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THE IDEA OF CONSCIENCE IN THE MYSTICISM OF RICHARD ROLLE AND HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

Аннотация. В данной статье исследуется проблема мистико-религиозных оснований морали, которые взаимосвязаны, в первую очередь, с внутренним миром человека — с долгом, совестью, чувством собственного достоинства. Основное внимание уделяется сравнительному анализу идеи совести в мистицизме Ричарда Ролла и философии морали Г. В. Ф. Гегеля. Если для Ролла совесть — это голос высшего трансцендентного Бога, то для Гегеля совесть — это обобщенный голос значимых других, перенесенный на внутренний план нашего сознания. Эти точки зрения не исключают друг друга: первая фокусируется на том, как созревает совесть, она формируется на основе мистического устремления и любви к Богу, вторая — на механизме функционирования зрелой совести, которая реализует себя в обществе в чувстве долга. Согласно Роллу, совесть — это биение внутреннего разума, тогда как для Гегеля, совесть — это божественный голос, обладающий непосредственным знанием о существовании человека и включающий в себя переживание религиозного или духовного качества, которое выходит за рамки концептуального анализа.

Ключевые слова: моральная философия, философия религии, совесть, Ричард Ролл, Георг Вильгельм Фридрих Гегель, мистицизм, теология

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THE IDEA OF CONSCIENCE IN THE MYSTICISM OF RICHARD ROLLE AND HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY

Abstract. This article examines the problem of mystical and religious foundations of morality, which are interconnected, first of all, with the inner world of a person - with duty, conscience, self-esteem. In what follows two theories of conscience are analyzed, compared and contrasted: those of the fourteenth-century mystic Richard Rolle and those of the philosopher Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. The main attention is paid to the comparative analysis of the idea of conscience in the mysticism of Rolle and in Hegel's moral philosophy. If for Rolle conscience is the voice of the supreme transcendent God, for Hegel conscience is a generalized voice of significant others transferred to the inner plane, which is conditioned by a person's political views or social position. These points of view do not exclude each other: one focuses on how conscience matures, how it is formed on the basis of mystical aspiration and love for God, while the other focuses on the mechanism of functioning of a mature conscience, which realizes itself in society in a sense of duty. According to Rolle, conscience is the beating of an inner intelligence. In the absence of this, we are unlikely to act upon the knowledge that conscience presents to us. According to Hegel, conscience is the divine voice with immediate knowledge of existence. But to goad us into action conscience must be more than this; its content incorporates an experience with a religious or spiritual quality that is beyond conceptual analysis.

Keywords: moral philosophy, philosophy of religion, conscience, Richard Rolle, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, mysticism, theology

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Introduction: The gateway to ethics

Whatever else may be doubted as to the meaning of ethics, it is uncontroversial that matters of conscience provide the material for it, or at the very least give us some idea of its scope. Conscience is that which makes us capable of moral government, of reflecting on moral characters and actions. We approve of some types of characters and actions, we disapprove of others; and the question arises, where does our ability to make such judgements come from? According to Joseph Butler, the ability to make such judgements originates from “our natural sense of gratitude, which implies a distinction between merely being the instrument of good, and intending it” [Butler 1906: 264]. The corresponding ancient Greek word *sineidesis* (συνείδησις) — goes back to the verb συνειδέναι, used in expressions indicating one's responsibility to oneself for the unholy deeds he has committed. The Latin word *conscientia* (a calque from the Greek) was used to refer not only to consciousness in general, but also to consciousness or memories of committed bad deeds or consciousness evaluating its own actions as worthy or unworthy. In the Middle Ages, there was a deepening of understanding of the idea of conscience (*synderesis*), denoting the commanding power of the soul, the inner knowledge of the principles given to man by God. Thus, conscience (*synderesis*) was understood as a deeper, imaginative ability to judge the correctness of a person's actions, as the ability of the will to perform the right actions, in contrast to conscience (*conscientia*), i. e., the ability of a person to evaluate specific actions as good (good) or evil (bad).

