

Long abstract

CONSERVATISM, PERSONAL VALUE & VALUE ACTUALISM

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Zürich November 2014

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§1 Introduction

Oakeshott famously distinguishes between the dispositions and the doctrines of conservatives:

The common belief that it is impossible (or, if not impossible, then so unpromising as to be not worth while attempting) to elicit explanatory general principles from what is recognized to be conservative conduct is not one that I share. It may be true that conservative conduct does not readily provoke articulation in the idiom of general ideas, and that consequently there has been a certain reluctance to undertake this kind of elucidation; but it is not to be presumed that conservative conduct is less eligible than any other for this sort of interpretation, for what it is worth. Nevertheless, this is not the enterprise I propose to engage in here. My theme is not a creed or a doctrine, but a disposition. To be conservative is to be disposed to think and behave in certain manners; it is to prefer certain kinds of conduct and certain conditions of human circumstances to others; it is to be disposed to make certain kinds of choices. And my design here is to construe this disposition as it appears in contemporary character, rather than to transpose it into the idiom of general principles.¹

Oakeshott's distinction, like the related distinction between a conservative *ethos* and a *political philosophy* of conservatism, carries over to liberalism and radicalism. In each case, the *ethos* is one thing, the *philosophy* another. Once the distinction is drawn it becomes clear that, for example, an *ethos* may involve commitment to a principle which is not endorsed as a normative political principle. One interesting application of the distinction is the claim made by some conservatives that the realisation of liberal political principles is only made possible by an underlying conservative *ethos*. As Kolnai puts it:

¹ Oakeshott « On Being Conservative »

The liberal conception of society...cannot support and protect liberty except in a precarious and self-contradictory fashion, relying on Conservative values unofficially tolerated yet continually harassed and eaten away...by the “law of evolution” of liberal democratic society...²

Another application of the distinction is the depressing claim, advanced by some conservatives, that the realisation of a high degree of political freedom or liberty requires a corresponding absence of inner freedom (*geistige Freiheit, liberté intérieure*), an indifference or blindness to epistemic values³: liberty requires narrow-mindedness (*Borniertheit*) and conformism. England (in its heyday) is the favourite example⁴. Is Switzerland (in its heyday) another ?

In what follows I examine two claims which are, I think, essential to conservative political philosophy and to the conservative ethos, and a claim which I think ought perhaps to be a part of conservative political philosophy but is not a part of the traditional conservative ethos or indeed of any political philosophy. In all three claims the category of values is central.

Conservatism, liberalism and radicalism have often been characterised in terms of value preferences and views about certain values. Conservatives, it is often said, attach great value to tradition and orderly freedom under the law. They prefer this to the ideal of equality or social justice. Indeed, like many liberals, they may well think that the very idea of social justice is a conceptual absurdity and adherence to it a sign of foolishness. Radicals attach great importance to the disvalues of « oppression » and inequality and to a variety of political utopias in which such disvalues are not exemplified. Liberals accord great importance to individual, negative freedom and the greatest possible freedom to realise one’s desires and projects. And so on.

My aim in what follows is to give a partial characterisation of conservatism, liberalism and radicalism which cuts a little deeper than characterisations of these kinds, a characterisation in terms of the philosophy of values, goods, rights, and norms. The main philosophical distinctions employed in what follows are

Personal or individual vs impersonal or universal values

Value-actualism vs Value-possibilism

Moral and ethical values vs values which are neither

I presuppose no particular view about values and norms other than the falsity of nihilism about values and norms and, here and there, the falsity of extreme subjectivism about values.

² Kolnai 1949

³ Cf. Mulligan 2013.

⁴ Cf Scheler 1916.

§2 Personal (Individual) vs Impersonal (Universal) Values

Fabio Molina, President of *Swiss Socialist Youth*, wants to replace the Swiss flag by the flag of peace on August 1 (*Tribune de Genève*, August 4, 2014)

A crucial part of any conservative political philosophy is surely a claim that goes something like this :

(PV1)The conservative's state (nation-state, empire, state-nation...) is intrinsically valuable for her

The distinction between what is valuable for someone and what is valuable *tout court* is the axiological counterpart of an older and in some ways more familiar deontic distinction, between particular and universal duties or obligations, a distinction taken seriously by such otherwise unlikely bed-fellows as Schleiermacher, Simmel and Winch. Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen in his recent *Personal Value* has recently set out a buck-passing version of personal value – of such facts as that a poem written by his oldest daughter and remnants of a bookshelf made for him by his father have great value for him⁵.

