



Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA



Aphorisms on the Wisdom of Life



ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Plain English Translation

Translated by Michael Berardi

MOUSEIA

THIS EDITION

Independent machine-assisted translation from the German, following the 1913 Ernst Ohle edition.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

Written 1851 · Philosophy

SOURCE

Original text from gutenberg.org.

Mouseia · mouseia.org

Edition dated 26 October 2026

Contents



Introduction	1
Chapter 1	3
Chapter 2	11
Chapter 3	33
Chapter 4	40
Chapter 5	87
Chapter 6	154

Introduction



Happiness is not easy to come by: it is very hard to find within ourselves, and impossible to find anywhere else.

Chamfort.

Here I use the term wisdom in living entirely in a this-worldly sense. I mean the art of getting through life as pleasantly and happily as possible. A guide to this art could also be called eudemonology: an instruction in how to lead a happy life. Such a life might in turn be defined as one that, viewed purely objectively—or rather, since this calls for a subjective judgment, after calm and careful thought—would be decidedly preferable to not existing. This definition implies that we would cling to it for its own sake, not just from fear of death. And this in turn implies that we would want it to last forever. Whether human life meets the definition of such an existence, or can even possibly meet it, is a question that my philosophy, as is well known, answers in the negative. Eudemonology, on the other hand, assumes an affirmative answer. It rests precisely on the inborn error whose criticism opens chapter 49 in volume 2 of my main work. To work out such a guide nonetheless, I have therefore had to abandon entirely the higher, metaphysical and ethical standpoint to which my actual philosophy leads. Consequently, the whole discussion I am about to offer rests, in a sense, on an accommodation: it stays with the ordinary, empirical standpoint and retains its error. Its value can therefore only be conditional,

since even the word eudemonology is merely a euphemism.—Nor does it claim to be complete. The subject is inexhaustible, and otherwise I would also have had to repeat what others have already said.

The only book I recall being written with an aim like that of these aphorisms is the very worthwhile book by *Cardanus*, *On Drawing Benefit from Adversity*. It can therefore supplement what is given here. *Aristotle* too included a short account of happiness in chapter 5 of book 1 of his *Rhetoric*, but it turned out very dry. I have not drawn on these predecessors. Compiling is not my business, all the more so because it destroys the unity of outlook that gives works of this kind their life.—In general, of course, the wise in every age have always said the same thing. And fools—that is, the immeasurably large majority in every age—have always done the same thing, namely the opposite. That is how it will continue. So *Voltaire* says: *We will leave this world just as foolish and just as wicked as we found it when we arrived.*

Chapter 1



Basic division.

Aristotle (Eth. Nicom. I, 8) divided the good things in human life into three classes: external goods, goods of the soul, and goods of the body. Keeping nothing from this division but the number three, I say that the differences in the lot of mortals can be traced to three basic categories. They are:

- ¹ What a person *is*: their personality, in the broadest sense. This includes health, strength, beauty, temperament, moral character, intelligence, and the development of that intelligence.
- ² What a person *has*: property and possessions of every kind.
- ³ What a person *represents*: this expression commonly means what a person is in other people's minds—how others *picture them*. It therefore consists in other people's opinion of them, and falls into honor, rank, and fame.

The differences to be considered under the first heading are those that nature itself has placed between people. That already suggests that their effect on happiness or unhappiness will be much more fundamental and far-reaching than the differences under the next two headings, which arise merely from human arrangements. All advantages of rank, birth—even royal birth—wealth, and the like compare with *genuine personal advantages*, a great mind or a great heart, as stage kings compare with real ones. Already *Metrodorus*, Epicurus's first pupil,

gave a chapter this title: The cause of happiness that lies in us is greater than the cause that comes from circumstances. (*The cause of happiness that comes from ourselves is greater than the one that arises from things.*—See Clemens Alex. Strom. II, 21, p. 362 of the Würzburg edition of the opp. polem.) And indeed, what matters most for a person's well-being, and for their whole way of existing, is clearly what exists or takes place within them. This is the immediate seat of inner comfort or discomfort, which results first of all from feeling, willing, and thinking. Everything outside us influences it only indirectly. So the same outward events or conditions affect each person quite differently. Even in identical surroundings, everyone lives in a different world. Each person deals directly only with their own ideas, feelings, and impulses of will. External things influence them only by bringing these about. The world each person lives in depends first of all on how they understand it, and thus varies with the differences between minds. Depending on those differences, it will be poor, dull, and shallow, or rich, interesting, and full of meaning. For example, someone who envies another person for the interesting events in their life should instead envy their power of understanding. That is what gave those events the significance they have in the person's account. The very event that looks so interesting in an intelligent mind would, in a shallow, ordinary mind, be only a dull scene from everyday life. This is particularly clear in some poems by Goethe and Byron that are plainly based on real events. A foolish reader may envy the poet for the delightful experience instead of envying the powerful imagination that could make something so great and beautiful out of a fairly ordinary incident. Similarly, a melancholic person sees a tragic scene where a cheerful person sees only an interesting conflict and an unemotional person sees something insignificant. All this rests on the fact that every reality—that is, every fully experienced present—consists of two halves, the subject and the object. They are, however, as necessarily and closely connected as oxygen and hydrogen in water. So if the objective half is exactly the same but the subjective half differs, the present reality is entirely different, just as it is in the reverse case. The finest and best objective half, combined with a dull, poor subjective half, still produces only a poor reality and present experience. It is like a beautiful

landscape in bad weather, or its image in a poor *camera obscura*. To put it more plainly: everyone is enclosed in their consciousness as in their skin, and lives directly only within it. That is why little can be done for them from outside. Onstage, one actor plays the prince, another the councilor, a third the servant or soldier or general, and so on. But these differences exist only on the surface. Inside, at the core of each appearance, there is the same thing: a poor actor with his troubles and hardships. Life is like that too. Differences in rank and wealth give each person a role to play. But no corresponding inner difference in happiness and contentment necessarily goes with it. Here too, inside everyone is the same poor fellow with his hardships and troubles. Their subject matter may differ from one person to another, but their form—that is, their real nature—is much the same in everyone. There are differences of degree, but these by no means follow status and wealth, that is, the role. Everything that exists or happens for a person is always immediately present only in their *consciousness* and happens for it. Clearly, then, the nature of consciousness itself is what matters most. In most cases it counts for more than the forms that appear within it. All the splendor and pleasures reflected in a fool's dull consciousness are very poor beside the consciousness of *Cervantes* as he wrote Don Quixote in an uncomfortable prison.—The objective half of the present and of reality is in the hands of fate, and is therefore changeable. We ourselves are the subjective half, so it is essentially unchangeable. Accordingly, despite all outward changes, each person's life keeps the same character throughout. It can be compared to a series of variations on *one* theme. No one can escape their own individuality. An animal, whatever conditions it is placed in, remains confined to the narrow circle nature has irrevocably drawn for its being. For example, our efforts to make a beloved animal happy must always stay within narrow limits, precisely because of these limits to its being and consciousness. The same holds for human beings: their individuality sets the measure of their possible happiness in advance. In particular, the limits of their mental powers fix once and for all their capacity for higher enjoyment. If those limits are narrow, no outside efforts, nothing that people or good fortune do for them, can lift them above the measure of ordinary, half-animal human happiness and comfort. They

remain dependent on sensual pleasure, a cozy and cheerful family life, low-level social company, and commonplace amusements. Even education can do little overall to widen that circle, though it can do something. For the highest, most varied, and most lasting pleasures are intellectual, however much we may deceive ourselves about this in our youth. And these depend chiefly on mental power.—This makes it clear how much our happiness depends on what we *are*, on our individuality. Yet people usually consider only our fate, only what we *have* or what we *represent*. But fate can improve, and someone with inner wealth will not ask much of it anyway. A fool, by contrast, remains a fool, and a dull blockhead remains a dull blockhead to the end, even in paradise surrounded by houris. That is why Goethe says:

People, servants, and conquerors

Admit it in every age:

The greatest happiness of earth's children

Is simply personality.

W. O. Divan.

Everything confirms that the subjective matters far more to our happiness and enjoyment than the objective. This ranges from the fact that hunger is the best cook and an old man looks indifferently at a young man's goddess, all the way up to the life of a genius or a saint. Health in particular outweighs all external goods so greatly that a healthy beggar really is happier than a sick king. A calm, cheerful temperament arising from perfect health and a well-made constitution; a clear, lively, penetrating mind that understands correctly; a moderate, gentle will and therefore a good conscience: these are advantages no rank or wealth can replace. What someone is in themselves, what accompanies them into solitude and what no one can give them or take away, plainly matters more to them than everything they may possess or may be in other people's eyes. A person with an active mind finds excellent entertainment in their own thoughts and imaginings, even in complete solitude. A dull person, on the other hand, cannot escape agonizing boredom through an endless change of parties, shows, outings, and amusements. A good, moderate, gentle character can be content in poor circumstances. A greedy, envious, or malicious character cannot be

content even with all the wealth in the world. And for someone who constantly enjoys an exceptional, intellectually outstanding individuality, most of the pleasures people generally seek are completely unnecessary, indeed only distracting and burdensome. That is why Horace says of himself:

Gems, marble, ivory, Etruscan statuettes, paintings,
Silver, clothes dyed with Gaetulian purple:

Some have none of these; one does not care to have them;

and Socrates, seeing luxury goods displayed for sale, said, "How many things there are that I do not need." So what we *are*, our personality, is absolutely the first and most important thing for our happiness in life. This is already true because it is constantly at work under all circumstances. Besides, unlike the goods in the other two categories, it is not subject to fate and cannot be snatched away from us. In that sense its value can be called absolute, as opposed to the merely relative value of the other two. It follows that a person is much less open to influence from outside than people tend to think. Only all-powerful time asserts its rights here too. Physical and mental advantages gradually yield to it; moral character alone remains beyond its reach. In this respect, the goods in the latter two categories would admittedly have an advantage over those in the first, since time does not directly steal them away. A second advantage might be that, being objective, they are by their nature obtainable. At least the possibility of acquiring them lies open to everyone. The subjective, by contrast, is not in our power at all. It enters by *divine right* and stays fixed and unchangeable for our whole life. Here, then, the following words hold without mercy:

As on the day that gave you to the world
The sun stood to greet the planets,
You grew at once, and have kept growing,
Under the law with which you first began.
This you must be; you cannot escape yourself,
So the sibyls said, so the prophets;
And neither time nor any power can break apart
The stamped form that develops as it lives.

Goethe.

The only thing in our power here is to use our given personality to the best possible advantage. We should therefore pursue only aims that suit it, seek precisely the kind of development appropriate to it, and avoid every other kind. In short, we should choose the position, occupation, and way of life that fit it.

A man built like Hercules, gifted with unusual muscle power, may be forced by outside circumstances into a sedentary occupation, some fussy, painstaking manual task, or studies and mental work. These require quite different powers, in which he is weaker, while leaving his exceptional powers unused. Such a man will feel unhappy all his life. Still more unhappy is someone whose intellectual powers greatly predominate, but who must leave them undeveloped and unused to carry on an ordinary trade that does not need them, or even do physical labor for which his strength is not quite adequate. Here, however, especially in youth, we must avoid the pitfall of overconfidence. We must not credit ourselves with an abundance of powers we do not have.

The decisive superiority of our first category over the other two also shows that it is wiser to work at preserving health and developing abilities than at acquiring wealth. This must not be misunderstood to mean that we should neglect to earn what is necessary and suitable. But wealth in the strict sense—a great surplus—can do little for our happiness. Many rich people therefore feel unhappy because they have no real mental cultivation, no knowledge, and consequently no objective interest that might enable them to occupy their minds. What wealth can provide beyond satisfying real and natural needs has little effect on our actual well-being. Rather, our well-being is disturbed by the many unavoidable worries involved in preserving a large fortune. Nevertheless, people make a thousand times more effort to acquire wealth than to cultivate their minds. Yet what we *are* certainly contributes much more to our happiness than what we *have*. So we see many a man restlessly busy, industrious as an ant, working from morning to night to increase the wealth he already owns. He knows nothing beyond the narrow horizon of the means to this end. His mind is empty and therefore unreceptive to everything else. The highest pleasures, the intellectual ones, are closed to him. He tries in vain to replace them with the fleeting sen-

sual pleasures he allows himself now and then, which cost little time but much money. At the end of his life, if fortune has been kind, its result is indeed a very large heap of money before him. He now leaves it to his heirs to increase that heap further or to spend it. Such a life, though carried on with a thoroughly solemn and important air, is therefore just as foolish as many another life that openly took the fool's cap as its symbol.

So what a person *has in themselves* matters most for their happiness in life. As a rule, however, this is so very little that most people who have got beyond the struggle against need feel fundamentally just as unhappy as those still caught in it. Their inner emptiness, their dull consciousness, and their poverty of mind drive them into company. But the company consists of people just like them, because *like delights in like*. Together they hunt for amusement and entertainment. They seek these first in sensual pleasures, in enjoyments of every kind, and finally in excesses. The source of the ruinous extravagance through which many a rich young son of a family spends his large inheritance, often in an unbelievably short time, is really nothing but boredom. It springs from the poverty and emptiness of mind just described. Such a young man was sent into the world outwardly rich but inwardly poor. He then tried in vain to replace inner wealth with outer wealth, wanting to receive everything *from outside*—like old men who try to strengthen themselves by the bodily exhalations of young girls. In the end his inner poverty brought outward poverty as well.

I need not emphasize the importance of the other two categories of good things in human life. The value of possessions is so universally recognized today that it needs no recommendation. Compared with the second category, the third is actually rather insubstantial, since it consists only in other people's opinion. Everyone, however, should strive for honor, meaning a good name. Only those who serve the state should strive for rank, and only a very few for fame. Honor is nevertheless regarded as a priceless good, and fame as the most precious thing a person can attain, the golden fleece of the chosen few. Only fools, on the other hand, would prefer rank to possessions. The second and third categories

also stand in what is called a reciprocal relationship. Petronius's *If you have, you will be esteemed* is true; and conversely, the favorable opinion of others, in all its forms, often helps a person gain possessions.

Chapter 2



What a person is.

We have already seen in general that this contributes much more to happiness than what a person *has* or what they *represent*. What always matters is what someone is, and therefore what they have in themselves. Their individuality accompanies them always and everywhere and colors everything they experience. In everything and through everything, what they immediately enjoy is only themselves. This is true even of physical pleasures, and still more of intellectual ones. So the English expression *to enjoy one's self* is very apt. For example, people say *he enjoys himself at Paris*—not “he enjoys Paris,” but “he enjoys *himself* in Paris.”—But if someone's individuality is of poor quality, all pleasures are like fine wines in a mouth tainted with bile. So, in good times as in bad, apart from serious disasters, what matters less is what meets and befalls a person in life than how they feel it. It depends on the kind and degree of their receptiveness in every respect. What someone is within and has in themselves—in short, their personality and its value—is the only thing that directly affects their happiness and well-being. Everything else works indirectly, so its effect can be thwarted; the effect of personality never can. That is precisely why envy directed at personal advantages is the most implacable kind, as well as the most carefully concealed. Further, the nature of consciousness alone is lasting and persistent. Individuality works continually, steadily, more or less at every moment. Everything else works only at particular times, occasionally and tem-

porarily, and is itself subject to change as well. That is why Aristotle says: Nature is lasting, not possessions (*for nature endures, not wealth*). Eth. Eud. VII, 2. This is why we bear a misfortune that has come to us entirely from outside with more composure than one we caused ourselves. Fate can change, but our own nature never can. The subjective goods, then—a noble character, an able mind, a happy temperament, a cheerful spirit, and a well-formed, entirely healthy body, or generally *a sound mind in a sound body* (Juvenal. Sat. X, 356)—are the first and most important things for our happiness. We should therefore take much more care to develop and preserve them than to possess external goods and external honor.

Of all these qualities, the one that makes us happy most directly is cheerfulness. This good quality is its own immediate reward. Anyone who is cheerful always has a reason to be so: the very fact that they are cheerful. Nothing can replace every other good as completely as this quality can, while nothing can replace it. Suppose someone is young, beautiful, rich, and respected. To judge their happiness, we must ask whether they are cheerful as well. But if they are cheerful, it makes no difference whether they are young or old, straight-backed or hunch-backed, poor or rich: they are happy. In my early youth I once opened an old book and found these words: “Someone who laughs a lot is happy, and someone who cries a lot is unhappy.” This is a very simple-minded remark. Yet its simple truth has kept me from forgetting it, though it is the most extreme example of a *truism*. For this reason we should open every door to cheerfulness whenever it appears: it never comes at the wrong time. Instead, we often hesitate to let it in. First we want to know whether we really have reason to be satisfied in every respect. Or we fear it will interrupt our serious reflections and important worries. Yet it is very uncertain what these will improve, whereas cheerfulness is an immediate gain. It alone is, so to speak, the ready cash of happiness; everything else is merely a banknote. Only cheerfulness makes us happy directly in the present. That makes it the highest good for beings whose reality takes the form of an indivisible present between two infinite stretches of time. We should therefore put acquiring and fostering this good before every other aim. Now it is certain that nothing contributes less to cheerfulness than wealth,

and nothing more than health. Cheerful, contented faces are at home among the lower, working classes, especially those who work the land; disgruntled faces among the rich and distinguished. So above all we should try to preserve that high degree of perfect health of which cheerfulness is the bloom. The means are well known: avoid all excesses and indulgences, all violent or unpleasant emotions, and all excessive or prolonged mental effort; get at least two hours of brisk exercise in the open air every day; take plenty of cold baths, and adopt similar measures in your way of life. Without proper daily exercise, no one can stay healthy. To be performed properly, all life processes require movement, both of the parts in which they take place and of the whole. So Aristotle rightly says: Life consists in movement. Life consists in movement and has its being in it. Throughout the organism's interior, rapid movement goes on without stopping. The heart beats vigorously and tirelessly in its complicated double contraction and expansion. In 28 beats it has driven the entire mass of blood through the whole greater and lesser circulation. The lungs pump without pause like a steam engine. The intestines keep twisting in *peristaltic movement*. All the glands constantly absorb and secrete. Even the brain has a double movement with every heartbeat and every breath. If outward movement is almost entirely lacking, as it is in the completely sedentary lives of countless people, a glaring and harmful imbalance arises between outward rest and inward turmoil. The continual inward movement actually wants some support from outward movement. This imbalance becomes like the state in which some emotion makes us boil inside, but we are not allowed to show any of it outwardly. Even trees need the movement caused by wind if they are to thrive. Here a rule applies that can be put most briefly in Latin: *Every movement is more of a movement the faster it is.*—To see how much our happiness depends on a cheerful mood, and that mood on our health, compare the impression the same external conditions or events make on us on a day when we are healthy and vigorous with their effect when ill health has made us irritable and anxious. It is not what things objectively and really are, but what they are for us, in our understanding of them, that makes us happy or unhappy. This is just what Epictetus says: People are disturbed not by things, but by their judgments

about things (*people are troubled not by things, but by their opinions about things*). In general, 9/10 of our happiness rests on health alone. With health, everything becomes a source of pleasure. Without it, no external good of any kind can be enjoyed. Even the other subjective goods—qualities of mind, disposition, and temperament—are subdued and badly impaired by ill health. So it is with good reason that, before anything else, people ask about one another's health and wish one another well. This really is by far the main thing in human happiness. It follows that the greatest of all follies is to sacrifice health for anything whatever: money, advancement, learning, fame, let alone sensual indulgence and fleeting pleasures. Rather, everything should come second to health. But however much health contributes to the cheerfulness so essential to our happiness, cheerfulness does not depend on health alone. Even with perfect health, a melancholic temperament and a mainly gloomy mood can exist. Their ultimate cause undoubtedly lies in the original and therefore unchangeable constitution of the organism, especially in the more or less normal relation between sensitivity, muscular responsiveness, and the power of replenishing the body. An abnormal excess of sensitivity will produce uneven moods, periods of excessive cheerfulness, and predominant melancholy. Genius too depends on an excess of nervous energy, and thus of sensitivity. So Aristotle quite rightly remarked that all outstanding and superior people are melancholic: All men who have become exceptional in philosophy, politics, poetry, or the arts appear to be melancholic (Probl. 30, 1). This is undoubtedly the passage Cicero had in mind in his often-quoted statement: *Aristotle says that all people of genius are melancholic* (Tusc. I, 33). *Shakespeare* described very nicely the great inborn differences in basic mood that we are considering here:

Nature has made strange people in her time:

Some always peer out through their eyes,

And laugh like parrots at a bagpiper;

Others look so sour

That they will not show their teeth in a smile,

Even if Nestor swears the joke deserves a laugh[A].

Merch. of Ven. Sc. I.

[A] Nature has produced strange characters in her time: some who always look cheerfully out of their little eyes and laugh like parrots at a bagpiper, and others with such sour faces that they will not bare their teeth in a smile, even if Nestor himself swore that the joke deserved a laugh.

This is the very difference *Plato* means by the terms ill-tempered and good-tempered. It can be traced to the very different degrees of receptiveness to pleasant and unpleasant impressions in different people. As a result, one person still laughs at something that drives another almost to despair. As a rule, the stronger the receptiveness to unpleasant impressions, the weaker the receptiveness to pleasant ones, and vice versa. Suppose an undertaking has an equal chance of turning out well or badly. An ill-tempered person will be annoyed or grieved if it turns out badly, but will not be glad if it turns out well. A good-tempered person, on the other hand, will not be annoyed or grieved by the bad outcome, but will be pleased by the good one. If nine out of ten plans succeed for an ill-tempered person, they are not pleased about those nine but annoyed about the one that failed. In the reverse case, a good-tempered person still knows how to find comfort and encouragement in the one success.—But hardly any evil is entirely without compensation. Here too, gloomy and anxious characters will on the whole have more imaginary accidents and sufferings to get through than cheerful, carefree people, but fewer real ones. Someone who sees everything in black, always fears the worst, and takes precautions accordingly, will not have miscalculated as often as someone who always paints things in cheerful colors and sees bright prospects.—When, however, a disorder of the nervous system or digestive organs reinforces an inborn gloomy disposition, it may reach the point where lasting discomfort produces weariness of life and thus a tendency to suicide. The slightest unpleasantness can then bring it about. Indeed, in the worst stages of the condition, even that is unnecessary. Continued discomfort alone leads to a decision to commit suicide. It is then carried out with such cool deliberation and firm resolve that the patient, usually already under supervision, remains intent on it and uses the first unguarded moment to seize this means of relief, now natural and welcome to them, without hesitation, struggle, or shrinking back. *Esquirol, On Mental Illnesses*, gives

detailed descriptions of this condition. Depending on the circumstances, however, even the healthiest and perhaps the most cheerful person may decide to commit suicide: namely, when the magnitude of suffering, or of an inescapably approaching misfortune, overcomes the terrors of death. The difference lies only in the size of the occasion needed to bring it about, which stands in inverse proportion to the gloomy disposition. The greater this disposition, the smaller the occasion can be, until it dwindles to nothing. The greater the good-tempered disposition and the health supporting it, the more the occasion must contain. There are therefore countless gradations between the two extremes of suicide: one arising purely from a diseased intensification of inborn gloom, the other committed by a healthy, cheerful person for wholly objective reasons. Beauty is partly related to health. This subjective advantage does not really contribute directly to our happiness, but only indirectly, through its impression on others. Still, it is very important, in a man as well. Beauty is an open letter of recommendation that wins people's hearts for us in advance. So Homer's lines apply especially to it:

The gods' glorious gifts are not to be thrown aside,
Whatever they themselves give; no one could win them by choice.

The broadest view shows us two enemies of human happiness: pain and boredom. We can also observe that the more successfully we move away from one, the closer we come to the other, and vice versa. Our life really is a more or less vigorous swing between them. This happens because they stand in a double opposition to one another, an outward or objective one and an inward or subjective one. Outwardly, need and deprivation produce pain, while security and abundance produce boredom. Accordingly, we see the lower classes in a constant struggle against need, and thus against pain, while the rich and distinguished are in a continual, often genuinely desperate struggle against boredom. Their inward or subjective opposition rests on this: in an individual, receptiveness to one stands in inverse proportion to receptiveness to the other, since it is determined by the extent of their mental powers. Dullness of mind is consistently joined with dullness of feeling and a lack of sensitivity. This makes someone less receptive to pain and grief of every kind and degree. But the same men-

tal dullness also produces that *inner emptiness* stamped on countless faces and betrayed by their constantly alert attention to every event, however tiny, in the outside world. This is the real source of boredom, and it always thirsts for outward stimulation to set mind and feelings in motion somehow. It is therefore not choosy about its means. Witness the miserable pastimes people resort to, their manner of socializing and conversation, and the many people standing in doorways or staring out of windows. This inner emptiness is the main source of the craving for company, distraction, amusement, and luxury of every kind that leads many people to extravagance and then misery. Nothing protects against this misery as surely as *inner* wealth, wealth of mind. The closer this comes to excellence, the less room it leaves for boredom. The inexhaustible activity of thought, its constantly renewed play with the varied appearances of the inner and outer worlds, and the power and drive to make ever-new combinations of them place an outstanding mind entirely beyond the reach of boredom, except in moments of exhaustion. On the other hand, heightened intelligence directly requires heightened sensitivity and is rooted in a greater intensity of will, and thus of passion. Its connection with these produces much stronger emotions of every kind, greater sensitivity to mental and even physical pain, and greater impatience with every obstacle or even mere interruption. The vividness of all ideas, including disagreeable ones, that comes from a powerful imagination contributes greatly to intensifying all this. What has been said applies proportionately to every intermediate stage in the wide space between the dullest fool and the greatest genius. Consequently, subjectively as well as objectively, everyone stands closer to one source of life's sufferings the farther they are from the other. Their natural inclination will accordingly guide them to adapt the objective to the subjective as far as possible in this respect: to take greater precautions against *the* source of suffering to which they are more receptive. A person with a rich mind will strive above all for freedom from pain and harassment, for peace and leisure. They will therefore seek a quiet, modest life, but one as undisturbed as possible. After some acquaintance with so-called human beings, they will choose retirement, and with a great mind, even solitude. For the more someone has in themselves, the less they need from outside,

and the less other people can mean to them. That is why intellectual excellence leads to unsociability. Indeed, if quantity could replace quality in company, it would be worth living even in high society. But unfortunately a hundred fools in a heap still do not make one sensible person.—Someone at the other extreme will seek amusement and company at any price as soon as need allows them to catch their breath. They will readily settle for anything, fleeing nothing so much as themselves. For in solitude, where everyone is thrown back on themselves, it becomes clear what they have *in themselves*. There the fool in royal purple groans under the unshakable burden of his pitiful individuality, while a highly gifted person peoples and enlivens the most desolate surroundings with thoughts. So *Seneca* is very right to say: *All foolishness suffers from disgust with itself* (ep. 9). So is Jesus Sirach when he says: “The fool’s life is worse than death.” Accordingly, we will generally find that someone is sociable in proportion to their mental poverty and their overall commonness. For in this world there is little more to choose between than solitude and commonness. Black people are said to be the most sociable of all, just as they are also decidedly inferior intellectually. According to reports from North America in French newspapers (*le Commerce*, Octbr. 19, 1837), Black people, free people and slaves mixed together, crowd in large numbers into the narrowest space because they cannot see their black, snub-nosed faces repeated often enough.

