead to such a lofty concept as conviction, that which ethical life is built around and ethical virtue depends upon. My essential suggestions thus far are these: that morality is a subject of frequent and intense conversations such as the Kant/Williams discourse, that there is a depth to the moral law that it is often not granted in these conversations,¹⁰⁵ and that proper attention to this depth might lead to a better understanding of the nature of ethics. Additionally, there is the suggestion (but not yet any real argument) that all of this is properly held in view by a conception of morality as an introduction to ethics.

Under this conception, the notions of moral loss and the letter/spirit distinction tried to provide a few insights about moral luck. First, that a situation seems to involve fortune does not rule out the involvement of morality in the situation, since in many ways morality is what framed the situation as an ethical quandary. The relationship between the moral law and moral loss shows that morality has jurisdiction in issues of both the voluntary and the involuntary; so though not perhaps in the way that Kant assumed, morality seems quite inescapable. This leads to a second insight, that the influence of moral luck is in many situations questionable. If a defining characteristic of moral luck is the absence of morality's authority, and yet morality retains jurisdiction even in the involuntary, then it needs to be shown how situations of the involuntary are to be seen as affected by luck (and not merely loss). In any case, more than the notion of luck is necessary to keep morality out of human life altogether, and that illustrates a third insight here. The relationship between law and loss gives morality a point of entry into an area of human life which luck does not: the ordinary; and the letter/spirit distinction brings to ethics a mechanism suitable for navigating both the typical

and tragic quandaries alike: conviction. Morality seems capable of going farther - to both the surface and the depths - to make sense of human life than was initially supposed.

The notions of moral loss and the letter/spirit distinction also tried to provide a few insights about moral conflicts. The first is that if moral conflicts are a threat to the integrity and usefulness of the moral law, it is not because the moral law is ignorant of, blind to, surprised by, removed from, or hostile toward the occurrences of moral conflict in the human ethical life. Indeed for human beings, the moral law starts from the fact of moral loss (and vice versa), and it is often the moral law itself that informs of moral conflict. Rigidity in moral standards on the part of the letter of the law does not come without the interpretive flexibility on the part of the spirit of the law; and that morality is equipped with both gives it an integrity and authority to speak to and navigate through situations of moral conflict. There need be, then, no single elaborate letter of the law that unfolds with increasing specificity to deliver moral commands right down to the very moments one finds oneself in. An introduction would not reasonably be expected to provide such elaboration. Morality can, with Williams, reject the obligation-out obligation-in principle, and that is a second insight here. An overall conception of morality should find the spirit of the law rich enough that the letter of the law need not overstep its proper bounds. Indeed, both levels of morality have their proper place, which leads to a the third insight: different moral conflicts apply to morality in different ways. A moral conflict on the level of the letter does not necessitate a conflict on the level of the spirit, and vice versa. The force of conviction is capable of deflecting and absorbing the blows of moral conflicts (even ones caused by luck) to see that the legitimacy of the moral law as a practical institution is not compromised; and this can mean identifying apparent moral conflicts as only superficial,¹⁰⁶ and delegating to which level (letter or spirit) the conflict truly

applies.¹⁰⁷ There will be the suspicion that this all seems a bit messy, but indeed, that is just what is shown: that an introductory institution be essentially practical should not bar it from being messy.

Morality, and other things

The intricacies that morality invites into human life are immeasurable. It has been suggested that, as an introduction to ethics, morality is *about* much more than rules. It is about the human struggle to navigate, through conviction, these two tensions between the moral law and moral loss, and also the letter of the law and the spirit of it. Yet morality is still, after all this, a simple institution, as an introduction must be. The essence of morality requires only this, that there is a letter of the moral law aiming to apprehend and represent the spirit of the moral law. This should be found in some ways not far off from Kant's morality, the essence of which is just lawfulness aimed at the possession of the good will. I hope the relationships of law and loss, and letter and spirit, have helped to safeguard against any philosophical perversion of the subject. For though these claims should be straightforward and uncontroversial, it seems that many philosophers would seek to add to, subtract from or transform morality into some other thing than it really is, hoping either to prop it up or tear it down. It is implied here that in his account of morality, Kant provides a very good, but insufficient, introduction to ethics by stretching obligation and reason too far; but Williams in some ways allows morality too far a reach by stretching notions such as blame and guilt too far. Both of these approaches will land morality equally disqualified as an institution that should aid human beings in ethical life. The especially relevant contaminations of morality here are the overvaluing of the importance of reason and obligation in morality, and the

perceived obsession with blame and guilt in morality. This section will argue that these confusions are a result of inadequate attention to the law/loss and letter/spirit relationships, and that ethical conviction as framed by morality provides a useful framework for why and how these issues pervert conceptions of morality.

Impartiality, impersonality and what morality values

It was pointed out in the first chapter that many suppose Kantian morality to be mostly centered and resting on the ideas of obligation and reason. It was shortly after pointed out that the foundations for Kant's moral philosophy (to his own admission) in fact center around, begin and end with a consideration of the good will. Though obligation and reason have their place of importance easily given by all of the discussion of the categorical imperative, one might take Kant's admission of the primacy of the good will to be sufficient for not supposing that obligation and reason hold such *the* fundamental position in his moral philosophy, especially when he supposed the purpose of obligation and reason to be the production of the good will.¹⁰⁸ So obligation and reason, in Kant's view, are neither the beginning, end, nor core of morality, and that should be a reasonable position, unless Kant's whole philosophy is to be put up for interpretive grabs.¹⁰⁹ But in case it is not found reasonable enough for morality in general, perhaps the earlier developed letter/spirit distinction could be of help in determining the place of obligation and reason. Recall that one letter/spirit distinction was introduced by Kant as a caveat to his position that "moral worth... must be represented as proper incentives to action."¹¹⁰ It is obligation and reason that inform these incentives and thus aim at the good will, which is in this work being likened to the spirit of the law (though not the spirit that Kant discussed). If the additional distinction here is found reasonable, then obligation and

reason may be found to inform primarily the letter of the law. But even on Kant's account, conformity to the letter of the moral law will not by itself do, as the letter without the spirit turns out to be "sheer hypocrisy" and even hatred of the moral law.¹¹¹ An implication here is that obligation and reason are themselves good only insofar as they help to produce the spirit of the law.¹¹² So it seems that any critique of the whole of morality that centers around obligation and reason has likely either overvalued the letter of the law, undervalued the spirit of it, or not adequately attended to the relation between the two in the determination of moral worth. All three are grave misunderstandings of the institution of morality.