In what follows two theories of conscience, are separated by centuries, will be analyzed, compared and contrasted: that of the 14th-century mystic Richard Rolle and that the philosopher Georg Friedrich Wilhelm Hegel. The analysis will be based on the difference between *synderesis* and *conscientia*. According to Rolle, we are motivated to do the right thing by *synderesis* — a prick of conscience as “God's power”, as an indicator of moral duty, whereas for Hegel conscience — *conscientia* is presented as a cognitive-moral force (reason, intuition, feelings), the fundamental ability of a person to express value judgments, to realize himself as a morally responsible being, intentionally defined in relation to good. Rolle and Hegel agreed that conscience is interpreted as “the voice of another”; “through the mouth of conscience”, as it were, the Universal law, the supreme Truth, speaks, it is the voice of transcendent forces. Hegel will characterize conscience as a kind of inner voice; but to distinguish a good conscience from a bad one requires both self-knowledge and a desire to do one's duty on the basis of knowing what is right, which can be decided by reason. Yet, while Hegel deepens our understanding of what is meant by conscience and why it is central to an understanding of practical reason, acting ethically, doing the right thing, cannot be explained by knowledge and reason alone, and Rolle's mysticism can fill this explanatory gap.

A thorn in the flesh

The *Prick of Conscience* is a Middle English poem dating from the first half of the fourteenth century¹. It advocates penitential reflection and is attributed to the mystic philosopher Richard Rolle of Hampole (c. 1300–1349), who stood at the origins of the development of English mysticism of the 14th century. There is still no unambiguous assessment of Rolle's life and work. Enthusiastic hagiographic materials prepared by his followers shortly after his death show that although the mystic was never canonized, Rolle's contemporaries had a rather high opinion of him. On the other hand, Walter Hilton's critical attack aimed at exposing "false" mystical experience was implicitly directed at Rolle and his followers, and this makes us understand that not all of Rolle's contemporaries were convinced of his holiness [Hilton 1923]. For example, N. Watson in his extensive work devoted to Rolle, without detracting from all his spiritual achievements, contends that Rolle was determined to establish and implement a form of hermit and mystical authority while insisting that "his experiences can legitimately be seen as normative, and thus as possessing authority, both over the reader and in the context of an affective mystical tradition some of whose tenets they challenge. Rolle writes explicitly in order to change the way people think about and engage in affective mysticism, and does so on the basis of his interpretation of a particular set of events in his own life" [Watson 1991a: 21]. At the same time, the first researchers into mysticism, Francis Comper and Evelyn Underhill, highly praise the activity of the English mystic: "...a pioneer leading the path that others should have followed so quickly: especially Walter Hilton and lady Juliana from Norwich, whose names have somewhat eclipsed Richard's name since they were his students" [Comper 1969: 91].

Modern researchers note that the stylistic concept of the interpretation of Rolle's mystical experience is connected not only with his own pious and ecstatic mysticism, but also with his understanding of the function of literary discourse in its highest rhetorical form [Copeland 1984: 65], or believe that Rolle was a "mystic with strong poetic inclinations" [Riehle 1981: 6], which often makes it possible to see in this something secondary in relation to speculative mysticism, although the richness and diversity of Rolle's texts characterize him as "a genuine mystic with unwavering devotion to the highest order of love" [De Ford 1984: 189–190], or as an "individualist and eccentric mystic" [Pollard 1997: 88]. Of course, the greatest impact on Rolle was made by the works of Richard of St. Victor, St. Bernard and St. Bonaventure. The influence of Franciscan poetry is also traced, where "his God is a singer and a song, like angels and blessed ones in heaven, are all combined in one melody, both vocal and instrumental" [Horstmann 1984: 85]. It is not by chance that Horstmann called Rolle "the English Bonaventure", emphasizing that in his mysticism "there are all feelings, enthusiasm, inspiration, not restrained by reasoning or any external rule, or method of discrimination" [Ibid.: 85]. It is not surprising that such ambiguous praise from the very beginning caused controversy.

¹ The fact of not finding an MSS older than the middle of the fourteenth century would seem to show that Hampole compiled the *Prick of Conscience* only a few years before his death (A. D. 1349).