The brain acts as the parasite or pensioner of the whole organism. Accordingly, the *free leisure* each person has earned is the fruit and yield of their entire existence, which otherwise consists only of effort and work. It gives them the free enjoyment of their consciousness and individuality. But what does free leisure yield for most people? Boredom and dullness, whenever sensual pleasures or foolish activities are not there to fill it. Their way of spending it shows how utterly worthless it is: it is precisely Ariosto’s *long idleness of ignorant men*. Ordinary people think only of *passing* the time; anyone with some talent thinks of *using* it.—Limited minds are so exposed to boredom because their intellect is nothing more than the *medium that supplies motives* for their will. If for the moment there are no motives to grasp, the will rests and the intellect takes a holiday. Neither becomes active on its own. The result is a dreadful stagnation

of every power in the whole person—boredom. To counter this, people put small motives before the will, merely temporary ones adopted at choice. These are meant to excite it and thereby activate the intellect, which has to grasp them. These motives relate to real, natural motives as paper money relates to silver, since their value is arbitrarily agreed on. Such motives are *games*, with cards and so on, invented for this purpose. If these are unavailable, a limited person helps themselves by rattling or drumming on whatever comes to hand. A cigar too is a welcome substitute for thoughts.—That is why card playing has become the chief occupation of every social gathering in every country. It measures their worth and declares their complete bankruptcy of thought. Having no thoughts to exchange, they exchange cards and try to take each other's guilders. What a miserable race! Yet, so as not to be unjust even here, I will not suppress the thought that one might perhaps offer this excuse for card playing: it is preliminary training for life in the world and in business. It teaches people to make clever use of circumstances unchangeably given by chance—the cards—to get whatever can be got from them. For this purpose, people also learn to keep their composure by putting a cheerful face on a bad hand. But precisely for that reason card playing also has a corrupting effect. The spirit of the game is to win away what belongs to another person by every means, every trick and maneuver. The habit of doing this in play takes root and spreads into practical life. Gradually people come to act in the same way in matters of mine and yours, and to regard every advantage they happen to hold as permissible so long as the law allows it. Civil life supplies examples every day.—As I said, then, *free leisure* is the flower, or rather the fruit, of each person's existence, since it alone puts them in possession of their own self. Those who then also receive something worthwhile in themselves must be called happy. For the vast majority, by contrast, free leisure yields nothing but a fellow no one can do anything with, terribly bored and a burden to himself. Let us therefore rejoice, "dear brothers, that we are not children of the servant woman, but of the free woman." (Gal. 4, 31.)

Further, just as the happiest country is the one that needs few or no imports, so the happiest person is one who has enough in their inner wealth and needs little or nothing from outside for entertainment. Such imports cost a great deal, create dependence, bring danger, cause annoyance, and in the end are still only a poor replacement for what grows on one's own soil. We should not expect much in any respect from others, or from outside in general. There are very narrow limits to what one person can be to another. In the end everyone remains alone, and what matters then is *who* is alone. So Goethe's general observation applies here too (Dicht. u. Wahrh. Bd. 3, S. 474): in all things, each person is finally thrown back on themselves. Or, as *Oliver Goldsmith* says:

Wherever we are, we are left to ourselves,

And make or find our own happiness.

(The Traveller v. 431 sq.)

Everyone must therefore be and provide the best and the greatest part for themselves. The more this amounts to, and the more they consequently find the sources of their pleasure within themselves, the happier they will be. So Aristotle says with perfect justice: Happiness belongs to the self-sufficient (Eth. Eud. VII, 2); in other words, happiness belongs to those who are enough for themselves. All external sources of happiness and pleasure are by their nature extremely uncertain, precarious, passing, and subject to chance. Even under the most favorable circumstances, they can easily fail. Indeed, this is inevitable, since they cannot always be at hand. In old age, almost all of them necessarily dry up. Love, joking, the desire to travel, delight in horses, and fitness for society then leave us. Death even carries off our friends and relatives. More than ever, it then matters what a person has in themselves, for that will hold out the longest. But at every age, too, it is and remains the genuine and only lasting source of happiness. There is not much to be had anywhere in the world. Need and pain fill it, while boredom lurks in every corner for those who have escaped them. Besides, as a rule, wickedness rules it and foolishness does the loudest talking. Fate is cruel and people are pitiful. In a world like this, someone who has much in themselves is like a bright, warm, cheerful Christmas room amid the snow and ice of a December night. So having an excellent, rich individual-

ty, and especially a great deal of intelligence, is undoubtedly the happiest lot on earth, however different it may be from the most dazzling one. That is why Queen Christina of Sweden, at only 19, spoke wisely about Descartes. She then knew him only through *one* essay and spoken reports, while he had been living in the deepest solitude in Holland for 20 years: *Mr. Descartes is the happiest of all men, and his situation seems enviable to me.* (Vie de Descartes par Baillet, Liv. VII, ch. 10.) Only, as was also the case with Descartes, outward circumstances must favor a person enough to let them possess themselves and take pleasure in themselves. So even Ecclesiastes (7, 12) says: “Wisdom is good with an inheritance, and helps a person enjoy the sun.” Anyone granted this lot by the favor of nature and fate will guard with anxious care the access to this inner source of happiness. Its conditions are independence and leisure. They will therefore gladly buy these through moderation and thrift, all the more because, unlike others, they do not depend on external sources of pleasure. So the prospect of offices, money, favor, and worldly applause will not tempt them to give themselves up to suit people’s low aims or bad taste. If the case arises, they will act like *Horace* in the letter to Maecenas (Lib. I, ep. 7). It is very foolish to lose *inwardly* in order to gain *outwardly*: to give up all or most of one’s peace, leisure, and independence for brilliance, rank, splendor, titles, and honor. Yet *Goethe* did this. My guiding genius has firmly drawn me in the other direction. The truth discussed here—that the main source of human happiness springs from within—is also confirmed by *Aristotle*’s very sound observation in the Nicomachean Ethics (I, 7; et VII, 13, 14). Every pleasure presupposes some activity, and thus the exercise of some power, and cannot exist without it. Stobaeus too repeats this Aristotelian teaching, that a person’s happiness consists in the unobstructed exercise of their outstanding ability, in his account of Peripatetic ethics (Ecl. eth. II, c. 7, p. 268-278). For example: Happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, in actions that proceed as desired (*happiness is the exercise of excellence through successful actions*). He also explains that excellence means mastery of any kind. Now the original purpose of the powers with which nature has equipped human beings is the struggle against need, which presses on them from every side. But when this struggle pauses, their unoccu-

pied powers become a burden. They must now *play* with them, that is, use them without a purpose. Otherwise they immediately fall prey to the other source of human suffering, boredom. It therefore torments the great and rich above all. Lucretius already gave a description of their misery whose accuracy we still have daily opportunities to recognize in every large city:

Often he goes out from his great house,

Weary of being home, then suddenly returns,

Since he finds things no better outside.

He races his ponies headlong to his country house,

As if rushing to help put out a house fire:

At once he yawns as he reaches its doorway,

Or falls heavily asleep and seeks oblivion,

Or hurries back to visit the city again.

III, 1073.

In youth these gentlemen must rely on muscular and sexual powers. Later, however, only mental powers remain. If these are lacking, or have not been developed and supplied with accumulated material to work on, their misery is great. Since the *will* is the only inexhaustible power, they now stimulate it by exciting the passions, for example through high-stakes gambling, that truly degrading vice.—In general, every unoccupied individual will choose a game to employ the kind of powers that predominate in them: perhaps bowling or chess, hunting or painting, horse racing or music, card playing or poetry, heraldry or philosophy, and so on. We can even examine the matter systematically by going back to the root of all expressions of human power: the *three basic physiological powers*. Here we must consider them in their purposeless play. They appear as the sources of three kinds of possible enjoyment, from which each person will choose what suits them according to which of these powers predominates. First, then, the pleasures of the *power of bodily replenishment*: eating, drinking, digesting, resting, and sleeping. Other peoples even give whole nations credit for these as their national enjoyments. Second, the pleasures of *muscular responsiveness*: walking, jumping, wrestling, dancing, fencing, riding, and athletic games of every kind, as well as hunting and even combat and war.

Third, the pleasures of *sensitivity*: looking, thinking, feeling, writing poetry, creating visual art, making music, learning, reading, meditating, inventing, philosophizing, and so on.—Many reflections could be made on the value, degree, and duration of each kind of pleasure; I leave them to the reader. But everyone will see that our enjoyment, which always depends on using our own powers, and therefore our happiness, which consists in the frequent return of that enjoyment, will be greater the nobler the power on which it depends. Nor will anyone deny the superiority in this respect of sensitivity over the other two basic physiological powers. Its decisive predominance is what distinguishes human beings from the other animal species, whereas animals possess the other two powers to an equal or even greater degree. Our powers of knowledge belong to sensitivity. Its predominance therefore enables us to enjoy pleasures consisting in *knowing*, the so-called *intellectual* pleasures, and these will be greater the more decisive that predominance is[B]. An ordinary, normal person can take a lively interest in something only if it excites their *will*, and thus has a personal interest for them. But every lasting excitement of the *will* is at least mixed in character, and thus involves pain. A deliberate means of exciting it is card playing, the universal occupation of “good society” everywhere. It does so through interests so small that they can cause only momentary, slight pain, not lasting, serious pain. They can therefore be regarded as a mere tickling of the will[C].—Someone whose mental powers predominate, on the other hand, is capable of the liveliest interest through *knowledge* alone, without any involvement of the *will*. Indeed, they need it. This interest then places them in a region where pain is essentially unknown, as if in the atmosphere of the gods who live at ease, the gods who live easily. The lives of others, meanwhile, pass in dullness. All their thoughts and efforts are directed at the petty interests of their personal welfare, and through these at miseries of every kind. So intolerable boredom overtakes them as soon as their occupation with those aims comes to a halt and they are thrown back on themselves. Only the wild fire of passion can bring some movement into the stagnant mass. By contrast, someone equipped with predominant mental powers has an existence rich in thought, lively and meaningful throughout. Worthy and interesting subjects occupy them as soon as

they can give themselves over to them, and they carry within themselves a source of the noblest pleasures. External stimulation comes from the works of nature and the sight of human activity, and then from the very varied achievements of the highly gifted in every age and country. Only they can really enjoy these fully, because only they can fully understand and feel them. It was therefore really for them that those people lived; it was really to them that they spoke. The rest, merely accidental listeners, half-grasp one thing or another. Admittedly, all this gives such a person one more need than other people: the need to learn, see, study, meditate, and practice, and consequently the need for free leisure. But, as *Voltaire* rightly remarks, *there are no real pleasures without real needs*. This need is therefore the condition that opens pleasures to them that remain closed to others. For those others, the beauties of nature and art and intellectual works of every kind, even if they heap them up around themselves, are fundamentally only what courtesans are to an old man. As a result, a person so favored leads a second, intellectual life alongside their personal life. Gradually this becomes their real purpose, and they see the first life only as a means to it. Others must regard their dull, empty, and troubled existence itself as their purpose. The intellectual life will therefore occupy such a person above all. Through the continual growth of insight and knowledge, it acquires coherence, a steady development, a wholeness and perfection becoming more and more rounded, like a work of art taking shape. The merely practical lives of others, aimed only at personal welfare and capable only of increasing in length, not in depth, stand in sad contrast. Yet, as I said, these lives must count for them as ends in themselves, while for the intellectual person such a life is only a means.

[B] Nature continually rises higher: first from the mechanical and chemical activity of the inorganic world to plant life and its dim enjoyment of itself; from there to the animal kingdom, where intelligence and consciousness dawn. These then rise step by step from weak beginnings until, through the last and greatest step, nature reaches the *human being*. In the human intellect, then, nature reaches the highest point and goal of its productions. It supplies the most perfect and difficult thing it can bring forth. But even within the human species, the intellect has many marked gradations, and very rarely reaches the

highest, truly great intelligence. In the narrower and stricter sense, this is therefore nature's most difficult and highest product, and thus the rarest and most valuable thing the world has to show. In such an intelligence, the clearest consciousness appears, and the world is accordingly presented more distinctly and completely than anywhere else. A person endowed with it therefore possesses the noblest and most precious thing on earth, and with it a source of pleasures beside which all the others are small. They need nothing further from outside but the leisure to enjoy this possession undisturbed and to polish their diamond. For all other, nonintellectual pleasures are of a lower kind. They all come down to movements of the will: wishing, hoping, fearing, and attaining, whatever the object may be. These can never occur without pain. Besides, attainment generally brings more or less disappointment, whereas in intellectual pleasures truth becomes ever clearer. No pain rules in the realm of intelligence; everything there is knowledge. But all intellectual pleasures are accessible to each person only through, and thus in proportion to, their own intelligence. For *all the intelligence in the world is useless to someone who has none*. One real disadvantage that accompanies this superiority is that throughout nature the capacity for pain increases with the degree of intelligence. So here too it reaches its highest level.

[C] *Vulgarity* consists basically in willing completely outweighing knowing in consciousness. This reaches the point where knowing occurs only in the service of the will. Where that service does not call for it—where no motives, large or small, are present—knowing stops entirely, and a complete emptiness of thought results. But willing without knowing is the commonest thing there is. Every block of wood has it and shows it at least when it falls. That is why this condition constitutes vulgarity. In it, only the sense organs and the slight activity of understanding needed to grasp their data remain active. As a result, a vulgar person is constantly open to all impressions and instantly notices everything happening around them. The faintest sound and every circumstance, however trivial, immediately catch their attention, just as with animals. This whole state

becomes visible in their face and entire appearance. It produces the vulgar look, whose impression is all the more repulsive when, as is usually the case, the will that alone fills consciousness here is low, selfish, and generally bad.

Our practical, actual life is boring and dull when passions do not move it. But when they do move it, it soon becomes painful. So only those are happy who have received some surplus of intellect beyond what is needed to serve their will. With it, they lead an intellectual life alongside their actual one. This constantly occupies and entertains them in a *painless* yet lively way. Mere leisure—an intellect *unoccupied* in the service of the will—is not enough for this. A real surplus of *power* is required. Only this enables a purely intellectual activity that does not serve the will. Otherwise, *leisure without learning is death and the burial of a living person* (Sen. ep. 82). Depending on whether this surplus is small or large, there are countless gradations of the intellectual life that can be led alongside actual life. They range from merely collecting and describing insects, birds, minerals, and coins to the highest achievements of poetry and philosophy. Such an intellectual life protects not only against boredom but against its destructive consequences too. It becomes a defense against bad company and the many dangers, misfortunes, losses, and extravagances that people fall into when they seek their happiness entirely in the actual world. For example, my philosophy has never earned me anything, but it has saved me a great deal.

The ordinary person, on the other hand, depends for enjoyment of life on things *outside themselves*: possessions, rank, wife and children, friends, society, and so on. Their happiness in life rests on these. So it collapses when they lose them or find themselves deceived in them. To express this relationship, we can say that their center of gravity lies *outside themselves*. This is also why their wishes and whims constantly change. If their means allow it, they will buy country houses one time and horses another, give parties at one time and travel at another. In general, they will indulge in great luxury, precisely because they seek satisfaction *from outside* in things of every kind. They are like a weakened person hoping to gain health and strength from consommés and drugs from the pharmacy, when their true source is the body's own vitality. Now, without going straight to the other extreme, let us place beside them someone whose

mental powers are not exactly outstanding, but do exceed the ordinary scant measure. We may see this person practicing some fine art as an amateur, or pursuing an empirical science such as botany, mineralogy, physics, astronomy, history, and the like. They soon find a large part of their enjoyment in this, refreshing themselves with it when those external sources fail or no longer satisfy. To that extent we can say that their center of gravity already lies partly *within themselves*. But mere amateur practice in art is still very far from creative ability. And purely empirical sciences stop at the relations of appearances to one another. So the whole person cannot be absorbed in them; they cannot fill the person's whole being down to its depths. Their existence therefore cannot become so interwoven with these pursuits that they lose interest in everything else. This is reserved for the highest intellectual excellence alone, which people usually call genius. Only genius takes the existence and nature of things as a whole and in an absolute sense for its subject. According to its individual direction, it will then try to express its deep understanding of this through art, poetry, or philosophy. So only for a person of this kind is undisturbed occupation with themselves, their thoughts, and their works an urgent need. Solitude is welcome, free leisure the highest good, and everything else dispensable—indeed, when present, often merely a burden. Only of such a person, therefore, can we say that their center of gravity lies *entirely within them*. This even explains why the extremely rare people of this kind, despite the best of characters, still do not show that intimate and boundless concern for friends, family, and community of which some others are capable. Ultimately, they can find consolation for everything, as long as they still have themselves. So they have one more isolating element within them. It is all the more effective because others can never really satisfy them completely. They therefore cannot see others as wholly their equals. Indeed, since they always feel the difference in every detail, they gradually get used to moving among people as beings of another kind, and in their thoughts about them to using the third-person plural rather than the first.—

From this point of view, someone whom nature has richly endowed intellectually now appears the happiest. For the subjective is certainly closer to us than the objective, whose effect, whatever it may be, is always mediated by the sub-

jective and is thus only secondary. This is also confirmed by the fine lines:

The wealth of the soul is the only true wealth;

Other riches bring more trouble than they are worth.

Lucian in Anthol. I, 67.

A person with such inner wealth needs nothing more from outside than a negative gift: free leisure, so they can cultivate and develop their mental abilities and enjoy their inner wealth. Really, then, they need only permission to be wholly themselves every day and every hour throughout their life. If someone is destined to leave the imprint of their mind on the entire human race, only one thing means happiness or unhappiness to them: being able to develop their abilities fully and complete their works—or being prevented from doing so. Everything else is trivial to them. Accordingly, we see the great minds of every age place the very highest value on free leisure. For each person's free leisure is worth as much as they themselves are worth. Happiness seems to lie in leisure (*happiness appears to be situated in leisure*), says Aristotle (Eth. Nic. X, 7). And Diogenes Laertius (II, 5, 31) reports that Socrates praised leisure as the finest of possessions (*Socrates praised leisure as the finest of all possessions*). It also fits with this that Aristotle (Eth. Nic. X, 7, 8, 9) declares the philosophical life the happiest. Even his statement in the Politics (IV, 11) belongs here: The happy life is one of unimpeded excellence. Translated fully, this means: "To be able to exercise one's excellence without hindrance, whatever kind it may be, is true happiness." This therefore agrees with Goethe's statement in Wilhelm Meister: "Whoever is born with a talent, for a talent, finds their finest existence in it."—But possessing free leisure is foreign not only to the ordinary human lot but also to ordinary human nature. Our natural calling is to spend our time obtaining what is necessary for our own and our family's existence. We are children of need, not free intelligences. Accordingly, free leisure soon becomes a burden, and finally a torment, to the ordinary person, unless they can fill it with all kinds of artificial and invented aims: games, pastimes, and hobbies of every sort. For the same reason it also brings danger, since it is rightly said that *it is difficult to stay quiet in leisure*. On the other hand, an intellect far exceeding the normal measure is likewise abnormal, and thus unnatural. Yet if one does occur, the

happiness of the person endowed with it requires precisely that free leisure which is sometimes burdensome and sometimes harmful to others. Without it, they will be a Pegasus in harness, and therefore unhappy. But when both unnatural conditions, the outer and the inner, come together, it is a great stroke of luck. The person so favored will now lead a higher kind of life, exempt from the two opposing sources of human suffering: need and boredom, or anxious labor for existence and the inability to bear leisure—that is, free existence itself. Otherwise, people escape these two evils only because the evils themselves neutralize and cancel one another.

Against all this, however, we must consider the other side. Great mental gifts, through the predominance of nervous activity, produce an enormously heightened sensitivity to pain in every form. Further, the passionate temperament on which they depend, together with the greater vividness and completeness of all ideas inseparable from them, makes the emotions aroused by these ideas incomparably more intense. Yet in general there are more painful emotions than pleasant ones. Finally, great mental gifts estrange their owner from other people and their activities: the more someone has in themselves, the less they can find in others. A hundred things that give others great satisfaction are dull and unenjoyable to them. So perhaps the law of compensation, which asserts itself everywhere, remains in force here as well. It has even been claimed often enough, and not without apparent grounds, that the most intellectually limited person is fundamentally the happiest, though no one would envy them this happiness. I am all the less willing to anticipate the reader's final decision on the question because even *Sophocles* made two directly opposite statements about it:

Wisdom is by far the foremost part of happiness.

(Being wise is by far the first part of happiness.)

Antig. 1328.

and again:

Life is sweetest when you think of nothing.

(The life of those who think nothing is the most pleasant.)

Ajax. 550.

The philosophers of the Old Testament disagree just as much.

“The fool’s life is worse than death!”

(For the fool’s life is more wretched than death.)

Jes. Sir. 22, 12.

and

“Where there is much wisdom, there is much grief.”

(Whoever adds knowledge will add pain.)

Kohel. 1, 18.

Still, I do not want to leave unmentioned here that the person who *has no intellectual needs* because their mental powers are strictly and barely of the normal measure is precisely what a term unique to German calls a *philistine*. The expression originated in student life. Later it was used in a higher sense, though still one resembling its original meaning through its contrast with a follower of the Muses. For this person is and remains a man without the Muses. From a higher standpoint, I would indeed define philistines as people who are continually and most seriously occupied with a reality that is not real. But such a definition, already transcendental, would not suit the popular standpoint I have adopted in this essay. Perhaps not every reader would fully understand it either. The first definition, by contrast, is easier to explain in detail and sufficiently identifies the essential point, the root of all the qualities that characterize the *philistine*. He is, then, *a person without intellectual needs*. Many things follow from this. First, *as regards himself*, he has no intellectual *pleasures*, according to the principle already mentioned: *there are no real pleasures without real needs*. No drive toward knowledge and insight for their own sake gives life to his existence. Nor does a drive toward truly aesthetic pleasures, which is closely related to the first. If fashion or authority nevertheless forces any pleasures of this kind on him, he will get them over with as quickly as possible, like forced labor. Only sensual pleasures are real pleasures for him; he compensates himself with these. So oysters and champagne are the high point of his existence, and the purpose of his life is to obtain everything that contributes to bodily comfort. Lucky for him if that takes plenty of work! For if these goods have already been bestowed on him, he inevitably falls prey to boredom. Against it, he then tries

everything imaginable: balls, theater, company, card playing, gambling, horses, women, drinking, travel, and so on. Yet all this is not enough to combat boredom where the lack of intellectual needs makes intellectual pleasures impossible. That is why a dull, dry seriousness, approaching that of an animal, is a distinctive characteristic of the philistine. Nothing delights him, nothing excites him, nothing wins his interest. Sensual pleasures are soon exhausted; company, consisting of just such philistines, soon becomes boring; card playing finally becomes tiring. At most, he still has the pleasures of vanity in his own way. These consist in surpassing others in wealth or rank, or in influence and power, for which they then honor him. Or at least he associates with those who excel in these things and so basks in their reflected brilliance (*a snob*).—*Second, as regards others*, the basic quality of the philistine just established has this consequence: since he has no intellectual needs, only physical ones, he will seek someone capable of satisfying the latter, not the former. Outstanding mental abilities will therefore be the very last thing he demands of others. Rather, if he encounters such abilities, they will arouse his aversion, even his hatred. He feels only an unpleasant sense of inferiority, along with a dull, secret envy. He hides this most carefully, even trying to conceal it from himself, but precisely for that reason it sometimes grows into a quiet fury. So it will never occur to him to measure his esteem or respect by such qualities. He reserves these exclusively for rank and wealth, power and influence, which in his eyes are the only true advantages, and the ones in which he too would like to excel.—But all this follows from his being a person *without intellectual needs*. The great suffering of all philistines is that *things of the mind* give them no entertainment. To escape boredom, they always need *actual things*. These, however, are in part soon exhausted, and then tire rather than entertain; in part they bring misfortune of every kind. Things of the mind, by contrast, are inexhaustible and in themselves innocent and harmless.

Throughout this discussion of the personal qualities that contribute to our happiness, I have chiefly considered the intellectual ones after the physical ones. As for how moral excellence too makes us happy directly, I have already

explained this in my prize essay on the foundation of morality, § 22, S. 275 (2. Aufl. 272), to which I therefore refer the reader.

Chapter 3



What a person has.

Epicurus, the great teacher of happiness, rightly and elegantly divided human needs into three classes. First, those that are natural and necessary: the ones that cause pain if not satisfied. So only *food and clothing* belong here. They are easy to satisfy. Second, those that are natural but not necessary: the need for sexual satisfaction. Epicurus does not state this in Laertius's account; indeed, I am presenting his teaching here in a somewhat adjusted and polished form. This need is harder to satisfy. Third, those that are neither natural nor necessary: the needs for luxury, indulgence, display, and splendor. They are endless and very hard to satisfy. (See Diog. Laert. L. X, c. 27, § 149, also § 127.—Cic. de fin. I, 13.)

It is difficult, if not impossible, to set a limit to our reasonable wishes about possessions. Each person's satisfaction in this respect rests not on an absolute amount but on a merely relative one: the relation between their demands and their possessions. Possessions considered alone are therefore as meaningless as the numerator of a fraction without its denominator. A person does not miss goods they have never thought of laying claim to, but is perfectly content without them. Another person who owns a hundred times more feels unhappy because they lack one thing they lay claim to. Here too, everyone has their own horizon of what they might possibly attain. Their demands extend as far as that horizon. When something within it presents itself in a way that lets them confi-

dently expect to attain it, they feel happy. When difficulties arise and take away the prospect, they feel unhappy. What lies outside that horizon has no effect on them. So the great possessions of the rich do not disturb the poor. Conversely, the many things a rich person already owns do not comfort them when their plans fail. (Wealth is like seawater: the more you drink, the thirstier you become.—The same applies to fame.)—After the loss of wealth or prosperity, once the first pain is over, our habitual mood is not very different from what it was before. The reason is that, after fate has reduced the factor of our possessions, we ourselves reduce the factor of our demands by just as much. This operation is what really hurts in a misfortune. Once it is complete, the pain is felt less and less, and finally not at all: the wound heals over. Conversely, a stroke of luck raises the limit that holds down our demands, and they expand. This is where the joy lies. But it too lasts only until this operation is entirely complete. We get used to the expanded measure of our demands and become indifferent to the possessions that match it. The passage in Homer, *Od. XVIII*, 130-137, already says this, ending:

For the mind of people living on earth is such
As the day the father of gods and men brings upon them.