It was suggested earlier that morality need not accept Williams' obligation-out obligation-in principle, based on a somewhat loose idea that the spirit of the law can make up for in conviction what the letter of the law might lack in order. Having the fuller discourse of the letter/spirit and law/loss distinctions in view provides the positioning to more fully explore that idea. It has to do with another earlier claim that morality is ultimately a simple institution, which consists essentially in a letter of the law that advocates for the spirit of the law. It also grants a certain understanding of moral loss. When moral conflicts - which may be nothing more than particular expressions of the fundamental condition of moral loss - confront human beings, the moral demand is to favor the spirit of the law, just as in any other situation, as moral loss is always present. If there is a letter to the law that should help follow the spirit, then the letter should certainly be followed. If there is not, it is not unreasonable to think that the spirit of the law can, within the human heart (the dwelling of the moral law), amend the letter to appropriate the situation.¹¹³ The husband confronted by the situations of conflicting peril¹¹⁴ has no more complicated a *moral* demand upon him than to favor the spirit of the law; and this is not without regard to, but may be without conformity to, what the law should

dictate to him in letter. The ethical vulnerability here then might not be a propensity for one thought too many, but rather one thought too few.¹¹⁵

There is another way that morality can be misused, but the weight of misunderstanding rests more on moral loss. It relates to the perceived (or perhaps projected) obsession with blame and guilt within morality. There was an attempt earlier to conjure a universal intuition of moral loss, and involved in this was the thought that no particular person or circumstance is alone responsible for the condition of moral loss.¹¹⁶ One common view (held by Williams) believes that blame is attributed in the morality system to one who does not do something that one had a reason - perhaps an overriding reason - to do.¹¹⁷ There are at least three reasons why this account of blame cannot be identified with morality, two of which can be dealt with at this point.¹¹⁸ The first is involves a lack of appreciation for the law/loss relationship. If moral loss is true, then the moral law stands the only entity of perfection in the moral realm, and therefore the only entity with a legitimate right to blame. But blame (and also guilt) is a strictly human phenomenon, while the moral law convicts of loss to steer toward the spirit of the law. That human beings might twist the moral law to their own purposes should not be a problem with the law, but with the human beings who abuse it. The second point is related, that the institution of blame often serves as a form of coercion for human beings to conform with the law. This conformity is usually to the letter of the law, and it should be at this point clear that mere conformity to the letter of the law is insufficient for moral worth. But there is an additional point here, that if the moral law did incorporate blame, it would be inconsistent with its fundamental aims to use blame (or guilt) as is usually suggested. For moral agents can be under no compulsion - other than a pure pull toward the good will - to attain moral worth. So it seems that any view of morality that observes blame

and guilt to be its characteristic reactions might need to explain how it is morality that is held in view.

What these confusions amount to is an application of certain moral values where they do not belong, in order to suggest a particular brand of impartiality and impersonality in morality that may not be ultimately present. Morality, as an introduction to ethics, will try to pull individuals into ethics with first impressions, but it will never present the whole body of ethics to anyone. To be sure, the moral law must be impartial - especially in letter. A transgression is a transgression, and a partial violation of the law is a violation of its whole body, regardless of persons, characters or circumstances. But this does not mean that the law in spirit is restricted from empathy and familiarity with the human condition; indeed, any view of morality that holds it to such a restriction has likely not given adequate attention the extent of the paradoxically full and simultaneous presence of both the moral law and moral loss in human life. Morality must be impersonal in its demand on individuals to desire with their whole souls - relationships and the attachments therein included - the good will. Those who are repulsed with moral blame are right in their opposition, but they often illuminate that the real problem with blame between moral agents is that it grossly distorts the moral value of human trust - a relational dynamic that involves the full-blown spectrum of human life - and that this might be the reason that the letter of the law makes certain prohibitions such as lying. Ironically, such reductions end up presenting morality as being much less burdensome than it might be found if its full weight was granted. For, granted the reality of moral loss and the difficulty of attaining the letter of the law, part of the place that morality holds in human ethical life is just this: to demonstrate that the admirable moral agent must be quite remote from the ordinary conception of the decent human being,¹¹⁹ and to challenge any ethical view

that tries to bridge that gap with ease. Rather, it requires the discipline of developing ethical conviction, a discipline which morality teaches.

Ethical conviction and what must save morality

A large part of what has been put under investigation thus far is the proper place of morality in ethics and human life. It is a point of this work that problems of the self should be addressed as just that, and these problems are not necessarily problems for any institution that the self relates to, including morality. But problems for morality, on the other hand, certainly are problems for human beings, and this chapter will try to show how human beings can live with morality granted that they must. Problems for morality, as an introduction, are also problems for ethics itself, and this suggestion from the first chapter will be solidified in this chapter. For all of the problems and complications that this simple institution brings with it, it also brings solutions - or at least responses - to many of these. It will be the final suggestion of this work that morality may, after all, be the entry point to ethics for human beings.

An ethics without morality

Up to this point there have not been many suggestions about proper ethical philosophy, as the scope has been limited to morality proper. Where the end of the first chapter anticipated whether Williams would deal fatal blows to morality, it was hinted at that such a death might include notions essentials to ethics. Ultimately, it might be seen that what these notions hinge on is conviction, a notion Williams rightly esteems as central to human ethical life. He supposes that in the absence of morality, his notions of confidence and importance¹²⁰ adequately support the notion of ethical conviction. But without the law/loss and letter/spirit relations, notions that live quite close to conviction - especially ethical truth - may be lost. In fact, without these, it might be difficult to hold up any real notion of ethical

conviction at all; and without any substantive notion of conviction, it is unclear what sort of ethics survives.

Williams' discussion of *confidence* comes in a wider discussion of the failed quest for an objective ethics, in order to rescue to core of ethical conviction from the particular failures of reflection and ethical knowledge.¹²¹ If there is no objective way to settle ethical differences, Williams says, relativism might seem the appropriate response; and where relativism fails, one might expect reflection to succeed. But ultimately these will not do, and to navigate real ethical quandaries, "we need a third conception... *confidence*."¹²² Williams supposes that confidence can without coercion restore ethical conviction from its lack, and it can do this as "merely one good among others."¹²³ But this attitude does not retain the sort of truth that we usually suppose goes into ethical conviction. Moral loss is a condition that holds all human beings ethically handicapped, and the moral law reveals the ethical standards that they - despite their handicap - aspire to (and, in letter, reveals the set of standards that they could not possibly fulfill). It was supposed in the last chapter that conviction should be the force that serves to navigate this tricky state that human beings find themselves in. Surely what is desired in situations of moral conflict - what the husband desires¹²⁴ - is more than the certainty that an action is permissible, but also more than a mere option that he can be confident in. The desire is for some notion of redemption from moral loss, some reconciliation with the moral law; and while confidence is an important ingredient for ethical conviction, it provides little help in pointing toward what it is that human beings should have conviction *in*.¹²⁵

