



Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals

IMMANUEL KANT

Musean Translation

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

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TRANSLATOR

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Preface



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by Immanuel Kant.

387 Preface.

Ancient Greek philosophy divided into three sciences: *physics*, *ethics*, and *logic*. This division perfectly suits the nature of the subject. Nothing needs improving in it, except perhaps to add the principle on which it rests, both to assure ourselves of its completeness and to determine the necessary subdivisions correctly.

All rational cognition is either *material*, considering some object, or *formal*, concerned only with the form of understanding and reason themselves and with the universal rules of thinking as such, without distinction of objects. Formal philosophy is called *logic*. Material philosophy, which deals with determinate objects and the laws to which they are subject, is in turn twofold. For these laws are either laws of *nature* or laws of *freedom*. The science of the former is called *physics*; that of the latter, *ethics*. The first is also called the doctrine of nature, the second the doctrine of morals.

Logic can have no empirical part—that is, no part in which the universal and necessary laws of thinking rest on grounds drawn from experience. Otherwise it would not be logic: a canon for understanding or reason that holds for all thinking and must be demonstrated. Natural and moral philosophy, by con-

trast, can each have an empirical part. The former must determine the laws of nature as an object of experience; the latter, the laws of the human will insofar as nature affects it. The first are laws according to which everything

388 happens; the second, laws according to which everything ought to happen, though with consideration also of the conditions under which it often does not happen.

All philosophy, insofar as it rests on grounds of experience, may be called *empirical*; philosophy that presents its teachings solely from a priori principles may be called *pure* philosophy. When the latter is merely formal, it is called logic; when it is restricted to determinate objects of understanding, it is called metaphysics.

In this way the idea of a twofold metaphysics arises: a *metaphysics of nature* and a *metaphysics of morals*. Physics will therefore have its empirical part, but also a rational part; ethics will have the same, although here the empirical part might specifically be called *practical anthropology*, and the rational part *morality* proper.

All trades, crafts, and arts have benefited from the division of labor. Instead of one person doing everything, each confines himself to a particular kind of work, markedly different from others in how it must be handled, so that he can accomplish it with the greatest perfection and greater ease. Where work is not distinguished and divided in this way, where everyone is a jack-of-all-trades, the trades remain in the deepest barbarism. It would indeed be worth considering whether pure philosophy in all its parts does not require its own specialist. Would the whole enterprise of learning not fare better if those accustomed to selling a mixture of the empirical and the rational, blended to the public's taste in all sorts of proportions unknown even to themselves—those who call themselves independent thinkers, but call those who prepare the purely rational part brooders—were warned not to practice two occupations at once? These occupations differ greatly in the way they must be pursued; each may require a special talent, and combining them in one person produces only bunglers. But here I ask only whether the nature of science does not require us always to sepa-

rate the empirical from the rational part carefully, placing a metaphysics of nature before physics proper, or empirical physics, and a metaphysics of morals before practical anthropology. Both forms of metaphysics would have to be carefully cleared of everything empirical, so that we might know how much pure reason can accomplish in either case

389 and from what sources it draws this a priori instruction of its own. It makes no difference whether the latter task is undertaken by all moral teachers, whose name is Legion, or only by some who feel called to it.

Since my purpose here is directed specifically toward moral philosophy, I restrict the question posed to this: must we not consider it supremely necessary to develop, for once, a pure moral philosophy, entirely cleared of everything that might be empirical and belong to anthropology? That such a philosophy must exist is evident from the ordinary idea of duty and moral laws. Everyone must acknowledge that a law, if it is to hold morally—that is, as the ground of an obligation—must carry absolute necessity with it. The command “You shall not lie” cannot hold only for human beings, leaving other rational beings free to disregard it; the same applies to all other moral laws in the proper sense. The ground of obligation must therefore be sought not in human nature or in the circumstances of the world in which a human being is placed, but a priori, solely in concepts of pure reason. Any other prescription founded on principles of mere experience—even one that is universal in a certain respect—can be called a practical rule but never a moral law if even the smallest part of it, perhaps only one motive, rests on empirical grounds.

Thus moral laws, together with their principles, differ not only essentially, within practical cognition as a whole, from everything else that contains anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests entirely on its pure part; and, applied to human beings, it borrows not the slightest thing from knowledge of them, or anthropology, but gives them laws a priori as rational beings. These laws do, of course, still require judgment sharpened by experience, partly to distinguish the cases in which they apply, partly to gain them admission to the

human will and give them force in practice. For the human being, affected by so many inclinations, is indeed capable of the idea of a practical pure reason, but cannot so readily make it effective in concreto in the conduct of life.

A metaphysics of morals is therefore indispensably necessary, not merely from a speculative motive, to investigate the source of the practical principles that lie a

390 priori in our reason, but because morals themselves remain exposed to every kind of corruption so long as we lack that guiding thread and supreme norm for judging them correctly. For something to be morally good, it is not enough that it *conform* to the moral law; it must also be done *for the sake of that law*. Otherwise the conformity is only highly contingent and precarious, because a nonmoral ground will indeed sometimes produce actions in accordance with the law, but will repeatedly produce actions contrary to it. Yet the moral law in its purity and genuineness—which matter most of all in practical affairs—is to be sought nowhere but in a pure philosophy. This philosophy, or metaphysics, must therefore come first; without it there can be no moral philosophy at all. A philosophy that mixes these pure principles with empirical ones does not even deserve the name of philosophy. For philosophy is distinguished from ordinary rational cognition precisely by presenting in a separate science what the latter grasps only in a mixture. Still less does it deserve the name of moral philosophy, since by this very mixture it actually impairs the purity of morals themselves and defeats its own purpose.

We must certainly not suppose that what is required here is already supplied by the introductory discipline that the celebrated *Wolff* placed before his moral philosophy, namely what he called *general practical philosophy*, and that there is therefore no wholly new field to enter. Precisely because it was intended as a general practical philosophy, it considered no will of a particular kind—for example, one determined without any empirical motives, entirely from a priori principles, which might be called a pure will. It considered willing in general, with all the actions and conditions belonging to it in this general sense. It thus differs from a metaphysics of morals just as general logic differs from transcendental philosophy. The former presents the actions and rules of thinking *in*

general; the latter, only the particular actions and rules of *pure* thinking, that is, of thinking through which objects are cognized entirely a priori. For a metaphysics of morals must investigate the idea and principles of a possible *pure* will, not the actions and conditions of human willing in general, which are drawn for the most part from psychology. That general

391 practical philosophy also speaks of moral laws and duty—though without any justification—constitutes no objection to my claim. For here too the authors of that science remain faithful to their idea of it. They do not distinguish motives presented as such entirely a priori by reason alone, which are properly moral, from empirical motives that understanding raises to universal concepts merely by comparing experiences. Instead, without attending to the difference in their sources, they consider only their greater or smaller sum, treating them all as of the same kind. In this way they form their concept of *obligation*: a concept that is certainly anything but moral, yet is all that can be demanded in a philosophy that makes no judgment at all about the *origin* of all possible practical concepts—whether they occur a priori or merely a posteriori.

Intending, then, to provide a metaphysics of morals someday, I am putting this groundwork first. Strictly speaking, there is no foundation for such a metaphysics other than the critique of a *pure practical reason*, just as the critique of pure speculative reason already provided is the foundation for metaphysics. Yet, for one thing, the former is not as supremely necessary as the latter. In moral matters, human reason can readily be brought to great correctness and thoroughness even in the most ordinary understanding, whereas in its theoretical but pure use it is altogether dialectical. For another, I require of a critique of pure practical reason that, if it is to be complete, its unity with speculative reason must also be capable of presentation in a common principle. For ultimately there can be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application. But I could not yet achieve such completeness here without introducing considerations of an entirely different kind and confusing the reader. I have therefore used the title *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* rather than *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*.

Third, even a metaphysics of morals, despite its forbidding title, admits a high degree of accessibility and suitability for ordinary understanding. I therefore find it useful to separate this preliminary treatment of its foundation from it, so that I shall not later have to attach the subtleties

392 unavoidable here to teachings that are easier to grasp.

The present groundwork, however, is nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*. This alone is an undertaking complete in its purpose and to be separated from every other moral investigation. Applying the same principle to the whole system would indeed cast much light on my claims about this important central question, which has so far been discussed in a far from satisfactory way. The principle's adequacy, manifest everywhere, would greatly confirm them. But I had to forgo this advantage, which would at bottom serve self-love more than the common good. For ease of use and the apparent adequacy of a principle provide no wholly secure proof of its correctness. Rather, they awaken a certain bias against examining and weighing the principle with full rigor on its own, without any regard to what follows from it.

I have adopted in this work the method I believe most suitable if we wish to proceed analytically from ordinary cognition to the determination of its supreme principle, and then synthetically back from the examination of this principle and its sources to the ordinary cognition in which we find it used. The division is therefore as follows:

- ¹ *First section:* Transition from ordinary moral rational cognition to philosophical cognition.
- ² *Second section:* Transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals.
- ³ *Third section:* Final step from the metaphysics of morals to the critique of pure practical reason.

Section I



393 First Section.

Transition from ordinary moral rational cognition to philosophical cognition. Nothing anywhere in the world, or indeed beyond it, can possibly be conceived that could be held good without qualification except a *good will*. Understanding, wit, judgment, and whatever else the *talents* of the mind may be called, or courage, resolution, and perseverance in one's purpose as qualities of *temperament*, are undoubtedly good and desirable in many respects. Yet they can also become extremely evil and harmful if the will that is to make use of these natural gifts, and whose distinctive constitution is therefore called *character*, is not good. It is the same with the *gifts of fortune*. Power, wealth, honor, even health and that whole condition of well-being and contentment with one's state called *happiness*, give courage and often thereby arrogance as well, unless a good will is present to correct their influence on the mind and, with it, the entire principle of action, making it serve a universal purpose. Not to mention that a rational, impartial spectator can never take pleasure even in the sight of the uninterrupted prosperity of a being whom no trace of a pure and good will adorns. Thus a good will appears to be the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy. Some qualities even favor this good will itself and can greatly ease its work, but nevertheless have no

394 inner, unconditional worth. They still presuppose a good will, which limits the high esteem we otherwise rightly hold for them and forbids us to regard them as good absolutely. Moderation in emotions and passions, self-control, and sober reflection are not only good in many respects, but even seem to constitute part of a person's *inner* worth. Yet they fall far short of being declared good without qualification, however unconditionally the ancients praised them. For without the principles of a good will they can become supremely evil, and a villain's cold blood makes him not only far more dangerous but also immediately more loathsome in our eyes than he would have been without it.

A good will is good not through what it effects or accomplishes, nor through its fitness to attain some proposed end, but through willing alone—that is, in itself. Considered in itself, it must be esteemed incomparably higher than everything it could ever bring about to satisfy any inclination, or even, if you will, the sum of all inclinations. Even if, through some particular disfavor of fate or the meager provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will wholly lacked the power to carry out its purpose; if, despite its utmost exertion, it accomplished nothing and only the good will remained—not, of course, as a mere wish, but as the mustering of every means within our power—it would still shine by itself like a jewel, as something that has its full worth within itself. Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add to nor diminish this worth. Usefulness would be merely the setting, as it were, enabling us to handle the jewel better in ordinary dealings or to draw the attention of those who are not yet sufficiently discerning, but not to recommend it to connoisseurs or determine its worth.

Yet there is something so strange in this idea of the absolute worth of mere willing, with no account taken of usefulness in appraising it, that even though ordinary reason itself agrees with the idea, a suspicion must arise that perhaps some high-flown fantasy secretly lies beneath it, and that we may have misunderstood nature's purpose in assigning our will

395 reason as its governor. Let us therefore examine this idea from that point of view.

In the natural capacities of an organized being—that is, one arranged purposively for life—we take it as a principle that no instrument for any end is to be found in it unless that instrument is also the one best suited and most appropriate to that end. Now if, in a being endowed with reason and a will, its *preservation*, its *well-being*, in a word its *happiness*, were nature's true purpose, nature would have made a very poor arrangement in choosing the creature's reason to carry out that purpose. For all the actions it has to perform with this aim, and the whole rule of its conduct, would have been prescribed to it far more exactly by instinct, and that end could have been secured far more surely in that way than it ever can through reason. And if reason had nonetheless been granted to this favored creature, it would have had to serve only to contemplate the fortunate constitution of its nature, to admire it, to rejoice in it, and to give thanks for it to its beneficent cause—not to subject its faculty of desire to that weak and deceptive guidance and to bungle nature's purpose. In a word, nature would have prevented reason from venturing into *practical use* and presuming, with its weak insights, to devise for itself the plan of happiness and the means of reaching it. Nature would herself have undertaken the choice not only of ends but also of means, and with wise foresight would have entrusted both solely to instinct.

In fact, we also find that the more a cultivated reason concerns itself with the enjoyment of life and happiness, the further a human being departs from true contentment. From this there arises in many people, indeed in those most experienced in reason's use, if only they are candid enough to admit it, a certain degree of *misology*, that is, hatred of reason. For after reckoning all the advantage they derive—I will not say from the invention of all the arts of common luxury, but even from the sciences, which in the end also seem to them a luxury of the understanding—they nevertheless find that they have actually only brought more hardship upon

396 themselves than they have gained in happiness. They finally come to envy rather than despise the more ordinary sort of people, who remain closer to the guidance of mere natural instinct and allow their reason little influence over

what they do or leave undone. To this extent we must concede that the judgment of those who greatly temper, and even reduce below zero, the boastful praises of the advantages reason was supposed to confer on us in happiness and contentment with life is by no means peevish or ungrateful to the goodness of the world's governance. Rather, these judgments secretly rest on the idea of another and far worthier purpose of their existence, for which, and not for happiness, reason is properly intended. The individual's private aim must therefore largely yield to this purpose as the supreme condition.

For reason is not sufficiently competent to guide the will securely concerning its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs, some of which it even multiplies itself. An implanted natural instinct would have led us far more surely toward that end. Yet reason has nonetheless been allotted to us as a practical faculty—that is, one that is to influence the *will*. Its true vocation must therefore be to produce a will that is good not as a *means* to some other purpose, but *good in itself*. For this, reason was absolutely necessary, if nature has everywhere proceeded purposively in distributing her capacities. This will need not, then, be the sole and complete good, but it must be the highest good and the condition of everything else, even of every desire for happiness. In that case it is entirely consistent with nature's wisdom to observe that the cultivation of reason required for the first and unconditional purpose restricts the attainment of the second, always conditional purpose—happiness—in many ways, at least in this life, and may even reduce it below nothing, without nature thereby acting inexpediently. For reason, which recognizes its highest practical vocation in establishing a good will, is capable, on attaining this purpose, only of a contentment of its own kind: contentment from fulfilling an end that reason alone determines, even if this should involve considerable harm to the ends of inclination.

³⁹⁷ To develop the concept of a will that is to be highly esteemed in itself and is good without any further purpose—a concept already present in natural, sound understanding, needing not so much to be taught as merely clarified, and always standing foremost in our appraisal of the whole worth of our actions as the condition of everything else—let us consider the concept of *duty*.

It contains that of a good will, though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances. Far from concealing the good will and making it unrecognizable, these bring it out by contrast and let it shine all the more brightly.