The source of our dissatisfaction lies in our constantly renewed attempts to push the factor of our demands upward, while the immobility of the other factor prevents it.—

Among a race so needy and so made up of needs as the human race, it is no surprise that *wealth* is valued more highly and sincerely than anything else, indeed worshiped, while even power is valued only as a means to wealth. Nor is it surprising that everything else is pushed aside or thrown overboard to make money—for example, philosophy by philosophy professors.—People are often reproached for directing their wishes chiefly toward money and loving it above all else. Yet it is natural, perhaps even unavoidable, to love something that, like an untiring Proteus, is ready at every moment to turn into the current object of our ever-changing wishes and varied needs. Every other good can satisfy only *one* wish, *one* need. Food is good only for the hungry, wine for the healthy, medicine for the sick, a fur coat for winter, women for youth, and so on. They are

therefore all good in relation to something, that is, only relatively good. Money alone is the absolute good, because it meets not merely *one* need *in a particular case*, but *need* in general, *in the abstract*.—

We should regard *the assets we own* as a protective wall against the many possible evils and misfortunes, not as permission, still less an obligation, to obtain the world's pleasures.—People who start with no assets but eventually reach a position where their talents, of whatever kind, earn them a great deal almost always imagine that their talent is their permanent capital and its earnings are the interest. Accordingly, they do not put aside part of what they earn to build up permanent capital, but spend as much as they earn. Later, however, they usually fall into poverty because their earnings falter or stop. Either the talent itself has been exhausted because it was temporary in nature, as with the talent for almost all fine arts, or it could be put to use only under particular circumstances and favorable conditions that have ceased. Craftspeople may carry on in this way, since the abilities needed for their work are not easily lost and can also be replaced by the labor of journeymen. Their products are necessities and therefore always find buyers. So the proverb “A trade has a golden foundation” is right. But this is not the case with artists and *virtuosos* of every kind. That is precisely why they are highly paid. What they earn should therefore become their capital. Instead, they rashly regard it as mere interest and so move toward their ruin.—People with inherited assets, on the other hand, at least know correctly from the start what is capital and what is interest. Most will therefore try to secure the capital and under no circumstances touch it. Indeed, if possible, they will put aside at least an eighth of the interest to meet future interruptions of income. So they generally remain prosperous.—This whole observation does not apply to merchants. For them, money itself is a means of further earning, like a tool of their trade. So even if they earned it all themselves, they try to preserve and increase it by using it. Accordingly, wealth is more truly at home in this class than in any other.

In general, however, we will usually find that those who have already grappled with real need and deprivation fear them incomparably less, and are therefore more inclined to extravagance, than those who know them only by hearsay.

The first group includes everyone who has risen fairly quickly from poverty to prosperity through lucky events of any kind or through special talents, whatever their sort. The second group consists of those born into prosperity who have remained there. These consistently think more about the future and are therefore more economical than the first group. We might infer that need is not as bad as it looks from a distance. But the true reason may rather be this: to someone born into inherited wealth, it seems indispensable, the element of the only possible life, as essential as air. So they guard it like their life, and are consequently usually orderly, cautious, and thrifty. To someone born into inherited poverty, by contrast, poverty seems the natural state. Wealth later acquired somehow seems superfluous, fit only to be enjoyed and squandered. When it is gone again, they get along without it just as before and have one less worry. Then things go as Shakespeare says:

The saying must prove true:

Beggars put on horseback ride their horse to death.

(The proverb must be proved true: a beggar put on horseback rides his animal to death.)

Henry VI. P. 3. A. 1.

Added to this, of course, is the firm and excessive confidence such people carry, not so much in their heads as in their hearts, partly in fate and partly in their own resources, which have already helped them out of need and poverty. So they do not regard the depths of need and poverty as bottomless, as those born rich may do. Instead, they think that when they hit bottom they will be lifted up again.—This human peculiarity also explains why women who were poor girls are very often more demanding and extravagant than women who brought a rich dowry. Rich girls usually bring not only assets but also more eagerness, indeed an inherited drive, to preserve them than poor girls do. Anyone wishing to claim the opposite, however, will find an authority on their side in Ariosto's first satire. Dr. Johnson, on the other hand, agrees with me: *A wealthy woman, being used to handling money, spends it sensibly. But a woman who first gains control of money when she marries takes such delight in spending it that she throws it away extravagantly.* (S. Boswell, Life of Johnson, ann. 1776, aetat.

67.) In any case, I would advise anyone marrying a poor girl to leave her only an annuity, not the capital itself, and especially to ensure that the children's assets do not come into her hands.

I do not at all believe I am writing anything unworthy of my pen by recommending care in preserving earned and inherited assets. To possess enough from the outset to live comfortably in true independence—that is, without working—even if only for oneself, without a family, is a priceless advantage. It is exemption and immunity from the need and toil attached to human life, and thus emancipation from universal forced labor, the natural lot of the child of earth. Only with this favor of fate is someone born a truly free person. Only then are they really *their own master*, in control of their time and powers, able to say every morning, “The day is mine.” For this very reason, the difference between someone with an income of a thousand thalers and someone with an income of a hundred thousand is infinitely smaller than the difference between the first person and someone who has nothing. But inherited wealth reaches its highest value when it falls to someone endowed with mental powers of a higher kind, pursuing aims that do not fit well with earning a living. Then fate has endowed them twice over, and they can now live for their genius. They will repay their debt to humanity a hundredfold by doing what no one else could and producing something that benefits humanity as a whole, perhaps even bringing it honor. Another person in such a favored position will earn humanity's gratitude through philanthropic efforts. But someone who does none of these things, even to some extent or as an attempt, and does not even open up at least the possibility of advancing some science by learning it thoroughly—such a person, with inherited wealth, is a mere idler and contemptible. Nor will they be happy. Exemption from need hands them over to the other pole of human misery, boredom. It torments them so much that they would be much happier if need had given them something to do. This very boredom, however, will easily tempt them into extravagances that cost them the advantage they did not deserve. Countless people are indeed in need only because, when they had money, they spent it merely to get momentary relief from the boredom that oppressed them.

Things are quite different, however, when the aim is to rise high in government service. Here one must acquire favor, friends, and connections in order to gain promotion through them, step by step, perhaps even to the highest posts. In this case it is probably better, fundamentally, to have been thrust into the world without any assets at all. Especially for someone who is not noble but has some talent, being a completely poor devil will be a real advantage and recommendation. For what everyone most seeks and loves, even in mere conversation and still more in service, is the other person's inferiority. Only a poor devil is convinced and thoroughly conscious, to the degree required here, of his complete, deep, decisive, all-around inferiority and his utter insignificance and worthlessness. So only he bows often and long enough, and only his bows reach a full 90°. Only he lets everything be done to him and smiles at it. Only he recognizes the complete worthlessness of merit. Only he publicly praises the literary botchwork of his superiors, or of other influential people, as masterpieces, loudly or in large print. Only he knows how to beg. Consequently, only he can become, in good time—that is, in youth—an initiate into that hidden truth Goethe revealed to us in these words:

“Let no one complain

About what is base:

For that is what holds power,

Whatever people tell you.”

W. O. Divan.

Someone who has the means to live from the outset, on the other hand, will usually prove unruly. He is used to walking *with his head held high*. He has not learned all those arts, and perhaps also relies defiantly on some talents. Instead, he should understand how inadequate these are against *mediocrity that crawls*. In the end he may even be capable of noticing his superiors' inferiority. And when it comes to indignities, he balks or shies away. That is no way to get ahead in the world. Rather, he may finally come to say with the impudent Voltaire: *We have only two days to live; it is not worth spending them crawling beneath*

contemptible rogues.—Unfortunately, to say it in passing, this description, *contemptible rogue*, has a devilishly large number of subjects in the world. We see, then, that Juvenal's lines

Those people do not rise easily whose merits are blocked

By poverty at home,

apply more to the career of people with outstanding skills than to that of people making their way in the world.

I have not counted wife and children among *what a person has*, since they are the ones who have him. Friends could more readily be included, though here too the possessor must equally be the other's possession.

Chapter 4



What a person represents.

This—our existence in other people’s opinion—is consistently valued far too highly because of a particular weakness in our nature. Yet the slightest reflection could teach us that, in itself, it is unimportant to our happiness. It is therefore almost inexplicable how much inward delight everyone takes whenever they notice signs of other people’s favorable opinion and their vanity is flattered in some way. As surely as a cat purrs when stroked, sweet delight appears on the face of someone praised in the field where they claim distinction, even if the praise is obviously false. Signs of others’ approval often console them for real misfortune, or for the meager flow of the two main sources of our happiness discussed so far. Conversely, it is astonishing how surely every injury to their ambition—in any sense, degree, or relation—every slight, setback in precedence, or show of disregard hurts them, often deeply. Insofar as the sense of honor rests on this quality, it may have useful effects on many people’s behavior as a substitute for morality. But for a person’s own *happiness*, especially the peace of mind and independence so essential to it, it does more to disturb and harm than to help. From our standpoint, then, it is advisable to set limits to it. Through proper reflection and a correct estimate of the value of good things, we should moderate this great sensitivity to others’ opinion as far as possible, both when it is flattered and when it is hurt. Both hang by the same thread. Otherwise we remain slaves to other people’s opinions and judgments:

So light, so small is the thing that casts down
And raises up a mind hungry for praise.

A correct estimate of the value of what we are in and *for ourselves*, compared with what we are merely in *others'* eyes, will therefore contribute much to our happiness. The first includes everything that fills the time of our own existence, its inner content, and thus all the goods we have considered under the headings “what a person is” and “what a person has.” For the place where all these things exercise their effects is our own consciousness. The place of what we are *for others*, on the other hand, is someone else’s consciousness: the image under which we appear in it, together with the concepts applied to that image[D]. This is something that does not exist for us directly at all, but only indirectly, insofar as it determines other people’s behavior toward us. Even that behavior itself really matters only insofar as it influences something capable of modifying what we are *in and for ourselves*. Apart from that, what happens in someone else’s consciousness is, as such, a matter of indifference to us. We too will gradually become indifferent to it once we gain sufficient knowledge of the superficiality and futility of the thoughts, the narrowness of the concepts, the pettiness of the dispositions, the wrongheadedness of the opinions, and the number of errors in the vast majority of minds. We must also learn from our own experience how disparagingly people sometimes speak of anyone, as soon as they have no reason to fear them or believe it will not reach their ears—especially after we have once heard half a dozen blockheads speak dismissively of the greatest man. We will then realize that anyone who sets great value on people’s opinion does them too much honor.

[D] The highest ranks, in their brilliance, their splendor, display, magnificence, and every kind of public show, can say: our happiness lies entirely outside ourselves; its place is in other people’s heads.

In any case, someone is left with a meager resource if they do not find happiness in the two classes of goods already discussed but must seek it in this third one: not in what they really are, but in what they are in someone else’s mind. For the basis of our being, and therefore of our happiness too, is our animal nature. So health is most essential to our welfare, and next to it the means of

maintaining ourselves: a living free from financial worry. Honor, splendor, rank, and fame, however much some people may value them, cannot compete with those essential goods or replace them. Rather, if necessary, we would give them up without hesitation for those goods. It will therefore contribute to our happiness if we gain this simple insight early: everyone lives first and really in their own skin, not in other people's opinion. Consequently, our actual, personal condition—as determined by health, temperament, abilities, income, wife, child, friends, place of residence, and so on—is a hundred times more important for our happiness than whatever others choose to make of us. The opposite delusion makes us unhappy. When someone emphatically cries, “Honor stands even above life,” this really means: “Existence and well-being are nothing; what others think of us is what matters.” At best, the statement can be accepted as an exaggeration based on the plain truth that honor—that is, people's opinion of us—is often indispensable to getting ahead and maintaining our position among people. I will return to this later. But look at almost everything people tirelessly strive for all their lives, with restless effort and through a thousand dangers and hardships: its ultimate aim is to raise them in other people's opinion. Not only offices, titles, and decorations, but also wealth, and even scholarship[E] and art, are sought fundamentally and chiefly for this reason. Greater respect from others is the final goal they work toward. Unfortunately, this proves only the magnitude of human foolishness. Placing far too much value on other people's opinion is a universally prevailing delusion. Whether it is rooted in our nature itself or arose as a consequence of society and civilization, it has an utterly excessive influence on everything we do or leave undone, and one hostile to our happiness. We can trace this from the point where it appears in anxious, slavish concern for *what people will say*, to where it drives Virginius's dagger into his daughter's heart, or tempts someone to sacrifice peace, wealth, health, and even life for posthumous fame. This delusion certainly offers a convenient lever to anyone who has to rule or otherwise direct people. That is why the instruction to keep the sense of honor active and sharpen it holds a central place in every art of training human beings. But regarding a person's own happiness, which is our aim here, the matter is quite

different. We should rather warn people not to place too much value on others' opinion. Yet daily experience teaches that they do. Most people place the highest value precisely on others' opinion of them, and care more about it than about what is immediately present to them because it occurs in *their own consciousness*. Reversing the natural order, they see the former as the real part of their existence and the latter as merely a part existing in the mind. They make the derivative and secondary thing the main one, caring more about the image of their being in other people's heads than about that being itself. This direct valuing of something that has no direct existence for us is the foolishness called *vanity*, *emptiness*, a name meant to express the hollowness and lack of substance of this striving. It is also easy to see from the above that, like avarice, it consists in forgetting the end while attending to the means.

[E] *Your knowledge is nothing unless someone else knows that you know it.*

In fact, the value we place on other people's opinion and our continual concern about it generally exceed almost every reasonable purpose. This can be regarded as a kind of widespread, or rather inborn, mania. In everything we do or leave undone, other people's opinion is considered almost before anything else. On close examination, we will find that concern about it has produced almost half of all the troubles and fears we have ever felt. It underlies our self-esteem, so often wounded because it is so morbidly sensitive, all our vanities and pretensions, and our display and self-importance. Without this concern and craving, luxury would hardly be a tenth of what it is. Every kind of pride, *point of honor*, and *touchiness about honor*, however varied its type and sphere, rests on it—and what sacrifices it often demands there! It already appears in children, then at every age, but most strongly in later life. As the capacity for sensual pleasures dries up, vanity and arrogance then have only avarice left to share their rule. It can be observed most clearly among the French, where it is thoroughly endemic. It often finds an outlet in the most absurd ambition, the most ridiculous national vanity, and the most shameless boasting. Their striving thereby defeats itself: it has made them the laughingstock of other nations, and *the great nation* has become a mocking nickname. To explain more specifically the misguided, excessive concern for other people's opinion under discussion, here is a truly

extreme example of this foolishness rooted in human nature. It is exceptionally revealing because the circumstances and a character suited to them coincide in a way that throws the matter into sharp relief. Through it we can fully measure the strength of this most peculiar motive. The following passage is taken from the Times of March 31, 1846, from a detailed report of the just-completed execution of *Thomas Wix*, a journeyman who had murdered his master out of revenge: "On the morning set for the execution, the reverend prison chaplain came to him early. But *Wix*, though behaving calmly, showed no interest in his exhortations. His only concern was to succeed in behaving with great bravado before the spectators of his shameful end. ... And he did succeed. In the courtyard he had to cross to reach the gallows scaffold erected right beside the prison, he said, 'Well then, as Dr. Dodd said, I shall soon know the great secret!' Although his arms were bound, he climbed the ladder to the scaffold without the slightest help. Once there, he bowed to the spectators on his right and left. These bows were answered and rewarded with thunderous cheers from the assembled crowd, and so on."—What a magnificent specimen of the craving for admiration: with death in its most terrible form before his eyes, and eternity behind it, he has no concern but the impression he makes on the crowd of gawkers who have gathered, and the opinion he will leave in their heads!—Yet *Lecomte*, executed in France that same year for attempting to kill the king, was likewise chiefly annoyed during his trial that he could not appear before the Chamber of Peers in decent clothes. Even at his execution, one of his main annoyances was that he had not been allowed to shave beforehand. We see that things were no different in the past from what *Mateo Aleman* says in the introduction (*declaration*) to his famous novel *Guzman de Alfarache*. Many deluded criminals take away from the last hours, which they ought to devote exclusively to their souls' salvation, the time needed to compose and memorize a little sermon they want to deliver on the gallows ladder.—But we can see ourselves reflected in such traits, for colossal cases always provide the clearest illustration. Perhaps in most cases, all our worrying, fretting, brooding, annoyance, anxiety,

exertion, and so on really concern other people's opinion, and are just as absurd as the concerns of those poor condemned men. Our envy and hatred, too, spring largely from the same root.

Clearly, hardly anything could contribute as much to our happiness, which rests for the greatest part on peace of mind and contentment, as restricting and reducing this motive to a reasonably justifiable measure. That might be a fiftieth of its present size. It would mean pulling this constantly tormenting thorn out of our flesh. But this is very difficult, since we are dealing with a natural, inborn perversity. *Even the wise shed the desire for glory last*, says Tacitus (hist. VI, 6). The only way to get rid of this universal foolishness would be to recognize it clearly as such. To that end, we must make several things clear to ourselves: how entirely false, wrongheaded, mistaken, and absurd most opinions in people's heads tend to be, and therefore how little attention they deserve in themselves; how little real influence other people's opinion can have on us in most matters and cases; how generally unfavorable it usually is, so that almost everyone would be sick with anger if they heard everything said about them and the tone in which it was said; and finally, that even honor itself really has only indirect, not direct, value, along with further considerations of this kind. If we succeeded in turning away from this universal foolishness, the result would be an incredibly large increase in peace of mind and cheerfulness, as well as a firmer, more confident bearing and altogether less self-conscious, more natural behavior. The extremely beneficial influence of a withdrawn way of life on our peace of mind rests largely on this: it removes us from continually living before other people's eyes, and thus from constantly considering what their opinion might be, and thereby gives us back to ourselves. Likewise, we would escape a great deal of real misfortune into which this striving for something that exists only in the mind—or, more correctly, this ruinous foolishness—alone drags us. We would also have much more care to spare for solid goods and could then enjoy these with fewer disturbances. But, as I said, fine things are difficult.

The foolishness of our nature described here produces three main offshoots: ambition, vanity, and pride. The difference between the last two is this: *pride* is an already firmly established conviction of one's own superior value in some respect; *vanity*, by contrast, is the wish to awaken that conviction in others. It is usually accompanied by the quiet hope that, as a result, one may also be able to make it one's own. So pride is high self-esteem arising from *within*, and thus directly; vanity is the effort to obtain it from *outside*, and thus indirectly. Accordingly, vanity makes people talkative, pride silent. But the vain person should know that the high opinion of others they seek is much more easily and surely gained through continued silence than through talking, even if one has the finest things to say.—People are not proud simply because they want to be. At most, anyone who wants to can put on pride, but they will soon fall out of this assumed role, as out of any other. Only the firm, inward, unshakable conviction of superior qualities and special worth makes someone truly proud. This conviction may be mistaken or rest on merely external and conventional advantages. That does not harm pride, so long as the conviction is really and seriously present. Since pride is rooted in *conviction*, it is, like all knowledge, not subject to our *free choice*. Its worst enemy, by which I mean its greatest obstacle, is vanity. Vanity courts other people's approval so that it can base a high opinion of itself on that approval, whereas pride presupposes that this opinion is already entirely firm.

However consistently pride is criticized and denounced, I suspect that this has chiefly come from people who have nothing to be proud of. Faced with the shamelessness and brazen stupidity of most people, anyone with any advantages does quite well to keep them in view themselves, so they do not fall completely into oblivion. For if someone good-naturedly ignores those advantages and deals with such people as though entirely their equal, they will immediately and innocently take them to be just that. I would recommend this most strongly to those whose advantages are of the highest kind—that is, real, and thus purely personal—because, unlike decorations and titles, they are not recalled to mind at every moment by an impression on the senses. Otherwise they will often enough see an example of *a pig teaching Minerva*. “Joke with the slave; soon he

will show you his backside” is an excellent Arabic proverb. Nor should Horace’s *Take on the pride your merits have earned* be rejected. The virtue of modesty, however, is a highly profitable invention for worthless people. It requires everyone to speak of themselves as if they too were worthless, which levels things wonderfully: the result makes it seem as though there were nothing but worthless people at all.

The cheapest kind of pride, however, is national pride. It betrays a lack of *individual* qualities to be proud of in the person afflicted with it. Otherwise, they would not reach for something shared with so many millions. Someone with significant personal advantages will instead recognize their own nation’s faults most clearly, since those faults are constantly before their eyes. But every pitiful fool who has nothing in the world to be proud of grasps at the last resort: pride in the nation they happen to belong to. This restores them, and in gratitude they are now ready to defend all its characteristic faults and follies with fists and feet. Thus, for example, among fifty Englishmen there will hardly be more than one who agrees when someone speaks with due contempt of their nation’s stupid and degrading bigotry. That one, however, is usually a man of intelligence. —The Germans are free of national pride, and thereby give proof of the honesty for which they are praised. Those among them who profess and ridiculously put on such pride give proof of the opposite. This is done chiefly by the “German brothers” and democrats, who flatter the people to mislead them. It is said, to be sure, that the Germans invented gunpowder; I cannot agree with that opinion. And Lichtenberg asks: “Why does hardly anyone who is not German pretend to be one, but generally, when someone wants to pass themselves off as something, as a Frenchman or an Englishman?” Besides, individuality far outweighs nationality, and in any given person the former deserves a thousand times more consideration than the latter. Since national character speaks of the mass of people, there will never honestly be much good to say of it. Rather, human narrowness, wrongheadedness, and wickedness appear in a different form in each country, and this is called the national character. Disgusted with *one* such character, we praise another, until we have had the same experience with it.—Every nation mocks the others, and all are right.

The subject of this chapter—what we *represent* in the world, meaning what we are in other people's eyes—can, as noted above, be divided into *honor*, *rank*, and *fame*.

Rank may matter a great deal to the crowd and to philistines, and it may be very useful in running the machinery of the state. But for our purposes, a few words will do. It is a conventional value—in other words, really a make-believe one. It produces a make-believe respect, and the whole thing is a play put on for the crowd.—Decorations are bills of exchange drawn on public opinion. Their value depends on the issuer's credit. Still, they are a thoroughly useful institution, quite apart from all the money they save the state by replacing cash rewards—provided they are awarded with judgment and fairness. The crowd has eyes and ears, but not much else: very little judgment in particular, and even little memory. Some achievements are entirely beyond its understanding. Others it understands and cheers when they happen, but soon forgets afterward. So I think it quite appropriate to use a cross or a star to tell the crowd, at all times and in all places: "This man is not your equal: he has earned distinction!" But when decorations are awarded unfairly, without judgment, or too freely, they lose this value. A prince should therefore be as careful about awarding them as a merchant is about signing bills of exchange. The inscription *for merit* on a cross says the same thing twice. Every decoration should be *for merit*—*that goes without saying*.—

Discussing *honor* is much harder and takes much longer than discussing rank. First we must define it. If I were to say, for this purpose, that honor is external conscience and conscience is internal honor, some people might like that. But it would be a clever explanation rather than a clear and sound one. So I say this: objectively, honor is other people's opinion of our worth; subjectively, it is our fear of that opinion. In this second sense it often has a very beneficial effect, though certainly not a purely moral one—in a man of honor.

The feeling for honor and shame lives in everyone who is not wholly corrupt. Its root and origin, and the reason honor is valued so highly, are as follows. On his own, a human being can do very little. He is a stranded Robinson Crusoe. Only together with others does he amount to much and have much power. He

becomes aware of this as soon as his consciousness begins to develop at all. He immediately wants to be seen as a useful member of human society: someone able to do *his fair share* and therefore entitled to share in the benefits of human community. He becomes such a person by doing, first, what is required of everyone everywhere, and then what is required and expected of him in the particular position he occupies. But just as quickly he realizes that what matters here is not being such a person in his own opinion, but in other people's. This explains his eager pursuit of other people's favorable *opinion* and the high value he places on it. Both arise with the spontaneous force of an inborn feeling. We call it a sense of honor or, depending on the circumstances, a sense of shame (*modesty*). It makes his cheeks turn red whenever he thinks he is about to fall in other people's opinion, even when he knows he is innocent. It does so even when the failing being exposed concerns only a relative obligation, one he has freely taken on. Conversely, nothing gives him more courage to live than gaining, or regaining, the certainty that other people think well of him. It promises him the protection and help of everyone's combined strength. Against life's evils, that is an infinitely stronger defensive wall than his own strength.

The different relationships a person can have with others give rise to several *kinds of honor*. These are relationships in which others must be able to trust him, and so must hold a certain favorable opinion of him. They chiefly concern what is mine and yours, then the performance of people who undertake a task, and finally sexual relations. These correspond to civic honor, professional honor, and sexual honor, each of which has further subdivisions.

Civic honor has the widest scope. It consists in the assumption that we respect everyone's rights unconditionally and will therefore never use unjust or illegal means to benefit ourselves. It is a condition for taking part in all peaceful dealings. A single act that clearly and seriously contradicts it destroys it; so does any criminal punishment, though only if the punishment is just. Ultimately, honor always rests on the conviction that moral character cannot change. On that view, one bad act guarantees that every later act will have the same moral quality whenever similar circumstances arise. The English use of *character* to mean reputation or honor also bears this out. That is precisely why lost honor cannot

be restored, unless its loss was based on deception, such as slander or misleading appearances. Accordingly, there are laws against slander, defamatory writings, and insults. An insult, mere name-calling, is a condensed slander without supporting reasons. This could be put well in Greek: "Abuse is slander in brief"—though the phrase occurs nowhere. Of course, by insulting someone a person shows that he has nothing real and true to bring against him. Otherwise he would present it as the premises and confidently leave his listeners to draw the conclusion. Instead, he gives the conclusion and owes us the premises. But he counts on the assumption that he is doing this only for the sake of a welcome brevity.—Civic honor takes its name from the citizen class, but it applies to all classes without distinction, not excluding even the highest. No one can do without it. It is a thoroughly serious matter that everyone should be careful not to take lightly. Anyone who breaks faith has lost other people's faith and trust forever, whatever he may do and whoever he may be. The bitter fruits of that loss are sure to follow.

In a certain sense, *honor* has a *negative* character, unlike fame, which has a *positive* one. Honor is not an opinion about special qualities belonging to this person alone. It concerns only the qualities normally taken for granted, which he too is expected to possess. It says merely that he is no exception; fame says that he is. Fame must therefore first be earned. Honor merely needs not to be lost. Correspondingly, lack of fame is obscurity, something negative; lack of honor is disgrace, something positive.—But this negative quality must not be confused with passivity. On the contrary, honor has a thoroughly active character. It comes solely from its *possessor* and rests on *his* actions and omissions, not on what others do or what happens to him. It is therefore among the things within our control. As we will soon see, this distinguishes true honor from chivalric honor, or false honor. The only possible attack on honor from outside is slander. The only remedy is to refute it, with publicity suited to its reach, and to expose the slanderer.

Respect for age seems to rest on this: young people's honor is assumed, but has not yet been tested, so it really exists on credit. Older people, however, have had to show in the course of their lives whether their conduct could preserve their

honor. Years alone are not enough to justify the respect that younger people are everywhere required to show older people. Animals also live for years, some for many more. Nor is experience, understood simply as closer knowledge of the way the world goes, enough to justify it. The mere weakness of old age would entitle it to consideration rather than respect. Yet it is remarkable that people have an inborn, and therefore truly instinctive, respect for white hair. Wrinkles, a much more reliable sign of age, do not inspire this respect at all. No one ever speaks of venerable wrinkles, but people always speak of venerable white hair.

Honor has only an indirect value. As explained at the start of this chapter, other people's opinion of us can matter to us only insofar as it determines, or may sometimes determine, how they act toward us. But that is the case as long as we live with or among people. In civilized life, we owe our security and possessions only to society. We also need others in all our undertakings, and they must trust us before they will deal with us. Their opinion of us is therefore highly valuable to us, though always only indirectly. I cannot grant it any direct value. *Cicero* agrees: *As for a good reputation, Chrysippus and Diogenes used to say that, apart from its usefulness, one should not even lift a finger for it. I agree with them entirely.* (fin. III, 17.) Likewise, *Helvétius* gives a detailed explanation of this truth in his masterpiece, *On the Mind* (Disc. III, ch. 13). His conclusion is: *We do not love esteem for its own sake, but solely for the advantages it brings.* Since a means cannot be worth more than its end, the grand declaration "Honor comes before life" is, as already said, an exaggeration.