That is supposed to be helped by Williams' notion of *importance*, but this notion is poorly understood¹²⁶ - and bound to be so - and that is a real problem. As was discussed in the

first chapter, Williams wants to use this notion primarily to show that obligation is merely one method of ethical deliberation, and also that it is a poor one.¹²⁷ The fundamental convolution is whether importance is supposed to be understood as a *measure* or a *judge*. Importance as a measure would be a value, which different projects have differing amounts of (or even kinds) for different human beings. Here the role of importance with respect to projects might be analogous to the role of money with respect to materials. Importance as a judge, in contrast, would be the deliberative mechanism itself that decides which project to follow - which material to purchase. Williams' notion convolutes these two, and the result is the appearance that importance can actually be both measure and judge. Importance is supposed to both distinguish between matters of *relative* and *simple* importance, and also the view through which deliberative priority is assigned.¹²⁸ There is a straightforward explanation of why this will not by itself be useful to human ethical life, and it is twofold.

Williams' view of (especially Kantian) morality sees obligation being given (among other functions) the commensurable measure of moral worth: all moral agents and their actions can be weighed by the extent to which they fulfill their obligations. If importance is to be the commensurable measure through which projects are prioritized, then it cannot also be the mechanism that distinguishes kinds of projects. Money can put two items under the same measure of value, but it will not inform that one item is a good and one item is a service. The second part is that if, on the other hand, importance is the mechanism that distinguishes between types, then it will be of no help in deciding which projects are *more* important. If money distinguished between kinds of materials - say, cheap and expensive - it still could not explain why one kind should be preferred to the other. The intuition that tells a human being to favor simple importances over relative importances cannot itself be importance. Ultimately,

importance will run into the same problem that Williams believes morality has - it cannot with integrity delegate its own importance in ethical deliberation. Morality does not need to encounter the problems of importance that Williams supposes, because as an introduction it simply points toward (rather than decides) what is ethically important. The commensurability of morality in ethical values requires only this, that all parts of ethics will have in common that human beings arrived at them through morality.

So there should be some doubt whether Williams' own notions are sufficient to keep ethics afloat in the absence of morality. This should be found true especially in practice, that at least part of the reason that morality has long played such an integral part in ethical philosophy is because it is integral to the human experience. It will here be argued that this is necessarily so. This can be supported by the expression of the moral law in the form of common sense, the human desire for rules and reasons, and the need for human beings to lead communal lives. Williams admits that morality is deeply rooted in human beings,¹²⁹ and the Kantian position is that this is because the moral law is an innate for human beings. It is an important feature of morality being an introduction to ethics that the moral law is wired in whether or not any specific ethic is. Any position that wants to toss morality out will need to show how morality is nonessential to humanity in such a way that permits its disposal.

Many of the points here have already been made, though independently, throughout this work. In the discussion of the law/loss relationship, it was suggested that human beings have basic ideas of right and wrong behavior, and rules that should accompany these ideas. It does not matter that the content of many of these notions is societally manufactured. For though societal pressures could develop endless specific rules of decent human conduct, it is

less likely that one could be societally persuaded to buy in to the rule-giving form itself. One may be convinced to follow specific rules, but it is unclear how one would be convinced on a deep level that rules are what should be followed.¹³⁰ Yet human beings do deeply desire both rules and reasons for both their own and others' behavior; and even the great lengths that human beings will go to in order to excuse themselves from the specific rules illustrate how deeply they believe in rules as an institution. The Kantian intuition that morality is completely derived from and governed by reason, though an insufficient picture of morality and ethics,¹³¹ is not a bad one, and it explains much of the fundamental human ethical life, especially its beginnings.

After all, it still seems a fair claim that the moral law, as Kant supposed, is simply built into human nature. It is doubtful that any philosophy could ultimately disprove (in the strict sense) this Kantian intuition, but that is not the real point. Early on in his own philosophy, Williams supposes ethics to be about finding one's "deepest impulse" and following it,¹³² and it is seen in his somewhat final judgment of morality that the notions of *confidence* and *importance* are the primary notions useful in this journey. While Kant is often criticized for presenting a cold decision machine for an ethical theory,¹³³ it is unclear that Williams' own notions of confidence and importance do not combine to create their own sort of decision machine for favoring this "deepest impulse." But granted this is not a decision machine of its own kind, Williams' ethical foundations have the danger of leading to a philosophy that everything is ultimately permitted; and it becomes unclear in that case what need one would have for the sanction of truth in feeling that "there *is* something that is your deepest impulse."¹³⁴ If there is not first reason for believing that there should be some specific content of ethical convictions,

then it is unlikely that any certainty about one's *deepest impulse* is going to be found more compelling than ethical knowledge or even Kant's moral obligation.

This view of ethics seems to leave out at least two of the basic truths about human life that morality holds in full view, and that are necessary for legitimate ethical conviction. The first is that often times, the deepest impulses of human beings are bad. An ethics that starts from the law/loss relationship of morality will not lose sight of this, and prove useful in ways which an ethics without morality could never hope for. Williams supposes that ethics, perhaps through importance, should try to see around the "intimidating structure that morality has made."¹³⁵ But this supposedly widened vision ignores a second truth about human life, that often times our moral impulses are the deepest ones. As an introduction to ethics, morality does not need to contain all of our deepest impulses, but it must carry some of them. In developing practical confidence, it seems then that an ethical conviction that eliminates morality would have to be self-deceptive on some deep level; and it is not clear why we should be encouraged to make the trade to this form of self-deception over that which is allegedly found in morality.¹³⁶ For ethical conviction is at its core about integrity, and this can disagree with practical confidence itself. It seems that morality, on this account, is thrown out not for a grave misunderstanding of human life,¹³⁷ but rather because it impresses on human beings certain notions about ethical life that it understands *too well*, and because it is too committed to answering finally some of the basic questions¹³⁸ of life. What is still left for the one who would reject morality, then, is to explain how the core of ethics and humanity itself should remain intact without morality.

The proper place of morality: the introduction to ethics

If it is true that both human beings and ethics need morality in the sense that they have morality at their essence, then perhaps a better approach to morality is to search for its wisdoms rather than to cast it out to eliminate our confusions about it. This section will try to show how morality can suggest an accurate self-understanding of oneself as an ethical being. It also will try to show that morality cares that human beings develop an agreeable psychological composition with respect to ethical life. Finally, it will be posited that morality quite literally is an introduction to ethics, in that this is the likely point of entry into ethical life for human beings. Ultimately it is suggested here that these things, which are essential to ethics, are best (perhaps only) provided by morality; and the one who desires to rid human life of morality needs to explain how else these crucial elements should be found in ethics.