If the distinction between value for (the value of the beloved for the lover) and impersonal values (justice) is a stable one, then even a liberal may take his state to be intrinsically valuable for him. But he does not put this forward as a part of his liberal philosophy. If he employs the language of value at all, he will say that the state is extrinsically valuable for the citizen (cf. von Mises 1927).

Conservative political philosophy understands « state » in (PV1) in a way which is politically and philosophically unpalatable for the liberal:

(PV2)The conservative's state (nation-state, empire, state-nation...) is intrinsically valuable for her and she takes her state to be something which cannot be fully characterised in individualist terms

The conservative's state is characterised in a way which looks overblown from the point of view of other political philosophies. Conservative characterisations of the state run from the view that it is a legal person, a useful fiction, to the views of the German Romantics and the view that it is a person, not an individual person but a collective or corporate person. (A limit case is provided by the charming tendency of English conservatives and English political theorists to avoid the term « state » altogether, except when referring to what goes on in Europe). But for a liberal such as von Mises,

The state is neither warm nor cold [Nietzsche's « the coldest of all cold monsters »], for *it is an abstract concept, in the name of which* living men – the organs of the state – act..⁶

⁵ Rønnow-Rasmussen 2011 ; on this, see Mulligan 2014, Massin 2015.

⁶ Emphasis mine – KM. „Man kommt freilich der Wahrheit auch nicht näher, wenn man, durch diese und ähnliche Lehren gereizt, mit Nietzsche den Staat das kälteste aller kalten Ungeheuer nennt. Der Staat ist weder

Similarly, according to the only available political philosophies of the Belgian Empire, the EU is a „postmodern state“⁷, where „postmodern“ functions as a modifier rather than a determiner, like „ex » in « ex-King ». It is not exactly a state because it is ironic and pragmatic, a « space » in which « governance » takes place. It is not cold but cool.

The conservative’s state, on the other hand, is indeed warm. His attachments, real or professed, to the state, its symbols, representatives and structures require him to see the state as a collective person. Persons are, after all, by far the most important category of what is valuable for persons and a person’s strongest and deepest attachments are to what is or seems to be valuable for her. If the conservative’s understanding of his state as a collective person, as expounded, for example, by Scruton or Scheler⁸, is mistaken, then his attachments are incorrect, indeed irrational. Examples of what von Mises calls « the divinisation and adoration of the state » (*Staatsvergottung, Staatsanbetung*). (Many but not all of these attachments are incorporated into conservative political philosophy – flags, memorials, military service, treason...)⁹.

The category of collective persons, except on very anaemic understandings thereof, is unacceptable to any individualist. But some versions are more unacceptable than others. Suppose you think that every person is or has a self and that a self is the bearer of mental acts and states. If you also think that there are collective persons, you are committed to a view the individualist rightly takes to be crazy. Suppose you think that claims of the form « there are (no) selves » are conceptual absurdities (since « self » is not a noun) and that persons are unities of mental acts and states. Then, if you believe in collective persons, you believe that there are unities of mental acts and states made up of other unities of mental acts and states. This, it seems to me, is less crazy than the previous view. A non-metaphysical worry the individualist, in particular the liberal, has with the distinction between individual and collective persons is that the former can easily come to be seen as nothing more than members of collective persons. But suppose we say that to every individual person there belongs both an intimate person and a social person, that a state is a collective and wholly social person and that a state, like positive law, may deal only with individual, social persons, and never with the intimate, individual person and her conscience, the sphere of what was called above inner freedom. Then we have a view of the relations between individuals and the state which does justice to a number of liberal and conservative concerns (although it remains metaphysically unacceptable to the liberal individualist)¹⁰. To Burke’s concern that government should limit its influence « to everything that is truly and properly public » and to Lord Acton’s principle that « All freedom consists *in radice* in the preservation of an inner sphere exempt from State power ». Burke’s requirement implies that the state should have no influence on the realisations of either aesthetic or epistemic value nor on the realisations of

kalt noch warm, denn er ist ein abstrakter Begriff, in dessen Namen lebendige Menschen - die Organe des Staates, die Regierung - handeln....“ (von Mises 1927 51).