So much for civic honor. *Professional honor* is other people's general opinion that a man holding an office really has all the qualities it requires and always fulfills his official duties faithfully. The more important and extensive a man's sphere of action in the state—the higher and more influential his position—the higher people's opinion must be of the intellectual abilities and moral qualities that fit him for it. He therefore has a correspondingly greater degree of honor. His titles, decorations, and so on express this, as does other people's deferential behavior toward him. By this same measure, a person's station generally determines the particular degree of honor he receives, though this is modified by the

crowd's ability to judge the importance of that station. Still, someone who has special duties and fulfills them is always granted more honor than an ordinary citizen, whose honor rests chiefly on negative qualities.

Professional honor further requires an officeholder to maintain respect for the office itself, for the sake of his colleagues and successors. He does this by faithfully carrying out his duties, but also by not allowing attacks on the office itself, or on himself as its holder, to go unpunished. These include claims that he does not properly perform his duties or that the office itself does not serve the public good. By securing legal punishment, he must prove that these attacks were unjust.

Professional honor includes the honor of public servants, doctors, lawyers, all public teachers, and indeed all holders of academic degrees. In short, it belongs to everyone publicly declared qualified to perform a certain intellectual task, who has thereby undertaken to perform it: in a word, the honor of everyone who publicly undertakes a responsibility, as such. True *military honor* also belongs here. It consists in this: someone who has undertaken to defend the common fatherland must actually possess the qualities needed for that task—above all courage, bravery, and strength. He must be seriously prepared to defend his country to the death and, in general, never abandon the flag to which he has sworn allegiance, for anything in the world.—I have used *professional honor* in a broader sense here than usual. Ordinarily it means the respect citizens owe to the office itself.

Sexual honor, I think, needs closer examination, with its principles traced back to their root. This will also confirm that all honor ultimately rests on considerations of usefulness. By its nature, sexual honor divides into women's honor and men's honor. On both sides, it is a well-understood *sense of group solidarity*. The former is by far the more important, because sexual relations are the chief concern in a woman's life.—*Female honor*, then, is the general opinion that an unmarried girl has given herself to no man, and that a wife has given herself only to her husband. The importance of this opinion rests on the following facts. The female sex demands and expects everything from the male sex: everything it wants and needs. The male sex initially and directly wants only one

thing from the female sex. An arrangement therefore had to be made so that men could obtain that one thing from women only by undertaking to provide everything, including support for the children born of the union. The welfare of the whole female sex rests on this arrangement. To enforce it, women must necessarily stick together and show *group solidarity*. They then stand as one body, in closed ranks, against the entire male sex. Through its superior physical and intellectual strength, that sex naturally possesses all earthly goods. It is their common enemy, which must be defeated and conquered so that, by possessing it, they can gain possession of earthly goods. To this end, the rule of honor for the whole female sex is that men must be completely denied all sex outside marriage. Every individual man is thus forced into marriage, a kind of capitulation, and the whole female sex is provided for. But this purpose can be fully achieved only by strict observance of that rule. So the entire female sex, with a true *sense of group solidarity*, watches to ensure that all its members uphold it. Accordingly, any girl who has sex outside marriage has betrayed the whole female sex, since its welfare would be undermined if such behavior became general. It casts her out and brands her with shame: she has lost her honor. No woman may associate with her anymore. She is avoided like someone carrying the plague. The adulteress meets the same fate. She has not kept the terms of the capitulation her husband entered into. Such an example discourages men from entering into it, although the welfare of the whole female sex rests on it. Moreover, because her act involves a gross breach of promise and deception, the adulteress loses her civic honor along with her sexual honor. That is why people use the partly excusing expression “a fallen girl,” but not “a fallen wife.” The seducer can restore the former’s respectability by marrying her; the adulterer cannot do the same for the latter after her divorce.—With this clearly understood, we recognize that the principle of female honor rests on a beneficial, even necessary, but carefully calculated *group solidarity* based on self-interest. We can therefore consider it supremely important to women’s lives and give it a great relative value. But we cannot give it an absolute value that goes beyond life and its purposes and must therefore be bought even at the cost of life itself. Accordingly, we cannot applaud the extravagant actions of Lucretia and

Virginus, which turn into tragic farces. That is precisely why the ending of Emilia Galotti is so outrageous that one leaves the theater thoroughly upset. By contrast, despite sexual honor, one cannot help sympathizing with Klärchen in Egmont. Taking the principle of female honor to such an extreme is one of the many cases of forgetting the end while concentrating on the means. Such excess falsely assigns sexual honor an absolute value, though it has only a relative value, even more than all other honor. Indeed, one might call its value merely conventional, when one learns from *Thomasius, On Concubinage*, that in almost every country and age, down to the Lutheran Reformation, concubinage was a legally permitted and recognized relationship in which the concubine remained respectable. There is no need even to mention Mylitta at Babylon (Herodot I, 199), and so on. There are also certainly social circumstances that make the outward form of marriage impossible. This is especially so in Catholic countries, where divorce is unavailable, but everywhere in the case of ruling princes. In my opinion, they act much more morally by keeping a mistress than by entering a morganatic marriage. If the legitimate line should die out, the descendants of such a marriage might one day advance claims. Thus, however remote the chance, such a marriage creates the possibility of civil war. Besides, a morganatic marriage—a marriage contracted in defiance of all external circumstances—is ultimately a concession to women and priests, two classes to whom one should be as careful as possible not to concede anything. We should also consider that everyone in the country can marry the woman of his choice except one person, who is denied this natural right: that poor man is the prince. His hand belongs to the country and is given according to reasons of state, meaning the country's welfare. Yet he too is human and sometimes wants to follow his heart. So trying to forbid or reproach a prince for keeping a mistress is as unjust and ungrateful as it is petty and narrow-minded—provided, of course, that she is allowed no influence over the government. As for the mistress herself, in matters of sexual honor she is in some sense an exceptional person, exempt from the general rule. She has given herself only to a man who loved her and whom she loved, but whom she could never marry.—More generally, the many bloody sacrifices made to the principle of female honor—in

infanticide and mothers' suicides—show that its origin is not purely natural. Certainly, a girl who gives herself away unlawfully breaks faith with her entire sex. But this loyalty is only tacitly assumed, not sworn. And since, in the usual case, her own interests suffer most directly, her foolishness is infinitely greater than her wickedness.

Men's sexual honor is called into being by women's, as an opposing *group solidarity*. It demands that every man who has entered the capitulation called marriage, so favorable to the other side, should now ensure that its terms are kept toward him. Otherwise, lax observance might weaken even this agreement. Men would then give everything without being assured even of the one thing they bargained for in return: exclusive possession of the woman. Accordingly, a man's honor requires him to call his wife to account for adultery and punish it, at least by separating from her. If he knowingly tolerates it, the community of men brands him with shame. But this is nowhere near as far-reaching as the shame that strikes a woman who loses her sexual honor. It is only a *stain of a slighter kind*, because a man's sexual relationship is subordinate: he has many other, more important relationships. The two great dramatic poets of modern times have each made this male honor their subject twice: Shakespeare in *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*, and Calderón in *The Physician of His Honor* (the doctor of his honor) and *Secret Revenge for a Secret Insult* (secret revenge for secret disgrace). Incidentally, this honor requires punishment only of the woman, not of her lover. Punishing him is merely a *deed beyond what duty requires*. This confirms its origin, as given above, in men's *group solidarity*.—

Honor, as I have considered it so far in its kinds and principles, is recognized as generally valid among all peoples and in all ages. Some local and temporary modifications of the principles of female honor can, admittedly, be found. But there is another kind of honor, completely different from this universally accepted one. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans had any idea of it. Nor, down to the present day, do the Chinese, Hindus, or Muslims know anything of it. It arose only in the Middle Ages and became established only in Christian Europe. Even here it exists only among an extremely small fraction of the population: the upper classes and those who imitate them. This is *chivalric honor*, or

the *point of honor*. Its principles differ entirely from those of the honor discussed so far; some even contradict them. The earlier kind makes an *honorable man*, while this one makes a *man of honor*. So I will set out its principles separately here, as a code or mirror of chivalric honor.

- ¹ Honor consists *not* in other people's opinion of our worth, but solely in their *expression* of such an opinion. It makes no difference whether they really hold the opinion they express, let alone whether it is well founded. Others may therefore think as badly of us as they please because of the way we live, and despise us as deeply as they like. As long as no one dares say so aloud, our honor suffers no damage at all. Conversely, even if our qualities and actions compel everyone else to respect us very highly—for that is not up to their arbitrary choice—any one person need only voice contempt for us, even the worst and stupidest person, and our honor is immediately wounded. Indeed, it is lost forever unless it is restored.—As an unnecessary further proof that what matters is not other people's *opinion*, but solely its *expression*, consider that offensive remarks can be *withdrawn*, with an apology if necessary. It is then as though they had never been made. Whether the opinion that produced them has also changed, and why it should have changed, is irrelevant. Only its expression is canceled, and then everything is fine. The aim here, then, is not to earn respect but to force it.
- ² A man's honor rests not on what he *does*, but on what he *suffers*, on what happens to him. Under the principles of the universally accepted honor discussed first, it depends only on what *he himself* says or does. Chivalric honor, by contrast, depends on what someone else says or does. It lies in everyone's hands—indeed, hangs on the tip of everyone's tongue. If someone reaches for it, it can be lost forever at any moment, unless the injured man snatches it back through a process of restoration to be mentioned shortly. But he can do so only at the risk of his life, health, freedom, property, and peace of mind. A man's conduct may therefore be perfectly upright and noble, his heart the purest, and his mind the most outstanding. Yet he can lose his honor at any moment, whenever someone chooses to *insult* him. This person need only have avoided breaking

these laws of honor himself. Otherwise, he may be the most worthless scoundrel, the stupidest animal, an idler, gambler, and debt-maker—in short, someone not worth the first man’s glance. In fact, it will usually be precisely that sort of person who chooses to do it. As *Seneca* rightly observes, *The more contemptible and ridiculous someone is, the more unrestrained his tongue* (de constantia, 11). Such a person will also be most easily provoked against a man like the first one described. Opposites hate each other, and the sight of superior qualities commonly produces the silent rage of worthlessness. That is exactly why Goethe says:

Why complain about enemies?

Could those people ever become friends

When the kind of person you are

Is a constant, silent reproach to them?

W. O. Divan.

We can see how much people of the last kind described owe to the principle of honor. It puts them on a level with people otherwise beyond their reach in every respect.—Once such a person has insulted someone—that is, attributed a bad quality to him—the insult initially counts as an objectively true and well-founded judgment, a legally binding decree. Indeed, it remains true and valid for all time unless it is immediately washed out in blood. The man insulted remains, in the eyes of all “men of honor,” whatever his insulter called him, even if that insulter is the lowest of all men. For he has, to use the *technical term*, “let it stick.” Accordingly, “men of honor” will now thoroughly despise him and flee from him as though he had the plague. They may, for example, loudly and publicly refuse to attend a gathering to which he is admitted, and so on.—I believe I can confidently trace the origin of this wise fundamental view to the following fact. According to C. G. von Wächter’s “Beiträge zur deutschen Geschichte, besonders des deutschen Strafrechts,” 1845, in criminal trials during the Middle Ages, down to the fifteenth century, the accuser did not have to prove guilt; the accused had to prove his innocence. He could do so by an oath clearing himself, but for this he also needed oath-helpers (*fellow swearers*), who swore that they were convinced he was incapable of perjury. If

he had none, or the accuser refused to accept them, there followed a judgment of God, usually by single combat. The accused was now a “man under reproach” and had to clear himself. Here we see the origin of the concept of being under reproach and of the entire procedure that still takes place today among “men of honor,” only with the oath omitted. This also explains the obligatory high indignation with which “men of honor” receive an accusation of lying and demand bloody revenge for it. Given how common lies are, this seems very strange, but especially in England it has grown into a deeply rooted superstition. Really, anyone who threatens to punish the accusation of lying with death ought never to have told a lie in his life. In those medieval criminal trials, the shorter procedure was for the accused to reply to his accuser, “You are lying.” A judgment of God was then immediately ordered. That is why, under the chivalric code of honor, an accusation of lying must be followed at once by an appeal to weapons.—So much for insults. But there is something even worse than an insult, something so terrifying that I must ask “men of honor” to forgive me for merely mentioning it in this code of chivalric honor. I know that the bare thought of it makes their skin shudder and their hair stand on end. It is the *supreme evil*, the greatest evil in the world, worse than death and damnation. One person can, *horrible to say*, give another a slap or a blow. This is a dreadful event. It brings about so complete a death of honor that, while all other injuries to honor can be cured by bloodletting, this one requires an outright killing for a thorough cure.

- ³ Honor has absolutely nothing to do with what a person may be in himself, or with the question whether his moral character can ever change, or with any such pedantic subtleties. Once injured or temporarily lost, it can be restored quickly and completely, if one acts promptly, by a single universal remedy: the duel. If, however, the offender does not belong to the classes that acknowledge the chivalric code of honor, or has already broken that code once, one can perform an operation with a sure result. If armed, one stabs him on the spot, or even an hour afterward. Honor is then healed. This applies especially if the injury to honor was physical, but also if it was merely verbal. Otherwise, or if

one wants to avoid this step for fear of the unpleasant consequences, or is simply uncertain whether the offender submits to the laws of chivalric honor, there is a palliative remedy: gaining the “advantage.” This means that if he has been rude, one must be noticeably ruder. If insults can go no further, one starts hitting. Here too there is an ascending scale of honor-saving measures: slaps are cured by blows with a stick, and these by lashes with a hunting whip. Some recommend spitting as a proven remedy even for the latter. Only when one is too late to use these methods is it absolutely necessary to proceed to bloody operations. This palliative method really rests on the following rule.

- ⁴ Just as being insulted is a disgrace, giving an insult is an honor. Suppose, for example, that my opponent has truth, justice, and reason on his side, but I insult him. They must all pack up and leave, and right and honor are on my side. He, meanwhile, has lost his honor for the moment—until he restores it, not through justice and reason, but through shooting and stabbing. Rudeness is therefore a quality that, in matters of honor, replaces or outweighs every other. The rudest person is always right. *Why say more?* Whatever stupidity, bad manners, or wickedness someone may have committed, one rude act wipes it away as such and immediately makes it legitimate. In a discussion or other conversation, someone else may show more accurate knowledge, a stricter love of truth, sounder judgment, or greater understanding than we do. Or he may generally display intellectual advantages that put us in the shade. We can immediately cancel all such superiorities, along with the poverty in us that they expose, and become superior ourselves in turn, by being insulting and rude. Rudeness defeats every argument and eclipses every kind of intelligence. Unless our opponent goes along with this and answers with greater rudeness, drawing us into the noble contest for the advantage, we remain the victors and honor is on our side. Truth, knowledge, understanding, intelligence, and wit must pack up and leave, driven from the field by divine rudeness. So, whenever someone voices an opinion different from theirs, or merely shows more understanding than they can bring into the field, “men of honor” immediately make as if to mount that warhorse. If they lack a counterargument in a dispute, they look for a rude

remark, which serves the same purpose and is easier to find. Then they depart victorious. We can already see how rightly the principle of honor is credited with refining the tone of society.—This rule in turn rests on the following one, the true fundamental rule and soul of the entire code.

⁵ The highest court of justice, to which one can appeal from any other in every dispute so far as honor is concerned, is physical force—in other words, animal nature. Every rude act is really an appeal to animal nature. It declares a contest of intellectual powers or moral right to have no jurisdiction, and substitutes a contest of physical powers. In the human species, defined by *Franklin* as a *tool-making animal* (an animal that makes tools), this is carried out in a duel with the weapons peculiar to that species, and produces an irrevocable decision.—As everyone knows, this fundamental rule is expressed in a single term: *fist-law*. The term is ironic, like *mad reason*, which it resembles in form. Accordingly, chivalric honor ought to be called fist-honor.—

⁶ Earlier we found civic honor very scrupulous about mine and yours, obligations undertaken, and promises given. The code now under consideration, by contrast, shows the noblest generosity in these matters. Only *one* kind of promise must not be broken: a word of honor, meaning a promise accompanied by the words “On my honor!” This creates the presumption that any other promise may be broken. Even after breaking this word of honor, one can, if necessary, still save one’s honor through the universal remedy, the duel—in this case with those who claim that we gave our word of honor.—Furthermore, only *one* debt must be paid unconditionally: a gambling debt. This is accordingly called a “debt of honor.” One may cheat Jews and Christians out of every other debt without doing chivalric honor the slightest harm.—

Any unbiased person can see at first glance that this strange, barbaric, ridiculous code of honor did not arise from human nature itself or from a sound view of human relationships. Its extremely limited scope confirms this. It applies exclusively in Europe, and only since the Middle Ages; even here, only among the nobility, the military, and their imitators. Neither the Greeks nor the Romans nor the highly civilized Asian peoples of ancient and modern

times know anything of this honor and its principles. They all recognize only the honor analyzed first. For all of them, a man counts as what his actions and omissions reveal him to be, not as whatever some loose tongue chooses to call him. For all of them, what someone says or does may destroy his *own* honor, but never another person's. A blow is merely a blow, of the sort any horse or donkey can deliver more dangerously. Depending on the circumstances, it may provoke anger and perhaps be avenged on the spot. But it has nothing to do with honor. No account is kept of blows and insults, together with the "satisfaction" received for them or neglected to be demanded. These peoples are no less brave or willing to risk death than the peoples of Christian Europe. The Greeks and Romans were surely heroes through and through, but they knew nothing of the *point of honor*. Among them, single combat was not a matter for the nation's nobles, but for hired gladiators, expendable slaves, and condemned criminals, who were set against one another, alternating with wild beasts, to amuse the people. Gladiatorial games were abolished when Christianity was introduced. But in the Christian era the duel took their place, by way of trial by ordeal. Those games were a cruel sacrifice to the public appetite for spectacle. The duel is a cruel sacrifice to public prejudice—but offered not by criminals, slaves, and prisoners, as the games were, but by free and noble men.

Many surviving anecdotes show that the ancients were completely free of this prejudice. For example, when a Teutonic chief challenged *Marius* to single combat, that hero had him told that "if he was tired of living, he could hang himself." Still, he offered him a retired gladiator to fight with (Freinsh. suppl. in Liv. lib. LXVIII, c. 12). In Plutarch (Them. 11), we read that the fleet commander Eurybiades, while arguing with Themistocles, raised his stick to strike him. But we do not read that Themistocles then drew his sword. Instead, he said, "Strike me, but listen": "Hit me, but hear me out." How indignant the reader "of honor" must feel at finding no report that the Athenian officer corps immediately declared it would no longer serve under such a Themistocles!—A modern French writer therefore says, quite rightly: *If someone took it into his head to say that Demosthenes was a man of honor, people would smile with pity;——Cicero was not a man of honor either.* (Soirées littéraires, par C. Durand. Rouen

1828. Vol. 2. p. 300.) Further, the passage in Plato (de leg. IX, die letzten 6 Seiten, imgleichen XI p. 131 Bip.) about physical mistreatment sufficiently shows that the ancients had no idea of the chivalric point of honor in such matters. *Socrates* was often physically mistreated because of his frequent debates, and he bore it calmly. Once, when he was kicked, he accepted it patiently and said to someone who was surprised: "If a donkey had kicked me, would I take it to court?"—(Diog. Laert. II, 21.) Another time, someone asked him, "Isn't that man insulting and abusing you?" He replied, "No: what he says doesn't apply to me" (ibid. 36).—Stobaeus (Florileg., ed. Gaisford, Vol. I, p. 327-330) has preserved a long passage from *Musonius* that shows how the ancients regarded insults. They recognized no satisfaction except legal redress, and wise men disdained even that. Plato's *Gorgias* (S. 86 Bip.) clearly shows that the ancients knew no satisfaction for a slap except legal redress; *Socrates'* opinion of it is also given there (S. 133). The same emerges from *Gellius'* account (XX, 1) of a certain *Lucius Veratius*, who amused himself by slapping Roman citizens he met in the street for no reason. To prevent any complications, he had a slave accompany him with a bag of copper coins and immediately pay each startled victim the legally prescribed compensation of 25 asses. The musician *Nicodromus* slapped *Crates*, the famous Cynic, so hard that his face became swollen and bloody. *Crates* then fastened to his forehead a small board inscribed "Nicodromus made this" (*Made by Nicodromus*). This brought great shame on the flute player for showing such brutality toward a man whom all Athens revered like a household god (Apul. Flor. p. 126 bip.). (Diog. Laert. VI, 89.)—We have a letter from *Diogenes* of Sinope to Melesippus about his having been beaten by the drunken sons of Athenians. He tells him it is of no importance. (Nota Casaub. ad Diog. Laert. VI, 33.)—In his book *On the Constancy of the Wise Man*, from chapter 10 to the end, Seneca examines insult, *affront*, in detail to show that the wise man disregards it. In chapter 14 he says: "*But what will the wise man do if struck with a fist? What Cato did when he was struck in the face: he did not flare up or avenge the injury; he did not even forgive it, but denied that it had happened.*" "Yes," you cry, "but those were wise men!"—And you are fools? Agreed.—

So we see that the entire chivalric principle of honor was unknown to the ancients. In every respect, they remained faithful to an unbiased, natural view of things, and would not let anyone talk them into such sinister, disastrous absurdities. They could therefore see a blow to the face as nothing more than what it is: a small physical injury. For modern people, however, it has become a catastrophe and a subject for tragedies, as in Corneille's *Le Cid* and a more recent German middle-class tragedy called "The Power of Circumstances," which ought to be called "The Power of Prejudice." If a slap actually occurs in the National Assembly in Paris, all Europe echoes with it. To those people "of honor" who must be upset by these classical reminders and examples from antiquity, I recommend an antidote. Read the story of Mr. *Desglonds* in *Diderot's* masterpiece *Jacques the Fatalist*. It is a choice example of modern chivalric honor in which they can delight and find inspiration.

What has been said sufficiently shows that the chivalric principle of honor cannot be an original principle rooted in human nature itself. It is therefore artificial, and its origin is easy to find. It is plainly a child of the time when fists were better trained than heads and priests kept reason in chains: the much-praised Middle Ages and their chivalry. Back then, people let the good Lord not only provide for them but also judge for them. Difficult legal cases were therefore decided by ordeals or judgments of God. With few exceptions these consisted of single combats, not just between knights but also between ordinary citizens, as a fine example in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* (T. 2, A. 2, Sz. 3) shows. Moreover, any judicial decision could still be appealed to single combat as the higher court, namely God's judgment. Physical strength and skill—animal nature—were thus put on the judge's bench in place of reason. Right and wrong were decided not by what a person had done, but by what happened to him—exactly according to the chivalric principle of honor still in force today. Anyone who still doubts this origin of dueling should read the excellent book by J. G. Mellinger, *The History of Duelling*, 1849. Indeed, even today, among those who live by the chivalric principle of honor—people not generally known for

being especially well informed or thoughtful—some really regard the outcome of a duel as God’s decision on the dispute behind it. This is surely a traditionally inherited opinion.

Apart from its origin, the immediate tendency of the chivalric principle of honor is to use threats of physical force to compel outward signs of a respect that one considers either too difficult or unnecessary to earn in reality. This is rather like warming the bulb of a thermometer with one’s hand and then using the rising mercury to prove that one’s room is well heated. On closer inspection, this is the heart of the matter. Civic honor, which aims at peaceful dealings with others, consists in their opinion that we deserve complete *trust* because we respect everyone’s rights unconditionally. Chivalric honor consists in their opinion that we are *to be feared* because we intend to defend our own rights unconditionally. The principle that being feared matters more than being trusted would not be so very wrong, given how little we can count on people’s justice, if we lived in a state of nature. There everyone must protect himself and defend his rights directly. But in civilized life, where the state has taken over the protection of our persons and property, this principle no longer applies. It stands useless and deserted, like the castles and watchtowers from the age of fist-law among well-cultivated fields, busy roads, or even railroads. Accordingly, chivalric honor, which holds on to that principle, has turned to personal injuries that the state punishes lightly or not at all, following the principle *the law does not concern itself with trifles*. These are insignificant offenses, some of them mere teasing. But in regard to these, chivalric honor has worked itself up into an overvaluation of one’s own person entirely unsuited to human nature, condition, and fate. It raises the person to a kind of sacred status. It therefore finds the state’s punishment for small offenses against him completely inadequate, and undertakes to punish them itself, always by attacking the offender’s life and body. Plainly, this rests on the most excessive pride and outrageous arrogance. Forgetting completely what a human being actually is, it claims unconditional inviolability and freedom from criticism for him. Yet anyone who intends to enforce this by violence, and accordingly proclaims the rule “Anyone who insults me, or even strikes me, shall die,” really deserves to be

expelled from the country for that alone[F]. To dress up this presumptuous arrogance, people offer all sorts of excuses. They say that neither of two fearless men will ever give way, so that the slightest provocation would lead to insults, then blows, and finally killing. It is therefore better, for decency's sake, to skip the intermediate stages and go straight to weapons. They have arranged the details of the procedure into a rigid, pedantic system of laws and rules. It is the most solemn farce in the world, a veritable temple of honor to folly. But the principle itself is false. In matters of little importance—important matters are always left to the courts—one of two fearless men does indeed give way: the wiser one. And mere opinions are left alone. The people prove this, or rather all the numerous classes that do not acknowledge the chivalric principle of honor and among whom disputes therefore take their natural course. In these classes, killing is a hundred times rarer than in the fraction, perhaps only 1/1000 of the whole population, that worships that principle. Even a fistfight is rare.—Another claim is that polite society's good manners and refined behavior ultimately rest on this principle of honor and its duels, which form a defensive wall against outbreaks of brutality and bad manners. Yet Athens, Corinth, and Rome certainly had good—indeed very good—society, refined manners, and good conversational tone, without the bogeyman of chivalric honor behind them. Admittedly, women did not preside over society there as they do with us. This gives conversation a frivolous, silly character and banishes all substantial discussion. It also surely contributes greatly to the fact that personal courage ranks above every other quality in our polite society. Yet it is really a very subordinate quality, a mere noncommissioned officer's virtue. Even animals surpass us in it, which is why we say, for example, “brave as a lion.” Indeed, contrary to that claim, the chivalric principle of honor is often a safe refuge for dishonesty and wickedness on a large scale, and for bad manners, thoughtlessness, and loutishness on a small one. Many very annoying forms of misconduct are silently tolerated simply because no one wants to risk his neck by reproving them.—In keeping with all this, we find dueling flourishing most strongly, and pursued with bloodthirsty seriousness, precisely in the nation that has shown a

lack of true honor in political and financial affairs. Those who have experienced its private dealings can tell us how matters stand there. As for its politeness and social refinement, it has long been famous as an example of what to avoid.