It has been said¹³⁹ that a true understanding of oneself is the highest of wisdoms. Part of what has been suggested in this chapter (and this work as a whole) is that morality puts human beings in touch with some very deep truths about their nature and about the world - truths that are often sacrificed or ignored, along with their benefits, in ethical theories that undervalue or leave out morality. But of course, truths by themselves often bring little advantage to the soul,¹⁴⁰ which might be why this man who esteemed self-understanding thought that this necessarily brought along with it a "humble estimate of oneself."¹⁴¹ Humility has over time become less and less viewed as essential to ethical virtue, but if our intuitions about moral law and loss are true, then it really is necessary. At least part of what moral loss works to show is the position of frailty that human beings are in with respect to their moral agency, and why simple confidence does not restore ethical conviction.¹⁴² When moral loss dominates a situation, and the moral law goes unfulfilled, the appropriate reaction is not to

shake fists at the law for being oppressive and impossible, and subsequently disown it. For human beings really do believe in the moral law, or else they should not be so upset when they fail by its standards; indeed, it is their own standards that they fail by. To attempt, on these sentiments, to distance oneself from the truth of moral law is a self-betrayal; and the one who realizes that he is far off from the mark of the admirable moral agent will only add to the disparity in trying to change or throw out the mark. To be able to accept responsibility for, learn in the midst of and move on from moral shortcomings - and do these with grace and humility - are often times the first steps of ethical development. Morality shows that these must be an aspiration of any respectable ethical theory, and any theory that would like to leave out morality will need to present another way of developing these capacities.

Of course, if the only function of morality were to present accurately the difficulties of ethical life, there would be good reason to feel begrudgingly toward it, for it would serve only to be the constant source of unconfident souls. The apprehension of ethical truths alone does not usually edify the soul, but this does not mean that ethical truths are simply unhelpful¹⁴³ in the cultivation of ethical conviction. A mere recognition of the ethical truth of moral loss and law does not alone produce ethical conviction, but accompanying truths - for example, humility - might. But what this ethical conviction (and perhaps the truth of humility itself) hinges on is the human reaction to the more primary truths presented them. The reactions of human beings to morality matter, because morality is our first impression of ethics. The compulsively unfaithful husband who feels the moral impulse not to seek a divorce, and subsequently suppresses this impulse in an attempt to free himself from his marital shortcomings by nonetheless obtaining the divorce, is not likely to find ethical conviction in any direction that he acts. But if in the face of his moral struggles he rather seeks a means to

be at peace with the deep impulses of morality (in the case of humility, perhaps by a confession of his frailty), the prospect of ethical conviction is greater.¹⁴⁴

It is worth noting that this ethical conviction does not necessarily mean a fulfillment of or conformity to the moral law, for one honest look at the ideal of perfection represented in the moral law should show that one will never measure up. Such a law could not be about justifications at all, and in fact, what the law/loss relation should reveal is that the common quest to obtain moral worth under the letter of the law is a foolish one. If virtue is indeed something attainable, morality shows that it will not be so via any amount of conformity to the law.¹⁴⁵ This might at first glance be taken as another reason to look for a way out of the morality system. It is unclear why one should keep the depressing outlook that prophesies constant moral failure. But there is an outlook that sees a more positive contribution by morality to the human ethical life, and it has to do with a certain kind of ethical freedom. First, the impossible weight of the moral law actually can result in freedom from the poisonous desire to seek justification under the law; indeed it should be found a self-evident feature of the law that it cannot be about justifications, as it will only provide a lack therein. So it seems that the search for moral justification, which many suppose to be oppressive, is actually an institution that morality works to free human beings from. Second, the peace of ethical knowledge found in morality must provide at least some of the confidence of ethical conviction. Though no amount or quality of reasons could fill one with absolute certainty toward a course of action, the one who moves with ethical conviction on some level must truly *know* that the action is acceptable. The moral law provides hard and fast intuitions about right and wrong, and these must be at least part of ethical knowledge. Such freedoms, among

others, can be a source of great joy that morality sometimes reigns supreme over ethical conviction.

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Philosophers and laymen alike have often used morality to invite misconceptions of human life into ethics, and also of ethics into human life. The Kant/Williams discourse provides a rich backdrop on which to consider these misconceptions. But the misconceptions of morality involved are just as numerous and just as serious. One thing that the Kant/Williams discourse shows is this: that ethics can be neither contained by nor cultivated without morality. Though much of Williams' critique of *Kantian* morality is quite astute, the philosophical and ethical wisdoms of morality abound in spite of these. Morality understands the fundamental condition of moral loss, and the sometimes irreducible quandaries that this condition places human beings in. It understands the nature of the moral law, and the intricacies that the levels of letter and spirit invite into human life. Perhaps more importantly, it understands the uncompromising relationship between moral loss and moral law, and how the human navigation of this relationship leads into the ethical realm via giving rise to ethical conviction. Finally, for all of its pressures, morality abounds in valuable wisdoms for the one discovering that the human soul occupies a place of ethical significance in the world. It is responsible for pointing out, grounding and providing a framework for some of the most fundamental truths about the world and human beings; and these are essential to any viable ethical theory and sensible conception of human life.

Postscript

Considering that the title of this work is *Saving morality: Why we cannot, and why we must*, there was not herein much discussion about the actual salvation of morality. The main title *Saving morality* is straightforwardly inspired by Williams' thought that "we would be better off without" morality.¹⁴⁶ Williams' *Ethics and the Limits* makes it so that any philosopher who wants even to mention morality as a legitimate ethical-philosophical notion, must first salvage it from very serious criticisms. So there is first the point that *morality* should be in some sort of very grave danger, and it was a point of the first chapter of this work to show that Williams' criticisms present such a danger.

The subtitle of the work is more open textured, having two parts, the first of which asks *why we cannot* save morality. In a straightforward way, this just makes the main title more weighty, suggesting that Williams has raised such damning criticisms that there could be no salvation for morality. The end of the first chapter makes a less straightforward interpretation, that salvation is proportional to condemnation.¹⁴⁷ The second chapter works to show that morality is not in quite the danger that we might have supposed after being exposed to Williams' critique of morality. The first part of the subtitle deepens the question on another level, the level of *who* cannot save morality. Williams' point that "morality is not an invention of philosophers"¹⁴⁸ is relevant here. He is right: philosophers were not responsible for the creation of morality, but they shall likewise not be responsible for the destruction of it, unless they do away with humanity altogether.