I pass over all actions already recognized as contrary to duty, however useful they may be for one purpose or another. With these the question cannot even arise whether they might have been done *from duty*, since they actually conflict with it. I also set aside actions that really accord with duty but toward which people have immediately *no inclination*, performing them nonetheless because some other inclination drives them to do so. For here it is easy to distinguish whether the action in accordance with duty was done *from duty* or from a self-seeking purpose. The distinction is far harder to notice when the action accords with duty and the subject also has an *immediate* inclination toward it. For example, it certainly accords with duty that a shopkeeper should not overcharge an inexperienced customer. Where there is much trade, a prudent merchant does not do so either, but keeps a fixed general price for everyone, so that a child buys from him as well as anyone else. One is therefore served honestly. But this is far from sufficient to justify believing that the merchant acted in this way from duty and principles of honesty. His advantage required it. We cannot here assume that, besides this, he has an immediate inclination toward his customers, so as to favor none over another in price out of love, as it were. Thus the action was done neither from duty nor from immediate inclination, but solely from self-interest.

To preserve one's life, by contrast, is a duty, and everyone also has an immediate inclination to do so. Yet because of this, the often anxious care most people take of their lives has no inner worth, and its maxim no moral

³⁹⁸ content. They preserve their lives *in accordance with duty*, but not *from duty*. If, by contrast, adversity and hopeless grief have entirely taken away the taste for life; if the unfortunate person, strong in soul, more outraged by his fate than fainthearted or dejected, wishes for death yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear but from duty, then his maxim has moral content.

To be beneficent where one can is a duty. Besides this, there are many souls so disposed to sympathy that, without any further motive of vanity or self-interest, they take an inner pleasure in spreading joy around them and can delight in the contentment of others insofar as it is their work. But I maintain that in such a case an action of this kind, however much it accords with duty and however lovable it may be, still has no true moral worth. It stands on the same footing as other inclinations, such as the inclination toward honor, which, when it fortunately lights on what is in fact beneficial to all and in accordance with duty, and therefore honorable, deserves praise and encouragement, but not high esteem. For the maxim lacks moral content: namely, to do such actions not from inclination but *from duty*. Suppose, then, that the mind of this philanthropist were clouded by his own grief, extinguishing all sympathy for the fate of others. He would still have the means to benefit others in distress, but their distress would not move him, because he is sufficiently occupied with his own. And now, when no inclination any longer prompts him, suppose he nevertheless tore himself out of this deathly insensibility and performed the action without any inclination, solely from duty: only then does it first have its genuine moral worth. More still: if nature had put little sympathy into the heart of one person or another; if, though otherwise an honest man, he were cold in temperament and indifferent to the sufferings of others, perhaps because, himself endowed with the particular gift of patience and enduring strength against his own sufferings, he presupposes or even demands the same in everyone else; if nature had not properly formed such a man, who would certainly not be her worst product, to be a philanthropist, would he not still find within himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than that of a good-natured temperament? Certainly! It is precisely here that the worth of character begins, which is moral

399 and incomparably the highest: namely, that he does good not from inclination, but from duty.

To secure one's own happiness is a duty, at least indirectly. For discontent with one's condition, amid a press of cares and unsatisfied needs, could easily become a great *temptation to transgress one's duties*. Yet even without regard to duty, all human beings already have of themselves the strongest and most intimate inclination toward happiness, because in this very idea all inclinations unite into a sum. But the prescription of happiness is usually such that it greatly impairs some inclinations, while a human being can form no definite and secure concept of the sum of the satisfaction of them all under the name of happiness. It is therefore no wonder that a single inclination, definite as to what it promises and the time when it can be satisfied, may outweigh a wavering idea. A person with gout, for instance, may choose to enjoy what tastes good to him and suffer what he can, because by his reckoning he has at least not deprived himself of the enjoyment of the present moment through perhaps groundless expectations of a happiness supposed to lie in health. But even in this case, if the general inclination toward happiness did not determine his will, if health at least did not enter so necessarily into his reckoning, a law would still remain, here as in every other case: to promote his happiness not from inclination but from duty. Only then does his conduct first have its proper moral worth.

This is undoubtedly also how we must understand the passages of Scripture that command us to love our neighbor, even our enemy. For love as an inclination cannot be commanded. But beneficence from duty, even when no inclination whatsoever prompts it, indeed when a natural and unconquerable aversion resists it, is *practical* rather than *pathological* love. It lies in the will, not in the tendency of feeling; in principles of action, not in melting sympathy. This alone can be commanded.

The second proposition is this: an action from duty has its moral worth *not in the purpose* to be attained through it, but in the maxim by which it is resolved upon. Its worth therefore depends not on

400 the actual existence of the action's object, but solely on the *principle of willing* according to which the action was performed, regardless of every object of the faculty of desire. It is clear from what has gone before that the purposes we may

have in acting, and their effects as ends and incentives of the will, cannot confer unconditional and moral worth on actions. Where, then, can this worth lie, if it is not to consist in the will's relation to the expected effect? It can lie nowhere else *than in the principle of the will*, regardless of the ends that such an action can bring about. For the will stands, as it were, at a crossroads between its a priori principle, which is formal, and its a posteriori incentive, which is material. Since it must nevertheless be determined by something, when an action is done from duty it must be determined by the formal principle of willing as such, since every material principle has been taken away from it.

The third proposition, as a consequence of the two preceding ones, I would express as follows: *duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law*. I can indeed have an *inclination* toward an object as the effect of my intended action, but *never respect* for it, precisely because it is merely an effect and not the activity of a will. Likewise I can have no respect for inclination as such, whether my own or another person's. At most I can approve it in the first case and sometimes even love it in the second—that is, regard it as favorable to my own advantage. Only what is connected with my will solely as a ground, never as an effect; what does not serve my inclination but outweighs it, or at least wholly excludes it from consideration in making a choice—that is, the law by itself—can be an object of respect and therefore a command. Now an action from duty must wholly set aside the influence of inclination and, with it, every object of the will. Nothing therefore remains that could determine the will except, objectively, the *law* and, subjectively, *pure respect* for this practical law: thus the maxim *) of obeying

*) A *maxim* is the subjective principle of willing. The objective principle—that is, what would also serve all rational beings subjectively as a practical principle if reason had complete authority over the faculty of desire—is the practical *law*.

401 such a law even at the cost of all my inclinations.

Thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it, nor therefore in any principle of action that needs to borrow its motive from this expected effect. For all these effects—comfort in one's condition, even the

promotion of others' happiness—could also have been brought about by other causes, without requiring the will of a rational being, in which alone the highest and unconditional good can nevertheless be found. Therefore nothing other than the *representation of the law* in itself, *which of course occurs only in a rational being*, insofar as it rather than the expected effect determines the will, can constitute that preeminent good we call moral. This good is already present in the person who acts according to that representation; it must not first be awaited from the effect. *)

*) I might be accused of merely taking refuge, behind the word *respect*, in an obscure feeling, instead of giving a clear answer to the question through a concept of reason. But although respect is a feeling, it is not one *received* through influence, but a feeling *self-produced* through a concept of reason. It is therefore specifically distinct from all feelings of the first kind, which can be reduced to inclination or fear. What I recognize immediately as a law for myself I recognize with respect, which signifies merely the consciousness of the *subordination* of my will to a law, without the mediation of other influences on my sense. The immediate determination of the will by the law and the consciousness of this determination is called *respect*, so that respect is regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject, not as its *cause*. Strictly speaking, respect is the representation of a worth that impairs my self-love. Thus it is something regarded as an object neither of inclination nor of fear, although it has something analogous to both. The *object* of respect is therefore solely the *law*, specifically the law that *we impose on ourselves*, yet as necessary in itself. As a law we are subject to it without consulting self-love; as imposed on us by ourselves, it is nevertheless a consequence of our will and has an analogy with fear in the first respect, with inclination in the second. All respect for a person is properly only respect for the law—of integrity, and so forth—of which that person gives us an example. Because we also regard the development of our talents as a duty, in a talented person we likewise represent to ourselves, as it were, the *example of a law*: to become like that person in this respect through practice. This constitutes our respect. All so-called moral *interest* consists solely in *respect* for the law.

402 But what kind of law can this be, whose representation must determine the will, even without regard to the effect expected from it, if that will is to be called good absolutely and without qualification? Since I have deprived the will of every incentive that might arise for it from obeying any law, nothing remains except the universal conformity of actions to law as such, which alone is to serve the will as its principle. That is, I ought never to act except so *that I could also will my maxim to become a universal law*. Here it is mere conformity to law as such, without grounding it on any particular law directed at certain actions, that serves the will as its principle, and must do so if duty is not to be everywhere an empty delusion and a chimerical concept. Ordinary human reason agrees entirely with this in its practical judgment and always keeps this principle in view.

Let the question be, for example: when I am in difficulty, may I not make a promise with the intention of not keeping it? Here I readily distinguish the two meanings the question may have: whether it is prudent, or whether it accords with duty, to make a false promise. The former can undoubtedly often be the case. I do indeed see that it is not enough to extricate myself from a present embarrassment by this evasion. I must consider carefully whether this lie may later give rise to far greater trouble than the difficulties from which I now escape. And since, with all my supposed *shrewdness*, the consequences are not so easy to foresee that a trust once lost could not prove far more harmful to me than all the evil I now intend to avoid, would it not be *more prudent* to act here on a universal maxim and make it my habit to promise nothing except with the intention of keeping it? But I soon see that such a maxim would still rest only on the consequences to be feared. Now to be truthful from duty is quite a different thing from being truthful out of concern for harmful consequences. In the first case the concept of the action already contains in itself a law for me; in the second, I must first look elsewhere for the effects that might be connected with it for me. For if I depart from the principle of duty, it is quite certainly evil. But if I abandon my maxim of

403 prudence, that may sometimes be very advantageous to me, although it is of course safer to remain with it. Yet to learn, in the shortest and still unerring way, the answer to the question whether a lying promise accords with duty, I ask myself: would I be content that my maxim—to extricate myself from difficulty through an untrue promise—should hold as a universal law, for others as well as myself? And could I say to myself: everyone may make an untrue promise when he finds himself in a difficulty from which he cannot extricate himself in any other way? I soon become aware that I can indeed will the lie, but cannot possibly will a universal law of lying. For under such a law there would properly be no promising at all, since it would be futile to profess to others my will regarding my future actions. They would not believe this profession, or, if they rashly did, would repay me in the same coin. Thus my maxim, as soon as it was made a universal law, would necessarily destroy itself.

To know what I must do so that my willing may be morally good, I therefore need no far-reaching acuteness. Inexperienced in the course of the world, unable to be prepared for every event that may arise in it, I ask myself only: can you also will that your maxim become a universal law? If not, it must be rejected, not because of any disadvantage that may result to you or to others, but because it cannot fit as a principle into a possible universal legislation. For such legislation, however, reason compels immediate respect from me. Although I do not yet *see* on what that respect rests—the philosopher may investigate that—I at least understand this much: it is the appraisal of a worth that far outweighs all the worth of whatever inclination recommends. And the necessity of my actions from *pure* respect for the practical law is what constitutes duty, before which every other motive must yield, because it is the condition of a will good *in itself*, whose worth surpasses everything.

We have thus reached the principle of ordinary human reason's moral cognition. Ordinary reason admittedly does not think of this principle separately in such a universal form, yet always actually has it before its eyes and uses it as the standard of its judgment.

404 It would be easy to show here how, with this compass in hand, ordinary reason knows very well in every case how to distinguish what is good and what is evil, what accords with duty and what opposes it, if, without teaching it anything new, we merely draw its attention to its own principle, as Socrates did, and how it follows that no science or philosophy is needed to know what one must do to be honest and good, or even wise and virtuous. We might well have presumed beforehand that knowledge of what everyone is obliged to do, and therefore also to know, would fall within the reach of everyone, even the most ordinary person. Yet here we cannot help admiring how greatly the practical faculty of judgment surpasses the theoretical in ordinary human understanding. In the latter, when ordinary reason ventures to depart from the laws of experience and the perceptions of the senses, it falls into sheer incomprehensibility and contradiction with itself, or at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and instability. But in practical matters the faculty of judgment first begins to show its true advantage when ordinary understanding excludes all incentives of sense from practical laws. It then even becomes subtle, whether it wishes to quibble with its conscience or with other claims about what is to be called right, or sincerely to determine the worth of actions for its own instruction. Most importantly, in this last case it may hope to arrive at the right result as confidently as any philosopher, indeed almost more securely than the philosopher himself. For the philosopher can have no other principle than ordinary understanding, but can easily confuse his judgment with a host of foreign considerations irrelevant to the subject, and make it deviate from its straight course. Would it not therefore be wiser, in moral matters, to leave things to the judgment of ordinary reason, and at most introduce philosophy only to present the system of morals more completely and intelligibly, and its rules more conveniently for use, though still more for disputation, rather than to draw ordinary human understanding away from its fortunate simplicity even for practical purposes, and through philosophy set it on a new path of inquiry and instruction? Innocence is a splendid thing, but it is also

405 very unfortunate that it cannot readily be preserved and is easily led astray. Thus even wisdom—which otherwise consists more in doing and refraining than in knowing—also needs science, not to learn from it, but to give its prescription entrance and durability. In his needs and inclinations, whose complete satisfaction he gathers together under the name of happiness, a human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty that reason presents to him as so worthy of respect. Now reason issues its prescriptions relentlessly, without promising anything to the inclinations, thus as it were setting aside and disregarding those impetuous claims that seem so reasonable, and that no command will make disappear. From this, however, there arises a *natural dialectic*: a tendency to quibble sophistically against those strict laws of duty and cast doubt on their validity, or at least their purity and rigor, and if possible make them more suited to our wishes and inclinations—that is, to corrupt them in effect and rob them of their entire dignity, which in the end even ordinary practical reason cannot approve.

Thus *ordinary human reason* is driven, not by any speculative need—which never occurs to it so long as it is content to be merely sound reason—but on practical grounds themselves, to leave its own circle and take a step into the field of *practical philosophy*. There it seeks information and clear instruction about the source of its principle and the correct determination of that principle in comparison with maxims grounded in need and inclination. In this way it may escape its predicament over the claims on both sides, and avoid the danger of losing every genuine moral principle through the ambiguity into which it so easily falls. Thus, as ordinary practical reason cultivates itself, a *dialectic* also develops in it unnoticed, just as happens in its theoretical use, forcing it to seek help in philosophy. The former, therefore, will probably find rest nowhere except in a complete critique of our reason, any more than the latter will.

Section II



406 Second Section.

Transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals.

Although we have drawn our concept of duty so far from the ordinary use of our practical reason, it must by no means be inferred that we have treated it as a concept of experience. On the contrary, if we attend to experience of what people do and leave undone, we encounter frequent and, as we ourselves admit, justified complaints: no certain examples can be cited of a disposition to act from pure duty. Although much may happen *in accordance with* what *duty* commands, it always remains doubtful whether it actually happens *from duty* and thus has moral worth. Hence there have always been philosophers who have flatly denied the reality of this disposition in human actions, attributing everything to self-love of greater or lesser refinement. Yet they did not therefore question the correctness of the concept of morality. Rather, with heartfelt regret they spoke of the frailty and impurity of human nature, noble enough to take so worthy an idea as its prescription, but at the same time too weak to follow it, using reason, which should serve it in giving laws, only to attend to the interests of inclinations, either individually or, at best, in their greatest mutual compatibility.