⁷ Cf. Cooper 2000.

⁸ See Scheler 1966, Scruton XXXX.

⁹ See Pierre Manent’s claim that the abolition of the death-penalty is due above all to declining belief in the state.

¹⁰ Elements of this view, as expounded in this paragraph, are to be found at many places in the broad church of personalist political and social philosophy. Thus the distinction between intimate and social persons seems to go back to William James’ account of social selves. The most careful presentation is to be found in Scheler 1966.

their consecutive values – no cultural politics, no *Kulturpolitik*, no *état culturel*¹¹, no state universities – quite independently of any arguments to the effect that the market does these things better than the state.

But the conservative's state is not merely a higher-order person. It also comprehends numerous lower-order unities, platoons little and large, families, tribes, clans, communities, associations of many different types. And a consistent conservative must, I suggest, see these too as collective persons. Thus we have

(PV3)The conservative's state (nation-state, empire, state-nation...) is intrinsically valuable for her as are its constitutive unities. She takes her state and its constitutive unities to be something which cannot be fully characterised in individualist terms

The „intermediate associations“ celebrated first of all by de Tocqueville and more recently by Oakeshott (neither de Tocqueville nor Oakeshott think of such associations as collective persons) and Nisbet are assigned great importance in some but not all liberal philosophies and in many conservative philosophies¹².

One reason for thinking that (PV3) is part of normative conservative philosophy is that it immediately entails many of the familiar features of conservatism. Belief in collective persons allows one to make sense of conservative traditionalism (the counterpart of radical or leftist utopianism), of the partnership between past, present and future generations Tom Paine and his successors find so incomprehensible, of place or home à la Heidegger or Scruton (« *we* have lived here for... »), of the rôles of appeals to language, culture, race, blood, kith, kin, the nearest and dearest etc. etc. in conservative politics, and – as already noted – of the attachments and sentiments of conservatives both at the level of the conservative ethos and at the level of political philosophy.

Finally, is it not the perception that conservatives are committed to something like (PV3) together with *either* a rejection of appeals to particular personal values in the political sphere *or* a rejection of the very idea of personal values which lies behind the most frequently voiced radical reproach – that conservatives are evil, egoistic, people who feather their nests and those of their own, jingoistic, chauvinistic, nationalistic, or otherwise morally dubious ? "The modern conservative », says G. K. Galbraith, « is engaged in one of man's oldest exercises in moral philosophy; that is, the search for a superior moral justification for selfishness."¹³

If one thinks that the distinction between personal and impersonal values corresponds to a real difference and that the two categories are not empty, then one may well think, with

¹¹ Cf. Fumaroli 1991.

¹² See de Tocqueville, Oakeshott, Nisbet (« the sole object of the conservative tradition » is « the protection of the social order and its constitutive groups from the enveloping bureaucracy of the national state » Nisbet *Prejudices* 59), Rahé, Scruton, Scheler. - The things that are intrinsically valuable for the conservative include the existence of the other individuals he refers to as „we“ for whom these things are also intrinsically valuable. His intrinsic personal values are *shared* values.

¹³ Galbraith XXXX. For more in the same vein, see Robin 2011.

Max Scheler, perhaps the first philosopher of personal value, that the “right relation between value-universalism and value-individualism” is that the recognition and realisation of universal values is a minimum which must be satisfied before the recognition and realisation of individual values¹⁴. The point parallels a claim about duties made by Malebranche, following a long tradition: “One must always dispense justice before exercising charity”¹⁵.

§3 Value-Actualism & Value Iteration

Conservative, n. A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others (Ambrose Bierce, *Devil's Dictionary*)

“A radical? She’s a female Jacobin—she’s a nihilist. Whatever *is*, is wrong. . . . She [Olive Chancellor] would reform the solar system if she could get hold of it.”
(H. James, *The Bostonians*)

In a stimulating paper¹⁶, Gerry Cohen explores and defends a principle about valuing or valuation (“particular valuing”) to which he thinks conservatives are rightly attached

a person values something as the particular valuable thing that it is, and not merely for the value that resides in it,

even though the particular indeed gets its value from a universal value, our valuing of it, the particular, is not merely a valuing of the universal value that it has.

