The natural property of human consciousness is what guides obligations. C.S. Lewis[[1]](#footnote--1) explains,

If you take a thing  like a stone or **a tree**, it **is what it** is and **there seems no sense in saying it ought to have  been otherwise.** Of course **you may say a** stone is  "the wrong  shape" if  you want to use it for a  rockery, or that a **tree is a bad tree because it does not give  you** as much **shade** as you expected. **But all you  mean is that the** stone or **tree does not happen to be convenient** for  some purpose of  your own.  **You  are not**,  except as a joke, **blaming  them** for that. **You** really  **know**, that,  given the weather  and the soil, **the tree could not have been any different.** What we, from our point of view, call a "bad" tree is obeying  the laws of its nature just as much as a "good" one.      Now have you noticed what follows? It follows that what we usually call the  laws  of nature-the  way  weather works on a tree for  example-may  not really be laws  in  the strict sense, but only in a manner of speaking. **When you say that  falling stones always obey the law of gravitation, is not this much the same as saying that the law only means "what stones always do**"? You do not really think that when a stone is  let go, it suddenly remembers that it is under orders to fall to  the  ground.  You only mean that, in fact, it does fall.  In other  words, **you  cannot be sure that there is anything over and  above the facts** themselves, any  law **about  what  ought to happen,  as distinct from what does happen.** The laws  of nature, as applied to stones or trees, may  only mean "what Nature, in fact, does."  But if  you turn to **the Law of Human Nature**, the  Law of Decent Behaviour, it is a different matter. That law certainly **does not mean "what  human beings, in fact, do**"; for as I said before, many of them do not obey this law at all, and none of them obey it completely. The law of gravity tells you what stones do if you drop them; but  **the Law** of HumanNature **tells you what human beings  ought to do and do not.** In  other words, **when you are dealing with humans, something else comes in above and beyond the actual facts.** You have the facts (how men do behave) and you also have something else (how  they ought to behave). In the rest of the  universe  there  need not  be  anything but the  facts.  Electrons  and molecules behave in a certain way,  and certain results follow, and that may be the whole story. (\*) But  men behave in a certain way and that is not the whole  story,  for  all  the  time  you  know  that  they  ought  to  behave differently.

This requires that morality be based in a conception of obligation as consistency of moral personhood. Gregory Strom[[2]](#footnote-0) writes,

Now, the ―ought-ought gap‖ is our fanciful term for a mental ailment in which one knows  that there is some reason such that any good person would respond to it by doing A, but in which  one does not know what that reason is.  But this way of formulating the problem obscures a great  many issues, for if we consider any particular case in which **someone** wrestles with the ought- ought gap, it is clear that she **may know a great deal about the reason to do A and nonetheless  fail to understand why she ought to do it.  Anyone who says**, for example, something like ―**I  know I should return the money—but if I don‘t, no one will ever know I acquired it,** and I won‘t  get into any trouble—**so why should I do it?‖ is not entirely in the dark about the reasons that  there are to return the money.**  We can even imagine her able to supply herself with a  demonstration, **grounded in secure a priori principles** about (say) the concept of property, **that  morality requires her to return this money**, and nonetheless unable to understand why she should  return it.  This shows that what someone in such a fix really needs is not merely to appreciate  that a good person would return the money because of such-and-such a reason.  For this can appear to her merely as an alien fact having nothing to do with her.  **What is really needed,  therefore, is for her to recognize these facts as having to do with her.  That is, she must relate  herself to the concept of a good person in such a way that, for her, recognition that a good person  returns the money for such-and-such a reason is the same thing as practical recognition of the  rational force of this reason that manifests itself in her returning the money.**  In other words, not  only must she learn to refine her concept of a good person to the point where it is adequate to her  situation, but also she must think of herself as a good person; **she must learn to think of herself as  primarily or essentially what she learns about when she learns about good people.**

As a result, morality demands consistency of the will as it is the natural, fundamental component of personhood. David Velleman[[3]](#footnote-1) explains,

Kant offered an explanation for this oddity. His explanation was that **acting for reasons is essential to being a person, something to which you unavoidably aspire.** **In order to be a person, you must have an approach to the world that is sufficiently coherent and constant to qualify as single, continuing point-of-view.** And part of what gives you a single, continuing point-of-view is your acceptance of particular considerations as having the force to reasons whenever they are true. We might be tempted to make this point by saying that you are a unified, persisting person and hence that you do approach practical questions from a point-of-view framed by constant reasons. But this way of making the point wouldn’t explain why you feel compelled to act for reasons; it would simply locate action for reasons in a broader context, as part of what makes you a person. One of Kant’s greatest insights, however, is that a unified, persisting person is something that you are because it is something that you aspire to be. **Antecedently** to this aspiration, **you are merely aware that you are capable of being a person. But any creature aware that it is capable of being a person**, in Kant’s view **is ipso facto capable of appreciating the value of being a person and is therefore** ineluctably **drawn toward personhood.** The value of being a person in the present context is precisely that of attaining a perspective that transcends that of your current, momentary self. **Right now, you would rather sleep than swim, but you also know that if you roll over and sleep, you will wake up wishing that you had swum instead. Your impulse to decide on the basis of reasons is,** at bottom **an impulse to transcend these momentary points-of-view, by attaining a single, constant perspective that can subsume both of them.** It’s like the impulse to attain a higher vantage point that overlooks the restricted standpoints on the ground below. This higher vantage point is neither your current perspective of wanting to sleep, nor our later perspective of wishing you had swum, but a timeless perspective from which you can reflect on now-wanting-this and later-wishing-that, a perspective from which you can attach constant practical implications to these considerations and come to a stable, all-things-considered judgment. If you want to imagine what it would be like never to attain a continuing point-of-view, imagine being a cat. A cat feels like going out and meows to go out; feels like coming gin and meows to come in; feels like going out again and meows to go out; and so on, all day long. The cat cannot think, “I have things to do outside and things to do inside, so how should I organize my day?” But when you, a person, find yourself to-ing and fro-ing in this manner, you feel an impulse to find a constant perspective on the question when you should “to” and when you should “fro” This impulse is unavoidable as soon as the availability of the more encompassing vantage point appears. **As soon as you glimpse the possibility of attaining a constant perspective from which to reflect on and adjudicate among your shifting preferences, you are drawn toward that perspective, as you would be drawn toward the top of a hill that commanded a terrain through which you had been wandering.** To attain that standpoint, in this case, would be to attain the single, continuing point-of-view that would constitute the identity of a person. To see the possibility of attaining it is therefore to see the possibility of being a person; and seeing that possibility of unavoidably leads to you to aspire toward it.

[READ ENGSTROM ETC.]

1. C.S. Lewis. *Mere Christianity.* 1943. [↑](#footnote-ref--1)
2. Gregory Strom. In Defense of the Practical Imagination. University of Pittsburgh. No date. http://www.pitt.edu/~gbs4/In%20Defense%20of%20the%20Practical%20Imagination.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
3. Self to Self (check any case) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)