407 In fact, it is absolutely impossible through experience to establish with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an action otherwise in accordance with duty rested solely on moral grounds and on the representation of one's duty. It does sometimes happen that, on the strictest self-examination, we find nothing besides the moral ground of duty that could have been powerful enough to move us to this or that good action and so great a sacrifice. Yet we cannot safely conclude from this that no secret impulse of self-love, under the mere pretense of that idea, was the real determining cause of the will. We gladly flatter ourselves with a nobler motive falsely claimed as our own, but in fact, even through the most strenuous examination, we can never fully get behind our hidden incentives. For when moral worth is at issue, what matters is not the actions we see, but their inner principles, which we do not see.

We could do no more welcome service to those who deride all morality as a mere fantasy of a human imagination overreaching itself through conceit than to concede that concepts of duty must be drawn solely from experience, just as, for convenience, we also like to persuade ourselves that this is the case with all other concepts. For then we prepare them a certain triumph. Out of love for humanity, I am willing to concede that most of our actions still accord with duty. But if we look more closely at people's thoughts and endeavors, we everywhere come upon the dear self, which is always prominent and on which their purpose rests, rather than on the strict command of duty, which would often require self-denial. Nor need one be an enemy of virtue, but merely a cool observer who does not immediately take the liveliest wish for the good as its reality, to become doubtful at certain moments—especially with advancing years and a judgment partly made shrewder by experience, partly sharpened for observation—whether any true virtue is actually found in the world. Here nothing can save us from wholly abandoning our ideas of duty and preserve in our souls a well-grounded respect for its law except the clear conviction that, even if no actions had ever arisen from such pure sources,

408 the question here is not at all whether this or that happens, but that reason, by itself and independently of all appearances, commands what ought to happen. Thus actions of which the world may so far have given no example, and whose feasibility someone who grounds everything on experience might greatly doubt, are nevertheless relentlessly commanded by reason. Pure honesty in friendship, for example, can be demanded no less of everyone even if there has never yet been an honest friend, because this duty, as duty as such, lies prior to all experience in the idea of a reason that determines the will through a priori grounds.

Add to this that, unless we wish to deny the concept of morality all truth and relation to any possible object, we cannot dispute that its law is so comprehensive in meaning that it must hold not merely for human beings but for *all rational beings as such*, not merely under contingent conditions and with exceptions but *absolutely necessarily*. It is then clear that no experience could furnish occasion to infer even the possibility of such apodictic laws. For by what right can we bring what perhaps holds only under the contingent conditions of humanity into unrestricted respect as a universal prescription for every rational nature? And how are laws determining *our* will to be held as laws determining the will of a rational being as such, and only as such also our own, if they were merely empirical and did not originate entirely a priori from pure but practical reason?

Nor could we give morality worse advice than to try to borrow it from examples. For every example presented to me must itself first be judged by principles of morality to determine whether it is worthy to serve as an original example, that is, as a model. It can by no means provide the supreme source of the concept of morality. Even the Holy One of the Gospel must first be compared with our ideal of moral perfection before he is recognized as such. He himself also says: "Why do you call me (whom you see) good? No one is good (the archetype of the good) except the one God (whom you do not see)." But from where do we have the concept of God

409 as the highest good? Solely from the *idea* of moral perfection that reason forms a priori and inseparably connects with the concept of a free will. Imitation has no place at all in morality. Examples serve only for encouragement: they put beyond doubt the feasibility of what the law commands and make perceptible what the practical rule expresses more universally. But they can never justify setting aside its true original, which lies in reason, and taking examples as our guide.

If, then, every genuine supreme principle of morality must rest solely on pure reason, independently of all experience, I believe there is no need even to ask whether it is good to present these concepts universally, in the abstract, just as they stand a priori together with their principles, if this cognition is to be distinguished from ordinary cognition and called philosophical. But in our time this question may well be necessary. For if votes were gathered on whether pure rational cognition, separated from everything empirical, and therefore a metaphysics of morals, or popular practical philosophy were preferable, one could soon guess which side would carry the greater weight.

This descent to popular concepts is certainly praiseworthy when the ascent to the principles of pure reason has first been made and brought to full satisfaction. That would mean first grounding moral teaching in metaphysics and then, once it stands firm, giving it *entrance* through popularity. But to try to accommodate popularity already in the first investigation, on which the entire correctness of the principles depends, is utterly absurd. Not only can this procedure never claim the extremely rare merit of true *philosophical popularity*, since there is no art in being generally understandable when one renounces every thorough insight; it also produces a disgusting jumble of patched-together observations and half-reasoned principles. Shallow minds feast on it because it is useful enough for everyday chatter, while discerning people feel confused and turn away dissatisfied without being able to help themselves. Philosophers who see through the illusion clearly, however, gain little hearing when they call for a temporary withdrawal from this pretended

410 popularity, so that only after definite insight has been gained may one rightly be popular.

One need only look at attempts to treat morality in this favored taste. One soon encounters the particular constitution of human nature, sometimes also the idea of rational nature as such; now perfection, now happiness; here moral feeling, there fear of God; something from this and something from that in a wondrous mixture. Yet no one thinks to ask whether the principles of morality are to be sought in knowledge of human nature at all, which we can acquire only from experience. And if not—if these principles are to be found wholly a priori, free from everything empirical, solely in pure concepts of reason, and nowhere else in even the smallest part—no one resolves instead to separate this investigation entirely as pure practical philosophy or, if one may use so discredited a name, as a metaphysics *) of morals, bring it by itself to full completeness, and ask the public that demands popularity to wait until this undertaking is finished.

Yet such a wholly isolated metaphysics of morals, mixed with no anthropology, theology, physics, or hyperphysics, still less with hidden qualities that might be called hypophysical, is not only an indispensable basis for all theoretical, securely determined cognition of duties. It is also something of the highest importance, urgently needed for the actual fulfillment of their prescriptions. For the pure representation of duty, and of the moral law as such, unmixed with any foreign addition of empirical inducements, has through reason alone—which here first becomes aware that it can also be practical by itself—so much more powerful an influence on the human heart than all other incentives, *)

*) If one wishes, one can distinguish the pure philosophy of morals, or metaphysics, from its application, namely to human nature, just as pure mathematics is distinguished from applied mathematics, pure logic from applied logic. This designation also immediately reminds us that moral principles must not be grounded on the peculiarities of human nature, but must stand by themselves a priori. From them, however, practical rules must be derivable for human nature as for every rational nature.

411 however many may be summoned from the empirical field, that in the consciousness of its dignity it disdains them and can gradually become their master. By contrast, a mixed moral teaching, composed of incentives from feelings and inclinations together with concepts of reason, must make the mind waver between motives that cannot be brought under any principle and can lead only very contingently to good, but often also to evil.

What has been said makes clear that all moral concepts have their seat and origin entirely a priori in reason, in the most ordinary human reason just as in reason that is speculative to the highest degree. They cannot be abstracted from any empirical and therefore merely contingent cognition. Their dignity, enabling them to serve us as supreme practical principles, lies precisely in this purity of their origin. Every empirical addition takes just as much away from their genuine influence and from the unrestricted worth of actions. To draw their concepts and laws from pure reason, present them pure and unmixed, and indeed determine the scope of this entire practical or pure rational cognition—that is, the whole faculty of pure practical reason—is demanded not only by the greatest necessity in a theoretical respect, when speculation alone is at issue, but is also of the greatest practical importance. Yet here we must not do what speculative philosophy permits, and sometimes even finds necessary: make the principles dependent on the particular

*) I have a letter from the late, excellent *Sulzer* in which he asks me what the cause might be that the teachings of virtue, however convincing they are to reason, nevertheless accomplish so little. My answer was delayed by the preparations needed to give it completely. But the answer is simply that the teachers themselves have not clarified their concepts. In wishing to do too much good by seeking motives for moral goodness everywhere, to make the medicine really potent, they spoil it. For the most ordinary observation shows that when an action of integrity is presented as performed with a steadfast soul, apart from every purpose of gaining advantage in this or another world, even under the greatest temptations of distress or enticement, it leaves far behind and eclipses every similar action affected in the least by a foreign incentive. It elevates the

soul and awakens the wish to be able to act in the same way. Even children of middle years feel this impression, and duties should never be presented to them otherwise.

412 nature of human reason. Rather, because moral laws are to hold for every rational being as such, we must derive them from the universal concept of a rational being as such. In this way we must first present all morality, which needs anthropology for its *application* to human beings, independently of anthropology, completely as pure philosophy, that is, as metaphysics. This can readily be done in this kind of wholly separate cognition. We must be well aware that without possessing such a metaphysics, it would be futile not merely to determine precisely, for speculative judgment, what is moral in duty in everything that accords with duty; even in ordinary practical use, and especially in moral instruction, it would be impossible to ground morals on their genuine principles and thereby produce pure moral dispositions, implanting them in minds for the greatest good of the world.

But in this treatment we are to advance by natural stages, not merely from ordinary moral judgment, which here deserves great respect, to philosophical judgment, as was done before, but from a popular philosophy that can go no further than it can grope by means of examples, to metaphysics. Metaphysics lets nothing empirical hold it back, and since it must measure out the whole compass of rational cognition of this kind, it goes if necessary as far as ideas, where even examples forsake us. To make this advance, we must follow the practical faculty of reason from its universal rules of determination to the point where the concept of duty arises from it, and present it clearly.

Everything in nature works according to laws. Only a rational being has the capacity to act *according to the representation* of laws, that is, according to principles, or has a *will*. Since *reason* is required to derive actions from laws, the will is nothing other than practical reason. If reason unfailingly determines the will, the actions of such a being, recognized as objectively necessary, are also subjectively necessary. That is, the will is a capacity to choose *only what* reason, independently of inclination, recognizes as practically necessary, that is, as good.

But if reason by itself does not sufficiently determine the will, and the will is still subject to subjective conditions, certain incentives, that do not always agree with the objective ones; in

413 a word, if the will is not *in itself* wholly in conformity with reason, as is actually the case in human beings, then actions recognized as objectively necessary are subjectively contingent. The determination of such a will in conformity with objective laws is *necessitation*: the relation of objective laws to a will that is not thoroughly good is represented as the determination of the will of a rational being by grounds of reason, to which, however, this will is not by its nature necessarily obedient.

The representation of an objective principle, insofar as it necessitates a will, is called a command of reason, and the formula of the command is called an *imperative*.

All imperatives are expressed through an *ought*, thereby indicating the relation of an objective law of reason to a will that, because of its subjective constitution, is not necessarily determined by that law: a necessitation. They say that doing or refraining from something would be good, but they say it to a will that does not always do something merely because it is represented to it as good to do. What is practically *good*, however, determines the will through representations of reason, thus not from subjective causes but objectively, from grounds valid for every rational being as such. It is distinguished from the *pleasant*: that which influences the will only through sensation, from merely subjective causes valid only for this or that person's sense, not as a principle of reason that holds for everyone. *)

*) The dependence of the faculty of desire on sensations is called inclination, and this therefore always indicates a *need*. But the dependence of a contingently determinable will on principles of reason is called an *interest*. Interest thus occurs only in a dependent will, which is not of itself always in conformity with reason; in the divine will no interest can be conceived. Yet even the human will can *take an interest* in something without thereby *acting from interest*. The first signifies a *practical* interest in the action; the second, a *pathological* interest

in the action's object. The first indicates only the will's dependence on principles of reason in themselves; the second, its dependence on those principles for the sake of inclination, where reason merely supplies the practical rule for satisfying the need of inclination. In the first case the action interests me; in the second, the action's object insofar as it is pleasant to me. We saw in the first section that in an action from duty we must attend not to interest in the object, but solely to the action itself and its principle in reason, the law.

414 A perfectly good will would likewise stand under objective laws of the good, but could not be represented as *necessitated* by them to act in conformity with law, since of itself, by its subjective constitution, it can be determined only through the representation of the good. Thus no imperatives hold for the *divine* will or, in general, for a *holy* will. *Ought* is out of place here, because *willing* is already of itself necessarily in accord with the law. Imperatives are therefore only formulas expressing the relation of objective laws of willing as such to the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being, for example, the human will.

Now all *imperatives* command either *hypothetically* or *categorically*. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to attain something else that one wills, or at least could possibly will. The categorical imperative would be one that represents an action as objectively necessary in itself, without relation to another end.

Since every practical law represents a possible action as good, and therefore as necessary for a subject capable of being practically determined by reason, all imperatives are formulas determining an action that is necessary according to the principle of a will good in some way. If the action would be good merely as a *means* to something else, the imperative is *hypothetical*. If it is represented as good *in itself*, thus as necessary in a will in itself conforming to reason, as its principle, the imperative is *categorical*.

The imperative therefore says which action possible through me would be good, and presents the practical rule in relation to a will that does not immediately act merely because the action is good. This is partly because the subject

does not always know that it is good, partly because, even if it did know, its maxims might still oppose the objective principles of a practical reason.

The hypothetical imperative thus says only that the action is good for some *possible* or *actual* purpose. In the former

415 case it is a *problematic*, in the second an *assertoric-practical* principle. The categorical imperative, which declares the action objectively necessary in itself, without reference to any purpose, and thus without any other end, holds as an *apodictic-practical* principle.

Anything possible through the powers of some rational being can also be conceived as a possible purpose for some will. There are therefore infinitely many principles of action insofar as the action is represented as necessary to attain some possible purpose to be brought about through it. All sciences have some practical part consisting of problems that some end is possible for us, and of imperatives stating how it can be attained. These may therefore be called imperatives of *skill* as such. Whether the end is rational and good is not at issue here, but only what one must do to attain it. The prescriptions a physician follows to make his patient thoroughly healthy, and those a poisoner follows to kill him with certainty, are of equal worth insofar as each serves to bring about its purpose perfectly. Because in early youth we do not know what ends may arise for us in life, parents chiefly seek to have their children learn *many different things* and provide for their *skill* in using means to all sorts of *discretionary* ends. They cannot determine whether any of these will actually become a purpose of their pupil in the future, though it is possible that he may one day have it. This care is so great that they commonly neglect, on that account, to form and correct their children's judgment about the worth of the things they might choose as ends.

There is nevertheless *one* end that can be presupposed as actual in all rational beings to whom imperatives apply, namely as dependent beings. It is thus a purpose they not merely *can* have, but one we can safely presuppose that they all have by a natural necessity: the purpose of *happiness*. The hypothetical imperative that represents the practical necessity of an action as a means to pro-

mote happiness is *assertoric*. We must not present it merely as necessary for an uncertain, merely possible purpose, but for a purpose that can be presupposed with certainty and a priori in every human being,

416 because it belongs to his being. Now skill in choosing the means to one's own greatest well-being may be called *prudence* *) in the narrowest sense. Thus the imperative relating to the choice of means to one's own happiness, that is, the prescription of prudence, is still *hypothetical*. The action is not commanded absolutely, but only as a means to another purpose.

Finally, there is an imperative that commands this conduct immediately, without making some other purpose to be attained through a certain conduct its underlying condition. This imperative is *categorical*. It concerns not the matter of the action and what is to result from it, but the form and the principle from which the action itself follows. What is essentially good in it consists in the disposition, whatever the result may be. This imperative may be called the imperative of *morality*.