He gives the following argument:

1. A thing that has intrinsic value is worthy of being revered or cherished.
2. We do not regard something as being worthy of being revered or cherish if we have no reason to regret its destruction, as such.
3. If we care only about their value, we never have reason to regret the destruction of valuable things, as such.

∴

4. We are right to be biased in favour of existing embodiments of value.

At many points in his paper he approaches or touches on various principles in the philosophy of values and valuing without ever quite endorsing these principles. One such principle is Value Iteration (Value Ascent) :

¹⁴ Scheler 1966 484.

¹⁵ Malebranche, *Morale*, II, 7.

¹⁶ Thanks to Emma Tieffenbach who kindly put me onto it.

If All Souls is wonderful, then it is good that All Souls is wonderful
If Maria's face is pretty, then it is good that Maria's face is pretty

If it is just that p , then it is good that it is just that p
(just situations are a good thing)

If it is unjust that p , then it is bad that it is unjust that p
(unjust situations are a bad thing)

Another such principle is Value Actualism

If it is good/bad/unjust/disgraceful/shameful...that p , then p ¹⁷

Value Actualism does not hold for all types of value. It clearly does not hold in the case of comparative value:

It is better that p than that not- p .¹⁸

Value iteration tells us that the exemplification of positive value by a particular or situation is itself positively valuable. Value actualism tells us that (at least in the case of monadic value) only the actual is valuable. And these claims about value have consequences for valuing, for the relation between emotions and sentiments, on the one hand, and values and their bearers on the other hand. We do not merely value objects or situations in virtue of the values they exemplify or seem to exemplify. We also value the exemplification of value by objects and situations in virtue of the value of such exemplification. Cohen valued All Souls because it is wonderful and he valued the fact that it is wonderful in virtue of the positive value of this fact, a fact which entails the existence of All Souls. It is the positive value of this fact which gave him a reason to regret the destruction (or substantial modification) of All Souls. Emotions and sentiments are, by and large, prejudiced in favour of present and past actuality¹⁹. There are exceptions – most obviously, hope, fear and jealousy. But attachments, hatreds, loves, admiration, respect, as well as Cohen's three examples, regret, reverence and cherishing and, to a lesser extent, sadness and joy, all seem to be skewed in favour of the actual. This is even true of some types of preference, for example, object-preferences such as preferring claret to Burgundy, Robert Musil to Thomas Mann or Venice to Florence.

¹⁷ Cf. Halldén 1956. « It is good/shameful that » is factive. Value actualism is denied by Oddie, Scheler 1966.

¹⁸ Some philosophers reject the principles of value iteration mentioned, eg, if something is good, then it is good that it exists, in favour of : if something is good, then its existence is better than its non-existence. (Cf. The conservative principle: It is politically better to eliminate existing evils than to bring into being non-existent goods). But I ignore this in what follows (only because it requires complicated formulations). Note also that, according to Broome and others, for it to be good that p is just for it to be the case that it is better that p than that not- p . – A possible objection to value actualism : if you buy a lottery ticket, do you not buy more than the actual ticket, namely the possibility of winning the jackpot ? Cf. Meinong, Oddie.

¹⁹ Adam Morton, in his recent book, argues for a view of the emotions which is incompatible with this claim.

Cohen's project, he says, is to defend *one* conservative principle, the bias in favour of existing embodiments of value. But one lesson that might be drawn from his paper or from what I have suggested here is that the conservative ethos and its political philosophy attach an importance to *value* (and thus, *in virtue of the nature of value*, to existing embodiments of value) as opposed to other fundamental categories such as *deontic norms*, *rights* and *goods* and *evils* which distinguishes it from other types of political philosophy. The intrinsic value to the conservative subject or citizen of her state (considered in §2) is, after all, as she sees things, an example of embodied value, not of any hypothetical value of some hypothetical future state of affairs or object. Conservative political philosophy is, as the cant of conservative politicians suggests, a *Wertphilosophie*.