The second part of the subtitle adds a confusing clause, asking *why we must* save

morality after it has just been stated that we cannot. But this clause clarifies the *who* of *saving morality*, and it is certainly not philosophers, at least in the sense that philosophers have some special skills to save morality which other human beings lack. Kant's conception of the moral law as inherent in human beings is important for this work (especially the second chapter), and thus in a way, all human beings save the moral law by merely existing. But the *we* also contains a *what*, and that is ethics. It is a position of this work that to sacrifice *morality* is to compromise crucial ethical notions (such as *loss*, *law*, and *conviction*), possibly even *human being* and *life*. So it appears that ethics itself - along with human beings - *must* save morality if they are to be what they are.

For all of this semantic play, this work has made frequent use of inconclusive language such as "suggests," "points toward," "hints at," "directs," and "shows" among others. The simple answer to the two questions of the subtitle of the work is probably something like, "because it is the introduction to ethics." I did not take it to be crucial for the main argument to provide any operational definition of *introduction*, but there are a few points worth working out concerning just what could be involved in *morality as the introduction to ethics*. The notion might best be taken as a colloquial one, and we might attach many qualities to it. I believe that four such qualities required of an *introduction* are leverage, simplicity, modesty, and inspiration.¹⁴⁹

By *leverage* is meant the characteristic of an introduction that it is in some sense compelling. Here it may be difficult to see morality as an introduction and yet not as playing the game of the Archimedean point. But an introduction needs no analytically objective

grounds to have leverage; it needs only some manner of captivation, and also a door or pathway leading into what it introduces. This work has presented the law/loss relationship as leverage for morality. Leverage is for the half-convinced; and part of the role of an introduction is probably to finesse (and thereby in some sense, obscure) the boundaries. So it becomes unclear, and perhaps unimportant, what counts as inside or outside the moral realm.

By *simplicity* is meant that this leverage should be found straightforward. Introductions present simple, foundational points about the whole subject, although they do not need to touch on all of the points - even the essential ones - about the subject. This is found in morality mostly in that it requires for its essence only lawfulness aimed at the good will, and that the fundamental notions of law/loss and letter/spirit are basically compatible with this essence. Morality does not need elaborate structures of obligation governed by reason¹⁵⁰ in order to fulfill its role as an introduction to ethics.

It should not be a problem that these notions cannot explain the whole of ethics, which is connected to the third element, *modesty*, by which is meant that an introduction knows its proper place in the larger context of the whole project. It does not suppose itself to be responsible for holding up or completing the integrity of the entire project. Though morality sometimes holds our deepest impulses, it need not hold all of them all of the time. This should be found, among other things, in morality's proper refusal to delegate blame or try to reduce human life to rational obligations. Rather than overstep its bounds, a proper introduction finally provides *inspiration* to progress and explore further the project that it introduces. The main inspiration suggested in this work is the way in which the fundamental notions of

morality teach the central ethical notion of conviction, and in this way morality encourages individuals to delve deeper into the ethical.

One might be left wondering what has been meant here by *conviction* (particularly ethical conviction), and it is a point of this project that ethical conviction is not filled all the way out. While a loose definition of conviction was provided¹⁵¹ with the idea that conviction is the force of the soul that reveals what one is willing to live and die for, a few specific things were suggested about ethical conviction based upon the main argument of this work that morality, as an introduction to ethics, teaches ethical conviction. First, the environment in which ethical conviction is cultivated has been illustrated in the law/loss and letter/spirit tensions presented in morality. So it is the sort of thing that navigates fundamental tensions of human life, and as such will always have reference to morality. Second, ethical conviction is found necessary in ordinary and tragic instances alike, and it in part works to develop integrity (even over practical necessity) in how human beings approach these different kinds of instances. Third, some necessary features of conviction have been identified, such as confidence, importance and knowledge. Finally, conviction itself is a notion central to ethics, and perhaps *the* central notion.

The first chapter of this work hopefully showed that Williams' criticisms of morality, however serious and damaging, do leave morality alive. The second chapter tried to take this bit of breath left in morality in order to reexamine it in a fairly raw state (indeed, Williams' criticisms of morality may have been necessary for stripping away all that is not essential to

it). It was then posited what is required for morality essentially, and a few quite basic and simple notions that should be found at its core. The third chapter then tried to show that this simple view of morality holds it primarily as an introduction to ethics via conviction, and that is where the real argument of the main text ends.

Of course, there is probably an infinite list of related projects, many of which are important. For example, this work does not deliver final verdicts on either Kant¹⁵² or Williams, or their followers. It does not explain what the essential place of the often elevated notions of reason and obligation should be in morality. It does not work out exactly how something that rejects fundamental pillars of Kantian morality can still be considered morality. When I presented the first draft of this work to an adviser of mine, the first questioning feedback I received was that the title of the work seems to violate one of the cardinal rules of morality, that "*ought*" implies "*can*". This is telling of the project as a whole, that it has been willing to question and even throw out many notions long considered central to morality, in order to see more clearly the true nature of morality. Acknowledging this, I still hope that what has been done here should not be found a project lacking in positive contributions, because I hope that its largest contribution to philosophy is - like morality to the project of ethics - the doors that it opens up and work that it leaves to be done.

NOTES

1. Preface

¹ Bernard Williams, Morality: An Introduction to Ethics (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1993) xiii-xiv.

² Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) 174.

³ Of course, things simply being contrary to preferences is probably not sufficient for constituting a *real* moral issue; but it certainly is necessary. In any case, we would not hold our preferences unless in some sense we supposed that we *ought* to hold them. It might be objected that arousing this intuition has the danger of conflating desires with oughts; and the third chapter of this work will hold that at times this boundary is rightfully obscured.

⁴ This is a well-known theme of Kant's work, but one place it comes out with particular strength is in his Practical Philosophy (Ed. Mary J. Gregor. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 5:152.

⁵ Williams' discussion of conviction comes in Ethics and the Limits 168-171.

⁶ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 1.

⁷ Admittedly, this is not obvious and remains to be shown; and it is a claim that enters my argument near the end of the second chapter.

2. Morality and why we cannot save it

⁸ Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) 174.

⁹ Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits 196.

¹⁰ It is certainly admitted that these points might be broken down or condensed further.

¹¹ My internal harmony may be likened to what Williams calls "Ethical Consistency" in his Problems of the Self (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1973) 166-186.

¹² Williams, Ethics and the Limits, 176.

¹³ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 175. It will be a later question of this work whether morality really must hold this position.

¹⁴ Though this is a main theme of Williams' work in general, what is relevant here is that I take this to be a main point of Williams' "Ethical Consistency" in his Problems of the Self 166-186.

¹⁵ I have borrowed and will continue to borrow this phrase from Williams, Ethics and the Limits 188.