Willing according to these three kinds of principles is also clearly distinguished by the *inequality* of the necessitation of the will. To make this difference noticeable, I think the most appropriate names, in their order, would be *rules* of skill, *counsels* of prudence, and *commands*, or laws, of morality. For only *law* carries the concept of an *unconditional*, objective, and therefore universally valid *necessity*. Commands are laws that must be obeyed, that is, followed even against inclination. *Counsel* does contain necessity, but a necessity that can hold only under a subjective, contingent condition: whether this or that person counts this or that as part of his happiness. The categorical imperative, by contrast, is limited by no condition and, as absolutely though practically necessary, can properly be called a command. The first imperatives might also be called *technical*, belonging to art; the

*) The word prudence is taken in a twofold sense: in one it may be called worldly prudence, in the other private prudence. The first is a person's skill in influencing others in order to use them for his purposes. The second is the insight to unite all these purposes to his own lasting advantage. The latter is

properly that to which the worth even of the former is referred. Of someone prudent in the first way but not in the second, it would be better to say that he is clever and cunning, but on the whole imprudent.

417 second *pragmatic*, *) concerned with welfare; the third *moral*, concerned with free conduct as such, that is, with morals.

The question now arises: how are all these imperatives possible? This question asks not how the action commanded by the imperative can be carried out, but how we can conceive the mere necessitation of the will that the imperative expresses in the task it sets. How an imperative of skill is possible scarcely needs special discussion. Whoever wills the end also wills, insofar as reason has decisive influence on his actions, the means indispensably necessary to it that lie within his power. As regards willing, this proposition is analytic. For in willing an object as my effect, my causality as an acting cause, that is, the use of means, is already thought; and the imperative draws the concept of actions necessary to this end from the very concept of willing this end. Determining the means themselves for a proposed purpose does, of course, require synthetic propositions, but these concern the ground of making not the act of will, but the object, actual. Mathematics teaches only through synthetic propositions that, to divide a line into two equal parts according to a sure principle, I must draw two intersecting arcs from its ends. But if I know that the intended effect can occur only through such an action, then, if I fully will the effect, I also will the action required for it: this is an analytic proposition. For to represent something as an effect possible through me in a certain way, and to represent myself as acting in that same way in relation to it, are entirely one and the same.

The imperatives of prudence would agree entirely with those of skill, and would likewise be analytic, if only it were so easy to give a definite concept of happiness. For here as there it would mean: whoever wills the end also wills, necessarily in accordance with reason, the only means to it that lie in

*) It seems to me that the proper meaning of the word *pragmatic* can be determined most precisely in this way. For *enactments* are called pragmatic when they flow not properly from the right of states as necessary laws, but from *pro-*

vision for general welfare. A *history* is written *pragmatically* when it makes people *prudent*, that is, teaches the world how to attend to its advantage better, or at least as well as the world of former times.

418 his power. Unfortunately, however, the concept of happiness is so indeterminate that, although everyone wishes to attain it, no one can ever say definitely and in agreement with himself what he actually wishes and wills. The reason is that all the elements belonging to the concept of happiness are empirical: they must be borrowed from experience. Yet the idea of happiness requires an absolute whole, a maximum of well-being in my present and every future condition. Now it is impossible for even the most discerning and powerful, yet finite, being to form a definite concept of what he actually wills here. If he wills wealth, how much worry, envy, and harassment might he not bring upon himself through it! If he wills much knowledge and insight, this might perhaps become only a sharper eye, showing him still more terribly the evils that are now hidden from him but cannot be avoided, or burdening his desires, which already trouble him enough, with still more needs. If he wills a long life, who guarantees that it would not be a long misery? If he wills at least health, how often bodily discomfort has kept him from excess into which unrestricted health would have let him fall, and so forth! In short, he cannot determine with complete certainty, according to any principle, what will make him truly happy, because this would require omniscience. Thus one cannot act according to determinate principles in order to be happy, but only according to empirical counsels, for example, of diet, thrift, politeness, restraint, and so forth, which experience teaches promote well-being most on average. It follows that the imperatives of prudence, strictly speaking, cannot command at all, that is, represent actions as objectively practically *necessary*. They are to be regarded as recommendations, *consilia*, rather than commands, *praecepta*, of reason. The problem of determining securely and universally which action will promote a rational being's happiness is wholly insoluble. Thus no imperative concerning

it is possible that would command in the strict sense that we do what makes us happy. For happiness is not an ideal of reason but of imagination, resting merely on empirical grounds, from which it is futile to

419 expect a determination of an action through which the totality of an actually infinite series of consequences would be attained. This imperative of prudence would nonetheless be an analytic-practical proposition if we assumed that the means to happiness could be given with certainty. For it differs from the imperative of skill only in that the end is merely possible in the latter, but given in the former. Since both command only the means to what we presuppose to be willed as an end, the imperative commanding the willing of the means for someone who wills the end is analytic in both cases. There is therefore no difficulty concerning the possibility of such an imperative.

By contrast, how the imperative of *morality* is possible is undoubtedly the only question that needs a solution. It is not hypothetical at all, so the necessity represented objectively cannot rest on any presupposition, as with hypothetical imperatives. Yet we must never overlook that *no example*, and therefore nothing empirical, can establish whether there is any such imperative at all. We must rather fear that all those which seem categorical may in a concealed way be hypothetical. For example, suppose it is said, "You shall make no deceitful promise," and we assume that the necessity of refraining from it is not merely counsel to avoid some other evil, as if it meant, "You shall not make a lying promise, lest, if it comes to light, you lose your credit." Instead, an action of this kind must be regarded as evil in itself, and the imperative of prohibition is therefore categorical. Still, no example can demonstrate with certainty that here the will is determined without any other incentive, merely by the law, although it seems so. For it is always possible that fear of disgrace, perhaps also an obscure concern about other dangers, secretly influences the will. Who can prove through experience that a cause does not exist, when experience teaches only that we do not perceive it? In such a case the so-called moral imperative,

which appears as categorical and unconditional, would in fact be merely a pragmatic prescription, drawing our attention to our advantage and teaching us only to take care of it.

We shall therefore have to investigate the possibility of a *categorical* imperative wholly a priori, since here we lack the advantage that

420 its actuality is given in experience, so that its possibility would be needed not to establish it, but merely to explain it. This much, however, can be seen provisionally: the categorical imperative alone speaks as a practical *law*. All the others may indeed be called *principles* of the will, but not laws. For what is necessary to do merely to attain a discretionary purpose can be regarded as contingent in itself, and we can always be released from the prescription if we abandon the purpose. The unconditional command, by contrast, leaves the will no freedom to choose the opposite, and thus alone carries the necessity we demand of a law.

Second, the ground of the difficulty in understanding the possibility of this categorical imperative, or law of morality, is also very great. It is an a priori synthetic-practical proposition. *) Since understanding the possibility of propositions of this kind presents so much difficulty in theoretical cognition, we can readily infer that it will present no less in practical cognition.

In this problem we shall first try whether the mere concept of a categorical imperative may perhaps also provide its formula, containing the proposition that alone can be a categorical imperative. For how such an absolute command is possible, even if we know what it says, will still require a special and difficult effort, which we postpone to the final section.

When I think of a *hypothetical* imperative as such, I do not know in advance what it will contain until its condition is given to me. But when I think of a *categorical* imperative, I know at once what it contains. For besides the law, the imperative contains only the necessity that the maxim **) conform to this law, *) Without a presupposed condition from any inclination, I connect the deed with the will a priori, hence necessarily, though only objectively: under the idea of a reason that had complete authority over all subjective motives. This is

therefore a practical proposition that does not analytically derive the willing of an action from some other willing already presupposed, for we have no such perfect will. Rather, it connects the action immediately with the concept of the will of a rational being as something not contained in that concept.

**) A *maxim* is the subjective principle of acting and must be distinguished from the *objective principle*, namely the practical law. The former contains the practical rule that reason determines in accordance with the subject's conditions, often its ignorance or its inclinations, and is thus the principle according to which the subject *acts*. The law, however, is the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle according to which the subject *ought to act*, that is, an imperative.

421 and since the law contains no condition limiting it, nothing remains but the universality of a law as such, to which the maxim of the action ought to conform. It is this conformity alone that the imperative properly represents as necessary.

There is therefore only one categorical imperative, and it is this: *act only according to the maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.*

If all imperatives of duty can be derived from this single imperative as their principle, we shall at least be able to indicate what we think by the concept of duty and what it means, even if we leave unsettled whether what is called duty might be an empty concept altogether.

Since the universality of the law according to which effects occur constitutes what is properly called *nature* in the most general sense, as to form—that is, the existence of things insofar as it is determined by universal laws—the universal imperative of duty could also read: *act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature.*

We shall now enumerate some duties according to their customary division into duties toward ourselves and toward other human beings, and into perfect and imperfect duties. *)

1) Someone who, through a series of evils grown to hopelessness, feels weary of life still

*) It must be noted here that I reserve the division of duties entirely for a future *metaphysics of morals*. The division here is therefore merely discretionary, to arrange my examples. Further, by a perfect duty I here understand one that permits no exception to the advantage of inclination. Thus I have not merely external but also internal *perfect duties*. This conflicts with the accepted usage of the schools, but I do not intend to justify it here, since for my purpose it makes no difference whether this is conceded to me or not.

422 retains enough reason to ask himself whether taking his life might conflict with his duty toward himself. He now tests whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. His maxim is this: from self-love I make it my principle to shorten my life when its longer duration threatens more evil than it promises pleasure. The question remains only whether this principle of self-love could become a universal law of nature. But one soon sees that a nature whose law was to destroy life through the very feeling whose vocation is to impel the promotion of life would contradict itself, and therefore could not subsist as nature. Thus that maxim cannot possibly hold as a universal law of nature and consequently conflicts entirely with the supreme principle of all duty.

2) Another person finds himself driven by need to borrow money. He knows well that he will not be able to repay it, but also sees that nothing will be lent to him unless he firmly promises to repay it at a definite time. He feels inclined to make such a promise; yet he still has enough conscience to ask himself: is it not forbidden and contrary to duty to extricate myself from need in this way? Suppose he nonetheless resolved to do it. His maxim of action would read: when I believe myself in financial need, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know it will never happen. Now this principle of self-love or personal advantage may perhaps agree quite well with my entire future well-being, but the present question is whether it is right. I therefore transform self-love's demand into a universal law and frame the question thus: what would

happen if my maxim became a universal law? I see immediately that it could never hold as a universal law of nature and be consistent with itself, but must necessarily contradict itself. For the universality of a law allowing everyone, whenever he believes himself in need, to promise whatever occurs to him with the intention of not keeping it would make promising itself, and whatever end one might have in it, impossible. No one would believe that anything had been promised to him, but would laugh at every such utterance as an empty pretense.

3) A third person finds in himself a talent that, through some

423 cultivation, could make him useful in many respects. But he finds himself in comfortable circumstances and prefers to indulge in pleasure rather than trouble himself to extend and improve his fortunate natural capacities. Yet he still asks whether his maxim of neglecting his natural gifts, besides agreeing in itself with his tendency toward amusement, also agrees with what is called duty. He now sees that a nature according to such a universal law could indeed still subsist, even if a human being, like the South Sea islanders, let his talent rust and intended to spend his life merely in idleness, amusement, propagation—in a word, in enjoyment. But he cannot possibly *will* this to become a universal law of nature, or to be implanted in us as such by natural instinct. For as a rational being he necessarily wills that all his capacities be developed, since they are given to him and serve him for all sorts of possible purposes.

A *fourth* person, who prospers while seeing others struggle with great hardships, whom he could well help, thinks: “What does it matter to me? Let everyone be as happy as heaven wills or as he can make himself. I will take nothing from him, nor even envy him; only I have no wish to contribute anything to his well-being or to help him in need!” Now if such a way of thinking became a universal law of nature, the human race could certainly subsist, and undoubtedly even better than if everyone prattles about sympathy and goodwill, even eagerly practices them on occasion, but also cheats wherever he can, sells out people’s rights, or otherwise impairs them. Yet although a universal law of nature could subsist according to that maxim, it is impossible to *will* that such

a principle hold everywhere as a law of nature. For a will that resolved on this would conflict with itself, since many cases can arise in which it needs the love and sympathy of others, and in which, through such a law of nature arising from its own will, it would rob itself of all hope of the assistance it desires.

These are some of the many actual duties, or at least duties we hold to be such, whose division is clearly evident from the single principle

424 just stated. We must *be able to will* a maxim of our action to become a universal law: this is the canon of moral judgment of action as such. Some actions are so constituted that their maxim cannot even be thought without contradiction as a universal law of nature, much less could one *will* that it *should* become such a law. In others this inner impossibility is not present, yet it is still impossible to will that their maxim be raised to the universality of a law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself. We can readily see that the first conflicts with strict or narrower, unremitting duty; the second only with wider, meritorious duty. Thus all duties, as regards the kind of obligation, not the object of their action, have through these examples been set out completely in their dependence on the single principle.

If we attend to ourselves whenever we transgress a duty, we find that we do not actually will our maxim to become a universal law, since this is impossible for us. Rather, its opposite is to remain a law universally. We merely take the liberty of making an *exception* from it for ourselves, or only for this occasion, to the advantage of our inclination. Consequently, if we weighed everything from one and the same standpoint, that of reason, we would find a contradiction in our own will: a certain principle is objectively necessary as a universal law, yet subjectively it ought not to hold universally, but should permit exceptions. But since at one moment we consider our action from the standpoint of a will wholly conforming to reason, and then consider that same action from the standpoint of a will affected by inclination, there is really no contradiction here, but rather a resistance of inclination to reason's prescription, antagonismus. Through this, the universality of the principle, universalitas, is transformed into mere generality, generalitas, so that the practical principle of rea-

son is to meet the maxim halfway. Although this cannot be justified in our own impartial judgment, it nevertheless proves that we actually acknowledge the validity of the categorical imperative and, with all respect for it, permit ourselves only a few exceptions that seem to us insignificant and forced upon us.

425 We have thus established at least this much: if duty is a concept that is to contain meaning and actual legislation for our actions, this legislation can be expressed only in categorical imperatives, never in hypothetical ones. We have likewise presented clearly, and with a precision suited to every application, the content of the categorical imperative that would have to contain the principle of all duty—if there is any such thing at all. This is already a considerable achievement. Yet we have not advanced far enough to prove a priori that such an imperative actually holds, that there is a practical law which commands absolutely and of itself, without any incentives, and that following this law is duty.

In seeking to reach this point, it is of the utmost importance to take this warning to heart: we must never entertain the thought of deriving the reality of this principle from the *distinctive character of human nature*. For duty is to be the practically unconditional necessity of action; it must therefore hold for all rational beings to whom an imperative can apply at all, and *for that reason alone* also be a law for every human will. By contrast, anything derived from humanity's particular natural constitution, from certain feelings and propensities, or even, if possible, from a particular direction peculiar to human reason, which need not hold for the will of every rational being, can indeed furnish a maxim for us, but not a law. It can furnish a subjective principle according to which we have a propensity and inclination to be permitted to act, but not an objective principle according to which we would be *required* to act even if all our propensities, inclinations, and natural constitution opposed it. Indeed, the fewer the subjective causes in its favor and the more there are against it, the more this proves the sublimity and inner dignity of the command in a duty, without thereby weakening in the least the constraint imposed by the law or detracting at all from its validity.