Just as it may seem plausible to think that value is the central and distinctive category of conservatism, so too, one may think that sentiments and emotions, or at least certain emotions and sentiments, play a distinctive role in the ethos and philosophy of conservatism. After all, values are the formal objects of different emotions. Reverence and cherishing are two obvious candidates already mentioned, prominent chestnuts in the Conservative canon since Burke. The dispositions of Oakeshott's conservative also include "a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was or may be." (Oakeshott « On Being Conservative »)²⁰.

§4 Ethical Coffee & the Pharisaism of Radicalism

The conservative of 1880 is not the conservative of 1980, the socialist remains the same (Franz-Josef Strauss, quoted by Dirsch 2012)

Some contemporary conservatives and liberals think that Franz Josef Strauss was right in 1980 but that since he wrote radicalism in general, and leftism in particular, have changed almost beyond recognition. Radicals and leftists are now, as they never cease telling us and themselves, « ethical ». They drink ethical coffee in ethical cafés, sport ethical fashions and preach ethical banking and very ethical *droit de l'hommisme*. Some conservatives and liberals would say : not « ethical » but moralistic or pharisaical. Perhaps the most forceful version of this view is that formulated by Kenneth Minogue in his recent book, *The Servile Mind* and elsewhere²¹. The radical scepticism of postmodernism and its assault on epistemic value, he argues, has given way to the new radical ideology of ethics. In his Preface to the new edition of *Alien Powers*, in which he had analysed earlier incarnations of radicalism, Minogue uses the term « ethics ». In *The Servile Mind* he uses the expression « the politico-moral ». The

²⁰ Cf. Arthur Schlesinger's account of what « the pursuit of happiness » in the preamble to the American Constitution originally meant. « Pursuit », he argues, had the meaning it still has in the expression « pursuit of the law ».

²¹ But versions of the view are also to be found in de Benoist and much earlier in Polanyi and Arnold Gehlen's account of the « hyper-moralism » of contemporary intellectuals and its roots in the cosmopolitanism of the Stoics (« the pharisees of paganism », according to Bayle). More distant precursors are the anti-humanitarianisms of Nietzsche, Scheler and Heidegger and the long tradition of suspicions about the progressive's love of humanity going back to the eighteenth century („Even a bear....“).

expression „ethical“ recommends itself because it is the term used in the cant language of Minogue’s radicals. On the other hand, the neologism « the politico-moral » points to an important feature of radical ideology and allows Minogue to suggest that the politico-moral is anything but moral, indeed immoral²² :

Our inherited moral idiom is...being challenged by another, in which individuals find their identifying essence in supporting public policies that are both morally obligatory and politically imperative. Such policies are, I suggest, politico-moral. Such an attitude dramatically moralizes politics, and politicizes the moral life. It feeds on our instinctive support for good causes. Yet it also suggests that the most important sign of moral integrity, of decency and goodness, is not found in facing up to one’s responsibilities, but in holding the right opinions, generally about grand abstractions such as poverty and war. This illusion might well be fingered as the ultimate servility.²³

In a review of Minogue’s book, Anthony Daniels (Th. Dalrymple) formulates the accusation even more sharply:

There is now almost an inverse law of moral motion: we feel responsible for things in inverse proportion to the square of their proximity to ourselves. This is simultaneously grandiose and belittling. It is grandiose because it suggests that we are responsible for everything, including what happened in the past; but it is belittling because we know in our hearts that we cannot make much difference. It also dissolves the true moral life because it allows us to behave badly while continuing to believe that we are ‘ethical’. If I care so deeply about the fate of Darfur, or the Polar Ice cap, or the supposed genocide of the Tasmanians, does what I do in my little private sphere matter very much? Only dépassé Victorian moralists would even bother with such a trifle.²⁴

What, if anything is wrong with the politico-moral consensus ? How on earth could it be ethically wrong to be or preach the ethical ? Pharisaism, it has been said, is ethics in the wrong place. But what is its right place ? Minogue and Daniels give part of the answer to this question. The consensus endorses the position mentioned in §2 according to which, in the politico-moral sphere, no personal values, particularisms or principles of proximity are acceptable. The politico-moral has no room for moral individualism. It

can be seen as a kind of religion, with affiliations to paganism and vegetarianism...The idea of a crusade is closer to the essence of the matter than its

²² In the canting use of « ethical » it is a term of approval which functions like the term « good » (« unethical banking » is a bad thing) but allows one to avoid both the couple evil-ethically/morally good and the couple « immoral-moral ». It is perhaps worth noting that in the contemporary usage under discussion there is no trace of the distinction between thick « ethical » terms and „thin“ « moral » terms dear to philosophers from Nietzsche, Meinong and Scheler to Bernard Williams. Indeed in contemporary usage „ethical“ is a thin rather than a thick term insofar as „ethical“ relates above all to rights, a thin category.