[F] Chivalric honor is a child of pride and folly. (The opposite truth is stated most forcefully in *The Constant Prince*, in the words “*That is Adam’s inheritance.*”) It is very striking that this supreme form of pride exists solely and exclusively among followers of the religion that makes the utmost humility their duty. Neither earlier ages nor other parts of the world know this chivalric principle of honor. Still, we must attribute it not to religion, but to feudalism. Under that system, every nobleman saw himself as a little sovereign who recognized no human judge above him. He therefore learned to claim complete inviolability and sacredness for his person. Any attack on it, any blow or insult, consequently seemed to him a crime deserving death. Accordingly, the principle of honor and duels originally belonged only to the nobility, and as a result, in later times, to officers. Other upper classes subsequently joined them here and there, though never universally, so as not to count for less. Although duels developed out of ordeals, these were not the cause of the principle of honor, but its consequence and application. Anyone who recognizes no human judge appeals to the divine one. Ordeals themselves, however, are not peculiar to Christianity. They also occur widely in Hinduism, mostly in earlier times, though traces remain even now.—

All those excuses therefore fail. It can be argued with more justice that, just as a dog growls back when growled at and responds affectionately when petted, human nature also leads us to answer hostility with hostility and to become bitter and angry at signs of contempt or hatred. Cicero already says: *An insult has a certain sting that sensible and good men find very hard to bear.* And nowhere in the world, apart from a few pious sects, do people calmly accept insults, much less blows. But nature never leads us beyond retaliation proportionate to the matter. It does not lead us to punish an accusation of lying, stupidity, or cowardice with death. The old German principle “A slap calls for a dagger” is an outrageous chivalric superstition. In any case, answering or avenging insults is a matter of anger, certainly not of honor and duty, as the chivalric principle

of honor brands it. Rather, it is quite certain that a reproach can hurt only insofar as it hits home. We can also see this from the fact that the slightest hint that hits home wounds much more deeply than the gravest unfounded accusation. So anyone truly conscious of not deserving a reproach may and will confidently despise it. The principle of honor, however, demands that he display a sensitivity he does not possess and take bloody revenge for insults that do not hurt him. A person must have a low opinion of his own worth if he hurries to crush every expression that questions it so that it cannot be heard. True self-respect will therefore produce genuine indifference to insults. Where a lack of self-respect prevents this, prudence and good manners will teach one to preserve the appearance of indifference and conceal one's anger. If only we were rid of the superstition of chivalric honor, no one could imagine that insults could take anything from another person's honor or restore anything to his own. Nor could every injustice, brutality, or rude act immediately be legitimized by a willingness to give satisfaction—that is, to fight over it. People would then soon understand that, when it comes to abuse and insults, the loser of the contest is the winner. As *Vincenzo Monti* says, insults behave like church processions: they always return to where they started. Then, too, it would no longer be enough, as it is now, for someone to produce a rude remark in order to win the argument. Insight and understanding would consequently get a very different hearing from the one they get today. At present they must always first consider whether they might somehow offend the opinions of narrow-mindedness and stupidity, which their mere appearance has already alarmed and angered. If so, the head they inhabit might have to be put at hazard against the flat skull in which those other qualities live. Intellectual superiority would then gain its rightful leading place in society. At present, though discreetly, that place belongs to physical superiority and cavalryman's courage. As a result, the best people would have one less reason than they have now to withdraw from society. Such a change would produce *truly* good manners and pave the way for genuinely good society, of the kind that undoubtedly existed in Athens, Corinth, and Rome. Anyone who wants to see a sample should read Xenophon's Symposium.

The last defense of the chivalric code will no doubt be: “But then, heaven help us, someone might actually strike someone else!”—I could reply briefly that this has happened often enough among the 999/1000 of society who do not recognize that code, without anyone ever dying from it, whereas among its followers every blow generally becomes a fatal one. But I will examine the matter more closely. I have often tried to find some sound, or at least plausible, reason for the conviction so firmly held by one part of human society that a blow is something dreadful. I looked in both the animal and the rational side of human nature for a reason that was more than mere phrases and could be traced to clear concepts. I looked in vain. A blow is and remains a small physical evil that anyone can inflict on another. It proves nothing beyond the fact that he is stronger or more skillful, or that the other person was not on his guard. Analysis yields nothing further. Then I see the very knight who considers a blow from a human hand the greatest of evils receive a blow ten times harder from his horse, and limp away, suppressing his pain, while assuring us that it is nothing. So I thought the issue must be the human hand. But I see our knight receive sword thrusts and saber cuts from that hand in battle and assure us that they are trifles, not worth mentioning. Then I hear that even blows with the flat of a blade are nowhere near as bad as blows with a stick. Until recently, cadets were therefore subject to the former but not the latter. And the sword’s blow at a knighting is the greatest honor of all. Here my psychological and moral explanations run out. I have no choice but to regard the matter as an old, deeply rooted superstition—one more example among so many of what people can be talked into believing. The familiar fact that blows with a bamboo cane are a very common civil punishment in China, even for officials of every rank, confirms this. It shows us that human nature, even when highly civilized, does not pronounce the same judgment there[G]. Indeed, an unbiased look at human nature teaches us that hitting is as natural to humans as biting is to predators and butting is to horned cattle. Humans are simply animals that hit. That is also why we are outraged when, in rare cases, we hear that one person has bitten another. But giving and receiving blows is an event as natural as it is easy to bring about. It is easy to explain why greater refinement seeks to avoid this too,

through mutual self-control. But to impose on a nation, or even a single class, the belief that a blow is a dreadful disaster that must lead to murder and killing is cruel. There are too many real evils in the world for us to be allowed to multiply them with imaginary ones that bring real ones in their wake. Yet that is what this stupid, malicious superstition does. I must therefore even disapprove of governments and legislatures encouraging it by zealously pressing for the abolition of all corporal punishment, civilian and military. They think they are acting in humanity's interest, when the exact opposite is true. They are helping entrench that unnatural, disastrous delusion which has already claimed so many victims. For every offense except the gravest, a beating is the first punishment that occurs to people, and therefore the natural one. Someone who would not listen to reasons will listen to blows. A person who cannot be punished through his property because he has none, and who cannot be punished through his liberty without harming us because we need his services, should be punished by moderate blows. This is as fair as it is natural. No reasons are brought against it, only empty phrases about "human dignity." These rest not on clear concepts, but merely on that same harmful superstition. Almost laughable confirmation that this is the basis comes from the recent replacement, in the military of some countries, of beatings by punishment on wooden slats. This, exactly like a beating, causes physical pain, but is now supposed not to injure honor or degrade anyone.

[G] *Twenty or thirty strokes of a cane on the backside are, so to speak, the Chinese people's daily bread. It is a fatherly correction from the mandarin, carrying no disgrace, which they receive with thanks.*—Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, édition de 1819. Vol. 11, p. 454.

By encouraging that superstition in this way, governments play into the hands of chivalric honor and therefore of dueling, while on the other hand they try—or at least claim to try—to abolish dueling by law[H]. As a result, this fragment of fist-law, blown down from the roughest Middle Ages into the nineteenth century, still roams about here, a public scandal. It is high time it was thrown out in disgrace. These days one is not even allowed to set dogs or roosters systematically against one another; at least, such fights are punished in England.

Yet people are driven against their will into deadly combat by the ridiculous superstition of the absurd principle of chivalric honor and by its narrow-minded representatives and administrators. These impose on them the duty to fight one another like gladiators over some trifle. For the word “duel,” which probably comes not from the Latin *duellum*, but from the Spanish *duelo*, sorrow, lament, grievance, I therefore suggest to our German language purists the term “knight-baiting.” The pedantry with which this folly is practiced certainly gives material for laughter. Yet it is outrageous that this principle and its absurd code establish a state within the state. Recognizing no law but fist-law, it tyrannizes over the classes subject to it by maintaining a sacred court of the Vehm. Anyone can summon anyone else before it, using easily contrived occasions as its bailiffs, to undergo a judgment of life and death on both himself and the other man. Naturally, this becomes a hiding place from which the most depraved person, provided he belongs to those classes, can threaten or even kill the noblest and best, whom he must necessarily hate for being just that. Today the courts and police have more or less ensured that not every scoundrel can shout at us on the highway, “Your money or your life!” Sound reason should at last ensure that not every scoundrel can shout at us in the middle of peaceful dealings, “Your honor or your life!” The upper classes should be relieved of the anxiety caused by the fact that anyone, at any moment, may be made answerable with life and limb for the brutality, rudeness, stupidity, or malice of someone else who chooses to direct it at him. That two young, inexperienced hot-heads who clash in words should pay for it with their blood, health, or lives is a crying, shameful outrage. We can judge how harsh the tyranny of this state within the state is, and how powerful its superstition, from the repeated cases of people who could not restore their wounded chivalric honor because the offender’s rank was too high or too low, or his condition otherwise unsuitable. In despair they killed themselves, meeting a tragicomic end.—What is false and absurd generally reveals itself in the end by flowering into contradiction at its peak. Here too, finally, it appears as the most glaring conflict of rules: an officer is forbidden to duel, but is punished with dismissal if, when the occasion arises, he fails to do so.

[H] Governments seem eager to suppress dueling, but act as though they simply cannot manage it, even though it would plainly be very easy, especially at universities. The real reason, I think, is this. The state cannot fully pay for the services of its officers and civil servants in money. It therefore lets the other half of their wages consist in honor, represented by titles, uniforms, and decorations. To keep this nonmaterial payment for their services at a high value, the sense of honor must be nourished and sharpened in every way, even somewhat overstrained if necessary. Civic honor is not enough for this, if only because it is shared with everyone. So chivalric honor is called in to help and maintained in the way described. In England, where military and civil salaries are much higher than on the Continent, this expedient is unnecessary. That is precisely why dueling has been almost completely eradicated there, especially in the last twenty years. It now occurs extremely rarely and is then laughed at as folly. The large *Anti-duelling-society*, which counts many lords, admirals, and generals among its members, has certainly contributed greatly to this, and Moloch must do without his victims.

While I am on the subject, I will go still further in speaking freely. Viewed clearly and without prejudice, the distinction made so important and treated so seriously between killing one's enemy in open combat with equal weapons and killing him from ambush rests solely on what I have already said: this state within the state recognizes no law but the law of the stronger, or fist-law. It has elevated this to a judgment of God and made it the basis of its code. By the first method one has proved nothing more than that one is stronger or more skillful. The justification sought in facing open combat therefore assumes that the right of *the stronger* really is a *right*. In truth, the other person's inability to defend himself gives me the opportunity to kill him, but certainly not the right. That right—my *moral* justification—can rest only on my *motives* for taking his life. Suppose these really exist or are sufficient. There is then absolutely no reason to make the matter further depend on *whether* he or I can shoot or fence better. In that case it makes no difference how I take his life, from behind or from the front. Morally, the right of the stronger has no more weight than the right of the cleverer, exercised in a treacherous killing. The law of the head therefore

weighs as much as the law of the fist here. We should also note that both are used in a duel, since every feint in fencing is already a trick. If I consider myself morally justified in taking someone's life, it is foolish to let the matter depend on whether he happens to shoot or fence better than I do. In that case, after already wronging me, he is to take my life as well. That insults should be avenged not by dueling but by assassination is *Rousseau's* view. He cautiously hints at it in the mysteriously worded twenty-first note to Book 4 of *Émile* (S. 173, Bip.). But he is so caught in chivalric superstition that he regards merely being accused of lying as grounds for assassination. Yet he must have known that everyone has deserved this accusation countless times, and he himself to the highest degree. The prejudice that makes the right to kill an offender conditional on open combat with equal weapons plainly regards fist-law as a genuine right and single combat as a judgment of God. By contrast, the Italian who, inflamed with anger, attacks his offender with a knife wherever he finds him acts at least consistently and naturally. He is cleverer, but no worse, than the duelist. If someone says that I am justified in killing my enemy in a duel because he was trying to kill me, the answer is that by challenging him I put him in a position of self-defense. Deliberately putting one another in a position of self-defense really amounts only to seeking a plausible excuse for murder. A justification based on the principle *no wrong is done to one who consents* would be more reasonable, insofar as each has agreed to stake his life on the contest. But the objection is that the *consent* is not genuine. The tyranny of chivalric honor and its absurd code is the bailiff that dragged both combatants, or at least one of them, before this bloody court of the Vehm.

I have discussed chivalric honor at length, but with good intentions, and because philosophy is the only Hercules against the moral and intellectual monsters of this world. Two things chiefly distinguish the social condition of modern times from that of antiquity, to the disadvantage of the former. They have given it a solemn, gloomy, sinister coloring. Free of this, antiquity stands cheerful and unselfconscious, like the morning of life. They are chivalric honor and venereal disease—a *noble pair of brothers*! Together they have poisoned life's strife and love. The influence of venereal disease extends much further

than might appear at first glance, since it is by no means merely physical but also moral. Since Cupid's quiver began carrying poisoned arrows too, an alien, hostile, even devilish element has entered relations between the sexes. A dark, fearful distrust runs through them as a result. The direct influence of such a change in the foundation of all human community extends, more or less, to other social relationships as well. Explaining this would take me too far from my subject.—The influence of chivalric honor is similar, though quite different in kind. This solemn farce was unknown to the ancients, but makes modern society stiff, serious, and anxious, if only because every passing remark is scrutinized and chewed over. But there is more. This principle is a universal Minotaur. Unlike the ancient one, it must receive an annual tribute of sons of noble houses not from one country, but from every country in Europe. It is therefore time to attack this bogeyman boldly, as has been done here. May both monsters of modern times come to an end in the nineteenth century! Let us not give up hope that doctors, through preventive measures, will eventually succeed with the first. But getting rid of the *bogeyman* is the philosopher's task, through correcting people's concepts, since governments have so far failed to do it by enforcing laws. Besides, only the first method attacks the evil at its root. If, however, governments really are serious about abolishing dueling, and their limited success really comes only from inability, I will propose a law whose success I guarantee. It requires no bloody operations, no scaffold or gallows, no lifelong imprisonment. Rather, it is a tiny, very mild homeopathic remedy: anyone who challenges another person or answers a challenge receives, *in the Chinese manner*, 12 strokes of a stick from a corporal in broad daylight outside the main guardhouse. Challenge-bearers and seconds receive 6 each. The consequences of duels actually fought would remain subject to ordinary criminal proceedings. Someone of a chivalric disposition might object that after such punishment many a "man of honor" might shoot himself. I reply: better for such a fool to shoot himself than other people.—At bottom, however, I know very well that governments are not serious about abolishing duels. Apart from the highest posts, civil servants' salaries, and still more officers' pay, fall far below the value of their services. They are therefore paid the other half in hon-

or. This is represented first by titles and decorations, and more broadly by the honor of their station in general. For this class honor, the duel is a useful extra horse; that is why it has its preparatory school at universities. Its victims therefore pay the shortfall in salaries with their blood.—

For completeness, *national honor* should also be mentioned. It is the honor of an entire people as part of the community of nations. In that community there is no court but force, so each member must protect its own rights. A nation's honor therefore consists not only in the opinion it has earned that it can be trusted—its credit—but also in the opinion that it is to be feared. It must therefore never let violations of its rights go unanswered. It combines the point of honor of civic honor with that of chivalric honor.—

Earlier, *fame* was listed last among the things a person *represents*, meaning what he is in the world's eyes. We still have to consider it.—Fame and honor are twin siblings, but like the Dioscuri, of whom Pollux was immortal and Castor mortal: fame is the immortal brother of mortal honor. Of course, this applies only to fame of the highest kind, true and genuine fame. There are certainly many kinds of short-lived fame too.—Further, honor concerns only qualities demanded of everyone in the same circumstances; fame concerns only qualities that can be demanded of no one. Honor concerns qualities anyone may publicly claim; fame concerns qualities no one may claim for himself. Our honor extends as far as knowledge of us extends. Fame, on the contrary, runs ahead of knowledge of us and carries that knowledge wherever it goes. Everyone has a claim to honor; only exceptional people have a claim to fame. Fame is earned only through extraordinary achievements. These, in turn, are either *deeds* or *works*, so there are two roads to fame. A great heart chiefly equips one for the road of *deeds*; a great mind for that of *works*. Each road has its own advantages and disadvantages. The chief difference is that deeds pass away, while works remain. Even the noblest deed has only a temporary influence. A work of genius, however, lives and acts through all ages, benefiting and uplifting people. Only the memory of deeds remains. It grows ever weaker, more distorted, and less interesting, and must gradually die out unless history takes it up and passes it on to posterity in petrified form. Works, by contrast, are themselves immortal

and can survive every age, especially written works. Alexander the Great's name and memory live on, but Plato and Aristotle, Homer and Horace are themselves still here, living and acting directly. The Vedas with their Upanishads are here, but no knowledge at all has reached us of the deeds done in their time[I]. —Another disadvantage of deeds is their dependence on opportunity, which must first make them possible. Connected with this, their fame depends not only on their intrinsic worth, but also on the circumstances that give them importance and splendor. Further, when deeds are purely personal, as in war, their fame depends on the testimony of a few eyewitnesses. These are not always present, and are not always just and unbiased when they are. But deeds have the advantage of being practical matters within the range of ordinary human judgment. They are therefore immediately judged fairly, if only the facts are correctly communicated—unless their motives are correctly recognized or fairly assessed only later, since understanding any action requires knowing its motive. With works, the reverse is true. Their creation depends not on opportunity, but solely on their creator. And what they are in themselves they remain, as long as they exist. With them, the difficulty lies instead in judgment, and the higher their kind, the greater the difficulty. Competent judges are often lacking, as are unbiased and honest ones. On the other hand, their fame is not decided by *one* court: an appeal is possible. As said, only the memory of deeds reaches posterity, in the form handed down by contemporaries. Works themselves, however, reach posterity, just as they are, apart from any missing fragments. Here the facts cannot be distorted. Any harmful influence of the surroundings at their origin also later disappears. Often, only time gradually brings forward the few truly competent judges. Exceptional people themselves, they sit in judgment on still greater exceptions. They give their weighty votes one after another. Thus, sometimes admittedly only after centuries, a perfectly fair judgment is established, which no later age overturns. The fame of works is that certain, indeed inevitable. Whether their creator lives to see it, however, depends on external circumstances and chance. The higher and more difficult the kind of work, the rarer this is. Accordingly, Seneca (ep. 79.) says with incomparable beauty that fame follows merit as infallibly as a shadow fol-

lows a body, only, like the shadow, sometimes going ahead of it and sometimes behind it. After explaining this, he adds: Even if *envy has commanded silence* from everyone living with you, people will come who judge without hostility or favoritism. Incidentally, this shows us that the art of suppressing merit through malicious silence and deliberate disregard, to hide good work from the public in favor of bad work, was as customary among the scoundrels of Seneca's age as among those of ours. In both cases, *envy sealed their lips*.—As a rule, the longer fame is to last, the later it arrives, just as everything excellent matures slowly. Fame destined to survive its possessor resembles an oak, growing very slowly from its seed. Easy, passing fame resembles fast-growing annual plants. False fame resembles rapidly sprouting weeds, which are uprooted as quickly as possible. This process really rests on the fact that the more a person belongs to posterity—that is, to humanity generally and as a whole—the more alien he is to his own age. What he produces is not dedicated specifically to that age. It belongs to it not as that particular age, but only insofar as it is part of humanity, and so is not tinged with its local color. The age may therefore easily let him pass by as a stranger. It values instead those who serve the affairs of its brief day or the mood of the moment, and who therefore belong entirely to *it*, living and dying with it. Accordingly, the histories of art and literature consistently teach that the highest achievements of the human mind have generally met with disfavor. They remained in that position until minds of a higher kind appeared, responded to them, and brought them the esteem which the authority thus gained afterward preserved. Ultimately, all this rests on the fact that people can really understand and value only what resembles themselves. Now, the shallow respond to shallowness, the common to what is common, the unclear to confusion, and the brainless to nonsense. Everyone likes his own works best of all, since they resemble him completely. So the legendary old Epicharmus already sang:

There is nothing strange in what I say,
That people please themselves and think
Their nature fine. For a dog seems
Most beautiful to a dog, an ox to an ox,
A donkey to a donkey, and a pig to a pig.
I will translate this into German so that no one misses its meaning:
It is no wonder I speak as I think,
And those people, pleased with themselves, imagine
They deserve praise. So a dog sees a dog
As the finest creature, and an ox sees an ox,
A donkey a donkey, and a pig a pig.

[I] So it is a poor compliment to think one honors works by calling them deeds, as is fashionable today. Works are of an essentially higher kind. A deed is always just an action prompted by a motive, and so is individual and passing. It belongs to the universal, original element of the world: the will. A great or beautiful work, by contrast, endures because it has universal significance. It springs from the intellect, innocent and pure, which rises like a fragrance from this world of will.

One advantage of the fame of deeds is that it generally arrives immediately in a powerful explosion, often so powerful that it is heard across Europe. The fame of works, however, comes slowly and gradually, quietly at first and then louder and louder. It often reaches full strength only after a hundred years. But then it endures, because the works endure, sometimes for thousands of years. The other kind, after its first explosion is over, gradually weakens, becoming known to fewer and fewer people, until at last it leads only a ghostly existence in history.

Even the strongest arm, throwing a light object, cannot give it the motion needed to fly far and strike hard. It falls limply to the ground nearby because it lacks enough material substance of its own to absorb the force given to it. Beautiful and great thoughts, even masterpieces of genius, meet the same fate when only small, weak, or distorted minds are there to receive them. The voices of wise people in every age have joined in a chorus of complaint about this. For

example, Jesus Sirach says, “Someone speaking to a fool speaks to a sleeper. When it is over, he says: What is it?”—And Hamlet: *a sly remark sleeps in a fool’s ear* (a sly speech lies asleep in a fool’s ear). And Goethe:

The best-chosen words will be mocked

If the listener’s hearing is crooked.

And again:

You have no effect; everything stays unresponsive.

Keep your spirits up!

A stone in a swamp

Makes no ripples.

And Lichtenberg: “When a head and a book collide and there is a hollow sound, does it always come from the book?”—And again: “Such works are mirrors: if a monkey looks in, no apostle can look out.” Indeed, Father Gellert’s very beautiful and moving lament about this deserves to be recalled once again:

“Often the very finest gifts

Have the fewest admirers,

And most of the world

Takes the bad for the good;

We see this evil every day.

But how can we stop this plague?

I doubt that this affliction

Can be driven from our world.

There is just one remedy on earth,

But it is infinitely hard:

Fools must become wise;

And look! They never will.

They never know what things are worth.

Their eyes decide, not their understanding:

They forever praise what is inferior,

Because they have never known the good.”

Added to this intellectual incapacity, which means that excellence, as Goethe says, is recognized and valued even more rarely than it is found, is people's moral badness, here as everywhere, appearing in the form of envy. When someone gains fame, one more person is raised above all others of his kind. They are lowered by the same amount. Every outstanding achievement therefore gains its fame at the expense of those who have none.

"When we give honor to others,
We must lower our own standing."

Goethe. W. O. Divan.

This explains why, in whatever field excellence appears, the entire, very numerous body of mediocrity immediately joins forces and conspires to deny it recognition and, if possible, stifle it. Their secret password is: *Down with merit*. But even those who have merit themselves and have already gained fame for it are reluctant to see a new fame appear, whose brightness makes their own shine less brightly. So even Goethe says:

"Had I delayed coming into being
Until people granted me life,
I would not yet be on earth,
As you can understand
When you see how they behave,
Those who, to seem important,
Would gladly deny my existence."

Thus *honor* generally finds fair judges and is not attacked by envy; it is even granted to everyone in advance, on credit. *Fame*, however, must be fought for despite envy, and the laurel is awarded by a tribunal of decidedly unfavorable judges. We can and will share honor with everyone. Fame is diminished or made harder to obtain by everyone who gains it.—Furthermore, the difficulty of gaining fame through works is inversely proportional to the number of people who make up their audience, for reasons easy to see. It is therefore much greater for works promising instruction than for those promising entertainment. It is greatest for philosophical works. The instruction these promise is uncertain, on the one hand, and of no material use, on the other. Such works therefore first

appear before an audience consisting entirely of competitors.—The difficulties just described show that humanity would have received few or no immortal works if their creators had not completed them out of love for the works themselves and their own delight in them, but had needed fame to encourage them. Indeed, anyone who is to produce what is good and right and avoid what is bad must defy the judgment of the crowd and its spokespeople, and therefore despise them. This explains the truth of the observation particularly emphasized by *Osorius (de gloria)*: fame flees those who seek it and follows those who neglect it. The former adapt to their contemporaries' taste; the latter defy it.

As difficult as fame is to gain, it is easy to keep. Here too it contrasts with honor. Honor is granted to everyone, even on credit: one need only preserve it. But that is where the task lies, for one worthless act loses it beyond recovery. Fame, by contrast, can never really be lost. The deed or work that earned it stands forever, and its fame remains with its creator even if he adds nothing new. If fame really does fade away, if someone outlives it, then it was false: undeserved, produced by a temporary overvaluation. Or it was even the sort of fame Hegel had and Lichtenberg describes: "Trumpeted by a friendly clique of candidates and echoed back by empty heads;—but posterity, how it will smile when one day it knocks on those colorful word-shells, those fine nests of departed fashion and homes of dead agreements, and finds everything, everything empty—not even the smallest thought that could confidently say: *Come in!*"—

Fame really rests on what someone is compared with others. It is therefore essentially relative and can have only a relative value. It would disappear entirely if everyone else became what the celebrated person is. Only what keeps its value in all circumstances can have absolute value—here, what a person is directly and for himself. The worth and happiness of a great heart and a great mind must therefore lie in that. What is valuable is not fame, but what earns it. This is, so to speak, the substance of the matter; fame is only its incidental attribute. Indeed, fame chiefly affects the celebrated person as an outward sign confirming his own high opinion of himself. One might therefore say that, just as light is invisible unless reflected by a body, excellence becomes fully certain of itself only through fame. Yet fame is not even an infallible sign. There is fame with-

out merit and merit without fame, which is why Lessing's remark works so nicely: "Some people are famous, and others deserve to be." Besides, an existence whose worth or worthlessness depended on how it appeared in other people's eyes would be miserable. Yet that would be the life of the hero or genius if its value lay in fame, meaning other people's applause. Rather, every being lives and exists for its own sake, and therefore first of all in itself and for itself.—Whatever a person is, and in whatever way, he is so first and chiefly for himself. If it is not worth much here, it is not worth much at all. The image of his being in other people's heads, by contrast, is secondary, derivative, and subject to chance. It relates back to the original only very indirectly. Besides, the heads of the crowd are too wretched a stage for true happiness to find a place there. Only imaginary happiness can be found there. What a mixed company gathers in that temple of universal fame! Generals, ministers, quacks, jugglers, dancers, singers, millionaires, and Jews. Indeed, the advantages of all these are valued there much more sincerely, receiving much more *genuinely felt esteem* than intellectual qualities, especially those of the highest kind. With the great majority, these win only *esteem taken on trust*. From the standpoint of happiness, fame is therefore nothing more than the rarest and choicest morsel for our pride and vanity. But these exist in excess in most people, though they hide it. Perhaps they are strongest in those who are in some way capable of gaining fame. Such people must generally carry an uncertain awareness of their superior worth within them for a long time before the opportunity comes to prove it and then experience its recognition. Until then, they have felt as though they were suffering a secret injustice[[]]. More generally, as discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the value people place on others' opinion of them is quite disproportionate and unreasonable. So *Hobbes* expressed the matter very strongly, but perhaps correctly, in these words: *All pleasure of the mind and all high spirits lie in having people with whom one can compare oneself and think grandly of oneself* (de cive. I, 5). This explains the high value generally placed on fame and the sacrifices people make in the mere hope of gaining it one day:

Fame is the spur that lifts a clear mind
(That last weakness of noble minds)
To reject pleasures and spend its days in hard work.