Here we see philosophy placed, in fact, in a precarious position: it is to stand firm although there is nothing in heaven or on earth from which it hangs or on which it rests. Here it must prove its purity as the guardian of its own laws, not as the herald of those whispered to it by an implanted sense or by who knows what tutelary nature. All such laws, however much better they may be

426 than nothing at all, can never furnish principles dictated by reason, which must have their source entirely a priori, and with it their commanding authority: to expect nothing from human inclination, but everything from the supreme power of the law and the respect owed to it, or otherwise to condemn the human being to self-contempt and inward abhorrence.

Everything empirical, then, is not only wholly unfit as an addition to the principle of morality; it is also highly detrimental to the purity of morals themselves. For in this purity the distinctive worth of an absolutely good will, a worth exalted above all price, consists precisely in the principle of action being free from every influence of contingent grounds that experience alone can supply. Warnings against this negligence, or indeed this base manner of thinking, which seeks the principle among empirical motives and laws, cannot be given too often or too urgently. For human reason, when weary, gladly rests on this cushion, and in a dream of sweet illusions—which nevertheless have it embrace a cloud instead of Juno—substitutes for morality a bastard patched together from limbs of wholly different descent. It resembles everything one might wish to see in it, except virtue, for anyone who has once beheld virtue in its true form.*)

The question, then, is this: is it a necessary law for *all rational beings* always to judge their actions by maxims that they themselves can will to serve as universal laws? If there is such a law, it must already be connected, wholly a priori, with the concept of the will of a rational being as such. But to discover this connection, however much we may resist, we must take a step beyond, namely into metaphysics—though into a region distinct from speculative philosophy: the metaphysics of morals.

*) To behold virtue in its true form is nothing other than to present morality stripped of every admixture of the sensible and every spurious ornament of reward or self-love. How greatly it then eclipses everything else that appears alluring to the inclinations can readily be recognized by anyone through the slightest exercise of a reason not wholly spoiled for all abstraction.

427 In a practical philosophy, where our concern is not to assume grounds for what *happens*, but laws for *what ought to happen*, even if it never does—that is, objectively practical laws—we have no need to investigate why something pleases or displeases; how the pleasure of mere sensation differs from taste, and whether taste differs from a universal satisfaction of reason; on what the feeling of pleasure and displeasure rests; or how desires and inclinations arise from it, and from these, through the cooperation of reason, maxims. For all this belongs to an empirical psychology, which would constitute the second part of the doctrine of nature if we consider it as a *philosophy of nature* insofar as it is founded on *empirical laws*. Here, however, we are concerned with the objectively practical law, and thus with the relation of a will to itself insofar as it determines itself solely through reason. Everything that relates to the empirical therefore falls away of itself: for if *reason by itself alone* determines conduct—the possibility of which is precisely what we now wish to investigate—it must necessarily do so a priori.

The will is conceived as a capacity to determine itself to act *in accordance with the representation of certain laws*. And such a capacity can be found only in rational beings. Now, what serves the will as the objective ground of its self-determination is the *end*; and this, if given by reason alone, must hold equally for all rational beings. What, by contrast, contains merely the ground of the possibility of an action whose effect is an end is called the *means*. The subjective ground of desire is the *incentive*, the objective ground of willing the *motive*. Hence the distinction between subjective ends, which rest on incentives, and objective ends, which depend on motives valid for every rational being. Practical principles are *formal* when they abstract from all subjective ends; they are *material* when they take these, and thus certain incentives, as their basis.

The ends that a rational being chooses to set before itself as *effects* of its action—material ends—are all merely relative. For only their relation to a subject's faculty of desire, with its particular constitution, gives them their worth; this worth can therefore furnish no universal and necessary principles valid for all rational beings and for every act of willing,

428 principles, that is, practical laws. Hence all these relative ends are only the ground of hypothetical imperatives.

Suppose, however, that there were something *whose existence in itself* has an absolute worth, something that, as an *end in itself*, could be a ground of determinate laws: then in it, and in it alone, would lie the ground of a possible categorical imperative, that is, of a practical law.

Now I say that the human being, and every rational being in general, *exists* as an end in itself, *not merely as a means* for the arbitrary use of this or that will, but must in all his actions, whether directed toward himself or toward other rational beings, always be regarded *at the same time as an end*. All objects of the inclinations have only a conditional worth; for if the inclinations, and the needs grounded on them, did not exist, their object would be without worth. But the inclinations themselves, as sources of need, have so little absolute worth that they could be wished for their own sake; rather, to be wholly free of them must be the universal wish of every rational being. Thus the worth of all objects *to be acquired* through our action is always conditional. The beings whose existence rests not on our will but on nature have, to be sure, if they are nonrational beings, only a relative worth as means, and are therefore called *things*; rational beings, by contrast, are called *persons*, because their nature already marks them out as ends in themselves, that is, as something that may not be used merely as a means, and hence so far limits all caprice (and is an object of respect). These are therefore not merely subjective ends, whose existence as an effect of our action has a worth for us; they are *objective ends*, that is, things whose existence is in itself an end, and indeed an end such that no other end can be set in its place, to which they should serve *merely* as means; for without this nothing at all of

absolute worth would anywhere be encountered, and if all worth were conditional and hence contingent, no supreme practical principle could anywhere be found for reason.

If, then, there is to be a supreme practical principle, and with respect to the human will a categorical imperative, it must be one that, from the representation of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, makes this an *objective*

429 principle of the will, and thus can serve as a universal practical law. The ground of this principle is: *rational nature exists as an end in itself*. The human being necessarily represents his own existence in this way; so far, then, it is a *subjective* principle of human actions. But every other rational being also represents his existence in this way, on the same rational ground that holds for me*); thus it is at the same time an *objective* principle, from which, as a supreme practical ground, all laws of the will must be capable of being derived. The practical imperative will therefore be the following: *So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means*. We shall see whether this can be accomplished.

To stay with the previous examples: *first*, in accordance with the concept of a necessary duty toward oneself, a man who is thinking of suicide will ask whether his action can consist with the idea of humanity *as an end in itself*. If he destroys himself in order to escape from a burdensome condition, he uses a person merely *as a means* to preserve a tolerable condition until the end of life. But a human being is not a thing, hence not something that may be used *merely* as a means; rather, in all his actions he must always be regarded as an end in himself. Thus I cannot dispose of a human being in my own person, to maim him, to ruin him, or to kill him. (The closer determination of this principle, to avoid every misunderstanding—for example, amputation of limbs in order to preserve myself, or the danger to which I expose my life in order to preserve it, and so on—I must here pass over; it belongs to morals proper.)

Secondly, as concerns the necessary or obligatory duty toward others, a man who intends to make a deceitful promise to others will immediately see that he wants to use another human being *merely as a means*, without this other at the same time containing the end in himself. For the person whom I want to use for my purposes by such a promise cannot possibly agree with my way of proceeding toward him,

*) This proposition I set up here as a postulate; in the last section the grounds for it will be found.

430 and so himself contain the end of this action. This conflict with the principle of other human beings is more plainly seen when examples of attacks on the freedom and property of others are brought in. For there it shines clear that a violator of the rights of human beings is minded to use the persons of others merely as means, without considering that they, as rational beings, are to be valued always at the same time as ends, that is, only as beings who must be able to contain in themselves the very same end of the same action*).

Thirdly, with regard to the contingent (meritorious) duty toward oneself, it is not enough that the action not conflict with humanity in our person as an end in itself; it must also *harmonize with it*. Now there lie in humanity predispositions to a greater perfection, which belong to the end of nature with respect to humanity in our subject; to neglect these could perhaps consist with the *preservation* of humanity as an end in itself, but not with the *furthering* of this end.

Fourthly, as regards the meritorious duty toward others, the natural end that all human beings have is their own happiness. Now humanity could indeed subsist if no one contributed anything to the happiness of others, so long as nothing were thereby intentionally taken from it; but this is only a negative and not a positive agreement with *humanity as an end in itself*, if everyone does not also strive, as far as in him lies, to further the ends of others. For the subject who is an end in itself must have the ends of others, as far as possible, also as *my* ends, if that representation is to have *all* its effect in me.

This principle of humanity and of every rational nature in general, *as an end in itself*, which is the supreme limiting

*) Let no one think that the trivial rule, *quod tibi non vis fieri etc.*, can here serve as the standard or principle. For it is, though with various restrictions, only derived from that principle; it cannot be a universal law, for it does not contain the ground of duties toward oneself, nor of duties of love toward others (for many would gladly agree that others should do them no good, if only they might be spared showing kindness to them), and finally not of the duties owed to one another; for on this ground the criminal would argue against his punishing judges, and so forth.

431 condition of the freedom of the actions of every human being, is not borrowed from experience: first, because of its universality, since it extends to all rational beings in general, about which experience is not sufficient to determine anything; second, because in it humanity is represented not as the end of human beings (subjectively), that is, as an object that one of oneself actually makes one's end, but as an objective end which, whatever ends we may have, is to constitute as law the supreme limiting condition of all subjective ends, and hence it must spring from pure reason. For the ground of all practical legislation lies *objectively in the rule* and the form of universality that makes it capable of being a law (if need be, a law of nature) (according to the first principle), but *subjectively in the end*; the subject of all ends, however, is every rational being, as an end in itself (according to the second principle): from this there now follows the third practical principle of the will, as the supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, the idea of *the will of every rational being as a universally legislating will*.

All maxims are rejected according to this principle that cannot consist with the will's own universal legislation. The will is thus not merely subject to the law, but is so subject that it must also be regarded *as self-legislating* and just by that means first subject to the law (of which it can consider itself the author).

The imperatives according to the previous way of representing it—namely according to the lawfulness of actions that is similar to a *natural order*, or according to the universal *preference of ends* proper to rational beings in themselves—did indeed exclude from their commanding authority all admixture of

interest as an incentive, just because they were represented as categorical; but they were only assumed as categorical because one had to assume such imperatives if one wanted to explain the concept of duty. That there were practical propositions that command categorically could not be proved by itself, as indeed it cannot here still be done in this section either; but one thing could at least have been done, namely that the renunciation of all interest in willing from duty, as the specific distinguishing mark of the categorical from the hypothetical imperative, is contained in the imperative itself through

432 some determination that it contained would be hinted at; and this happens in the present third formula of the principle, namely in the idea of the will of every rational being as a *universally legislating* will.

For if we think such a will, then although a will that *stands under laws* may still be bound to this law by means of an interest, a will that is itself the supreme legislator cannot possibly depend any further on any interest; for such a dependent will would itself still need another law, which restricted the interest of its self-love to the condition of its being valid as a universal law.

Thus the *principle* of every human will, as *a will that through all its maxims legislates universally* *), would—provided only that as to its correctness this held good of it—quite well comport itself with the categorical imperative in this, that for the sake of the idea of universal legislation it *rests on no interest*, and thus among all possible imperatives alone can be *unconditional*; or better still, by inverting the proposition: if there is a categorical imperative (that is, a law for the will of every rational being), it can command nothing other than to do everything from the maxim of a will that could at the same time have itself as universally legislating for its object; for only then is the practical principle, and the imperative it obeys, unconditional, because it can have no interest at all at its ground.

It is no wonder, then, that when we look back at all the endeavors that have ever been undertaken to discover the principle of morality, they must all have failed. One saw the human being bound to laws by his duty, but it did not occur to one that he is subject *only to his own, and yet universal, legislation*, and that he

is bound only to act in accordance with his own will, which is, however, universally legislating in accordance with nature's purpose. For if one thought of him only as subject to a law (whatever it might be), then this law had to contain

*) I may here be spared the trouble of citing examples to illustrate this principle, for all those that first illustrated the categorical imperative and its formula can serve here for exactly the same purpose.

433 an interest in itself as a lure or compulsion, because it did not spring as a law from *his* will, but this will was constrained by *something else* to act in a certain way, in conformity with law. By this wholly necessary inference, however, all labor of finding a supreme ground of duty was irrecoverably lost. For one never obtained duty, but only the necessity of an action out of some interest or other. This might now be one's own interest or another's. But in that case the imperative had always to come out conditional and could not at all serve as a moral command. I therefore want to call this principle the principle of the *autonomy* of the will, in contrast with every other, which I accordingly count under *heteronomy*.

The concept of every rational being that must regard itself, through all the maxims of its will, as universally legislating, so as to judge itself and its actions from this standpoint, leads to a very fruitful concept attaching to it, namely that *of a realm of ends*.

By a realm, however, I understand the systematic union of different rational beings through common laws. Now since laws determine ends as regards their universal validity, if one abstracts from the personal differences of rational beings, as also from all content of their private ends, a whole of all ends (both of rational beings as ends in themselves and of the own ends that each may set himself) in systematic connection, that is, a realm of ends, can be thought as possible according to the above principles.

For all rational beings stand under the *law* that each of them should treat itself and all others *never merely as a means*, but always at the same time *as an end in itself*. Hereby, however, there arises a systematic union of rational beings

through common objective laws, that is, a realm; and because these laws have as their aim precisely the relation of these beings to one another as ends and means, it can be called a realm of ends (though only an ideal).

A rational being belongs as a *member* to the realm of ends when it is indeed universally legislating in it, but also itself subject to these laws. It belongs to it as *head* when, as legislating, it is subject to no will of another.

434 The rational being must always regard itself as legislating in a realm of ends possible through the freedom of the will, whether as a member or as a head. It cannot, however, maintain the place of the latter merely through the maxim of its will, but only if it is a completely independent being, without need and without limitation of a capacity adequate to the will.

Morality consists, then, in the reference of all action to the legislation through which alone a realm of ends is possible. But this legislation must be encountered in every rational being itself and must be capable of springing from its will, whose principle is therefore: to do no action according to any other maxim than one such that it could also consist with it that this maxim should be a universal law, and thus only in such a way *that the will through its maxim could at the same time regard itself as universally legislating*. But if the maxims are not already necessarily in agreement with this objective principle of rational beings as universally legislating by their nature, the necessity of acting on that principle is called practical necessitation, that is, *duty*. Duty does not belong to the head in the realm of ends, but to every member, and indeed to all in equal measure.

The practical necessity of acting according to this principle, that is, duty, rests not at all on feelings, impulses and inclinations, but solely on the relation of rational beings to one another, in which the will of a rational being must always at the same time be regarded as *legislating*, because otherwise it could not think of that being as *an end in itself*. Reason thus relates every maxim of the will, as universally legislating, to every other will and also to every action toward one-

self, and indeed not for the sake of any other practical motive or future advantage, but from the idea of the *dignity* of a rational being that obeys no law other than one that it at the same time gives itself.

In the realm of ends everything has either a *price* or a *dignity*. What has a price can be replaced by something else as its *equivalent*; what, on the other hand, is elevated above all price, and hence admits no equivalent, has a dignity.

What refers to the general human inclinations and needs has a *market price*; what, even without presupposing a need, corresponds to a certain taste, that is, to a satisfaction in

435 the mere purposeless play of our mental powers, an *affective price*; but what constitutes the condition under which alone something can be an end in itself has not merely a relative worth, that is, a price, but an inner worth, that is, *dignity*.