²³ Minogue 2010a. The servility in question is presented as the latest avatar of the « servitude, réglée, douce et paisible » foreseen by de Tocqueville (*De la Démocratie en Amérique*, II, 4, 6). Cf. Rahé on « soft despotism ».

²⁴ Daniels 2011

generally secularist supporters would like. Its ramifications in extending ideas of justice into all corners of life have as yet hardly been fully explored: international and intergenerational justice is merely the beginning of it. It will espouse any conception of justice that might promise to save a divided mankind, riven by conflict and mutual hatred, by turning it into a single harmonious community. Most striking are its sympathies and antipathies: sympathy toward international organizations, and antipathy toward moral individualism, along with a suspicion that objectivity and rationality tend to serve the interests of the powerful.²⁵

I wonder whether conservatives might not be well advised to go much further. Consider the following, little-known and far-reaching account of how to draw the dividing line between values (norms, rights and goods) which are ethical or moral and those which are neither ethical nor moral: There are many materially different types of non-ethical value – hedonic, vital, political, prudential, aesthetic, epistemic, legal and religious. There are personal and impersonal values. Values stand in relations of importance or height to one another. Objects and situations stand in contingent relations of betterness to one another which are determined by the degrees of value exemplified by their bearers. There are also two types of ethical value: evil or ethical badness and ethical or moral goodness. A person's ethical status is determined by (1) his preferences concerning all non-ethical values as to what is better than what and as to value-height, and (2) the extent to which his preferences are correct, and (3) the extent to which his intellectual, affective, conative and practical life incorporates and builds on correct preferences. It is always a bad thing to attempt to be morally good, to make ethical judgements about others or oneself, a bad thing which contributes to making one ethically or morally bad. (Cf. It is a bad thing to aim to be happy because happiness is essentially a side-effect which is not subject to the will).

This is a rough summary of Scheler's philosophy of pharisaism and ethics. It arguably entails that both Aristotelian and Kantian ethics are pharisaical and so immoral²⁶. (It is worth noting that even consequentialists can go some of the way with Scheler. The ideal utilitarianism of Moore makes the key distinction between ethical value or rightness and non-ethical value, for example, the value of pleasure, happiness or aesthetic enjoyment). It is not part of any conservative ethos or familiar political philosophy, as far as I can see. For conservatives, like their radical enemies and liberal allies, have often assumed that their political principles are also ethical or moral principles²⁷. But now that they have seen where this easy assumption leads they might perhaps like to reconsider.

²⁵ Minogue 2010 326

²⁶ Cf. Scheler 1966. For considerably weakened versions of Scheler's view, see the writings of two philosophers he influenced strongly, Nicolai Hartmann 1926, Dietrich von Hildebrand XXXX. A third philosopher strongly influenced by Scheler, Aurel Kolnai, criticizes and rejects Scheler's view (Kolnai 1926).

²⁷ Burke - "the principles of true politicks are those of morality enlarged,; Fitzjames Stevens ; Oakeshott ? To the extent that conservatives and liberals follow the natural law traditions they take principles of right (*Recht*) and wrong (*Unrecht*) to be *moral principles* and rights, such as the right to property, to be *moral rights* (cf. Rothbard, Nozick). The latter claim is loudly trumpeted by all members of the politico-moral consensus, as they impose successive « generations » (Bobbio) of new-fangled rights. But there is an alternative, which, like the Natural Law traditions, maintains that there are indeed rights and principles of right and wrong, which positive

Thanks to Graham Oddie for discussion about value actualism and to Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen for discussion of personal value.

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law may or may not track or incorporate, but which, contrary to the tradition, *are not themselves ethical or moral*. Versions of this alternative are defended by Reinach and other early phenomenologists and also by Hayek, drawing on (his) Hume. On this alternative, see Mulligan 2014a.

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