Despite differing opinions regarding the significance of Rolle's mysticism, he really led a life devoted to God. In his younger years, he studied at Oxford, though he may not have graduated, and upon returning to Yorkshire he became a hermit in order to live a perfect mystical life of "warmth, sweetness and song", for which he felt a vocation. Rolle relies on the authority of Scripture, the authority of the Church, as well as on the creations of the Church Fathers and saints, and the highest authority for all of them is God. In addition, of course, the mystic experienced his own private revelations. Nevertheless, the public nature of textual culture and the private sphere of personal experience were not mutually exclusive. That is, Christ was the Word made flesh, and as such could be read in the Book of Creation and was himself a created Book. The concept of the body of Christ as a text and the text as the body of Christ expands and includes the bodies of Christ's followers and, as some commentators have noticed, Rolle often positions himself as an intermediary between God and his reader and as an interpreter of mystical experience [Manter 2002: 15–37].

All of Rolle's works are aimed at those attached sufficiently to the world, in particular, they address the crucial issue concerning the relationship between the human and the divine. Conscience pricks, or remorse stings, this is what can motivate us to repent; the apostle Paul himself referred to the *stimulus carnis*, the sting of the flesh: "And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure" (2 Corinthians, 12:7). St. Paul may be referring to a genuine physical ailment, but the thorn in the flesh also serves as a metaphor to emphasize the temptation to sin and the need for salvation².

Rolle's mystical revelations contain a penitential program that highlights these psychosomatic qualities in the act of confession. The securing of forgiveness required the following five steps: *contritio cordis* (*contrition of the heart*), that one must feel genuinely sorry for the sin. This prick of conscience is the essential first step *confessio oris* (*confession of the mouth*), one must speak the sin out loud; and to a priest *shryfte of mouthe*, *penitentie* (*penance*). Language in mysticism has many functions, one of which is to "make oneself a suitable subject for mystical ascent" — the concept of ascent implies a change, a movement in metaphorical and spiritual space towards God. This ascent occurs as a result of shifting the focus of the contemplator's attention from the outer space to the inner, to the voice of conscience.

Thus, without the first step, the prick of conscience, the rest will not follow, and yet this phenomenological fact remains unexplained, though often described well enough: that initial sensation of compunction over having committed a sin, the physical consequences of which may be felt by the individual and observed by others. In this case, attrition is sometimes updated to contrition, but attrition is a more

² Similarly, with Dan Michel's translation of a devotional manual from French into English, *The Ayenbite of Inwyt* of the mid-14th century, the metaphor is again employed, the again-biting of inner intelligence. Wit, in the sense of the seat of consciousness and intelligence, inwit, that inward sense of what was right and wrong, a conscience. The again-bite is a literal translation of the Latin root of remorse, the verb *remordere*, to bite again, for the Romans themselves considered remorse to be an emotion that returned to torment you. "Conscience that is called Inwit", that is to say, like its Latin root, conscience literally means with knowledge, Latin *con-scientia* [Michel 1979].

fitting term for a description of the prick of conscience³. First there must be the feeling, then the action; in confession, for instance, the sinner must experience the feeling of conscience, then speak, then act, and subsequently confession is secured by another speech act, the priest uttering the words of absolution. Rolle writes about this condition:

Therefore one chosen and always desiring love turns himself into his love; for he has neither worldly substance nor desires to have, but following Christ by wilful poverty lives content and paid by the alms of other men, whiles his conscience is clear and made sweet with heavenly savour. All his heart shall he shed forth in love of his Maker, and he shall labour to be enlightened by daily increase in high desires. Every man forsaking this world, if he desires to be enflamed with the fire of the Holy Ghost, must busily take tent not to wax slow in prayer and meditation. Soothly by these, with tears following and Christ favouring, the mind shall be gladdened; and being glad, shall be lift into contemplative life [Rolle 1972: 125].

The mystic focuses not on the fear of God, but on an active and sweet love for Him, which is based on a *synderesis* — a prick of conscience:

But would God they knew themselves and that they would ransack their conscience; then should they not be presumptuous, nor making comparison with the deeds of their betters would they pride themselves. Truly the lover of the Godhead, whose inward parts are verily twirled with love of the unseen beauty and who joys with all the pith of his soul, is gladdened with most merry heat. Because he has continually given himself to constant devotion for God, when Christ wills, he shall receive—not of his own meed but of Christ's goodness—a holy sound sent from heaven, and thought and meditation shall be changed into song, and the mind shall bide in marvellous melody [Rolle 1972: 125].