As well as:

How hard it is to climb
To the heights where Fame's proud temple shines far away.

[J] Since our greatest pleasure consists in *being admired*, while admirers are reluctant to grant admiration even where there is every reason for it, the happiest person is the one who, by whatever means, has learned to admire himself sincerely. He must only keep others from shaking his belief.

Finally, this also explains why the vainest of all nations constantly talks about *glory* and unhesitatingly regards it as the chief driving force behind great deeds and great works.—But fame is undeniably secondary: merely the echo, image, shadow, or sign of merit. What is admired must in any case be worth more than the admiration. So what truly brings happiness cannot lie in fame, but in what earns it: merit itself, or, more precisely, the disposition and abilities from which it sprang, whether moral or intellectual. The best that anyone is, he must necessarily be for himself. Whatever of it is reflected in other people's heads, and whatever standing he has in their opinion, is incidental and can be only of secondary interest to him. Anyone who merely *deserves* fame, even without receiving it, therefore possesses by far the main thing. What he lacks is something for which that main thing can console him. It is not being thought a great man by the uncritical, so often deceived crowd that makes someone enviable, but being one. Nor is the great happiness that posterity learns about him, but that thoughts arise in him which deserve to be preserved and thought over for centuries. Moreover, this cannot be taken from him: it is among the things in our control; the other is among the things outside our control. If admiration itself were the main thing, what is admired would not deserve it. This is actually the case with false, undeserved fame. Its possessor must feed on it without actually having what it is supposed to signify, what it should merely reflect. But even this fame itself must often lose its charm for him. Despite all the self-deception born of self-love, he sometimes grows dizzy at a height for which he is unfit, or

feels like a copper ducat. Then he is seized by fear of exposure and deserved humiliation, especially when he already reads posterity's verdict on wiser people's faces. He is therefore like someone who holds property under a forged will.—The person who receives the truest fame, posthumous fame, never hears it, yet we consider him happy. His happiness therefore lay in the great qualities themselves that earned him fame, and in finding the opportunity to develop them. He was allowed to act as suited him, or to pursue what he pursued with pleasure and love: only works born from this attain lasting fame. His happiness therefore consisted in his great heart, or in the wealth of a mind whose imprint in his works wins the admiration of coming centuries. It consisted in the thoughts themselves, thinking through which became the occupation and delight of the noblest minds of an immeasurable future. So the value of posthumous fame lies in deserving it, and this is its own reward. Whether the works that earned it also sometimes enjoyed the fame of contemporaries depended on chance circumstances and was not very important. As a rule, people have no judgment of their own, and especially no ability at all to assess high and difficult achievements. In such matters they always follow someone else's authority. In a higher field, fame rests, for 99 out of 100 people giving praise, purely on trust. Even the most widespread applause of contemporaries can therefore have little value for thoughtful minds. They always hear in it only the echo of a few voices, which themselves are merely what the day happened to produce. Would a virtuoso feel flattered by his audience's loud applause if he knew that, apart from one or two people, it consisted entirely of the completely deaf? To hide their disability from one another, they clap eagerly as soon as they see that one person's hands moving. And what if he also knew that these leaders of the applause often accepted bribes to obtain the loudest applause for the most miserable fiddler?—This explains why contemporary fame so rarely undergoes the transformation into posthumous fame. Thus *d'Alembert*, in his very beautiful description of the temple of literary fame, says: "The inside of the temple is inhabited entirely by dead people who were not in it during their lives, and by a few living people, almost all of whom will be thrown out when they die." Incidentally, erecting a monument to someone during his lifetime amounts to

declaring that posterity cannot be trusted in his case.—If someone does live to experience fame that will become lasting fame, it will rarely happen before old age. Artists and poets may sometimes be exceptions to this rule; philosophers least of all. Portraits of men famous for their works confirm it, since these were generally made only after their celebrity began. They are usually shown old and gray, especially philosophers. From the standpoint of happiness, however, this is quite right. Fame and youth at once are too much for a mortal. Our life is so poor that its goods must be distributed more economically. Youth has more than enough in its own riches and can be satisfied with them. But in old age, when all pleasures and joys have died off like trees in winter, the tree of fame puts out its leaves at the most welcome time, a true wintergreen. One may also compare it to winter pears, which grow in summer but are enjoyed in winter. In old age there is no finer consolation than having embodied all the strength of one's youth in *works* that do not grow old *with* us.

Let us now look a little more closely at the ways of gaining fame in scholarship and science, the field nearest to our concern. We can lay down this rule. The intellectual superiority indicated by such fame is always shown through a new combination of some set of facts. These facts can be of very different kinds. But the more widely known and accessible to everyone they are, the greater and more widespread will be the fame attainable by combining them. Suppose, for example, that the facts consist of certain numbers or curves, a particular fact of physics, zoology, botany, or anatomy, a few corrupt passages in ancient authors, half-erased inscriptions or inscriptions whose alphabet we do not possess, or obscure points of history. Then the fame attainable by combining them correctly will not extend much further than knowledge of the facts themselves: to a small number of people, mostly living in retirement and jealous of fame in their own field.—But suppose the facts are known to the whole human race. They might, for example, be essential properties of human understanding or feeling shared by everyone, forces of nature whose entire mode of operation is constantly before our eyes, or the generally familiar course of nature as a whole. Then the fame of having shed light on them through a new, important, and plainly evident combination will in time spread through almost the entire civi-

lized world. If the facts are accessible to everyone, their combination generally will be too.—Even so, fame will always correspond only to the difficulty overcome. The more generally known the facts, the harder it is to combine them in a new yet correct way. An enormous number of minds have already tried them and exhausted the impossible combinations. Facts inaccessible to the general public, and reachable only by laborious and difficult paths, will almost always still allow new combinations. So if one approaches these with straightforward understanding and sound judgment—in other words, a moderate intellectual superiority—one may easily have the good fortune to make a new and correct combination. But the fame earned this way will have roughly the same limits as knowledge of the facts. Solving problems of this kind certainly requires much study and work merely to gain knowledge of the facts. In the other kind, where the greatest and most widespread fame is to be won, the facts are given free of charge. But in proportion as this latter kind requires less work, it requires more talent, indeed genius. No work or study can compare with these in worth or in the value placed on them.

It follows that people who feel they possess a capable understanding and sound judgment, but do not trust themselves to have the highest intellectual gifts, must not shrink from much study and exhausting work. By these means they can work their way out of the great mass of people who have the generally familiar facts before them, and reach more distant places accessible only to scholarly diligence. Here, where the number of competitors is infinitely smaller, even a moderately superior mind will soon find an opportunity for a new and correct combination of facts. The merit of its discovery will even rest partly on the difficulty of reaching those facts. But the applause thus earned from fellow scholars, the only experts in this field, will reach the great mass of people only from a distance.—If we follow this road to its extreme, we can identify the point at which the facts alone, because of the great difficulty of obtaining them, suffice to establish fame without any combination being needed. Journeys to very remote and seldom-visited countries achieve this. One becomes famous for what one has seen, not for what one has thought. This road also has the great

advantage that it is much easier to tell others what one has seen than what one has thought, and the same is true of understanding it. One will therefore find many more readers for the former than for the latter. As Asmus already says:

“When someone takes a journey,
He has something to tell.”

In keeping with all this, when we meet famous people of this kind personally, Horace’s remark often comes to mind:

Those who cross the sea change their sky, not their mind.

(*Epist.* I, 11, v. 27.)

But now consider, on the other hand, a mind endowed with high abilities. Only such a mind may venture to solve the great problems concerning the universal and the whole, and therefore the most difficult ones. It will do well to broaden its horizon as much as possible, but always evenly in every direction, never losing itself too far in any particular region known only to a few. In other words, it should not go deeply into the specialties of any individual science, much less concern itself with minute details. It does not need to tackle hard-to-reach subjects to escape the crowd of competitors. Precisely what lies before everyone will give it material for new, important, and true combinations. Accordingly, its merit can be appreciated by everyone who knows the facts—in other words, a large part of the human race. This is the basis of the enormous difference between the fame gained by poets and philosophers and that available to physicists, chemists, anatomists, mineralogists, zoologists, philologists, historians, and so on.

Chapter 5



Advice and Maxims.

I aim at completeness here even less than anywhere else. Otherwise I would have to repeat the many rules for living, some excellent, laid down by thinkers of every age, from Theognis and Pseudo-Solomon down to Rochefoucauld. I could not then avoid many worn-out commonplaces. With completeness, systematic arrangement also largely falls away. We can console ourselves for the absence of both by remembering that in matters of this kind they almost inevitably bring boredom in their wake. I have given only what happened to occur to me, seemed worth sharing, and, as far as I remember, has not yet been said—at least not fully and in just this way. So this is merely a gleaning after what others have already accomplished in this boundless field.

Still, to bring some order to the great variety of views and advice belonging here, I will divide them into general points, points concerning our behavior toward ourselves, then toward others, and finally toward the course of the world and fate.

A. General.

¹ I regard as the highest rule of all practical wisdom a statement *Aristotle* made in passing in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (VII, 12): “The sensible person pursues freedom from pain, not pleasure” (*The prudent man seeks what is free from pain, not what is pleasant*). This might be put still better in German as: “The

reasonable person pursues not pleasure, but freedom from pain”; or: “The reasonable person aims at freedom from pain, not enjoyment.” Its truth rests on the fact that all enjoyment and happiness are negative in nature, while pain is positive. An explanation and justification of this latter statement can be found in my main work, Bd. I, § 58. But I will also illustrate it here with a fact observable every day. If the whole body is healthy and sound except for one small sore or otherwise painful spot, the health of the whole does not enter consciousness. Our attention is constantly directed toward the pain of the injured spot, and the comfortable feeling of being alive as a whole is canceled.—Likewise, if all our affairs are going as we wish except for *one* that runs contrary to our intentions, that one keeps coming into our head, even if it is unimportant. We think about it often and give little thought to all the other, more important things going as we wish.—In both cases, it is the will that is impaired: in one case as it takes objective form in the organism, in the other as it does so in human striving. In both, we see that its satisfaction always has only a negative effect and is therefore not felt directly at all. At most, it enters consciousness through reflection. Its obstruction, by contrast, is positive and therefore makes itself known. Every enjoyment consists merely in removing this obstruction, in being freed from it, and is therefore short-lived.

This, then, is the basis of Aristotle’s rule praised above. It tells us to focus not on life’s pleasures and comforts, but on escaping its countless evils as far as possible. If this were not the right course, *Voltaire’s* statement, *Happiness is only a dream, and pain is real*, would have to be as false as it is in fact true. Accordingly, anyone wishing to assess the result of his life in terms of happiness should draw up the account not by the joys he has enjoyed, but by the evils he has escaped. Indeed, the study of happiness must begin by teaching that its very name is a euphemism, and that “living happily” can mean only living “less unhappily”—in other words, tolerably. Life is not really there to be enjoyed, but to be endured and got through. Various expressions convey this: *to pass one’s life*, *to discharge the task of life*, the Italian *one gets by like this*, and the German “one must try to get through,” “he will find his way through the world,” and so on. Indeed, in old age it is a consolation to have the work of life

behind us. The happiest lot therefore belongs to someone who gets through life without excessive mental or physical pain, not to someone who has experienced the liveliest joys or the greatest pleasures. Anyone who judges the happiness of a life by these latter things has chosen the wrong measure. Pleasures are and remain negative. The belief that they bring happiness is a delusion cherished by envy as its own punishment. Pains, by contrast, are positively felt, so their absence is the measure of happiness in life. If freedom from boredom is added to freedom from pain, earthly happiness is essentially achieved. The rest is an illusion. It follows that one should never buy pleasures at the price of pain, or even the risk of pain. Otherwise one pays for something negative and therefore illusory with something positive and real. On the other hand, one remains the winner by sacrificing pleasures to escape pain. In either case it makes no difference whether the pains follow the pleasures or precede them. It is truly the greatest mistake to try to turn this scene of misery into a pleasure resort, setting pleasures and joys as one's goal rather than the greatest possible freedom from pain, as so many people do. Someone who takes too dark a view and sees this world as a kind of hell, and therefore thinks only of obtaining a fireproof room in it, is much less mistaken. The fool runs after life's pleasures and finds himself deceived; the wise person avoids its evils. If even this fails, fate is to blame, not his foolishness. But insofar as he succeeds, he is not deceived, for the evils he avoided are thoroughly real. Even if he should have gone too far out of his way to avoid them and sacrificed pleasures unnecessarily, nothing has really been lost. All pleasures are illusory, and grieving over missing them would be petty, even ridiculous.

Failure to recognize this truth, encouraged by optimism, causes a great deal of unhappiness. When we are free from suffering, restless desires hold out visions of a happiness that does not exist and tempt us to pursue it. In doing so, we bring pain on ourselves, and pain is undeniably real. Then we mourn the painless condition we have lost. It lies behind us like a paradise we have thrown away, and we wish in vain that we could undo what has happened. It is as though an evil demon were always using the illusions of desire to lure us out of the painless condition that is the greatest real happiness.—Without looking

into the matter, a young man believes the world exists to be enjoyed. He thinks it is the home of a positive happiness that only those who lack the skill to seize it fail to find. Novels and poems reinforce this belief. So does the world's universal, constant use of deceptive appearances, which I will return to shortly. From then on, his life is a more or less calculated hunt for positive happiness, which is supposed to consist of positive pleasures. He must take his chances with the dangers he exposes himself to. As a rule, this hunt for game that does not exist leads to very real, positive unhappiness. It arrives as pain, suffering, illness, loss, worry, poverty, disgrace, and a thousand kinds of distress. The discovery of his mistake comes too late.—Suppose, instead, that he follows the rule we are considering here and plans his life around avoiding suffering: keeping away need, illness, and every kind of distress. Then his goal is real. Something can be achieved, and all the more so the less this plan is disturbed by the pursuit of the illusion of positive happiness. This agrees with what *Goethe*, in *Elective Affinities*, has *Mittler* say, a man who is always working for other people's happiness: "Anyone who wants to get rid of a trouble always knows what he wants. Anyone who wants something better than he has is completely blind." This recalls the fine French saying: *The better is the enemy of the good*. Indeed, we can derive from this the basic idea of Cynicism, as I have explained it in my main work, Bd. 2, Kap. 16. What led the Cynics to reject all pleasures, if not the thought of the pains connected with them, directly or indirectly? Avoiding those pains seemed far more important to them than gaining the pleasures. They were deeply struck by the insight that pleasure is negative and pain positive. Consistently, then, they did everything they could to avoid evils. But for that purpose they considered it necessary to reject pleasures completely and deliberately, because they saw them only as traps that hand us over to pain. As Schiller says, we were all born in Arcadia. That is, we enter the world full of claims to happiness and pleasure, and cherish the foolish hope of making those claims good. As a rule, though, fate soon comes along, grabs us roughly, and teaches us that nothing is *ours*: everything is *its*. It has an undisputed right not only to all we own and earn, and to wife and child, but even to arm and leg, eye and ear—yes, to the nose in the middle of our face. In any case, after a while

experience comes and teaches us that happiness and pleasure are a mirage. Visible only from a distance, they vanish when we approach. Suffering and pain, on the other hand, are real. They make themselves felt directly and need neither illusion nor expectation. If this lesson takes effect, we stop chasing happiness and pleasure. Instead, we try as far as possible to keep pain and suffering out. We then recognize that the best the world has to offer is a painless, quiet, bearable existence. We limit our demands to that, to be all the more sure of meeting them. The surest way to avoid being very unhappy is not to demand to be very happy. Goethe's youthful friend *Merck* saw this too when he wrote: "The nasty claim to happiness—and to the amount we dream of, at that—spoils everything in this world. Anyone who can free himself from it and wants nothing but what is in front of him can get by" (Briefe an und von Merck, S. 100). So it is advisable to reduce our demands for pleasure, possessions, rank, honor, and so on to a very modest level. It is precisely the pursuit of and struggle for happiness, splendor, and pleasure that brings on great misfortunes. This is wise and advisable for another reason too: being very unhappy is quite easy, whereas being very happy is not merely difficult but entirely impossible. So the poet of practical wisdom is quite right to sing:

Whoever loves the golden middle way
Lives safely, free of the filth
Of a run-down home, and sensibly avoids
A palace others envy.
The huge pine is shaken harder
By the winds; high towers fall
With a heavier crash; and lightning strikes
The highest mountain peaks.

But someone who has fully taken in the teaching of my philosophy knows that our whole existence is something that would be better not to be, and that the greatest wisdom is to deny and reject it. Such a person will have no great expectations of any thing or condition. He will not pursue anything in the world

with passion or complain bitterly about failing to obtain something. Instead, he will be deeply convinced by Plato's statement, "Nothing in human affairs deserves to be taken very seriously" (rep. X, 604), and also by this:

If you have lost possession of a world,
Do not grieve over it: it is nothing;
And if you have gained possession of a world,
Do not rejoice over it: it is nothing.
The pains and joys pass away;
Pass the world by: it is nothing.

Anwari Soheili.

(See the motto to Sadis Gulistan, übers. von Graf.)

What makes these helpful insights especially hard to gain is the world's deceptive show, mentioned above. Young people should therefore be shown early what lies behind it. Most splendid things are mere appearances, like stage scenery: the substance is missing. Ships with flags and garlands, for example, cannon fire, festive lighting, drums and trumpets, cheering and shouting, and so on are all the signboard, the signal, the hieroglyph for *joy*. But joy itself is usually nowhere to be found. It alone has declined the invitation. Where it really does appear, it generally comes uninvited and unannounced, of its own accord and *without ceremony*. Indeed, it slips in quietly, often on the most insignificant, trivial occasions, in the most everyday circumstances, and on occasions that are anything but splendid or glorious. Like gold in Australia, it is scattered here and there at the whim of chance, without rule or law, usually in tiny grains and very rarely in large masses. All the things mentioned above, on the other hand, are meant only to make others believe that joy has arrived. Creating that impression in other people's minds is the purpose. Grief is no different from joy in this respect. How mournfully that long, slow funeral procession approaches! The line of carriages has no end. But just look inside: they are all empty. In fact, the dead person is being taken to the grave only by all the coachmen in the city. What a telling picture of this world's friendship and respect! Such is the falsehood, emptiness, and show of human activity.—Another example is a crowd of invited guests in formal clothes receiving a fes-

tive welcome. They are the signboard for refined, elevated social life. But usually only constraint, discomfort, and boredom have arrived in its place. For wherever there are many guests, there is much rabble—even if every one of them wears the star of an order on his chest. Truly good company is always, and necessarily, very small. In general, glittering, noisy celebrations and entertainments always have an emptiness inside, perhaps even a jarring note. This is partly because they loudly contradict the misery and poverty of our existence, and the contrast brings out the truth more strongly. Yet from the outside it all makes an impression, and that was the purpose. *Chamfort* puts it delightfully: *Society, social circles, drawing rooms, what is called the world, is a wretched play, a bad opera with nothing of interest, kept going to some extent by the stage machinery, the costumes, and the scenery.*—In the same way, academies and university chairs of philosophy are the signboard, the outward appearance of *wisdom*. But wisdom too has generally declined the invitation and is to be found somewhere else entirely.—Clanging bells, priestly costumes, pious gestures, and grotesque behavior are the signboard, the false appearance of devotion, and so on.—Almost everything in the world can therefore be called an empty nutshell. The kernel itself is rare, and rarer still is it found inside the shell. It must be sought somewhere else entirely, and is usually found only by chance.

- ² To judge how happy someone is, do not ask what pleases him. Ask what troubles him. The more insignificant this is in itself, the happier he is. It takes a state of well-being to be sensitive to little things. In misfortune we do not notice them at all.
- ³ Beware of building your life's happiness on a *broad foundation* by making it depend on many requirements. On that kind of foundation it collapses most easily, because it offers far more opportunities for accidents, and they will certainly come. In this respect the structure of our happiness works the opposite way from all other structures, which stand most firmly on a broad foundation. So the surest way to escape great unhappiness is to keep your demands as low as possible in relation to your resources of every kind.

In general, one of the greatest and most common follies is to make *elaborate preparations* for life, whatever form they take. First of all, these count on a full human lifetime, which very few people reach. Even if they live that long, life still turns out to be too short for the plans they made, since carrying them out always takes far more time than expected. Like all human affairs, such plans also face so many risks of failure and obstruction that they very rarely reach their goal. Finally, even if everything is achieved in the end, we have left out of account the changes that time brings about in *ourselves*. We have failed to consider that our capacities, both for achieving things and for enjoying them, do not last throughout our lives. As a result, we often work toward things that no longer suit us when we finally obtain them. Or we spend years preparing a work, while those years quietly take away the strength needed to carry it out. So it often happens that we can no longer enjoy the wealth acquired through so much prolonged effort and danger, and have worked for others. Or we are no longer able to fill the position we have finally reached after years of activity and ambition. These things have come too late for us. Or the reverse happens: we come too late with what we have to offer, where achievements or creative work are concerned. The taste of the time has changed. A new generation has grown up that takes no interest in these things. Others have got ahead of us by shorter routes, and so on. Horace has everything discussed under this number in mind when he says:

Why wear out a mind too small

For plans that stretch forever?

This frequent mistake arises from an unavoidable optical illusion of the mind's eye. Seen from its entrance, life looks endless; but looking back from the end of the course, it seems very short. Of course, this has its good side: without that illusion, hardly anything great would be accomplished.

In general, we go through life like a traveler. As he walks forward, things take on different shapes from those they showed at a distance, and seem to change as he approaches. This is especially true of our wishes. We often find something quite different from what we were looking for, and even something better. Often, too, we find what we wanted by an entirely different route from the one

we first took in vain. In particular, where we were looking for pleasure, happiness, and joy, we often find instruction, insight, and knowledge instead: a lasting, genuine good in place of a fleeting, apparent one. This is also the idea running like a bass line through *Wilhelm Meister*. It is an intellectual novel, and for that very reason belongs to a higher kind than all the others, even Walter Scott's. Those are all merely ethical: they consider human nature only from the side of the will. The same basic idea is also symbolized in *The Magic Flute*, that grotesque but meaningful hieroglyph with its many meanings. It is drawn in broad, rough strokes, like stage scenery. Indeed, the symbolism would be complete if, at the end, Tamino gave up his wish to possess Tamina and asked for, and received, only initiation in the temple of wisdom instead, while Papageno, his necessary opposite, duly received his Papagena.—Outstanding, noble people soon become aware of this education by fate. They accept it gratefully and are willing to learn from it. They see that instruction can be found in the world, but not happiness. They therefore become used to exchanging hopes for insights, and content to do so, and finally say with Petrarch:

I feel no pleasure other than learning.

This can even go so far that they pursue their wishes and aims only for show, in a playful way, as it were. What they really and inwardly expect in earnest is only instruction. This then gives them a thoughtful, inspired, elevated air.—In this sense we can also say that we are like the alchemists. Looking only for gold, they discovered gunpowder, porcelain, medicines, and even laws of nature.

B. Our behavior toward ourselves.

- ⁴ A worker helping put up a building may not know the plan of the whole, or may not always have it in mind. That is how a person, as he spins out the individual days and hours of his life, relates to his life's course as a whole and its character. The more worthy, meaningful, planned, and individual that course is, the more necessary and helpful it is for him occasionally to see a reduced outline of it: its plan. Of course, this also requires him to have made a small start on "know yourself." He must know what he really wants, chiefly and above all else, and so what matters most to his happiness, and then what comes second

and third. He must also recognize his overall calling, his role, and his relationship to the world. If these are significant and grand, then seeing the plan of his life on a smaller scale will do more than anything else to strengthen him, lift his spirits, elevate him, encourage him to act, and keep him from going astray.

Only when a traveler reaches high ground can he look over the road he has covered, with all its twists and turns, and see how it fits together. In the same way, only at the end of a period of our lives, or indeed of our entire lives, do we recognize the true connection between our actions, achievements, and works: their precise consistency and links, and also their value. While we are engaged in them, we always act only according to the fixed qualities of our character, under the influence of motives, and within the limits of our abilities. So we act necessarily throughout, since at each moment we do only what seems right and suitable to us just then. Only the result shows what has come of it. Looking back over the whole connection shows how it happened and through what means. That is also why, while performing the greatest deeds or creating immortal works, we are not aware of them as such. We see them only as suited to our present purposes, matching our current intentions, and therefore right just now. Only afterward do our character and abilities shine out from the connected whole. Then, in the individual details, we see how, as if through inspiration, we took the only right path among a thousand wrong ones, guided by our genius. All this applies to theory as well as practice, and, in the reverse sense, to what is bad and unsuccessful.

- 5 An important part of practical wisdom is giving the right share of our attention to the present and to the future, so that neither spoils the other for us. Careless people live too much in the present; anxious, worried people too much in the future. Rarely does anyone strike exactly the right balance. Some people live only in the future through striving and hoping. They always look ahead and impatiently rush toward what is coming, as though it alone will bring true happiness, while letting the present slip by unnoticed and unenjoyed. Despite their knowing expressions, they are like those donkeys in Italy whose pace is quickened by a bundle of hay hanging from a stick attached to their heads. They

always see it just ahead of them and hope to reach it. These people cheat themselves out of their whole existence by always living only *for the time being*—until they are dead.—Instead of being constantly and exclusively occupied with plans and worries for the future, or giving ourselves up to longing for the past, we should never forget that only the present is real and certain. The future almost always turns out differently from what we imagine. Even the past was different. In fact, both amount to less, on the whole, than they seem to us. Distance makes objects smaller to the eye, but larger to the mind. Only the present is true and actual. It is time actually filled with reality, and our existence lies in it alone. We should therefore always give it a cheerful welcome. We should consciously enjoy as such every bearable hour that is free from immediate troubles or pain. That means not clouding it with gloomy looks over past disappointments or worries about the future. It is completely foolish to push away a good present hour, or deliberately spoil it, out of resentment over the past or anxiety about what is coming. Set aside a definite time for worry, and even for regret. But afterward, think of what has happened in these terms:

But let us leave what has happened, though we grieve,
Forcing the spirit in our hearts to submit to necessity,
and of the future in these terms:

These things rest on the knees of the gods,
but of the present: *Think of each separate day as a separate life* (Sen.), and make this only real time as pleasant for yourself as possible.

Only future troubles that are certain, and whose time of arrival is also certain, have a right to disturb us. There will be very few of these. Troubles are either merely possible, at most probable, or they are certain but their time of arrival is completely uncertain. If we let either kind prey on us, we will never have another peaceful moment. To avoid losing our peace in life over uncertain or indefinite troubles, we must get used to regarding the first kind as though they will never come, and the second as though they certainly will not come soon.

But the more fear leaves someone in peace, the more his wishes, desires, and demands disturb him. *Goethe's* much-loved song, "I have staked my cause on nothing," really says this: only after a person has been driven out of every possi-

ble claim and thrown back on bare, stripped-down existence does he gain the peace of mind that forms the basis of human happiness. That peace is necessary if he is to find the present, and therefore his whole life, enjoyable. For the same purpose, we should always remember that today comes only once and never again. Yet we imagine it will come back tomorrow. Tomorrow, however, is another day, which also comes only once. We forget that each day is an integral and therefore irreplaceable part of life. Instead, we treat it as falling under life in the way individuals fall under a general concept.—We would also appreciate and enjoy the present more if, in good health and good times, we always remembered how, in illness or sorrow, memory holds up every hour free from pain and deprivation as infinitely enviable: a lost paradise, an unappreciated friend. But we live through our good days without noticing them. Only when bad ones arrive do we wish the good ones back. With a gloomy face, we let a thousand cheerful, pleasant hours pass by unenjoyed, only to sigh for them later with fruitless longing in dark times. Instead, we should value every bearable present moment, even the everyday ones we now let pass so indifferently, and perhaps even push impatiently on their way. We should always remember that this moment is now passing into that glorified past, where memory will preserve it from then on, surrounded by the light of permanence. One day, especially in a bad hour, memory will lift the curtain, and it will appear as an object of our deepest longing.