Now morality is the condition under which alone a rational being can be an end in itself, because only through it is it possible to be a legislating member in the realm of ends. Thus morality, and humanity insofar as it is capable of it, is that which alone has dignity. Skill and diligence in work have a market price; wit, lively imagination and moods have an affective price; fidelity in promises and benevolence from principles (not from instinct), by contrast, have an inner worth. Neither nature nor art contains anything that could be set in their place in default of them; for their worth consists not in the effects that spring from them, in the advantage and use they bring about, but in the dispositions, that is, in the maxims of the will that are ready to reveal themselves in actions in this way, even if the outcome did not favor them. These actions also need no recommendation from any subjective disposition or taste, to be regarded with immediate favor and satisfaction, no immediate inclination or feeling for them: they present the will that exercises them as an object of immediate respect, for which nothing but reason is required in order to *impose* them on the will, not to *coax* them from it, which latter in the case of duties would anyway be a contradiction. This estimation therefore reveals the worth of such a way of thinking as

dignity and sets it infinitely above all price, with which it cannot at all be brought into reckoning and comparison without, as it were, violating its holiness.

And what is it, then, that entitles the morally good disposition, or virtue, to make such high claims? It is nothing less than the *share* that it procures for the rational being *in universal legislation*, and thereby makes it fit to be a member in a possible realm of ends, to which its own nature had already destined it, as an end in itself and precisely for that reason as legislating in the realm of ends, free in regard to all laws of nature, obeying only those which it gives itself and according to which its maxims can belong to a universal legislation (to which it at the same time

436 subjects itself). For nothing has a worth except the worth that the law determines for it. But the legislation itself, which determines all worth, must precisely for that reason have a dignity, that is, an unconditional, incomparable worth, for which the word *respect* alone furnishes the fitting expression of the estimation that a rational being has to undertake regarding it. *Autonomy* is thus the ground of the dignity of human and of every rational nature.

The three ways cited of presenting the principle of morality are, however, at bottom only so many formulas of one and the same law, of which each one of itself unites the other two within itself. Yet there is a difference among them that is indeed rather subjective than objective-practical, namely in order to bring an idea of reason nearer to intuition (by a certain analogy) and thereby nearer to feeling. All maxims have

1) a *form*, which consists in universality, and there the formula of the moral imperative is expressed as follows: that maxims must be chosen as if they were to hold as universal laws of nature;

2) a *matter*, namely an end, and there the formula says: that the rational being, as an end by its nature, hence as an end in itself, must serve every maxim as the limiting condition of all merely relative and arbitrary ends;

3) a *complete determination* of all maxims by that formula, namely: that all maxims should harmonize, out of their own legislation, into a possible realm of ends, as into a realm of nature*). The progression here takes place, as it were, through the categories of the *unity* of the form of the will (of its universality), of the *plurality* of the matter (of the objects, that is, of the ends) and of the *all-ness* or totality of the system of them. But one does better if in moral *judgment* one always proceeds by the strict method and takes the universal formula of the categorical imperative as the basis: *act according to the maxim that could also*

*) Teleology considers nature as a realm of ends, morality a possible realm of ends as a realm of nature. There the realm of ends is a theoretical idea for explaining what is. Here it is a practical idea, in order to bring about what is not, but can become real through our doing and omitting, and indeed in accordance with this very idea.

⁴³⁷ *be a universal law.* But if one wants at the same time to win entry for the moral law, it is very useful to lead one and the same action through the three named concepts and thereby, as much as can be done, to bring it nearer to intuition. We can now end where we began at the outset, namely with the concept of a will that is good without qualification. The *will* is *absolutely good* that cannot be evil, and whose maxim, when it is made into a universal law, can therefore never conflict with itself. This principle is thus also its supreme law: act always according to that maxim whose universality as a law you can at the same time will; this is the sole condition under which a will can never be in conflict with itself, and such an imperative is categorical. Because the validity of the will as a universal law for possible actions has an analogy with the universal connection of the existence of things under universal laws, which is the formal element of nature in general, the categorical imperative can also be expressed thus: *Act according to maxims that can at the same time have themselves as universal laws of nature for their object.* Such, then, is the formula of an absolutely good will. Rational nature distinguishes itself from the rest in that it sets an end for itself. This would be the matter of every good will. But since in the idea of a will that is absolutely good without any limiting condition (of the attainment of this or

that end) one must abstract entirely from every end *to be brought about* (as that would make every will only relatively good), the end here must be thought not as one to be brought about, but as a *self-subsistent* end, hence only negatively, that is, as an end that is never to be acted against, and that therefore must never be valued merely as a means, but always at the same time as an end, in every act of willing. This can now be nothing other than the subject of all possible ends itself, because this is at the same time the subject of a possible absolutely good will; for that will cannot without contradiction be subordinated to any other object. The principle: act in relation to every rational being (to yourself and others) in such a way that it counts in your maxim at the same time as an end in itself, is therefore at bottom identical with the fundamental principle: act according to a maxim that contains its own universal validity for every rational being

438 at the same time within itself, is at bottom one and the same. For that I should limit my maxim in the use of means to every end to the condition of its universal validity as a law for every subject says just as much as: the subject of ends, that is, the rational being itself, must never be laid at the ground of all maxims of action merely as a means, but as the supreme limiting condition in the use of all means, that is, always at the same time as an end.

Now it follows from this beyond dispute that every rational being, as an end in itself, must be able to regard itself, in regard to all laws to which it may ever be subject, at the same time as universally legislating, because precisely this fitness of its maxims for universal legislation marks it out as an end in itself; and likewise that this, its dignity (prerogative) above all merely natural beings, brings with it that it must always take its maxims from the standpoint of itself, but at the same time also of every other rational being as legislating (which are therefore also called persons). Now in this way a world of rational beings (*mundus intelligibilis*) is possible as a realm of ends, namely through the own legislation of all persons as members. Accordingly every rational being must act as if it were always through its maxims a legislating member in the universal realm of ends. The formal principle of these maxims is: act as if your maxim should at

the same time serve as a universal law (of all rational beings). A realm of ends is thus possible only by analogy with a realm of nature, the former only through maxims, that is, rules imposed on itself, the latter only through laws of externally necessitated efficient causes. Nevertheless, one still gives the whole of nature, even though it is regarded as a machine, the name of a realm of nature, insofar as it has relation to rational beings as its ends. Such a realm of ends would now actually come about through maxims whose rule the categorical imperative prescribes to all rational beings, if they were *universally followed*. But although the rational being cannot count on it that, even if it itself followed this maxim punctiliously, every other would therefore be faithful to the same maxim, and likewise that the realm of nature and its purposive arrangement would harmonize with it, as a fit member, into a realm of ends possible through it itself, that is, that his expectation of happiness

439 will favor this, that law nevertheless remains in full force, because it commands categorically: act according to maxims of a universally legislating member of a merely possible realm of ends. And herein lies precisely the paradox: that merely the dignity of humanity as rational nature, without any other end or advantage to be attained thereby, hence respect for a mere idea, should nevertheless serve as the unremitting precept of the will, and that precisely in this independence of the maxim from all such incentives consists its sublimity, and the worthiness of every rational subject to be a legislating member in the realm of ends; for otherwise it would have to be represented as merely subject to the law of nature of its needs. Even if the realm of nature as well as the realm of ends were thought as united under one head, and the latter thereby no longer remained a mere idea but received true reality, this would indeed procure for that realm the addition of a strong incentive, but never an increase of its inner worth; for notwithstanding this, even that sole unlimited legislator would still always have to be represented as judging the worth of rational beings only according to their unselfish conduct, prescribed to themselves solely from that idea. The essence of things does not change through their external relations, and that which, without thinking of the latter, alone constitutes the absolute

worth of the human being, that must also be the standard by which he is judged, by whoever it may be, even by the highest being. *Morality* is therefore the relation of actions to the autonomy of the will, that is, to the possible universal legislation through the maxims of the will. The action that can consist with the autonomy of the will is *permitted*; the one that does not agree with it is *not permitted*. The will whose maxims necessarily harmonize with the laws of autonomy is a *holy*, absolutely good will. The dependence of a will that is not absolutely good on the principle of autonomy (the moral necessitation) is *obligation*. This therefore cannot be extended to a holy being. The objective necessity of an action from obligation is called *duty*.

From the immediately preceding it is now easy to explain to oneself how it comes about that, although under the concept of duty we think a subjection under the law, we nevertheless thereby at the same time

440 a certain sublimity and *dignity* in that person who fulfills all his duties. For so far there is indeed no sublimity in him, insofar as he is *subject* to the moral law, but certainly insofar as he is in regard to that same law at the same time *legislating*, and only for that reason subordinate to it. We have also shown above how neither fear nor inclination, but solely respect for the law, is the incentive that can give an action moral worth. Our own will, insofar as it would act only under the condition of a universal legislation possible through its maxims—this will of ours that is possible in the idea—is the proper object of respect, and the dignity of humanity consists precisely in this capacity to legislate universally, although with the condition of being at the same time itself subject to precisely this legislation.

The autonomy of the will

as the supreme principle of morality.

Autonomy of the will is the constitution of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any constitution of the objects of willing). The principle of autonomy is therefore: to choose in no other way than so that the maxims of the choice are comprehended in the same act of willing at the same time as universal law. That this practical rule is an imperative, that is, that the will of every

rational being is necessarily bound to it as a condition, cannot be proved by mere analysis of the concepts occurring in it, because it is a synthetic proposition; one would have to go beyond the cognition of objects and to a critique of the subject, that is, of pure practical reason, for this synthetic proposition, which commands apodictically, must be capable of being known entirely a priori—but this business does not belong in the present section. That, however, the autonomy of the will just mentioned is the sole principle of morality can very well be demonstrated by mere analysis of the concepts of morality. For thereby it is found that its principle must be a categorical imperative, and that this commands nothing more or less than precisely this autonomy.

441 The heteronomy of the will
as the source of all spurious principles of morality.

If the will seeks the law that is to determine it anywhere *else* than in the fitness of its maxims for its own universal legislation—if, going beyond itself, it seeks this law in the constitution of any one of its objects—then what always comes out is *heteronomy*. The will then does not give itself the law; instead the object gives the law to the will through its relation to the will. Whether this relation rests on inclination or on representations of reason, it allows only hypothetical imperatives to become possible: I ought to do something *because I will something else*. The moral, and hence categorical, imperative, by contrast, says: I ought to act thus or so, even if I willed nothing else. For example, the former says: I ought not to lie, if I want to keep my honor; the latter says: I ought not to lie, even if it brought me not the least disgrace. The latter must therefore abstract from every object so far that this object has no *influence* at all on the will, so that practical reason (the will) does not merely administer a foreign interest, but proves only its own commanding authority as supreme legislation. Thus, for example, I ought to seek to further the happiness of others, not as if I cared whether that happiness existed (whether through immediate inclination, or through some indirect satisfaction by means of reason), but solely because the maxim that excludes it cannot be comprehended in one and the same act of willing as a universal law.

Division

of all possible principles of morality arising from the assumed basic concept of heteronomy.

Here human reason, as everywhere in its pure use, as long as it lacks critique, has first tried all possible wrong paths before it succeeds in hitting the only true one.

All principles that one may take from this standpoint are either *empirical* or *rational*. The *former*, taken from the principle

442 *of happiness*, are built on physical or moral feeling; the second, taken from the principle of *perfection*, are built either on the rational concept of perfection as a possible effect, or on the concept of a self-subsistent perfection (the will of God) as the determining cause of our will.

Empirical principles are altogether unfit to ground moral laws on them. For the universality with which they are to hold for all rational beings without distinction, and the unconditional practical necessity thereby imposed on them, fall away when the ground of them is taken from the *particular constitution of human nature* or from the contingent circumstances in which it is set. Yet the principle of *one's own happiness* is the most objectionable of all, not merely because it is false and experience contradicts the pretense that well-being always follows well-doing, and not merely because it contributes nothing at all to the grounding of morality, since it is something wholly different to make a happy man and to make a good man, and to make this man clever and sharp-witted for his own advantage rather than virtuous; but because it lays under morality incentives that rather undermine it and destroy its whole sublimity, since it places the motives to virtue and to vice in one class and only teaches one to draw up the calculation better, while wholly extinguishing the specific difference between the two. By contrast, moral feeling, this supposed special sense*), (however shallow the appeal to it is, since those who cannot *think* believe they can help themselves by *feeling*, even in what depends merely on universal laws; and however little feelings, which are by nature infinitely different in degree from one another, can furnish an equal standard of good and evil, and however

little one person can validly judge for another by his own feeling) nevertheless stays closer to morality and its dignity in that it pays virtue the honor of ascribing the satisfaction and high esteem for it to it *immediately*, and does not, as it were,

*) I count the principle of moral feeling under that of happiness, because every empirical interest promises a contribution to well-being through the agreeableness that something merely affords, whether this happens immediately and without regard to advantages, or with a view to them. Likewise, the principle of taking part in the happiness of others must, with *Hutcheson*, be counted under the same moral sense assumed by him.

443 to say to its face that it is not its beauty but only the advantage that binds us to it.

Among the *rational* or reason-based grounds of morality, the ontological concept of *perfection*—however empty, however indeterminate, and hence however unusable it is for finding, in the immeasurable field of possible reality, the greatest sum suited to us; however much it also has an unavoidable tendency to turn in a circle in order to distinguish specifically the reality here in question from every other, and cannot avoid covertly presupposing the morality it is supposed to explain—is nevertheless better than the theological concept, which derives morality from a divine, all-perfect will; not merely because we cannot after all intuit his perfection, but can derive it only from our concepts, among which that of morality is the foremost; but because, if we do not do this (which, if it were done, would be a gross circle in explaining), the concept of his will still left to us, made up from the properties of the desire for honor and dominion joined with the fearful representations of power and vengeful zeal, would have to be made the foundation of a system of morals directly opposed to morality. But if I had to choose between the concept of the moral sense and that of perfection in general (neither of which at least detracts from morality, though both are wholly unfit to support it as a foundation), I would decide for the latter, because it withdraws the decision of the question from sensibility and

brings it before the court of pure reason; and though it decides nothing there either, it nevertheless preserves undefiled the indeterminate idea (of a will good in itself) for closer determination.

For the rest, I believe I may be spared a lengthy refutation of all these doctrinal systems. It is so easy, and those whose office it is to declare themselves for one of these theories (since audiences do not readily endure the suspension of judgment) have presumably themselves seen it so well that it would be mere superfluous labor. What interests us more here is to know that these principles everywhere set up nothing but heteronomy of the will as the first ground of morality, and precisely for that reason must necessarily miss their aim.

444 Everywhere, where an object of the will has to be laid at the ground in order to prescribe the rule that is to determine the will, there the rule is nothing but heteronomy; the imperative is conditioned, namely: *if* or *because* one wills this object, one ought to act thus or so; hence it can never command morally, that is, categorically. Whether the object determines the will by means of inclination, as in the principle of one's own happiness, or by means of reason directed to objects of our possible willing in general, as in the principle of perfection, the will never determines itself *immediately* by the representation of the action, but only by the incentive that the foreseen effect of the action has on the will: *I ought to do something because I will something else*; and here yet another law would have to be laid at the ground in my subject, according to which I necessarily will this something else—a law that in turn needs an imperative to limit this maxim. For since the impulse that the representation of an object possible through our powers is to exert on the will, according to the natural constitution of the subject, belongs to the nature of the subject, whether of sensibility (of inclination and taste) or of understanding and reason, which, according to the particular constitution of their nature, exercise themselves with satisfaction on an object, it would really be nature that gives the law; and as such it must not only be known and proved by experience, and hence is in itself contingent and thereby unfit to be an apodictic practical rule, such as the moral rule must

be, but it is *always only heteronomy* of the will: the will does not give itself the law, but a foreign impulse gives it the law by means of a nature of the subject attuned to its receptivity.