¹⁶ Williams' dealing with this Greek tragedy comes in his Problems of the Self 173.

¹⁷ The experience of regret is of large importance to Williams. Along with the notion that "there was no better thing to be done," an important aspect of these sentiments seems to be the thought that "it was me who did it." This appears in Williams' discussion of regret in his "Moral Luck" in Moral Luck (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1981) 27-30.

¹⁸ In Williams' view, most moralists will insist either that one of the conflicting moral demands did not constitute an actual obligation, or that any regret after choosing the best course of action is irrational, or perhaps both. But these are both "falsifying of moral thought" and do not reflect accurately the human condition, Problems of the Self 183-184.

¹⁹ Williams analyzes and refutes this pillar of the morality system in Ethics and the Limits 181-187. It will be a later suggestion of this work that this need is specific to the Kantian variety of morality.

²⁰ It is sometimes remarked that Kantian duty instructs individuals to be morally upright *regardless* of reasons not to be. Here has been chosen a different expression, for two reasons. First, Kant cannot mean that duty is without regard to other reasons, as he has already given these attention. Second, duty could not carry with it overriding reasons if the will had no other reasons before it to be overridden. In any case, Kant's intuition that reasons are necessary for morality will be upheld in this work.

²¹ This phrase is taken from Williams' "Persons, character and morality" in his Moral Luck, 18, during a wider discourse on morality and interpersonal relations, 16-19. The phrase itself does not do much of the argumentative lifting, but it does express what Williams seems to find strange about morality in certain situations. It is a question, though, whether this really should be found strange, and also whether this is the real danger of moral deliberation.

²² Williams, Moral Luck 18. One might wonder whether this argument conflates the ultimate justification (and motivation) of an action with what we expect (or find) the spouse to be thinking at the time of deliberation. It certainly is justification enough that it is his spouse, but that does not mean that there is no *further* justification possible or that this justification is ultimate.

²³ Like regret and interpersonal relations, there seems to be something deeper at stake here for Williams, namely, the involvement of human emotions in the ethical life. It is easy to see how Williams' criticisms run together, as his point that the morality system is impersonal can be seen here.

²⁴ The concept of "moral luck" was developed both by Williams in his "Moral Luck," Moral Luck 20-39, and by Thomas Nagel in his "Moral Luck," Mortal Questions. (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 24-38.

²⁵ Among other places, Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:394. Here Kant seems to be saying that things external to the will can neither make it good nor detract from its goodness.

²⁶ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:446.

²⁷ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:387.

²⁸ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:446.

²⁹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:4452-453.

³⁰ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:459.

³¹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:4.

³² Kant, Practical Philosophy 8:456.

³³ Kant, Practical Philosophy 8:458.

³⁴ Laws are self-imposed in that a truly free will must be unaffected by external causes. As will be discussed in the next chapter, the manner in which the moral law counts as self-legislated may be more open-ended than Kant leads one to believe.

³⁵ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:447.

³⁶ Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:6.

³⁷ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:449.

³⁸ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:450. "Reckoning of" might here be replaced with "reason to" or "reason for," according to Kant's language.

³⁹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:455. It has often been said that there is a gap between Kant's claim that a free will conforms to universal law, and the claim that human beings ought to evaluate their maxims according to such a law. Kant seems to take this infamous link for granted, stating that this is the simple compulsion of a truly free will. The nuance in the reciprocation, as identified by Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:4, is this: that freedom is the reckoning of being of moral law, and moral law is the reckoning of understanding of freedom.

⁴⁰ Kant, Practical Philosophy 8:458.

⁴¹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:29-30. I later try to get the moral law off the ground from an almost opposite angle, with a reciprocal relationship between moral law and moral loss; and I hope this should guard against the concerns raised by moral luck.

⁴² Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:397.

⁴³ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:390. Kant might be read as saying that acting in conformity with the law is of no value. Such a position will find no support here; but it is in any case unclear whether this is a position to which morality is necessarily committed. In either case, Williams will dispute even the basic claim that higher esteem is always granted to the dutiful individual.

⁴⁴ It is worth wondering how loose these conceptions are allowed to be, and whether morality must take start from them in the way that Kant does.

⁴⁵ Nagel breaks down moral luck into four kinds in his "Moral Luck," Mortal Questions. Though this breakdown illuminates many things about the concept, the concept and problem of moral luck is here taken to be fairly straightforward, and as such does not require much exposition.

⁴⁶ Williams, "Moral Luck," Moral Luck 39.

⁴⁷ I will later demote obligation in favor of "conviction," as I find it a more adequate expression of the notion for many reasons, one of which is that it defends against Williams' confused criticism that Kantian moral obligation does not "go all the way down" in the way that practical necessity must, Ethics and the Limits 188.

⁴⁸ What follows is certainly not an exhaustive account. The primary distinction, if there is one, is that obligation is the necessity of action, while duty just is the action, Kant, Practical Philosophy 6:222.

⁴⁹ Kant, Practical Philosophy xiv. This is an interpretative point made by Allen Wood.

⁵⁰ Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:159; 6:224; 6:390-96. For example, the different duties that comprise an action; perfect and imperfect duties; grounds of obligation and obligations themselves; obligations of precedence and obligations of prevalence; ethical duties, duties of virtue, and duties of right; wide and narrow duties.

⁵¹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 8:13.

⁵² Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:391. Specifically, to empirical practical concepts without consideration of their origins.

⁵³ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 178. Williams associates this, in Kant's terminology, with the characteristic of the moral imperative being categorical.

⁵⁴ These three levels of the supremacy of morality appear in Williams, Ethics and the Limits on pages 177, 179, and 180, respectively.

⁵⁵ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 184. This work might agree with this statement if applied to morality rather than to ethics. It must be kept in mind here the distinction that Williams makes between the wider realm of ethics and the narrower ethical variety of morality; and this aptitude for comprehensive vision is a defining characteristic of how he distinguishes the two.

⁵⁶ This is a combination of thoughts from Williams. The notion of projects is provided explicitly in his "Persons, character and morality" in Moral Luck 5. The notion that importance is grounded in these personal projects is found in his Ethics and the Limits 186. The idea that this should be placed at the center of ethical considerations goes all the way back to his Morality: An Introduction to Ethics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 81.

⁵⁷ Williams supposes that he "needs only three things of" the notion of importance, and that "it does not matter... that this notion is poorly understood," Ethics and the Limits 186. The third chapter will present these stances as quite significant, and question them both.

⁵⁸ Williams, Moral Luck 23.

⁵⁹ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 196. That morality is deeply rooted will find agreement in this work; that it must hold a misconception of human life will not.

⁶⁰ Williams, Moral Luck 28.

⁶¹ Williams, Moral Luck 18.