The *Prick of Conscience* can thus guide the attentive and contrite reader towards a spotless life and a good death, his own personal doomsday, or the last judgement, at the end of time, when souls and bodies are reconstituted and a new order begins; the personal is thus recapitulated in the general, just as the harrowing of hell prefigures the general resurrection. But first, the reader must become susceptible to contrition by making his conscience tender⁴:

Prick of Conscience all men may feel,
For if a man read it and understand well,
And the matters therein till heart will take,

³ The again biting of inwit was adopted by James Joyce, who used it several times in *Ulysses* as a trope for self-conscience, though his spelling is *agenbite of inwit*, emphasizing the visceral quality associated with guilt. 'They wash and tub and scrub. Agenbite of inwit. Conscience. Yet here's a spot' [Joyce 1992: 18].

⁴ Rolle highlights the emotional and spiritual effect of warmth by using the word *molten*. In Middle English, *molten* meant "melted" and both words mean a change of state into a completely malleable state and metaphorically include the concept of spiritual rebirth.

It may his conscience tender make,
And till right way of rule bring it belief,
And his heart till dread and meekness drive,
And till love and yearning of heavenly bliss,
And to amend all that he has done amiss.
[Rolle 1863: 25]⁵

The Prick of Conscience is didactic and devotional and represents its subject matter as fact, not fiction:

Truly he who is stirred with busy love, and is continually with Jesus in thought, full soon perceives his own faults, the which correcting, henceforward he is aware of them; and so he brings righteousness busily to birth, until he is led to God and may sit with heavenly citizens in everlasting seats. Therefore, he stands clear in conscience and is steadfast in all good ways which is never noyed with worldly heaviness nor gladdened with vainglory [Rolle 1972: 60].

In another of his works, *The Fire of Love*, Rolle writes:

He holds it not great to shine in gold, nor to be lapped with a great manager, nor to go in purple and be glad in the array of bishops: but truly he sets a holy and sweet conscience before all pleasures and riches [Rolle 1972: 71]⁶.

For Christian mystics, the element of inverted mimesis is present as a process. The mystical experience reflects the theological inversion — it tastes the sweetness of the divine flesh inside, transforming the experience of divine unity into a word through written memory. Adam and Eve sought to taste the sweet fruit of knowledge and were expelled from Paradise. Mystics seek to taste the sweet fruit of divine knowledge with the reward of divine union. Indeed, it can be considered that the “reward” goes beyond the divine union during life to the final and eternal union with God after death; as Rolle hints, “Those who themselves feel the sweetness here will undoubtedly see it there” [Rolle 1972: 4–5].

A prick of conscience can be expressed as a perfect Divine presence in the mystical explication of the word *point*, which includes both temporal, spatial and moral connotations. In Middle English, *point* (one of several spellings) meant a small point marked on the surface, a small amount, the smallest part, a point in space, a place, and a short period of time, a moment. Rolle magnifies the small point of spiritual joy to such immensity that the sea seems like a simple drop. At the same time, Rolle achieves an increase in the joy of mystical experience and a concomitant decrease in the physical world. Thus, the English mystic emphasizes that “spiritual

⁵ We can compare: “In all things that we work or think be we more taking heed to the love of God than to knowledge or disputation. Love truly delights the soul and makes conscience sweet, drawing it from love of lusty things here beneath, and from desire of man’s own excellence. Knowledge without charity builds not to endless health but puffs up to most wretched undoing” [Rolle 1972: 61].

⁶ Walter Hilton in the *Scale of Perfection* writes about both the understanding of spiritual fire and the “eye of the heart”.

work” can be carried out almost instantly, as if “erasing” time, transferring God, contemplating and contemplation itself to the present moment.

Truly contemplative life is not perfectly gotten of any man in this vale of tears, even a little, unless first his heart is inflamed from its depths with the torches of eternal love so that he feels it burn with the fire of love, and his conscience he knows molten with heavenly sweetness. So no marvel a man is truly made contemplative whiles both tasting sweetness and feeling burning he nearly dies for the greatness of love. And therefore he is fastened in the halsing, as it were bodily, of endless love; for contemplating unceasingly with all his desire, he busies him to go up to see that undescribed light [Rolle 1972: 96].