The absolutely good will, whose principle must be a categorical imperative, will therefore, indeterminate in regard to all objects, contain merely the *form of willing* in general; and indeed as autonomy, that is, the fitness of the maxim of every good will to make itself into a universal law, is itself the sole law that the will of every rational being imposes on itself, without laying under it any incentive or interest whatsoever as its ground.

How such a synthetic practical proposition is possible a priori and why it is necessary is a problem whose solution no longer lies within the bounds of the metaphysics of morals, nor have we

445 asserted its truth here, still less pretended to have a proof of it in our power. We showed only, by developing the concept of morality that is once generally current, that an autonomy of the will unavoidably attaches to it, or rather lies at its ground. Whoever therefore holds morality to be something, and not a chimerical idea without truth, must at the same time concede the principle of it that has been cited. This section was thus, just like the first, merely analytic. That morality is no figment—which then follows if the categorical imperative, and with it the autonomy of the will, is true and as an a priori principle absolutely necessary—requires a *possible synthetic use of pure practical reason*, which we may not venture upon, however, without first prefixing a *critique* of this faculty of reason itself, whose main features, sufficient for our purpose, we have to present in the last section.

Section III



446 Third Section.

Transition from the metaphysics of morals to the critique of pure practical reason.

The concept of freedom is the key to the explanation of the autonomy of the will.

The *will* is a kind of causality of living beings, insofar as they are rational, and *freedom* would be that property of this causality by which it can be effective independently of foreign causes *determining* it, just as *natural necessity* is the property of the causality of all nonrational beings by which they are determined to activity through the influence of foreign causes.

The explanation of freedom that has been given is *negative* and therefore, for the purpose of seeing its essence, unfruitful; but there flows from it a *positive* concept of it, which is all the richer and more fruitful. Since the concept of a causality carries with it that of *laws* according to which something must be posited through something we call a cause, namely the consequence, freedom is therefore, though it is not a property of the will under natural laws, by no means lawless for that reason, but must rather be a causality according to immutable laws, though of a special kind; for otherwise a free will would be a thing of no account. Natural necessity was a heteronomy of efficient causes; for every effect was possible only according to the law that something else determined the efficient cause to causality; what, then, can the freedom

447 of the will be other than autonomy, that is, the property of the will to be a law to itself? But the proposition: the will is in all its actions a law to itself, designates only the principle of acting on no other maxim than one that can also have itself as a universal law for its object. But this is precisely the formula of the categorical imperative and the principle of morality: thus a free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same.

If, then, freedom of the will is presupposed, morality together with its principle follows from it by mere analysis of its concept. Yet the latter is always a synthetic proposition after all: an absolutely good will is one whose maxim can always contain itself, regarded as a universal law, within itself; for by analysis of the concept of an absolutely good will that property of the maxim cannot be found. Such synthetic propositions, however, are possible only because two cognitions are connected with each other through their connection with a third, in which they are both to be found. The *positive* concept of freedom brings about this third, which cannot, as in the case of physical causes, be the nature of the world of sense (in whose concept the concepts of something as cause come together in relation to *something else* as effect). What this third is, to which freedom points us and of which we have an idea a priori, cannot yet be indicated here straightaway, nor can the deduction of the concept of freedom be made comprehensible from pure practical reason, and with it also the possibility of a categorical imperative; but it still needs some preparation.

Freedom must be presupposed as a property of the will of all rational beings.

It is not enough that we ascribe freedom to our will, for whatever reason, if we do not also have sufficient ground to attribute the very same freedom to all rational beings. For since morality serves as a law for us only as for *rational* beings, it must also hold for all rational beings; and since it must be derived solely from the property of freedom, freedom must also be proved as a property of the will of all rational beings; and it is not enough to derive it from certain supposed experiences

448 of human nature (although this is also absolutely impossible and can be proved solely a priori); rather, one must prove it as belonging to the activity of rational beings endowed with a will in general. I now say: every being that can act in no other way than *under the idea of freedom* is, precisely for that reason, really free in a practical respect, that is, all laws that are inseparably bound up with freedom hold for it, just as if its will were also declared free in itself and validly in theoretical philosophy*). Now I assert: we must necessarily lend to every rational being that has a will also the idea of freedom, under which alone it acts. For in such a being we think a reason that is practical, that is, that has causality in regard to its objects. Now one cannot possibly think a reason that with its own consciousness received steering from elsewhere in regard to its judgments; for then the subject would ascribe the determination of its judgment not to its reason but to an impulse. It must regard itself as the author of its principles independently of foreign influences; consequently, as practical reason, or as the will of a rational being, it must be regarded by itself as free; that is, the will of such a being can be an own will only under the idea of freedom, and must therefore be attributed to all rational beings in a practical respect.

Of the interest that attaches to the ideas of morality.

We have finally traced the determinate concept of morality back to the idea of freedom; but this idea we could not prove as something real, not even in ourselves and in human nature; we

*) This route—of assuming freedom, for our purpose, only as something that rational beings merely lay at the ground in the idea for their actions—I take because I would thereby not have to make myself obliged to prove freedom also in its theoretical respect. For even if this latter is left undecided, the same laws still hold for a being that can act in no other way than under the idea of its own freedom, as would bind a being that were really free. We can therefore here relieve ourselves of the burden that presses on theory.

449 saw only that we must presuppose it if we want to think ourselves a being as rational and as endowed with consciousness of its causality in regard to actions, that is, with a will; and so we find that on the very same ground we must

attribute to every being endowed with reason and will this property of determining itself to action under the idea of its freedom.

But from the presupposition of these ideas there also flowed the consciousness of a law of acting: that the subjective principles of actions, that is, maxims, must always be taken in such a way that they can also hold objectively, that is, universally, as principles, and hence can serve for our own universal legislation. But why, then, ought I to subject myself to this principle, and indeed as a rational being in general, and thereby also subject all other beings endowed with reason? I will concede that no interest *drives* me to this, for that would not yield a categorical imperative; but I must nevertheless necessarily *take* an interest in it, and see how that comes about; for this ought is properly a willing that holds under the condition for every rational being if reason in it were practical without hindrances; for beings that, like us, are still affected by sensibility as incentives of another kind, and in whom what reason would do of itself alone does not always happen, that necessity of the action is called only an ought, and the subjective necessity is distinguished from the objective.

It seems, then, as if we in the idea of freedom actually presuppose only the moral law, namely the principle of the autonomy of the will itself, and could not prove its reality and objective necessity on its own; and then we would indeed have still gained something quite considerable, in that we would have determined the authentic principle more precisely than has perhaps otherwise been done; but in regard to its validity and the practical necessity of subjecting oneself to it, we would have come no further; for to anyone who asked us why the universal validity of our maxim, as a law, must be the limiting condition of our actions, and on what we ground the worth that we attach to this way of acting, which is supposed to be so great that there can be no higher interest anywhere, and how it comes about that the human being thereby alone gains his personal worth

450 that he believes he feels, in comparison with which that of an agreeable or disagreeable state is to be counted as nothing—to that person we could give no satisfactory answer.

We do indeed find that we can take an interest in a personal quality that carries with it no interest of condition, if that quality only makes us capable of partaking of the latter, in case reason should effect the distribution of it, that is, that the mere worthiness to be happy can, even without the motive of becoming partaker of this happiness, be interesting in itself: but this judgment is in fact only the effect of the importance of moral laws that is already presupposed (if we separate ourselves by the idea of freedom from all empirical interest); but that we do separate ourselves from it, that is, regard ourselves as free in acting and yet hold ourselves subject to certain laws in order to find a worth merely in our person that could compensate us for all loss of what gives our condition a worth, and how this is possible, hence *from what source the moral law binds*, we cannot in this way yet see.

Here there shows itself, one must freely admit, a kind of circle from which, as it seems, there is no way out. We assume ourselves as free in the order of efficient causes in order to think ourselves under moral laws in the order of ends, and we afterwards think ourselves as subject to these laws because we have attributed freedom of the will to ourselves; for freedom and the will's own legislation are both autonomy, hence interchangeable concepts, one of which therefore just for that reason cannot be used to explain the other and to state a ground for it, but at most only in order, in a logical respect, to bring apparently different representations of one and the same object under a single concept (as different fractions of equal content under the smallest expressions).

One way out still remains to us, namely to inquire whether we do not take a different standpoint when we think ourselves through freedom as causes effective a priori than when we represent ourselves, according to our actions, as effects that we see before our eyes.

It is an observation for which no subtle reflection will be required, but of which one may assume that even the commonest understanding, though in its way, by a dark distinction

451 of the power of judgment, which he calls feeling: that all representations that come to us without our choice (such as those of the senses) make objects known to us only as they affect us, while what they may be in themselves remains unknown to us; hence that, in regard to this kind of representation, even with the most strenuous attention and distinctness that the understanding can ever add, we still attain only to cognition of *appearances*, never of *things in themselves*. As soon as this distinction has once been made (possibly merely through the noted difference between the representations that are given to us from elsewhere and in which we are passive, and those that we produce solely out of ourselves and in which we prove our activity), it follows of itself that one must concede and assume that behind the appearances there is still something else, which is not appearance, namely things in themselves; although we freely admit that, since they can never become known to us, but always only as they affect us, we cannot come closer to them and can never know what they are in themselves. This must furnish a, though crude, distinction of a *world of sense* from a *world of the understanding*, of which the former can be very different according to the diversity of sensibility in various spectators of the world, while the latter, which lies at its ground, always remains the same. Even himself, and indeed according to the cognition that the human being has of himself through inner sensation, he may not presume to know as he is in himself. For since he does not, as it were, create himself and does not obtain his concept a priori but empirically, it is natural that he can gather intelligence about himself also only through inner sense and consequently only through the appearance of his nature and the manner in which his consciousness is affected; while he must nevertheless necessarily assume something else lying at the ground of this constitution of his own subject, composed as it is of nothing but appearances, namely his I as it may be constituted in itself, and thus must count himself, in respect of mere perception and receptivity for sensations, to the *world of sense*, but in respect of that in him which may be pure activity (of that which comes to consciousness not through affection of the senses at all, but immediately), to the *intellectual* world, which, however, he does not know any further. Such an inference must the reflecting human being draw concerning all things,

452 that may come before him; presumably it is also to be met with in the commonest understanding, which, as is well known, is very inclined to expect behind the objects of the senses always still something invisible that is active for itself, but then spoils this again by soon re-sensualizing this invisible thing, that is, by wanting to make it an object of intuition, and thereby becoming not one degree wiser.

Now the human being really finds in himself a faculty by which he distinguishes himself from all other things, indeed even from himself insofar as he is affected by objects, and that is *reason*. This, as pure self-activity, is even raised above the *understanding* in this respect: that although the latter is also self-activity and, unlike sense, does not contain merely representations that arise only when one is affected by things (hence passive), it nevertheless can produce from its activity no other concepts than those that serve merely to *bring sensible representations under rules* and thereby to unite them in one consciousness, without which use of sensibility it would think nothing at all; whereas reason, under the name of ideas, displays a spontaneity so pure that it thereby goes far beyond everything that sensibility can ever supply it, and proves its foremost business to consist in distinguishing the world of sense from the world of understanding, and thereby in marking out for the understanding itself its boundaries.

For this reason a rational being must regard itself as an *intelligence* (thus not from the side of its lower powers), as belonging not to the world of sense but to the world of understanding; hence it has two standpoints from which it can consider itself and cognize laws of the use of its powers, and consequently of all its actions: *first*, insofar as it belongs to the world of sense, under laws of nature (heteronomy); *second*, as belonging to the intelligible world, under laws that, independent of nature, are not empirical but grounded merely in reason.

As a rational, and hence as a being belonging to the intelligible world, the human being can never think the causality of his own will otherwise than under the idea of freedom; for independence from the determining causes of the world of sense (such as reason must always attribute to itself) is freedom.

Now with the idea of freedom the concept of *autonomy* is inseparably bound up, and with this the universal principle of morality, which in the idea lies at the ground of all actions

453 of *rational* beings, just as the law of nature lies at the ground of all appearances. Now the suspicion we raised above is removed, as though there were contained in our inference from freedom to autonomy, and from the latter to the moral law, a secret circle, namely that we perhaps laid the idea of freedom at the ground only for the sake of the moral law, in order to infer this afterwards again from freedom, and hence could give no ground at all for it, but only begged a principle that well-disposed souls will gladly concede, but which we could never set up as a demonstrable proposition. For now we see that, if we think ourselves as free, we transfer ourselves as members into the world of understanding and cognize the autonomy of the will together with its consequence, morality; but if we think ourselves as obliged, we consider ourselves as belonging to the world of sense and yet at the same time to the world of understanding.

How is a categorical imperative possible?

The rational being counts itself, as an intelligence, to the world of understanding, and merely as an efficient cause belonging to that world does it call its causality a *will*. On the other side it is nevertheless also conscious of itself as a piece of the world of sense, in which its actions are met with as mere appearances of that causality whose possibility, however, cannot be seen from that causality, which we do not know; rather, in its place those actions must be seen as determined by other appearances, namely desires and inclinations, as belonging to the world of sense. As a mere member of the world of understanding, all my actions would therefore be perfectly in accordance with the principle of the autonomy of the pure will; as a mere piece of the world of sense, they would have to be taken as wholly in accordance with the natural law of desires and inclinations, hence with the heteronomy of nature. (The former would rest on the supreme principle of morality, the latter on that of happiness.) But because *the world of understanding contains the ground of the world of sense, hence also of*

the laws of the latter, and is therefore immediately legislating in regard to my will (which belongs wholly to the world of understanding), and thus must also be thought as such, I shall therefore, as an intelligence, although on the other side like a being belonging to

454 the world of sense, nevertheless recognize myself as subject to the law of the former, that is, of reason, which in the idea of freedom contains the law of that world, and hence to the autonomy of the will; and consequently I must regard the laws of the world of understanding as imperatives for me, and actions in accordance with this principle as duties.

And thus categorical imperatives are possible, in that the idea of freedom makes me a member of an intelligible world, whereby, if I were such alone, all my actions *would* always be in accordance with the autonomy of the will, but since I at the same time intuit myself as a member of the world of sense, they *ought* to be in accordance with it—which *categorical* ought presents a synthetic proposition a priori, in that to my will affected by sensible desires there is added the idea of the very same will, but belonging to the world of understanding, a pure will that is practical for itself alone, which contains the supreme condition of the former according to reason; roughly as to the intuitions of the world of sense there are added concepts of the understanding, which for themselves signify nothing but lawful form in general, and thereby make possible synthetic propositions a priori, on which all cognition of a nature rests.