⁶² Perhaps, a morality in which obligation reigns supreme *sometimes*.

⁶³ Williams, Moral Luck 3.

⁶⁴ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 68.

⁶⁵ Of course, without morality, one might wonder where these justifications are to be found.

⁶⁶ Williams, Shame and Necessity (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993) 69.

⁶⁷ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 177. I will argue this claim in the following chapters. In this case, morality primarily provides a way to evaluate actions, but this does not necessarily lead to a demand to heap guilt on those who go astray (including oneself).

⁶⁸ Williams, Making Sense of Humanity (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1995) 42. This claim might not be found entirely true in the next chapter, as some of the focus is taken off of reasons.

⁶⁹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:393. It is especially interesting, considering the modern dichotomy between the right and the good, that Kant actually begins his pursuit with a consideration of goodness.

⁷⁰ This claim, along with the claim of unconditional value, are the two important aspects of the good will that Williams criticizes - much more so than he seems to criticize the content of Kant's good will.

⁷¹ It is certainly worth wondering whether or not this is sufficient for a good will, and whether morality must hold this conception of the good will.

⁷² Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:397. It is notable here is that the relationship is one of analytical clarification, rather than one of real metaphysical support or proof of existence.

⁷³ Kant, Practical Philosophy 6:222.

⁷⁴ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:396.

⁷⁵ Kant, Practical Philosophy 8:11.

⁷⁶ Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:15-16. See also Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:120-121, where practical reason is shown as supreme to speculative reason.

⁷⁷ Kant, Practical Philosophy 6:227.

⁷⁸ Kant, Practical Philosophy 6:223.

⁷⁹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:400.

⁸⁰ Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:29, 5:31-32. This anticipates a later point about the defective nature of human language, and the toll it takes on our understanding of morality and ethics.

⁸¹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 5:152.

⁸² For Kant, perhaps the three most crucial foundations that his philosophy makes are God, freedom, and immortality. These happen to be three crucial points of divergence for Williams and Kant - however unaddressed they may be today - as Williams does not assume or believe in any of these things. One of the main points of Williams' "God, morality and prudence" Williams, Morality 63-72, is that the complications with belief in God make many parts of morality problematic; and even if God existed, that might not make a difference for morality. Interestingly, Williams here brings to his defense an insight from Kant, that morality might be prior to God. Williams' work on moral luck compromises his belief in free agency in a very serious way. As for immortality, Williams' Makropulos case, Problems of the Self 82-100, finds that an eternal life would be a meaningless life; in the very least, though death is an evil, immortality is a worse idea. This disagreement between Kant and Williams is an important yet unaddressed one, as Kantian moral philosophy presupposes an unlimited amount of time to attain moral perfection. With these in mind, it should not be difficult to anticipate some of the ways in which these two philosophers might end up talking past each other.

⁸³ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:389.

⁸⁴ Kant, Practical Philosophy 4:390.

⁸⁵ Kant in many places (for example, Practical Philosophy 4:389) seems to claim that we basically know our duties and laws, and I believe that he is correct to assume so. He is rather interested in the essence and nature of duty, and what it has to do primarily with the good will, but also with reason, freedom, and law.

⁸⁶ Important here are the two chapters, "The Archimedean Point" and "Foundations: Practical Reason" in Williams, Ethics and the Limits 22-29 and 54-70, respectively.

⁸⁷ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 54.

⁸⁸ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits* 174.

3. Re-viewing morality, a simple institution

⁸⁹ Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) 1.

⁹⁰ Kant, *Practical Philosophy* 5:152.

⁹¹ It is not a point of this work to discuss which intuitions human beings are made aware of first (law or loss), as a proper understanding of their relationship shows that these two sets of intuitions in many ways develop together.

⁹² These differences have to do with where the standard comes from, where the standard is applied, and to what end the standard is held.

⁹³ This is an ordinary example from our daily lives, which Williams might consider amoral. There is herein a divergence with Williams on his use of tragedy to inform our ethical intuition, which will be filled out in the next chapter. A few things in particular interest me about these situations. First, that both men care about their place in line, and may feel that they have a rightful claim to it. Second, that both men assume that the other knows about what would be proper behavior in this situation, as opposed to another (the second man would not reply about being allowed to break a promise, for example). Third, that mere societal conditioning is not sufficient for the existence of these intuitions.

⁹⁴ Indeed, it might not even be the goal to make morally *acceptable* choices.

⁹⁵ And perhaps also of Kant.

⁹⁶ Although a transgression is not a source of blame for the moral law, as blame is something that human beings do.

⁹⁷ Williams, *Problems of the Self* 173.

⁹⁸ Indeed, it was a notion of importance not only in his philosophy, but in his life, from where much of his philosophy came, as portrayed by James Miller, *Examined Lives: from Socrates to Nietzsche* (New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011) 257-285.

⁹⁹ Earlier I was discussing the moral law as though it is not a product of human manufacturing, and that there can be found no fault in it - and that is true. The faulty workings of the letter of the law come when human beings attempt to represent it, primarily by language, which is perhaps one of the greatest institutional failures of human beings. The moment the maxims of moral law becomes tangled up with human language, they are bound to fail in innumerable ways.

¹⁰⁰ Indeed, this is where the majority of the action of the moral realm occurs - in the spirit, which is perhaps between the lines of the letter.

¹⁰¹ Kant, *Practical Philosophy* 5:161-5:162.

¹⁰² It does not yet need to be asserted that the spirit of the law has primacy over the letter of the law. As will be suggested later, the letter of the law has an equally important role, that it informs us of moral loss, presses the weight of self-legislation and conviction upon us, and in all of this points toward the true spirit of the law, which ultimately leads out of the law entirely.

¹⁰³ Consider our understanding of civil and common law. On the level of the letter, the United States law prohibiting the limitation of free speech directly conflicts the law prohibiting discussing the assassination of the President. But surely we do not suppose that this conflict compromises the integrity of the Constitution. Rather, we suppose that the law against assassination speech holds some spirit of the Constitution (perhaps, the democratic system that it favors) which the law promoting free speech also holds.

¹⁰⁴ Williams' brief discussion of something like conviction is found in conjunction with a consideration of his notion of "confidence" in his Ethics and the Limits 168-171.

¹⁰⁵ Certainly in this discourse by Williams, but also in some ways by Kant as well.

¹⁰⁶ An implication here is that Williams is wrong to discard the existence of Ross's *prima facie* obligations, as he does in his Ethics and the Limits 176-182f. To be sure, not all moral conflicts could be *prima facie*, but this does not mean that none of them are. It is simply that *prima facie* conflicts would be ones that apply only to one level (either letter or spirit) of the law, while real moral conflicts must present a conflict on both levels which is not reducible by some cooperation between them, and also that damages the ethical character of the persons involved beyond what may be accounted for by moral loss.