In using the metaphor of understanding God as a point, Rolle paradoxically expresses his confidence in the all-encompassing greatness of God. That is, if it can be contained in the smallest part and yet spreads its love and influence, then it is accessible to mystics and their readers through space and time. Thus, everyone is capable of experiencing such a “prick of conscience” and infinite love for God.

Rolle shows the need for psychological distancing, paying attention to the distance between the material and spiritual worlds both in spatial and moral terms. Thus, he describes earthly life as “the miserable dwelling of an exile” [Rolle 1972: 8]. This distancing also metaphorically denotes the gap between the material life with its “repentance and travels” and the life of the spirit, which leads to “joy without end”. Rolle advises that thought, word and action should be redirected from the mundane to the divine.

In the mystical experience of Rolle, the three degrees of love symbolize the ascending spiritual direction of the human soul to God: in the first degree of love (*insuperbabilis*) Rolle refers to love in that nothing can overcome it, that is, neither well-being, nor grief, nor contentment, nor longing, nor carnal lust, nor worldly pleasures. The second degree (*inseparabilis*) is achieved when “all your thoughts and your will are gathered together and completely focused on Jesus Christ, so that you can never forget him, but always think about him”. The third degree (*singularis*) singularity is a state “when all your joy is in Jesus Christ, and you cannot find joy or consolation in anything else”:

The holy lover of God shows himself neither too merry nor full heavy in this habitation of exile, but he has cheerfulness with ripeness. Forsooth some reprove laughter and some praise it. Laughter therefore which is from lightness and vanity of mind is to be reprov'd, but that truly that is of gladness of conscience and ghostly mirth is to be praised; the which is only in the righteous, and it is called mirth in the love of God. Wherefore if we be glad and merry, the wicked call us wanton; and if we be heavy, hypocrites [Rolle 1972: 69].

Rolle then passed to that affirmative state of high illumination and adoring love which he extols in the “Fire”: the state which includes the three degrees, or spiritual moods of *Calor*, *Dulcor*, *Canor* — “Heat, Sweetness and Song”. At the end of a

year, “the door biding open”, he experienced the first of these special graces: the Heat of Love Everlasting, or “Fire”, which gave its name to the *Incendium Amoris*. In many ways, the experiences of *Calor*, *Dulcor*, *Canor* are not at all an individual perception, but a cumulative general experience of mystical experience. Rolle talks about how he gained the experience of *Calor* and *Dulcor* almost simultaneously, while *Canor* was achieved a few months later:

Continually with joy shall I give thanks because He has made my soul in clearness of conscience like to singers clearly burning in endless love; and whiles she loves and seethes in burning, the changed mind, resting and being warmed by heat, and greatly enlarged by desire and the true beauty of lovely virtue, blossoms without vice or strife in the sight of our Maker; and thus beating praise within herself, gladdens the longer with merry song and refreshes labours [Rolle 1972: 87].

Heat, sweetness and song do not clearly coincide with the threefold mystical journey of purification, enlightenment and unity:

The house of the wilderness may also be said to be the rest of a sinner; for holy hermits are sundered from worldly strifes and sins; and, Christ, giving it, they receive the sweetness of a clear conscience, and singing the joys of everlasting love, they rest, refreshed by the most merry heat: and although with sharpness and frowardness they be pricked in body, nevertheless they resolutely hold within their soul praise and burning [Rolle 1972: 81].

They are also not parallel to the division of Rolle's love into three degrees:

From cleanness of conscience and plenteousness of ghostly gladness and inward mirth, rises the song of joy and the burning of endless love in a mind blowing truly [Rolle 1972: 90].

In any case, these three terms include four of the five senses:

Great longing truly grows in the joy of love when the sound of spiritual song is in the soul, and great heat gives increase to the sweetness of love, and now nothing is so pleasing as to think of life after death [Ibid.: 21].

Glad, therefore, I am [to be] melting into the desire of greater love, and especially because of the effect of the most sweet delight and spiritual sweetness which, with the spiritual flame, has so quickly comforted my mind. Truly, before this comforting flame and all this sweet devotion were showed to me, I really believed such heat could not be experienced in this [life of] exile: for truly, it enflames the soul as the real element of fire does in burning [Ibid.: 18].