- ⁶ *Every limitation makes us happier.* The narrower the range of what we see, do, and come into contact with, the happier we are. The wider it is, the more often we feel tormented or frightened. Our worries, wishes, and fears grow in number and size along with it. That is why even blind people are not as unhappy as we must suppose *in advance of experience*. The gentle, almost cheerful calm in their features bears this out. This rule also partly explains why the second half of life turns out sadder than the first. Over the course of life, the horizon of our aims and relationships keeps widening. In childhood it is limited to our immediate surroundings and closest relationships. In youth it already reaches much farther. In adulthood it covers our whole life's course, and often extends to the

most distant connections, to states and peoples. In old age it includes our descendants.—Every limitation, on the other hand, even an intellectual one, helps our happiness. The less the will is stirred up, the less suffering there is; and we know that suffering is positive, while happiness is only negative. A limited field of activity removes the external occasions that stir up the will; a limited mind removes the internal ones. The latter, however, has the disadvantage of opening the door to boredom. Boredom indirectly becomes the source of countless sufferings, because people reach for anything just to banish it. They try diversions, company, luxury, gambling, drinking, and so on, which bring harm, ruin, and misfortune of every kind. *It is hard to be at peace in idleness.* How much *external* limitation promotes human happiness, as far as happiness can go, and is even necessary for it, can be seen from the idyll. This is the only kind of poetry that attempts to portray happy people, and it always and essentially presents them in very limited circumstances and surroundings. A feeling for this also lies behind our enjoyment of so-called genre paintings.—Accordingly, the greatest possible *simplicity* in our circumstances, and even *uniformity* in our way of life, will make us happier, as long as they do not produce boredom. They make us least aware of life itself, and therefore of its essential burden. It flows along like a stream without waves or whirlpools.

- ⁷ In the end, our well-being or unhappiness depends on what fills and occupies our consciousness. In general, any purely intellectual occupation will do much more for a mind capable of it than real life, with its constant alternation of success and failure, its shocks and troubles. Of course, this already requires strong intellectual gifts. We should also note a reciprocal effect here. Just as an outwardly active life distracts and draws us away from study, depriving the mind of the calm and concentration it needs, so sustained mental work makes us more or less unfit for the bustle and activity of real life. It is therefore advisable to stop it completely for a while whenever circumstances arise that call for energetic practical action of any kind.

⁸ To live with full *awareness* and draw every lesson our own experience contains, we need to look back often. We should go over what we have lived through, done, and experienced, and what we felt at the time. We should also compare our former judgments with our present ones, our intentions and efforts with their results and the satisfaction those results gave us. This is a review of the private lesson experience has given each of us. Our own experience can also be seen as the text, and reflection and knowledge as the commentary on it. Much reflection and knowledge with little experience is like an edition with two lines of text and forty lines of commentary on each page. Much experience with little reflection and limited knowledge is like the Bipontine editions without notes, which leave much not understood.

Pythagoras's rule points to the same recommendation: in the evening, before falling asleep, review what you have done during the day. Someone who lives amid a rush of business or pleasures, never turning over his past but simply continuing to reel off his life, loses clear self-awareness. His mind becomes a chaos, and a certain confusion enters his thoughts. His abrupt, fragmentary, almost chopped-up conversation soon reveals it. This is all the more true the greater the external restlessness and the mass of impressions, and the less active his mind is within.

A related observation is that, after a long time has passed and the circumstances and surroundings that affected us are gone, we cannot recall and revive the mood and feelings they stirred up in us then. But we can remember our own *statements* that they prompted at the time. These are the result, expression, and measure of those feelings. Memory, or paper, should therefore carefully preserve such statements from memorable times. Diaries are very useful for this.

⁹ To be enough for ourselves, to be our own everything, and to be able to say, *Everything I have, I carry with me*, is certainly the quality that does most for our happiness. That is why *Aristotle's* statement, "Happiness belongs to the self-sufficient" (*Happiness belongs to those who are sufficient for themselves*. Eth. Eud. 7, 2), cannot be repeated too often. (Essentially, this is also the thought expressed with a very charming turn of phrase in Chamfort's saying, which I

placed at the head of this essay as its motto.) For one thing, no one can count with any certainty on anyone but himself. For another, the burdens and disadvantages, the danger and annoyance, that society brings with it are countless and unavoidable.

There is no more mistaken route to happiness than a life in fashionable society, with luxury and wild living (*the high life*). Its aim is to turn our wretched existence into a succession of joys, pleasures, and amusements. Disappointment is inevitable here, and just as inevitable in its required accompaniment: people lying to one another[K].

[K] Just as our body is wrapped in clothes, our mind is wrapped in lies. Our speech, our actions, our whole manner of being is false. Only through this covering can our true feelings sometimes be guessed, as the shape of the body can be guessed through clothes.

To begin with, all social company necessarily requires mutual adjustment and moderation. The larger the gathering, the blander it becomes. Each person can be entirely *himself* only while alone. Anyone who does not love solitude does not love freedom either, because we are free only when we are alone. Constraint is the inseparable companion of all social company. Every gathering demands sacrifices, and these are harder to make the more significant one's individuality is. Accordingly, each person will avoid, endure, or love solitude in exact proportion to his own worth. In solitude the wretched person feels all his wretchedness, the great mind all its greatness: in short, everyone feels what he is. Further, the higher someone stands in nature's ranking, the more alone he stands, essentially and unavoidably. In that case it is a blessing if physical solitude matches his intellectual solitude. Otherwise, being frequently surrounded by unlike beings interferes with him, even attacks him, robs him of himself, and offers nothing in exchange. Nature has also placed the widest moral and intellectual differences between people. Society ignores these and treats everyone as equal—or rather, substitutes the artificial distinctions and grades of class and rank, which very often run directly counter to nature's ranking. This arrangement suits those whom nature has placed low very well. But the few whom it has placed high lose out. That is why they tend to withdraw from society, and why

the ordinary and vulgar dominate every large gathering. What spoils society for great minds is that others have equal rights, and therefore equal claims, despite unequal abilities and therefore unequal contributions to the gathering. So-called good society recognizes every kind of distinction except intellectual distinction: that is actually forbidden. Society requires us to show boundless patience with every folly, absurdity, perversity, and dullness. Personal excellence, on the other hand, must beg forgiveness or hide itself. Intellectual superiority gives offense by its mere existence, without any intention to do so. Thus so-called good society not only has the disadvantage of offering us people we cannot praise or love. It also refuses to let us be what suits our nature. Instead, it forces us to shrink, or even disfigure ourselves, for the sake of agreement with others. Intelligent remarks and ideas belong only in intelligent company. In ordinary company they are positively hated. To please there, it is absolutely necessary to be shallow and narrow-minded. So in such company we must deny ourselves severely, giving up three-quarters of ourselves to make ourselves like the others. In exchange, of course, we have those others. But the more worth a person has in himself, the more he will find that the gain does not cover the loss and the deal goes against him. As a rule, people cannot pay their debts: that is, their company has nothing to compensate us for its boredom, burdens, and unpleasantness, and for the self-denial it imposes. Most company is therefore such that anyone who trades it for solitude makes a good bargain. Society cannot tolerate genuine superiority, meaning intellectual superiority, and it is also hard to find. So, to replace it, society has arbitrarily adopted a false, conventional superiority. This rests on arbitrary rules, is handed down traditionally among the upper classes, and changes like a password. It is what is called good manners, *social polish*, *being fashionable*. But whenever it clashes with genuine superiority, its weakness becomes apparent.—Besides, *when social polish arrives, common sense withdraws*.

In general, each person can be *in the most complete harmony* only with himself, not with his friend or his lover. Differences in individuality and mood always produce a dissonance, however slight. So true, deep peace of heart and complete peace of mind—the highest earthly good after health—can be found only

in solitude, and as a lasting state only in the deepest seclusion. If one's own self is great and rich, one then enjoys the happiest condition to be found on this poor earth. Yes, let it be said plainly: however closely friendship, love, and marriage bind people together, in the end each person is *genuinely concerned* only for himself, and at most for his child as well.—The less someone needs to come into contact with people, whether because of external circumstances or his own condition, the better off he is. Solitude and isolation let us survey all their evils at once, even if we do not feel them all at once. Society, by contrast, is *treacherous*. Behind the appearance of amusement, communication, social enjoyment, and so on, it hides great and often incurable evils. One of youth's main studies should be *learning to endure solitude*, because it is a source of happiness and peace of mind.—From all this it follows that the best-off person is the one who has counted only on himself and can be his own everything. Cicero even says: *No one can fail to be supremely happy who depends entirely on himself and places everything in himself alone.* (Paradox. II.) Besides, the more someone has in himself, the less others can be to him. A certain feeling of being fully sufficient to oneself keeps people of inner worth and richness from making the considerable sacrifices that company demands, let alone seeking it with marked self-denial. The opposite makes ordinary people so sociable and accommodating: they find it easier to put up with others than with themselves. There is also the fact that what has real worth in the world is not valued, and what is valued has no worth. The seclusion of every worthy and outstanding person is both the proof and the consequence of this. Given all this, someone who has something genuinely valuable in himself will show true practical wisdom by limiting his needs if necessary, simply to preserve or extend his freedom. Since his person has unavoidable ties to the human world, he will settle its dealings with that world as briefly as possible.

What makes people sociable, on the other hand, is their inability to endure solitude, and in solitude themselves. Inner emptiness and weariness drive them into company, and also abroad and on travels. Their minds lack the spring to set themselves in motion, so they seek to increase it through wine, and many become drunkards that way. For the same reason they need constant stimula-

tion from outside, and the strongest kind at that: stimulation by beings like themselves. Without it, their minds collapse under their own weight and sink into an oppressive lethargy[L]. Likewise, we could say that each of them is only a small fraction of the idea of humanity. He needs a great deal of supplementation by others to produce something like a full human consciousness. A whole person, by contrast, a human being *in the fullest sense*, is a unit rather than a fraction, and is therefore enough for himself. In this sense, ordinary company can be compared to that Russian horn music in which each horn has only one note. Music results only when they all come in at precisely the right time. The outlook and mind of most people are as monotonous as such a single-note horn. Many of them even look as if they always had just one and the same thought and were incapable of thinking any other. This explains not only why they are so boring, but also why they are so sociable and prefer to move in herds: *people's tendency to flock together*. The monotony of his own being becomes unbearable to each of them—*all foolishness suffers from weariness with itself*. Only together, through combination, do they amount to anything, like those horn players. An intelligent person, by contrast, can be compared to a virtuoso who performs his concerto *alone*, or to a piano. Just as the piano is a small orchestra by itself, so he is a small world. He presents within a single consciousness what the others become only by working together. Like the piano, he is suited not to being a part of the symphony but to a solo and a complete whole. If he is to work with them, he can do so only as the leading voice with accompaniment, like the piano, or to give the pitch in vocal music, like the piano.—Meanwhile, anyone who likes company can draw this rule from the comparison: what his companions lack in quality must be replaced to some extent by quantity. A single intelligent person may give him enough company. But if only the ordinary sort can be found, it is good to have plenty of them, so that their variety and cooperation produce something, on the analogy of that horn music. And may heaven grant him patience to go with it.

[L] As everyone knows, troubles are eased by being borne together. People seem to count boredom among them, so they sit together to be bored in company. Just as love of life is at bottom only fear of death, so people's *urge to*

socialize is not really direct. It rests not on love of company but on fear of *solitude*. They are not so much seeking the delightful presence of others as fleeing the emptiness and uneasiness of being alone, along with the monotony of their own consciousness. To escape this, they put up even with bad company, and likewise accept the annoyance and constraint that all company necessarily brings. But if their dislike of all this wins out, and as a result they become used to solitude and hardened against its immediate impression, so that it no longer has the effects described above, they can then remain constantly alone in the greatest comfort, without longing for company. That is precisely because their need for it is not direct, while they have now grown used to solitude's beneficial qualities.

People's inner emptiness and poverty also explain the following. When people of a better kind come together in an association for some noble, ideal purpose, the outcome is almost always this: some of humanity's *rabble* slip or push their way in. They belong to that countless mass that fills and covers everything everywhere like vermin, always ready to seize on anything at all to relieve their boredom, just as under other circumstances they would relieve their need. Soon they either destroy the whole enterprise or change it so much that it becomes almost the opposite of its original purpose.

Sociability can also be regarded as people warming one another mentally, like the bodily warmth they produce by crowding together in severe cold. But someone with plenty of mental warmth of his own does not need such grouping. A fable I devised in this sense can be found in the 2nd volume of this work, in the last chapter. From all this, each person's sociability is roughly in inverse proportion to his intellectual worth. Saying "He is very unsociable" almost amounts to saying "He is a man of great qualities."

For an intellectually outstanding person, solitude offers a double advantage: first, being with himself, and second, not being with others. We will value the second highly if we consider how much constraint, trouble, and even danger every association brings. *All our trouble comes from not being able to be alone*, says *Labruyère*. *Sociability* is one of the dangerous, indeed destructive, inclinations, since it brings us into contact with beings the great majority of whom are

morally bad and intellectually dull or misguided. An unsociable person is someone who does not need them. Having enough in oneself to have no need of company is a great blessing for this reason alone: almost all our suffering arises from society. Peace of mind, which is the most essential element of happiness after health, is endangered by all company and therefore cannot exist without a considerable amount of solitude. To gain the happiness of peace of mind, the Cynics renounce all possessions. Someone who renounces society for the same purpose has chosen the wisest means. For *Bernardin de St. Pierre's* words are as apt as they are beautiful: *A reduced diet restores health to the body, and a reduced diet of people restores peace to the soul.* So anyone who makes friends with solitude early, and even comes to love it, has acquired a gold mine. But by no means everyone can do this. Just as need originally drives people together, boredom does so once need is removed. Without either, everyone would probably remain alone, if only because solitude alone gives each person surroundings that match the exclusive importance, indeed uniqueness, he has in his own eyes. The world's crowds reduce this to nothing, giving it a painful *contradiction* at every step. In this sense solitude is even everyone's natural condition. It restores him, like the first Adam, to the original happiness suited to his nature.

But Adam had neither father nor mother! So in another sense solitude is not natural to human beings. On entering the world, a person finds himself not alone but among parents and siblings, in a community. Love of solitude therefore cannot exist as an original inclination. It can arise only from experience and reflection, in proportion to the development of one's own intellectual power, but also with advancing years. Thus, in general, each person's urge to socialize will be in inverse proportion to his age. A small child screams with fear and distress if left alone for just a few minutes. For a boy, being alone is a great punishment. Young men readily join one another. Only the nobler and more high-minded among them already seek solitude at times, though they still find it hard to spend a whole day alone. An adult man, on the other hand, finds this easy. He can already be alone a great deal, and more so the older he gets. An old man, left as the sole survivor of vanished generations, who has partly outgrown life's pleasures and partly lost his feeling for them, finds his true element in soli-

tude. In each individual, however, the growing inclination to withdraw and be alone will always be in proportion to his intellectual worth. As I said, it is not a purely natural inclination called forth directly by needs. Rather, it is only an effect of experience and reflection on it, especially the insight gained into the miserable moral and intellectual condition of most people. The worst of it is that, in each individual, moral and intellectual imperfections conspire and work hand in hand. This produces all kinds of extremely unpleasant phenomena that make most people's company unenjoyable, even unbearable. So although a great many things in this world are very bad, the worst of all remains society. Even *Voltaire*, that sociable Frenchman, had to say: *The earth is covered with people who do not deserve to be spoken to*. The gentle *Petrarch*, who loved solitude so strongly and persistently, gives the same reason for this inclination: I have always sought a solitary life

(The riverbanks, the fields, and woods know it),

To escape these twisted, shifty minds

That have lost the road to heaven.

He develops the point in the same spirit in his fine book *de vita solitaria*, which seems to have been *Zimmermann's* model for his famous work on solitude. In his sarcastic way, *Chamfort* expresses this same merely secondary, indirect origin of unsociability when he says: *People sometimes say of a man who lives alone, he does not like society. That is often like saying a man does not like walking because he does not enjoy walking in the forest of Bondy in the evening[M]*. But the gentle Christian Angelus Silesius says exactly the same thing in his own way and mythical language:

"Herod is an enemy; Joseph is reason,

To whom God reveals the danger in a dream (in the mind).

The world is Bethlehem, Egypt *solitude*:

Run, my soul! Run, or you will die of sorrow."

[M] *Sadi* says in the same sense, in the *Gulistan* (S. die Übers. v. Graf p. 65):

"Since that time we have taken leave of society and chosen the path of withdrawal, for *safety lies in solitude*."

Jordanus Brunus speaks in the same sense: *So many men who wished to taste heavenly life on earth said with one voice: "Look, I fled far away and remained in solitude."* In the same spirit, *Sadi* the Persian reports of himself in the *Gulistan*: "Tired of my friends in Damascus, I withdrew into the desert near Jerusalem to seek the company of animals." In short, everyone whom Prometheus formed from better clay has spoken in this sense. What pleasure can they find in the company of beings with whom they have any connection that could establish fellowship only through the lowest and least noble part of their own nature: its everyday, trivial, and vulgar elements? Since these others cannot rise to their level, they have no choice but to drag them down to their own, and that is what they try to do. It is therefore an aristocratic feeling that nourishes the inclination to withdraw and be alone. All scoundrels are sociable to a pitiful degree. The first sign of a person of a nobler kind, on the other hand, is that he takes no pleasure in the rest. He increasingly prefers solitude to their company. Then, gradually, with the years, he comes to see that, apart from rare exceptions, the only choice in the world is between solitude and vulgarity. Harsh as this sounds, even Angelus Silesius, despite his Christian gentleness and love, could not leave it unsaid:

"Solitude is needed: just do not be vulgar,
And you can be in a desert anywhere."

As for the truly great minds, it is surely natural that these real educators of the whole human race feel as little inclination to frequent company with the rest as a teacher feels to join the games of the noisy crowd of children around him. They have come into the world to steer humanity toward truth on the sea of its errors, and to draw it upward out of the dark pit of its crudeness and vulgarity, toward light, education, and refinement. They must live among others without really belonging to them. From youth on, they therefore feel themselves to be noticeably different beings. But only gradually, with the years, do they clearly understand the situation. They then take care to add physical distance to their intellectual distance from others. No one is allowed to approach unless he himself is already more or less exempt from the general vulgarity.

All this shows that love of solitude does not appear directly as an original drive. It develops indirectly and only gradually, especially in nobler minds, and not without overcoming the natural urge to socialize. At times it even has to resist Mephistopheles' whisper:

“Stop playing with your grief,
Which eats away your life like a vulture:
Even the worst company makes you feel
That you are human, among other humans.”

Solitude is the lot of all outstanding minds. They will sometimes sigh over it, but will always choose it as the lesser of two evils. With advancing age, however, *dare to be wise* becomes ever easier and more natural in this respect. In one's sixties, the drive toward solitude is truly natural, even instinctive. Everything now combines to encourage it. The strongest pull toward sociability, love of women and the sexual drive, no longer operates. Indeed, old age's lack of sexuality lays the basis for a certain self-sufficiency that gradually absorbs the urge to socialize altogether. We have got past a thousand illusions and follies. Active life is mostly over. We have nothing more to expect, no more plans or intentions. The generation we really belong to is no longer alive. Surrounded by an unfamiliar generation, we are already objectively and essentially alone. Meanwhile, time flies faster, and we still want to use it intellectually. Provided the mind has kept its strength, the great store of knowledge and experience gained, the gradually completed working-through of all our thoughts, and the well-practiced facility of all our powers now make study of every kind more interesting and easier than ever. We see clearly into a thousand things that used to be lost in fog. We reach conclusions and feel our full superiority. Long experience has taught us to stop expecting much from people. Taken as a whole, they are not the sort who improve on closer acquaintance. Instead, we know that, apart from rare strokes of luck, we will meet only very defective specimens of human nature, better left alone. We are therefore no longer exposed to the usual illusions. We soon recognize what each person is, and will rarely feel a wish to enter into closer relations with him. Finally, especially if we recognize solitude as a friend from youth, the habit of isolation and of keeping our own company has been

added and become second nature. Love of solitude, which once had to be wrested from the urge to socialize, is now entirely natural and simple. We are like a fish in water when alone. Thus every outstanding individuality, being unlike the rest and therefore standing alone, feels oppressed in youth by this essential isolation, but relieved by it in old age.

Of course, each person shares in this genuine advantage of old age only in proportion to his intellectual powers. An exceptional mind benefits most, though probably everyone does to a lesser degree. Only extremely impoverished, vulgar natures will remain as sociable in old age as before. They burden a society they no longer fit into, and at best manage to be tolerated, whereas once they were sought after.

The inverse relationship described between our age and our degree of sociability also has a side that can be understood in terms of purpose. The younger someone is, the more he still has to learn in every respect. Nature has directed him toward the mutual instruction everyone receives through contact with his own kind. In this sense, human society can be called a great Bell-Lancaster educational institution. Books and schools are artificial institutions, since they lie outside nature's plan. So it is very fitting that the younger someone is, the more diligently he attends this natural school.

Nothing is happy in every respect, says Horace, and an Indian proverb says, "No lotus without a stem." So solitude too, alongside its many advantages, has its small disadvantages and troubles. Compared with those of society, however, they are slight. Anyone who has something genuinely valuable in himself will therefore always find it easier to get along without people than with them.— Among those disadvantages is one that is less easy to become aware of than the others. Constantly staying at home makes our body so sensitive to outside influences that every cool breeze affects it unhealthily. In the same way, constant withdrawal and solitude make our mind so sensitive that the most insignificant incidents, words, or even mere expressions make us feel disturbed, offended, or hurt. Someone who always stays in the bustle pays no attention to such things.

But suppose someone, especially in his younger years, cannot endure the emptiness of solitude for long, however often justified dislike of people has already driven him back into it. I advise him to get used to taking part of his solitude into company. He should learn to be alone to some extent even among others: not immediately telling them what he thinks, and not taking what they say too seriously. Instead, he should expect little from them, morally or intellectually, and strengthen in himself an indifference to their opinions. This is the surest way to practice a consistently praiseworthy tolerance. Then, though in their midst, he will not be entirely in their company, but will take a more purely objective attitude toward them. This will protect him from too close a contact with society, and therefore from any contamination or even injury. We even have a dramatic portrayal worth reading of this limited or guarded sociability in *Moratin's* comedy "*el Café o sea la comedia nueva*," in the character of D. Pedro, especially in the second and third scenes of the first act. In this sense, society can also be compared to a fire. A wise person warms himself at a proper distance, rather than reaching into it like a fool, who burns himself and then flees into the cold of solitude, complaining that the fire burns.

- ¹⁰ *Envy* is natural to human beings, yet it is both a vice and a misfortune[N]. We should therefore regard it as the enemy of our happiness and try to smother it like an evil demon. *Seneca* guides us toward this with these fine words: *Let what is ours please us without comparison: someone tormented by a happier person will never be happy* (de ira III, 30), and again: *When you have looked at how many are ahead of you, think how many follow behind* (ep. 15). So we should look more often at those who are worse off than ourselves than at those who seem better off. Even when real troubles have arrived, the most effective comfort, though it flows from the same source as envy, will come from considering sufferings greater than our own. Next to that comes the company of people in the same position as ourselves, our *companions in misfortune*.

[N] People's *envy* shows how unhappy they feel. Their constant *attention* to what others do and do not do shows how bored they are.

So much for the active side of envy. On the passive side—being envied—we should consider that no hatred is as unforgiving as envy. We should therefore not work tirelessly and eagerly to arouse it. We would do better to deny ourselves this pleasure, like many others, because of its dangerous consequences.—There are *three aristocracies*: 1. the aristocracy of birth and rank, 2. the aristocracy of money, 3. the intellectual aristocracy. The last is really the noblest, and is recognized as such if only it is given time. Frederick the Great himself said: *Privileged souls rank as equals of sovereigns*. He said this to his court marshal, who objected that, while ministers and generals ate at the marshal's table, Voltaire was to sit at a table reserved for reigning rulers and their princes.—Each of these aristocracies is surrounded by an army of envious people. They are secretly bitter toward every member of it and, if they have nothing to fear from him, try in many ways to make him understand, “You are no better than we are!” But these very efforts betray their conviction of the opposite. The person envied should deal with this by keeping every member of that crowd at a distance and avoiding all contact with them as far as possible, so that a wide gulf keeps them apart. Where that is impossible, he should endure their efforts with the utmost calm, since their source itself neutralizes them. We see this procedure used everywhere. Members of one aristocracy, on the other hand, will usually get along well and without envy with members of either of the other two, because each weighs his own distinction against the other's.

- ¹¹ Consider an undertaking carefully and repeatedly before carrying it out. Even after thinking everything through as thoroughly as possible, make some allowance for the inadequacy of all human knowledge. There may still be circumstances that are impossible to investigate or foresee and that could make the whole calculation wrong. This consideration will always put weight on the negative side of the scales and advise us not to disturb important matters unnecessarily: *do not unsettle what is settled*. But once you have made your decision and begun the work, so that everything must now take its course and only the outcome remains to be awaited, do not torment yourself by constantly reconsidering what has already been done and repeatedly thinking about possi-

ble dangers. Instead, put the matter entirely out of mind. Keep that whole compartment of thought closed, reassuring yourself that you considered everything carefully at the proper time. The Italian proverb gives the same advice: *Tie it securely, then let it go*. Goethe translates this as “Saddle up well and ride with confidence.” Incidentally, a large part of his sayings under the heading “Proverbial” are translated Italian proverbs.—If the outcome is bad nonetheless, it is because all human affairs are subject to chance and error. *Socrates*, the wisest of men, needed a warning *divine voice* just to make the right choices in his own personal affairs, or at least avoid mistakes. This proves that no human understanding is adequate to the task. So the saying, supposedly from a pope, that we ourselves bear at least some blame for every misfortune that strikes us is not unconditionally true in every case, though it is true in the vast majority of cases. A feeling of this even seems to play a large part in people’s attempts to hide their misfortunes as much as possible and put on a contented face as far as they can. They fear that others will infer guilt from suffering.

- ¹² When an unfortunate event has already happened and can no longer be changed, do not even allow yourself the thought that things could be otherwise, still less the thought of how it could have been prevented. That is precisely what raises the pain to an unbearable level, turning you into a self-tormentor. Instead, act like King David. As long as his son lay sick, he constantly stormed Jehovah with prayers and pleading. But once his son was dead, he snapped his fingers at it and gave it no further thought. Anyone who cannot be that carefree should take refuge in a fatalistic standpoint. He should make clear to himself the great truth that everything that happens occurs necessarily and is therefore unavoidable.