¹⁰⁷ This is not to say that addressing moral conflicts is simply a matter of delegating and dispelling. Though they are few, there are indeed true moral conflicts. The next chapter will show that though morality does not fully contain what is necessary to deal with these, it does serve to point toward a better equipped institution.

¹⁰⁸ This is the place that Kant gave reason - the very reason for reason - in his philosophy; and when his philosophy is considered, reason should be given that place in it - no more, no less. It is not necessary then, as Williams supposes, that obligation "works to secure reliability."

¹⁰⁹ The point here being something of an echo to a prior position of mine, that it is of utmost importance to pay attention to philosopher's comments on their own work.

¹¹⁰ Kant, Practical Philosophy 1:151. It is interesting to note (just as it is interesting to note about Kant's good will) that Kant's consideration of moral worth here seems to be about "pure virtue." I take these two considerations, among others, to be indications that Kantian moral philosophy may be much closer to virtue ethics than is usually assumed.

¹¹¹ Kant, Practical Philosophy 1:152.

¹¹² This may be found to be at odds with Kantian philosophy, although I take it to be a point of his in declaring the purpose of reason. Though obligation and reason may be at the forefront of the letter of the law, and its representation of the moral law to human beings, I find no need that obligation and reason be given any higher place than this in morality.

¹¹³ This should not be taken to say that the moral law is malleable in a weak way. It has more to do with the gaps of fortitude in the human will, which the spirit of the law is apt to bridge, be it through plain letter of law or profound conviction of spirit.

¹¹⁴ Williams, Moral Luck 18. The next chapter will try to suggest that the supposed moral thought that one's actions are permissible would actually be a thought without content as far as the law is concerned.

¹¹⁵ One explanation in this example is that the law might simply suggest, out of letter, that the husband attempt to save them both (though in a certain order). But the spirit might just as quickly suggest that he only save his wife, and pay no mind to the peril of the stranger. Both are equally troubling ethical positions that result not from excessive but rather insufficient thought.

¹¹⁶ Although at times the moral law may impress itself upon individuals as if this were true. This may have something to do with the understanding of the law that if one portion of it is transgressed, the whole body is transgressed.

¹¹⁷ This is Williams' presentation of blame in morality, Practical Philosophy 192. Recall here that in Kant's view, obligations make use of overriding reasons.

¹¹⁸ The third is a point about morality and justifications, which is taken up in the next chapter.

¹¹⁹ This is of course directly contrary to Williams' view in Problems of the Self 173.

4. Ethical conviction and morality

¹²⁰ His account of the former comes in Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 167-173, and his account of the latter comes in pages 182-187f. I take it that he uses both of them in their colloquial sense.

¹²¹ Williams states that reflection, deliberation and certainty all fail to be "helpful in face of actual lack of ethical conviction," Ethics and the Limits 169.

¹²² Williams, Ethics and the Limits 170.

¹²³ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 170. It is likely that this is important for Williams to state because he must correct the mistaken standard of morality that obligation is the only viable way of ethical living. It seems that Williams here advocates a kind of ethical pluralism, holding that confidence is one promising way to arrive at ethical conviction.

¹²⁴ What the husband desires is for the content of ethical conviction (the force which can inform what one is willing to live and die for) to be filled out for him in that moment.

¹²⁵ This is related to, though not the same as, the concern that Williams sees himself addressing when he suggests that "faith in cognitive certainty" does not help us to know "what we are supposed to be certain about," Ethics and the Limits 170. Though Williams is correct, it is the content of the conviction, rather than the certainty, that matters.

¹²⁶ Williams states at the introduction of this notion that this is of no consequence, Ethics and the Limits 182.

¹²⁷ As he works out in Ethics and the Limits 182f.

¹²⁸ Both of these positions can be found in Williams, Ethics and the Limits 182-183.

¹²⁹ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 174, 196.

¹³⁰ This should be found related to Kant's positions concerning the purity and freedom of self-legislation, and lawfulness therefore being the moral force of utmost compulsion. Adherence to the rule-giving form must be genuine, and can therefore be trusted as a measure of moral worth. Although this work will diverge in suggesting that it is the integrity of the ethical conviction, and not the mere use of the rule-giving form alone, that is virtuous.

¹³¹ Perhaps in being a too far-reaching picture of morality, and an incomplete picture of ethics.

¹³² Bernard Williams, Morality: An Introduction to Ethics (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1972) 79. In citing this notion from others, Williams emphasizes "the idea that there is a discovery to be made here, rather than a decision."

¹³³ Williams himself criticizes this approach to ethical conviction in Ethics and the Limits 169-170.

¹³⁴ Williams, Morality 79.

¹³⁵ Williams, Ethics of Limits 182.

¹³⁶ This is interesting, especially granted that Williams' *confidence* is supposed to do away with self-deception, Ethics and the Limits 171.

¹³⁷ This is Williams' final verdict on morality, Ethics and the Limits 192.

¹³⁸ Indeed, perhaps the very questions mentioned by Williams, Ethics and the Limits 171

¹³⁹ While many have said something like this, the words I have in mind are usually attributed to the late Medieval Catholic monk Thomas á Kempis, The Inner Life (New York, NY: Penguin Great Ideas, 2004) 3-4.

¹⁴⁰ A point which Williams seems to acknowledge in his discussion of conviction, Ethics and the Limits 168-169.

¹⁴¹ Á Kempis, The Inner Life 3.

¹⁴² Humility may, in its own right, provide a certain kind of confidence.

¹⁴³ This is part of Williams' position with respect to ethical conviction, Ethics and the Limits 169-170.

¹⁴⁴ This introduces the notion of peace that, like humility, is often left out of ethical theories despite its necessity and helpfulness. It is a position of this work, though an incomplete one, that morality acquaints and familiarizes us with these central ethical sentiments in ways impossible without morality.

¹⁴⁵ And this is a Kantian wisdom.

5. Postscript

¹⁴⁶ Bernard Williams, Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985) 174. He admits here that he is working from a subjective interpretation of what he takes morality to be.

¹⁴⁷ I say that "what is in no danger requires no salvation," 17.

¹⁴⁸ Williams, Ethics and the Limits 174.

¹⁴⁹ These are probably not technical terms, and could be well substituted by whatever conjures the sentiments I am trying to.

¹⁵⁰ In fact, one of the subtler points of this work is that the whole discourse concerning *moral* worth might be a category mistake, since morality cannot properly be about justifications for human beings in the sense normally attributed therein.

¹⁵¹ On page 29 of this work.

¹⁵² Though the work does seem to treat Kant as something like an overzealous introduction to morality.

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