In Rolle's allegory, the metaphor (the fire of love) and the essence of God are one and the same. Rolle concretizes this concept when he writes:

Love is in the heart and in the will of man <...> in his soul. <...> the coal is so clothed in fire, that it is all fire <...> Likewise, this is what a true lover of Jesus Christ does: his heart so burns in love, that it will be turned into the fire of love, and be, as it were, all fire [Rolle 1972: 59–60].

All lovers to their love are truly likened, and love makes each one like the one that is he loves [Ibid.: 32]⁷.

Its literary origins are, of course, Scriptural — the fusion of the Johannine “God is love” with the fire imagery of the Hebrew prophets. But, examining the passages in which Rolle speaks of that “Heat” which the “Fire of Love” induced in his purified and heavenward turned heart, we see that this denotes a sensual as well as a spiritual experience — a *synderesis*.

Struck by the heart

Martin Luther frequently made reference to the matter of conscience in his work; at the Diet of Worms in 1521 an appeal was made to him to disavow his writings, and he responded by insisting that it can never be right to go against one’s conscience. Hegel took Luther’s view of conscience as the ultimate arbitrator and put it to use in his investigation into the kind of person who declines to submit to moral precepts that come from an external authority, the person who in the actual world will dutifully act in accordance with his or her own discernment in considerations of what is the right and what is the wrong thing to do.

In the wake of the Cartesian conception of subjectivity it is supposed that we may know our own minds through introspection, and the person who acts in accordance with the demands of his or her conscience is certain of his or herself, for to act according to one’s conscience is to act with knowledge. The actions of a subject thereby reveal who or what they are; a consciousness may advance upon itself through attaining a self-consciousness but will only attain a complete self-awareness in and through practical activity; a subject will finally come to know itself through its practical activity; which is to say, when, through conscience, it can discern the demands placed upon it to distinguish right from wrong and to act in accordance with these distinctions.

There is, however, a distinction to be made between conscience and morality which should form the basis of our conception of the practical subject. This distinction emerges due to the subject’s desire to do its duty while at the same time confronted by an indifferent reality; and further, within the world to which the subject belongs there is an ethical perspective within which it feels compelled to act. Hegel suggests three different ways of understanding the practical subject, the third of which is the important one for our purposes here. First, as an abstract person whose rights and status are guaranteed by human law in the ethical world. Second, as a freely acting ethical individual, the very apex of the cultural world. Third, as a

⁷ The fire of love is a term which goes back at least to the fourth century AD; it is used by St. Macarius of Egypt to describe the action of the Divine Energy upon the soul, which it is leading to perfection.

self of conscience, a combination of what is both individual and universal, and in that manner it differs from the merely ethical individual.

If we view the world from an ethical perspective, we discover it to be distinguished by an unresolved dualism between reality and purpose, an exemplification of the merely ethical individual, it is nevertheless overcome through acting from conscience. The self of conscience, according to Hegel, is "itself in its contingency completely valid in its own sight, and knows its immediate individuality to be pure knowing and doing, to be the true reality and harmony" [Hegel 1977: 384]. The self of conscience, in which Spirit is directly aware of itself as absolute truth and being, differs from the subject acting lawfully, for instance, for in that case such a subject is the culmination of the ethical world through recognition from others; and it also differs from the cultural, the free self. The self of conscience is unlike the merely ethical self in that it "is, in immediate unity, a self-realizing essence, and its action has immediately concretely moral form" [Hegel 1977: 385].

Typically, a subject acting from conscience acts not out of respect for this or that duty, or out of respect for duty in general, but by the fact that it "knows and does what is concretely right" [Hegel 1977: 386]. For example, it has no need to justify its morality to appeal to "a holy essence". A subject that acts from conscience overcomes the displacement connected to the ethical worldview through renunciation of the tension between duty and reality in favor of a view of a conscious subject that "knows that it has its truth in the immediate certainty of itself" [Ibid.: 387]. Therefore, the contradiction between the moral self as both implicit and explicit is resolved in "a simple self which is both a pure knowing and a knowledge of itself as this individual consciousness" [Ibid.].