The practical use of common human reason confirms the correctness of this deduction. There is no one, even the most hardened villain, if only he is otherwise accustomed to use reason, who, when examples of honesty in intentions, of steadfastness in following good maxims, of sympathy and general benevolence (and these moreover combined with great sacrifices of advantages and comforts) are set before him, does not wish that he too might be so disposed. But he cannot well bring this about in himself only because of his inclinations and impulses, while he at the same time wishes to be free of such inclinations as are burdensome to himself. He therefore proves by this that he transfers himself in thought, with a will free from impulses of sensibility, into a wholly dif-

ferent order of things than that of his desires in the field of sensibility, since from that wish he can expect no gratification of desires, hence no state satisfying any of his actual or otherwise conceivable inclinations (for thereby the very idea that entices this wish from him would lose its preeminence), but only a greater inner worth of his person. This better person

455 he believes himself to be, however, when he places himself at the standpoint of a member of the world of understanding, to which the idea of freedom, that is, independence from *determining* causes of the world of sense, involuntarily compels him, and in which he is conscious of a good will that, for his evil will as a member of the world of sense, constitutes by his own confession the law whose authority he knows by transgressing it. The moral ought is therefore his own necessary willing as a member of an intelligible world, and is thought by him as an ought only insofar as he at the same time regards himself as a member of the world of sense.

Of the extreme boundary of all practical philosophy.

All human beings think of themselves, in regard to the will, as free. Hence come all judgments about actions as such as *ought to have happened*, although they *did not happen*. Yet this freedom is no concept of experience and cannot be one either, because it always remains, although experience shows the opposite of those demands that are represented as necessary under its presupposition. On the other hand it is just as necessary that everything that happens be inevitably determined according to laws of nature, and this natural necessity is also no concept of experience, precisely because it carries with it the concept of necessity, hence a cognition a priori. But this concept of a nature is confirmed by experience and must itself be unavoidably presupposed if experience, that is, a cognition of the objects of the senses connected according to universal laws, is to be possible. Hence freedom is only an idea of reason, whose objective reality is in itself doubtful, whereas nature is a *concept of the understanding*, which proves its reality, and must necessarily prove it, on examples of experience.

Now although a dialectic of reason arises from this, since in regard to the will the freedom attributed to it seems to stand in contradiction with natural necessity, and at this parting of the ways reason in a *speculative* respect finds the path of natural necessity much more traveled and more serviceable than that of freedom: yet in a *practical* respect the footpath of freedom is the only one on which it is possible to make use of one's reason in our doing and omitting

456 at all; hence it will be as impossible for the subtlest philosophy as for the commonest human reason to reason freedom away. It must therefore well presuppose that no true contradiction will be met with between freedom and natural necessity in the very same human actions, for it can give up the concept of nature just as little as that of freedom.

Meanwhile this seeming contradiction must at least be destroyed in a convincing manner, even if one could never comprehend how freedom is possible. For if even the thought of freedom contradicted itself, or contradicted nature, which is equally necessary, then freedom would have to be wholly abandoned in the face of natural necessity.

But it is impossible to escape this contradiction if the subject that deems itself free thinks itself *in the same sense*, or *in the very same relation*, when it calls itself free, as when it assumes itself, in regard to the very same action, to be subject to the law of nature. Hence it is an inexorable task of speculative philosophy at least to show that its illusion about this contradiction rests on this, that we think the human being in another sense and relation when we call him free than when we hold him to be a piece of nature subject to its laws, and that both can not only very well coexist, but must also be thought as *necessarily united* in the same subject, because otherwise no ground could be given why we should burden reason with an idea that, although it can be united *without contradiction* with another sufficiently attested one, nevertheless entangles us in a business by which reason is much pressed hard in its theoretical use. But this duty falls merely to speculative philosophy, so that it may clear a free path for the practical. It is therefore not left to the philosopher's discretion whether he will remove the apparent conflict or leave it untouched; for in the latter case the the-

ory about it is a *bonum vacans*, into possession of which the fatalist can with good reason put himself and drive all morality out of its supposed property held without title.

Yet one cannot here say that the boundary of practical philosophy begins. For that settlement of the dispute does not belong to it at all; it demands only of speculative reason that the latter settle the discord in which it entangles itself in theoretical questions,

457 to an end, so that practical reason may have rest and security against external attacks that could dispute the ground on which it wants to build.

But the rightful claim even of common human reason to freedom of the will is grounded on the consciousness and the conceded presupposition of the independence of reason from merely subjectively determining causes, which altogether make up what belongs merely to sensation, hence under the general designation of sensibility. The human being who regards himself in this way as an intelligence thereby places himself in another order of things and in a relation to determining grounds of a wholly different kind when he thinks himself as an intelligence endowed with a will, and hence with causality, than when he perceives himself as a phenomenon in the world of sense (which he truly also is) and subjects his causality to external determination according to laws of nature. Now he soon becomes aware that both can take place at the same time, indeed must. For that a *thing in appearance* (as belonging to the world of sense) is subject to certain laws, of which the very same thing as *thing* or being *in itself* is independent, contains not the least contradiction; that he must, however, represent and think himself in this twofold manner rests, as regards the first, on the consciousness of himself as an object affected through the senses, and as regards the second, on the consciousness of himself as an intelligence, that is, as independent in the use of reason from sensible impressions (hence as belonging to the world of understanding).

Hence it comes about that the human being arrogates to himself a will that lets nothing count on its account that belongs merely to his desires and inclinations, and on the other hand thinks of actions as possible through himself,

indeed even as necessary, which can happen only by setting aside all desires and sensible incitements. The causality of these lies in him as an intelligence, and in the laws of effects and actions according to principles of an intelligible world, of which he indeed knows nothing further than that in it reason alone, and indeed pure reason independent of sensibility, gives the law; and likewise, since there he is as an intelligence the proper self (as a human being, by contrast, only an appearance of himself), those laws concern him immediately and categorically, so that what desires and impulses (hence the whole nature of the world of sense) incite to can never be contrary to the laws of his willing as an intelligence

458 do any harm, so much so that he does not answer for the former and does not ascribe it to his proper self, that is, to his will, though he does ascribe to it the indulgence he would like to bear toward them if he granted them influence on his maxims to the detriment of the rational laws of the will.

In that practical reason *thinks itself* into a world of understanding, it does not at all overstep its boundaries, but it does if it wanted to *look into it* or *feel its way into it*. The former is only a negative thought in regard to the world of sense, which gives reason no laws in determining the will, and is positive only in this single point, that that freedom as a negative determination is at the same time bound up with a (positive) power and even with a causality of reason, which we call a will, so to act that the principle of actions be in accordance with the essential constitution of a rational cause, that is, with the condition of the universal validity of the maxim as a law. But if it wanted to fetch from the world of understanding even an *object of the will*, that is, a moving cause, it would overstep its boundaries and presume to know something of which it knows nothing. The concept of a world of understanding is therefore only a *standpoint* that reason sees itself compelled to take outside the appearances in order to *think itself as practical*—which would not be possible if the influences of sensibility were determining for the human being, but which is nevertheless necessary unless one is to deny him the consciousness of himself as an intelligence, hence as a rational cause acting through reason, that is, as freely effective. This thought indeed brings with it the idea of another order and legislation

than that of the mechanism of nature, which affects the world of sense, and makes necessary the concept of an intelligible world (that is, the whole of rational beings as things in themselves), but without the least presumption of thinking anything more here than according to its *formal* condition, that is, the universality of the maxim of the will as a law, hence the autonomy of the latter, which alone can consist with its freedom; whereas all laws that are determined to an object give heteronomy, which is met with only in laws of nature and can also affect only the world of sense.

But then reason would overstep all its bounds if it undertook to *explain how* pure reason can be practical,

459 which would be wholly the same as the task of explaining *how freedom is possible*.

For we can explain nothing except what we can trace back to laws whose object can be given in some possible experience. Freedom, however, is a mere idea, whose objective reality can in no way be demonstrated according to laws of nature, and hence not in any possible experience either; and therefore, because no example can ever be subsumed under it by any analogy, it can never be comprehended, nor even merely seen into. It holds only as a necessary presupposition of reason in a being that believes itself conscious of a will, that is, of a power still distinct from the mere faculty of desire (namely of determining itself to action as an intelligence, hence according to laws of reason independently of natural instincts). But where determination according to laws of nature ceases, there too all *explanation* ceases, and nothing remains but *defense*, that is, the driving off of the objections of those who claim to have looked deeper into the essence of things and therefore boldly declare freedom to be impossible. One can only show them that the contradiction they supposedly discovered in it lies nowhere else than in this, that in order to make the law of nature valid in regard to human actions they had to regard the human being necessarily as appearance; and now, when it is demanded of them that they should think him as an intelligence also as a thing in itself, they still always regard him even there as appearance—where then, to be sure, the separation of

his causality (that is, of his will) from all laws of nature of the world of sense would stand in contradiction in one and the same subject; but this contradiction falls away if they would bethink themselves and, as is fair, admit that behind the appearances the things in themselves must after all (though hidden) lie at the ground, of whose laws of effect one cannot demand that they should be one and the same with those under which their appearances stand.

The subjective impossibility of *explaining* the freedom of the will is of a piece with the impossibility of discovering and making comprehensible an *interest* *)

*) Interest is that through which reason becomes practical, that is, becomes a cause determining the will. Hence one says only of a rational being that it takes an interest in something; nonrational creatures feel only sensible impulses. An immediate interest reason takes in an action only when the universal validity of its maxim is a sufficient determining ground of the will. Such an interest alone is pure. But if reason can determine the will only by means of another object of desire, or under the presupposition of a particular feeling of the subject, then reason takes only a mediate interest in the action; and since reason by itself alone can discover neither objects of the will nor a particular feeling lying at its ground without experience, the latter interest would be only empirical and no pure interest of reason. The logical interest of reason (to further its insights) is never immediate, but presupposes aims of its use.

460 which the human being can take in moral laws, is one and the same; and yet he really does take an interest in them, for which we call the foundation in us moral feeling, which some have falsely put forward as the standard of our moral judgment, whereas it must rather be regarded as the *subjective* effect that the law exercises on the will, to which reason alone supplies the objective grounds.

To will what reason alone prescribes as an ought to the sensibly affected rational being, there is indeed required a power of reason to *infuse a feeling of pleasure* or of satisfaction in the fulfillment of duty, hence a causality of reason to determine sensibility in accordance with its principles. But it is wholly impossible to see, that is, to make comprehensible a priori, how a mere thought that itself contains nothing sensible produces a sensation of pleasure or displeasure;

for that is a special kind of causality, of which, as of all causality, we can determine nothing a priori, but must therefore alone consult experience. But since experience can supply no relation of cause to effect other than between two objects of experience, and here pure reason is supposed, through mere ideas (which yield no object for experience), to be the cause of an effect that indeed lies in experience, the explanation of how and why the *universality of the maxim as a law*, hence morality, interests us is wholly impossible for us human beings. This much only is certain: that it does not have validity for us *because it interests* (for that would be heteronomy and dependence of practical reason on sensibility, namely

⁴⁶¹ on a feeling lying at its ground, in which case it could never be morally legislating), but that it interests because it holds for us as human beings, since it has sprung from our will as intelligence, hence from our proper self; *but what belongs to mere appearance is necessarily subordinated by reason to the constitution of the thing in itself.*

The question, then, how a categorical imperative is possible, can indeed be answered so far as one can state the sole presupposition under which it alone is possible, namely the idea of freedom, and likewise so far as one can see the necessity of this presupposition, which is sufficient for the *practical use* of reason, that is, for conviction of the *validity of this imperative*, and hence also of the moral law; but how this presupposition itself is possible can never be seen through by any human reason. But under the presupposition of the freedom of the will of an intelligence, the *autonomy* of that will, as the formal condition under which alone it can be determined, is a necessary consequence. To presuppose this freedom of the will is also not only quite *possible* (without falling into contradiction with the principle of natural necessity in the connection of the appearances of the world of sense), as speculative philosophy can show, but it is also *necessary* without further condition for a rational being that is conscious of its causality through reason, hence of a will (which is distinct from desires), to lay it practically, that is, in the idea, at the ground of all its arbitrary actions. But how pure reason can be practical for itself without other incentives that may be

taken from anywhere else, that is, how the mere *principle of the universal validity of all its maxims as laws* (which would indeed be the form of a pure practical reason), without any matter (object) of the will in which one might beforehand take some interest, can for itself furnish an incentive and bring about an interest that would be called purely *moral*, or in other words, *how pure reason can be practical*—to explain this, all human reason is wholly incapable, and all effort and labor spent in seeking an explanation of it is lost.

It is just the same as if I sought to fathom how freedom itself as the causality of a will is possible. For there I leave the philosophical

462 ground of explanation and have no other. I could indeed now rove about in the intelligible world that still remains to me, in the world of intelligences; but although I have an *idea* of it that has its good ground, I nevertheless have not the least *cognition* of it, and can never attain to such cognition through all the striving of my natural faculty of reason. It signifies only a something that remains when I have excluded everything belonging to the world of sense from the determining grounds of my will, merely in order to limit the principle of moving causes to the field of sensibility, by bounding it and showing that it does not comprehend everything in everything, but that beyond it there is still more; but I know nothing further of this more. Of pure reason, which thinks this ideal, there remains for me after separating off all matter, that is, cognition of objects, nothing but the form, namely the practical law of the universal validity of maxims, and in accordance with it, to think reason in relation to a pure world of understanding as a possible efficient cause, that is, as a cause determining the will; the incentive must here be wholly absent, unless this very idea of an intelligible world were itself the incentive, or that in which reason originally took an interest; but to make this comprehensible is precisely the task we cannot solve.

Here, then, is the supreme boundary of all moral inquiry, which is of great importance to determine also for this reason: that reason may not, on the one hand, in the world of sense, search about in a manner harmful to morals for the supreme moving cause and for a comprehensible but empirical interest, and, on

the other hand, that it may not in the space of transcendent concepts, empty for it, under the name of the intelligible world, beat its wings powerlessly without getting from the spot, and lose itself among figments. For the rest, the idea of a pure world of understanding as a whole of all intelligences, to which we ourselves belong as rational beings (though on the other side at the same time as members of the world of sense), always remains a serviceable and permitted idea for the purpose of a rational faith, even though all knowledge comes to an end at its boundary, in order, through the glorious ideal of a universal realm of *ends in themselves* (of rational beings), to which we can belong as members only when we carefully

- 463 conduct ourselves according to maxims of freedom as if they were laws of nature, and to bring about a lively interest in the moral law within us.

Concluding remark.

The speculative use of reason *in regard to nature* leads to the absolute necessity of some supreme cause of the *world*; the practical use of reason *with a view to freedom* leads also to absolute necessity, but only of the *laws of the actions* of a rational being as such. Now it is an essential *principle* of all use of our reason to drive its cognition to the consciousness of its *necessity* (for without this it would not be cognition of reason). But it is also an equally essential *limitation* of the very same reason that it can see the *necessity* neither of what is or happens, nor of what ought to happen, unless a *condition* under which it is or happens or ought to happen is laid at the ground. But in this way the satisfaction of reason is only ever further postponed by the constant inquiry after the condition. Hence it restlessly seeks the unconditionally necessary and sees itself compelled to assume it, without any means of making it comprehensible to itself, happy enough if only it can find out the concept that can be reconciled with this presupposition. It is therefore no censure of our deduction of the supreme principle of morality, but a reproach that one would have to make to human reason in general, that it cannot make an unconditioned practical law (such as the categorical imperative must be) comprehensible in its absolute necessity; for that it will not do this by means of a condition, namely by means of some interest laid

at the ground, cannot be held against it, because then it would not be a moral law, that is, a supreme law of freedom. And so we do indeed not comprehend the practical unconditional necessity of the moral imperative, but we do comprehend its *incomprehensibility*, which is all that can fairly be demanded of a philosophy that strives in principles up to the boundary of human reason.