There is a difference between the subject of conscience and the ethical view of the world that is motivated by pure duty and that cannot be measured against any particular situation, for that would imply a displacement of the reality of the situation. The subject of conscience is motivated by a specific purpose in a particular situation, whereas in the ethical worldview the subject exists for the ethical laws it obeys. The situation undergoes a reversal for the subject of conscience as the separation between the individual person and duty is surpassed: "the law (...) is for the sake of the self, not the self for the sake of the law" [Hegel 1977: 387]. Since the ethical subject does not act its relation to others remains implied, without content, whereas the subject of conscience acts upon its conviction, and is thereby recognized for what it does, since "the action is thus only the translation of its individual content into the objective element, in which it is universal and recognized" [Ibid.: 388].

In effect, conscience overcomes subject and object, for what is abstract is realized concretely as the act of consciousness, as it is "the *subject* that knows these moments within it" [Hegel 1977: 389]. Action in the real world can only be approximate, given that it requires knowledge, and a subject of conscience knows that its knowledge to be incomplete, but will act regardless while aware that it is the best that can be done. For "this incomplete knowledge is held by the conscientious mind to be sufficient and complete". In the end, a subject has to act upon what it knows, knowing it does not know everything, for "conscience knows that it has to choose (...) and to make a decision" [Ibid.: 390].

But what is this content of conscience, and how can we distinguish good conscience from bad conscience, given that we can no longer think of it as a divine

command? Perhaps one way is to distinguish actual concrete duties within the context of a society from pure duty, that is, “the content that at the same time counts as moral *essentiality* or as *duty*”. For instance, it is “everyone’s duty to take care of the support of himself and his family, and no less for the possibility of being useful to his fellow men, and of doing good to those in need”; so also should we aspire to “the preservation of life and the possibility of being useful to others” [Hegel 1977: 391]. Duties towards oneself correlate with duties towards others, and not at the expense of neglecting universal considerations, because what the individual does for himself also contributes to the general good; and, if we take it to be the case that we do have duties towards others, then “in the fulfilment of duty to individuals and so to oneself, the duty to the universal is also fulfilled” [Ibid.: 393].

For the subject of conscience knowledge is seemingly essential, a precondition for the “unity of the *in itself* and the *being for itself*” that is manifest in action; and action produces “the unity of pure thinking and individuality” that depends on the fact that an individual “knows the circumstances” [Hegel 1977: 392]. Pure knowing, pure duty, is the being in itself of conscience that leads to action with respect to others in the social world, which is to say, the immediate being for the other, but since correct action of the subject of conscience is being for another there is thereby something of a disparity in it, between what it is and what it does, that is to be resolved by saying that “its *actual* being is for it not this duty and determinate character it has put forward, but the actuality which it has in the absolute certainty of itself” [Ibid.: 394]. If a subject is not identical to what it does, it follows that others “do not know whether this conscience is morally good or evil”, and are limited to appearances and thereby poorly placed to pass judgements. What qualifies as an act of conscience is not only the specific act but also a recognition that what one does is one’s own, which is to say, “the knowledge and conviction that it *is* duty, through the knowledge of oneself in the deed” [Ibid.: 395].

We are for others in what we do. The decision to act in a given way is to be distinguished from acting in such a way, for of the self we can say this much:

...its *immediate* action is <...> solely the self-knowing *self* as such. A self-conscious subject that is certain in itself of the truth or that has realized itself in its deeds, that is, ‘which is acknowledged as knowing it’, and is recognized by others, for such a subject it is of no avail to question whether or not the intention is realized through the action, for the distinction between the universal consciousness and the individual’s self, upon which the very question is grounded, is superseded, or surpassed, through conscience; indeed, this surpassing *is* conscience [Hegel 1977: 396].

The ethical consciousness in the form of conscience necessarily on account of its actuality and on account of its deeds must acknowledge its opposite, which is to say, must acknowledge its guilt. This is the form that the knowledge of conscience takes, its laws or principles cannot be easily formulated, but we sense their operation, a kind of mystical awareness through suffering [Ibid.: 166]⁸.

⁸ Consider the case of Antigone. Creon, king of Thebes, had forbidden Antigone to bury her brother, Polynices, having declared him a traitor, but she buried him secretly anyway, moved by love for her brother and convinced of the injustice of the command. Two ethical powers are

But then, knowing something is in itself not a motivation to act; which brings us back to the prick of conscience. Hegel refers to the Socratic *daimon*, an earlier form of consciousness, that inner voice that Socrates acted in service of, which gave him a kind of nudge, so to speak. Hegel compared it to the divine; conscience possesses the capacity of knowing and of doing what it is necessary to do. "Conscience" says Hegel, "is the moral genius which knows the inner voice of what it immediately knows to be a divine voice; and since, in knowing this, it has an equally immediate knowledge of existence, it is the divine creative power which <...> possesses the spontaneity of life" [Hegel 1977: 397]. And yet, a question arises as to whether Hegel's particular concept of conscience can perform the task of determining duty at the level of pure practical reason, and then of determining that such duty will be carried out in the actual world. The action of the individual is a "solitary divine worship" that Hegel equates with the divine worship of a community. This is the way the group expresses itself through the individual, but does this not present us with the problem previously identified, that if conscience is akin to a command the source of which is external then all we have explained is conventional morality? How may we know, as Hegel insists, that God is immediately present for the subject of conscience, albeit that Hegel interprets this to mean that the religious form of knowledge of the subject of conscience exists in the utterances of a religious community that supersedes that subject's own particular spirit (correlating as it does with the confession of them out mentioned above)?

Certainly, this may be the step identified as contrition of the heart, a feeling of sorrow for the sin. But in order to be certain that it is more than a law of the heart that is being followed here, whereby the subject is acting upon impulse, perhaps even not quite rationally, presuming its own desires to be valid for all, a subject indeed perhaps rather centered upon itself, a further ingredient is needed, a different kind of knowledge, or rather, an experience with a religious or spiritual quality that is not so amenable to conceptual analysis; which brings us back to Rolle.

Mystical conscience: the heart warms

Hegel said: "The right of the subjective will is that whatever it is to recognize as valid should be perceived by it as good" [Hegel 1991: 158]. A subject of conscience once aware of the feeling of its heart will no longer privilege its inner self, a condition of the feeling in the first place, for it needs to be able to change, to forward itself as *o b j e c t i v e*, or universal, no longer merely reflecting on itself but realising that its pure self-knowledge is abstract; its duty that it is conscious of being universal, is the exact opposite of its individualistic self. The fully integrated subject of conscience is an active being that remains self-identical while expanding into a duality of subject and its deed: "it is God manifested in the midst of those who know themselves in the form of pure knowledge" [Ibid.: 409].

in collision, two separate spheres of existence under threat concerning what is intrinsic to both of them, and yet, though the law of the state should be preserved, Antigone was true to the truth of her conscience. Antigone acknowledges the infallible and unwritten law of the gods: "The unwritten and unchanging laws of heaven. They are not of to-day or yesterday; But ever live, and no one knows their birth-tide" [Hegel 1991: 158]. But they just are; to inquire into their origin or to confine them to the time from whence they arose would be to transcend them.

This manifestation is a particular kind of phenomenological recognition that may be described without being explained. “I cannot tell you how surprised I was the first time I felt my heart begin to warm”, wrote Rolle.

It was real warmth, too, not imaginary, and it felt as if it were actually on fire. I was astonished at the way the heat surged up, and how this new sensation brought great and unexpected comfort. I had to keep feeling my breast to make sure there was no physical reason for it! But once I realized that it came entirely from within <...> I was absolutely delighted, and wanted my love to be even greater [Rolle 1972: 118].

Truly the soul that is both sweet with the shining of conscience, and fair with the charity of endless love, may be called Christ’s garden; for she is cleansed from sins, flourishes with virtues and joys with the sweetness of high song, like as with songs of birds [Ibid.: 118].

Truly in this sweetness of high love the conscience shines. For cleanness lasts there, and the heart waxes lovingly warm; and the mind, mirthed with gifts, waxes hot [Ibid.: 136].

The which soul knowing the mystery of love, with a great cry ascends to his Love. In with most sharp and wise, and in feeling subtle; not spread in the things of this world, but all gathered and set in one God, that he may serve Him in clearness of conscience and shining of soul, whom he has purposed to love and himself to give to Him [Ibid.: 139].

And thus it was that he wrote “for the attention, not of the philosophers and sages of this world, not of great theologians bogged down in their interminable questionings, but of the simple and unlearned, who are seeking rather to love God than to amass knowledge” [Ibid.: 139].

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