For all that, this rule is one-sided. It is useful for our immediate relief and reassurance in misfortune. But when our own carelessness or recklessness is at least partly to blame, as is usually the case, repeatedly and painfully considering how it could have been prevented is a healthy self-discipline. It teaches us sense and improves us, and so serves the future. And we should not try to excuse, gloss over, or minimize obvious mistakes to ourselves, as we generally do. We should

admit them and clearly set them before our eyes in their full size, so that we can firmly resolve to avoid them in future. Of course, in doing this we must inflict on ourselves the great pain of dissatisfaction with ourselves. But a person who has not been beaten is not educated.

- ¹³ In everything that concerns our well-being or unhappiness, we should *keep our imagination on a leash*. First of all, do not build castles in the air: they cost too much, since immediately afterward we have to tear them down again with sighs. But we should be even more careful not to frighten ourselves by picturing merely possible misfortunes. If these were wholly invented, or at least very far-fetched, then on waking from such a dream we would know at once that it had all been illusion. We would enjoy the better reality all the more, and might even take from it a warning against very remote, though possible, misfortunes. But our imagination does not readily play with that kind. When entirely idle, it builds at most cheerful castles in the air. The material of its dark dreams consists of misfortunes that really do threaten us to some extent, even if from a distance. It magnifies these, brings their possibility much nearer than it really is, and paints them in the most frightening colors. On waking, we cannot shake off such a dream as quickly as a cheerful one. Reality immediately refutes the cheerful dream and leaves at most a faint hope in the realm of possibility. But if we have given ourselves over to gloomy imaginings (*dark fears*), they have brought images close to us that do not recede so easily. The possibility of the thing in general is certain, and we cannot always apply a measure to its degree of possibility. It then easily turns into probability, and we have delivered ourselves into the hands of anxiety. So we should consider matters affecting our well-being or unhappiness only with the eye of reason and judgment. We should use dry, cool reflection, working with bare concepts and *in the abstract*. Imagination must be kept out of it. It cannot judge; it merely puts images before our eyes that stir our feelings needlessly and often very painfully. This rule should be followed most strictly in the evening. Darkness makes us fearful and lets us see frightening shapes everywhere. Unclear thoughts have a similar effect, because every uncertainty breeds insecurity. So in the evening, when

exhaustion has covered understanding and judgment with an inner darkness, when the intellect is tired and confused and cannot get to the bottom of things, the subjects we think about readily take on a dangerous appearance and become terrifying images if they concern our personal affairs. This is most true at night in bed, when the mind is completely exhausted and judgment no longer up to its task, while imagination is still active. Then night gives everything its black coloring. Our thoughts before falling asleep, or especially on waking in the night, are therefore usually almost as bad distortions and reversals of things as dreams are. And when they concern personal affairs, they are usually pitch-black, even horrifying. In the morning all these terrifying images have vanished, just like dreams. That is what the Spanish proverb means: *The night is dark-colored, the day is white* (the night is colored, the day white). But even in the evening, once the light is lit, the understanding, like the eye, does not see as clearly as by day. So this time is not suited to thinking over serious, especially unpleasant, affairs. Morning is the right time for that, as it is for every kind of work without exception, mental as well as physical. Morning is the youth of the day. Everything is cheerful, fresh, and easy. We feel strong and have all our abilities fully at our disposal. We should not shorten it by getting up late, or waste it on unworthy occupations or conversations. We should regard it as the essence of life and in a sense keep it sacred. Evening, on the other hand, is the old age of the day. In the evening we are tired, talkative, and careless.—Every *day is a little life*: every waking and getting up a little birth, every fresh morning a little youth, and every going to bed and falling asleep a little death.

In general, our health, sleep, food, temperature, weather, surroundings, and many other external things have a powerful influence on our mood, and our mood on our thoughts. So our view of a matter, as well as our ability to accomplish something, depends greatly on time and even place. Therefore,

“Make use of a good mood,

For it comes so rarely.”

G.

It is not just objective insights and original thoughts whose arrival we must wait for, to see whether and when they choose to come. Even careful consideration of a personal matter does not always succeed at the time we have set aside for it, when we have sat down ready to think. It too chooses its own time. Then the appropriate train of thought comes alive uninvited, and we follow it with full attention.

Keeping imagination on a leash, as recommended, also means not allowing it to bring back and paint pictures of wrongs, harm, losses, insults, slights, hurts, and the like that we suffered in the past. This stirs up long-dormant resentment, anger, and all hateful passions again, polluting our mind. According to a fine comparison given by the Neoplatonist Proclus, every city contains not only noble and distinguished people but also rabble of every kind (the mob). In the same way, even the noblest and most elevated person has within him, as a potential, the very lowest and most vulgar elements of human, indeed animal, nature. This rabble must not be stirred into a riot or allowed to look out of the windows, because it makes an ugly sight. But the acts of imagination just described are its demagogues. Another related point is that the smallest annoyance, whether caused by people or things, can swell into a monster that drives us out of our minds if we keep brooding over it and painting it in glaring colors on an enlarged scale. Instead, we should view everything unpleasant in the most matter-of-fact, sober way, so that we can take it as lightly as possible.

Small objects held close to the eye restrict our field of vision and hide the world. In the same way, the people and things in our *immediate surroundings*, however utterly insignificant and unimportant they may be, often occupy our attention and thoughts far more than they deserve, and in an unpleasant way at that, crowding out important thoughts and concerns. We should work against this.

- ¹⁴ When we see something we do not own, the thought very easily occurs to us: “What if that were mine?” It makes us feel the lack of it. Instead, we should ask more often: “What if that were *not* mine?” I mean that we should sometimes try to view what we have as it would appear to us after we had lost it. This

applies to everything, whatever it may be: property, health, friends, a lover, wife, child, horse, and dog. Usually, only loss teaches us the value of things. The way of looking at them recommended here, on the other hand, will first make us immediately happier to have them than we were before. Second, it will lead us to prevent their loss in every way: not risking our property, not angering our friends, not exposing our wife's faithfulness to temptation, watching over our children's health, and so on.—We often try to brighten a gloomy present by speculating on favorable possibilities. We invent all kinds of illusory hopes, each pregnant with a disappointment that is sure to arrive when the hope shatters against hard reality. It would be better to speculate on the many bad possibilities. This would lead partly to precautions against them, and partly to pleasant surprises when they do not come true. After all, we are always noticeably more cheerful after getting through a period of anxiety. Indeed, it is even good sometimes to picture great misfortunes that could possibly strike us. Then we can bear the much smaller ones that actually come more easily, comforting ourselves by looking back at those great ones that did not happen. But in following this rule, we must not neglect the preceding one.

- 15 The affairs and events that concern us appear and become entangled quite separately, without order or connection, in the sharpest contrast, with nothing in common except that they are our affairs. To match them, our thoughts and concerns about them must change just as abruptly.—So when we take up one thing, we must set everything else aside and put it out of mind, attending to, enjoying, or enduring each thing in its own time, entirely unconcerned about the rest. We must have drawers for our thoughts, as it were, opening one while all the others stay closed. This keeps a heavy worry from spoiling every small pleasure of the present and robbing us of all peace. It keeps one line of thought from displacing another, and concern for an important affair from causing us to neglect many smaller ones, and so on. Above all, someone capable of high and noble reflections should never let personal affairs and low concerns so completely occupy and fill his mind that they block those reflections from entering. That would truly be *to lose the reasons for living for the sake of life*.—Of course,

this directing and redirecting of ourselves, like so much else, requires self-discipline. We should find strength for it in this thought: everyone must endure many great constraints from outside, which no life can avoid. Yet a little self-restraint applied at the right point prevents much external constraint later. It is like a small section of a circle near the center corresponding to a section at the circumference often a hundred times larger. Nothing frees us from external constraint as much as self-restraint. That is the meaning of Seneca's saying: *If you want to subject everything to yourself, subject yourself to reason* (ep. 37). Besides, self-restraint always remains in our control. In an extreme case, or where it touches our most sensitive spot, we can ease it a little. External constraint, on the other hand, is inconsiderate, unsparing, and merciless. It is therefore wise to forestall it with self-restraint.

- 16 We should set a limit to our wishes, keep our desires in check, and master our anger, always remembering that an individual can attain only an infinitely small part of all that is desirable, while many evils must strike everyone. In short: refrain and endure, *abstain and bear up*. Without observing this rule, neither wealth nor power can prevent us from feeling wretched. This is what Horace is getting at:

Through it all, read and ask knowledgeable people
About how you can pass your life peacefully,
So that ever-needy desire does not drive and torment you,
Nor fear, nor hope for things of only modest use.

- 17 "Life consists in movement" (*Life depends on motion*), says Aristotle, obviously rightly. Our physical life exists only in and through ceaseless movement. In the same way, our inner, mental life requires constant occupation: being busy with something, through action or thought. Even the drumming of hands or some object, to which unoccupied and thoughtless people immediately turn, shows this. Our existence is essentially restless. Complete inactivity soon becomes unbearable because it brings on the most dreadful boredom. We should regulate this drive so as to satisfy it systematically and therefore better. Activity, then—doing something, making something if possible, or at least learning

something—is indispensable to human happiness. Our powers demand to be used, and we want to perceive the result somehow. In this respect, however, the greatest satisfaction comes from *making* something, producing it, whether a basket or a book. Seeing a work grow daily under our hands and finally reach completion makes us happy directly. A work of art, a piece of writing, even a simple piece of manual work does this. Of course, the nobler the work, the greater the enjoyment. In this respect the happiest people are the highly gifted, who know they can produce significant, great, coherent works. A higher kind of interest thereby spreads over their whole existence, giving it a flavor missing from that of the rest, whose lives are quite bland by comparison. For them, besides the material interest common to everyone, life and the world have a second, higher interest: an interest in form, because they contain the material for their works. Throughout their lives they eagerly collect this material whenever personal need gives them any room to breathe. Their intellect is also in a sense twofold: one part for ordinary relationships, the affairs of the will, like everyone else's; another for the purely objective understanding of things. So they live a double life, spectators and actors at once, while the rest are only actors.—Meanwhile, let everyone pursue something suited to his abilities. We notice how harmful the lack of planned activity or any kind of work is on long pleasure trips, when now and then we feel truly unhappy. Without a real occupation, we have been torn out of our natural element, as it were. Human beings need to exert themselves and struggle against resistance as a mole needs to dig. The standstill brought about by the complete satisfaction of a lasting pleasure would be unbearable. Overcoming obstacles is the full enjoyment of human existence. Whether the obstacles are material, as in practical activity, or intellectual, as in learning and research, the struggle and victory make us happy. If we lack an opportunity for this, we create one as best we can. According to our individuality, we will hunt, play cup-and-ball, or, guided by the unconscious pull of our nature, seek quarrels, hatch intrigues, or engage in fraud and all kinds of wrongdoing, just to end the state of rest we find unbearable. *It is hard to be at peace in idleness.*

18 We should take clearly thought-out *concepts*, not *images of the imagination*, as the guiding star of our efforts. But usually the opposite happens. On closer examination, we will find that what finally decides our choices is usually not concepts and judgments, but an imagined picture representing and standing for one of the alternatives. I no longer remember in which novel by Voltaire or Diderot this occurs: when the hero was a young man, a Hercules at the cross-roads, virtue always appeared to him in the form of his old tutor, holding a snuffbox in his left hand and a pinch in his right, and moralizing in that pose. Vice, on the other hand, appeared as his mother's chambermaid.—Especially in youth, the goal of our happiness takes the form of a few images that hover before us, often remaining for half our lives or even our whole lives. They are really teasing ghosts. Once we reach them, they dissolve into nothing, as we discover that they deliver none of what they promised. Examples are particular scenes of domestic, civic, social, or country life; pictures of our home and surroundings, decorations of honor, marks of respect, and so on and so on. *Every fool has his hobbyhorse*. The image of the beloved often belongs here too. It is surely natural for us to be affected this way. What is vividly perceived, being immediate, acts more directly on our will than a concept or abstract thought does. An abstract thought gives only the general, without the particular that actually contains reality. It can therefore act on our will only indirectly. Yet only the concept keeps its word, so it is a mark of education to trust only that. Of course, it may sometimes need explanation and restatement through a few images—but *with a grain of salt*.

19 The preceding rule falls under a more general one: we should always master the impression made by what is present and vividly perceived. Compared with what is merely thought and known, this impression is disproportionately strong, not because of its subject matter or content, which is often very slight, but because of its form: vividness and immediacy. These press in on the mind, disturbing its peace or shaking its resolutions. What is present and vividly perceived is easy to take in, so it always acts with its full force at once. Thoughts and reasons, on the other hand, need time and quiet to be considered piece by

piece. We therefore cannot have all of them fully in mind at every moment. As a result, a pleasure we have renounced after reflection still tempts us when we see it. Likewise, a judgment hurts us although we know the person making it is completely unqualified; an insult angers us although we recognize it as beneath contempt; ten reasons against the existence of a danger are outweighed by the false appearance that it is actually present, and so on. In all this, our original irrationality asserts itself. Women will often succumb to an impression of this kind, and few men have reason so firmly in command that they do not suffer its effects. Where thoughts alone cannot entirely overcome it, the best course is to neutralize one impression with its opposite. For example, counter the impression of an insult by seeking out people who value us highly, or that of a threatening danger by actually looking at what works against it. The Italian whom Leibniz describes (in *den nouveaux essais*, Liv. I, c. 2, § 11) could even withstand the pain of torture this way. As he had resolved, he never for a moment let the image of the gallows, to which his confession would have brought him, leave his imagination during the torture. That is why he called out from time to time, *I see you*; he later explained his words in this way.—For the very reason considered here, when everyone around us holds a different opinion and acts accordingly, it is hard not to be shaken by them even if we are convinced they are wrong. A king fleeing persecution and traveling strictly *under a concealed identity* must find the private ceremonial submission of his trusted companion an almost necessary encouragement, to keep him from finally doubting himself.

- ²⁰ In the second chapter I have already stressed the great value of *health*, the first and most important condition of our happiness. Here I will give a few very general rules for strengthening and preserving it.

As long as you are healthy, toughen yourself by giving the body, both as a whole and in each part, plenty of exertion and hardship. Get used to resisting adverse influences of every kind. But as soon as an unhealthy condition appears,

whether in the whole body or one part, immediately take the opposite approach. Spare and care for the sick body or part in every way. What is suffering and weakened cannot be toughened.

Heavy use strengthens a muscle but weakens a nerve. So exercise your muscles through every suitable exertion, but protect your nerves from all strain. Protect the eyes from excessively bright light, especially reflected light, from all strain in dim light, and from looking for long periods at objects that are too small. Likewise protect the ears from excessively loud noise. Above all, protect the brain from forced, overly prolonged, or ill-timed exertion. Let it rest during digestion, because the same vital force that forms thoughts in the brain is then working hard in the stomach and intestines to prepare chyme and chyle. Likewise, let it rest during or after considerable muscular exertion. Motor nerves are like sensory nerves in this respect. Just as the pain we feel in injured limbs has its real seat in the brain, it is not really the legs and arms that walk and work, but the brain: specifically, the part that stimulates the nerves of those limbs through the medulla and spinal cord and thereby sets them moving. Accordingly, the fatigue we feel in our legs or arms also has its real seat in the brain. That is why only muscles whose movement is voluntary, meaning directed by the brain, become tired, and not those that work involuntarily, like the heart. Clearly, then, the brain is harmed if we force it to perform strong muscular activity and mental exertion simultaneously, or even in close succession. This does not conflict with the heightened mental activity we often feel at the beginning of a walk, or on short walks generally. The parts of the brain in question have not yet become tired. At the same time, this light muscular activity and the increased breathing it brings promote the upward flow of arterial blood to the brain, blood that is now also better oxygenated.—Above all, give the brain the full amount of sleep it needs for recovery. Sleep is to the whole person what winding is to a clock. (Vergl. *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* II, 217. – 3. Aufl. II, 240.) The more developed and active the brain, the greater this amount will be. Exceeding it, however, would merely waste time, because sleep then loses in intensity what it gains in duration. (Vergl. *Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* II, 247. – 3. Aufl. II, 275.)[O] In general, understand clearly that

our thinking is nothing but the organic function of the brain, and therefore behaves like every other organic activity in its need for exertion and rest. Excessive exertion damages the brain just as it damages the eyes. It has rightly been said: the brain thinks as the stomach digests. The delusion of an immaterial, simple soul that thinks essentially and constantly, and is therefore tireless, merely lodging in the brain and needing nothing in the world, has certainly led many people to treat themselves foolishly and dull their mental powers. Frederick the Great, for example, once tried to give up sleeping altogether. Professors of philosophy would do well not to encourage such a practically destructive delusion with their old wives' philosophy, which tries to conform to the catechism.—We should get used to regarding our mental powers entirely as physiological functions, and treat, spare, and exercise them accordingly. We should remember that every bodily illness, trouble, or disorder, in whatever part, affects the mind. *Cabanis, des Rapports du physique et du moral de l'homme*, best equips us for this.

[O] Sleep is a piece of *death* that we borrow *in advance*, receiving in exchange the restoration and renewal of life exhausted by a day. *Sleep is a loan taken from death*. Sleep borrows from death to maintain life. Or it is the *interim interest* on death, which is itself the repayment of the principal. The more generously and regularly the interest is paid, the later that repayment is demanded.

Neglect of the advice given here is why some great minds and great scholars have become mentally weak, childish, and even insane in old age. The celebrated English poets of this century, for example, such as *Walter Scott*, *Wordsworth*, *Southey*, and others, became mentally dull and incapable in old age, even in their sixties, and sank into mental disability. This can undoubtedly be explained by the fact that, tempted by high fees, they all practiced writing as a trade: they wrote for money. That leads to unnatural exertion. Anyone who puts his Pegasus in a harness and drives his Muse with a whip will pay for it in a way like someone who has performed forced service for Venus. I suspect that *Kant* too overworked himself in his later years, after he had finally become famous, and thereby brought on the second childhood of his last four years.—

Every month of the year has a distinctive, direct influence—that is, one independent of the weather—on our health and our bodily condition generally, and even on our mental condition.

C. Our behavior toward others.

- ²¹ To get through the world, it is useful to take along a large supply of *caution* and *forbearance*. The first protects us from harm and loss; the second from disputes and quarrels.

Anyone who has to live among people must not reject any individuality unconditionally, since nature has once and for all established and given it—not even the worst, most pitiful, or most ridiculous one. Instead, he must accept it as something unchangeable that, as a consequence of an eternal, metaphysical principle, must be what it is. In bad cases he should think: “There have to be odd characters like this too.” If he takes a different attitude, he acts unjustly and challenges the other person to a fight to the death. No one can change his essential individuality: his moral character, powers of understanding, temperament, facial features, and so on. If we condemn his being completely, he has no choice but to fight us as a mortal enemy. We are willing to grant him the right to exist only on condition that he becomes someone other than the person he unchangeably is. So to live among people, we must let everyone exist and count for something with his given individuality, whatever it may be. We may concern ourselves only with using it as its kind and nature allow. We must neither hope to change it nor condemn it outright as it is[P]. This is the true meaning of “Live and let live.” The task is not as easy as it is fair, however, and anyone who can avoid a good many individualities forever should count himself lucky.—Meanwhile, to learn to endure people, practice patience on lifeless objects that stubbornly resist what we are doing through mechanical or other physical necessity. There are daily opportunities for this. We can then learn to transfer the patience gained to people, getting used to the thought that whenever they obstruct us, they too must do so through a necessity arising from their nature,

just as strict as the necessity with which lifeless things act. So becoming indignant at what they do is as foolish as becoming indignant at a stone that rolls into our path.

[P] With some people, the wisest thought is: "I will not change him, so I will make use of him."

- 22 It is astonishing how easily and quickly similarity or difference of mind and feeling reveals itself between people in conversation. It can be felt in every little detail. Even if the conversation concerns the most remote, unimportant matters, between essentially unlike people almost every sentence spoken by one will more or less displease the other, and some will positively annoy him. Similar people, on the other hand, immediately feel a certain agreement in everything. If they are very similar, this soon flows into complete harmony, even unison. This explains, first, why entirely ordinary people are so sociable and so easily find very good company everywhere: such genuinely dear, worthy people. With unusual people the opposite happens, increasingly so the more outstanding they are. In their isolation they can sometimes feel truly delighted to find even one fiber like their own in someone else, however small it may be! For each person can be only as much to the other as the other is to him. Truly great minds nest alone, like eagles on the heights.—Second, this explains how like-minded people find one another so quickly, as though drawn together by a magnet: kindred souls greet one another from afar. Of course, we will most often have a chance to observe this in the low-minded or poorly gifted, but only because they exist in legions, whereas better and outstanding natures are, and are called, rare. Thus, for example, in a large association directed toward practical aims, two genuine scoundrels will recognize each other as quickly as if they wore a military badge. They will immediately join forces to plot abuse or betrayal. Likewise, imagine, *impossible as it is*, a large gathering made up entirely of very sensible, intelligent people except for two fools. These two will feel sympathetically drawn to one another, and each will soon rejoice inwardly that he has met at least one reasonable man. It really is remarkable to witness how two people, especially those who lag behind morally and intellectually, recognize one

another at first sight, eagerly try to approach, and hurry toward one another with friendly, joyful greetings as though they were old acquaintances. It is so striking that we are tempted to suppose, in keeping with the Buddhist doctrine of the transmigration of souls, that they had already been friends in a previous life.

What keeps people apart, however, even when they agree on much, and may also produce temporary disharmony between them, is the difference in their present moods. Each person's mood is almost always different, depending on his current situation, occupation, surroundings, physical condition, train of thought at the moment, and so on. This creates dissonances between even the most harmonious personalities. Always being able to make the adjustment needed to remove this disturbance and establish an equal temperament would be an achievement of the highest cultivation. We can gauge how much a shared mood does for social fellowship from this: even a large gathering is stirred to lively communication and sincere mutual interest, with general enjoyment, as soon as something objective affects everyone at once and in the same way. It may be a danger, a hope, a piece of news, an unusual sight, a play, music, or anything else. By overpowering all private interests, such things produce a universal unity of mood. In the absence of such an objective influence, people usually reach for a subjective one. Bottles are therefore the usual means of bringing a shared mood into a gathering. Even tea and coffee serve this purpose.

The disharmony that differences of momentary mood so easily introduce into all company also partly explains why everyone appears idealized, and sometimes almost glorified, in memory. Memory is free of these and all similar disturbing, though temporary, influences. It acts like the converging lens in a camera obscura: it draws everything together, producing a much more beautiful image than the original. We already gain some of the advantage of being seen this way through any absence. Although idealizing memory needs a good deal of time to complete its work, it begins at once. For this reason it is even wise to show yourself to acquaintances and good friends only after considerable intervals. When you meet again, you will then notice that memory has already been at work.

23 No one can see *above himself*. By this I mean that each person sees in another only as much as he himself is. He can grasp and understand the other only within the limits of his own intelligence. If that is of the lowest kind, all intellectual gifts, even the greatest, will have no effect on him. He will perceive nothing in their owner except the lowest part of his individuality: all his weaknesses and faults of temperament and character. These will make up that person for him. The other's higher intellectual abilities exist for him no more than color does for someone blind. For all minds are invisible to someone who has none, and every appraisal is a product of the worth of what is appraised multiplied by the appraiser's range of understanding. It follows that we put ourselves on a level with everyone we speak to. Whatever advantage we may have over him disappears, and even the self-denial required for this goes completely unrecognized. Consider how thoroughly low-minded and poorly gifted, and therefore how thoroughly *vulgar*, most people are. We will then see that it is impossible to speak to them without becoming *vulgar* ourselves for that time, by analogy with electrical induction. We will fully understand the real meaning and aptness of the expression "lowering oneself," and will gladly avoid all company with which we can communicate only through the *shameful part* of our nature. We will also see that, with stupid people and fools, there is only *one* way to show our intelligence: not to speak to them. Of course, someone in society will then sometimes feel like a dancer who has come to a ball and found only people unable to walk: whom is he to dance with?

24 *Someone* earns my high respect as one chosen out of a hundred if, when he has something to wait for and is sitting unoccupied, he does not immediately start tapping or rattling rhythmically with whatever is at hand—his stick, perhaps, or his knife and fork, or anything else. He is probably thinking about something. With many people, on the other hand, it is obvious that looking has entirely taken the place of thinking. They try to become aware of their existence by making a clatter, unless a cigar is at hand to serve the same purpose. For the same reason, they are constantly all eyes and ears for everything happening around them.

- ²⁵ *Rochevoucauld* aptly observed that it is hard to respect someone highly and love him greatly at the same time. We would therefore have to choose whether to seek people's love or their respect. Their love is always self-interested, though in very different ways. Besides, what wins it is not always something we can be proud of. Someone will chiefly be liked in proportion to how little he demands of other people's minds and hearts, genuinely and without pretense, and not merely from the sort of forbearance rooted in contempt. Now recall *Helvétius's* very true statement: *The degree of intelligence needed to please us is a fairly exact measure of the degree of intelligence we have.* The conclusion follows from these premises.—With people's respect, on the other hand, it is the reverse. It is wrested from them only against their will and, for that very reason, is usually hidden. So it gives us much greater inward satisfaction. It is connected with our worth, which is not directly true of people's love: love is subjective, respect objective. Love, of course, is more useful to us.
- ²⁶ Most people are so subjective that, at bottom, nothing interests them except themselves alone. That is why, whatever is said, they immediately think of themselves. Any accidental connection, however remote, with something personal to them seizes and takes over their full attention. They have no mental capacity left for the objective subject of the conversation. Likewise, no reasons count with them as soon as their interest or vanity opposes those reasons. They are therefore so easily distracted, hurt, insulted, or offended that, in speaking objectively with them about anything at all, we cannot be too careful about any possible, perhaps unfavorable, connection between what is said and the dear, delicate self before us. That alone matters to them, nothing else. While they have no sense or feeling for what is true, apt, beautiful, subtle, or witty in another person's speech, they are exquisitely sensitive to anything that might wound their petty vanity, however remotely or indirectly, or reflect unfavorably in any way on their highly precious self. In their sensitivity they resemble little dogs whose paws we so easily step on without noticing, and then have to listen to the squealing. Or they can be compared to a patient covered in wounds and swellings, with whom we must take the utmost care to avoid any possible

touch. Some go so far as to feel intelligence and understanding displayed in conversation with them—or merely not sufficiently hidden—as a direct insult, though they conceal this for the moment. Later, the inexperienced person thinks and puzzles in vain over what on earth he could have done to earn their resentment and hatred.—But they are just as easily flattered and won over. Their judgment is therefore usually bribed: merely a declaration in favor of their party or class, not an objective, fair judgment. All this rests on the fact that in them the will far outweighs knowledge, and their limited intellect is entirely in the will's service, unable to free itself even for a moment.

A magnificent example of people's pitiful subjectivity is *astrology*. Because of this subjectivity, people relate everything to themselves and return in a straight line from every thought to themselves. Astrology relates the movements of the great heavenly bodies to the miserable self, and also connects comets in the sky with earthly squabbles and scoundrelly behavior. This has happened in all ages, even the most ancient. (S. z. B. Stob. Eclog. L. I, c. 22, 9, pag. 478.)

²⁷ Whenever something wrongheaded is said in public or in company, or written in literature, and is well received, or at least not refuted, do not despair and think it will be left at that. Instead, know and take comfort that afterward, gradually, the matter will be turned over, examined, thought about, weighed, discussed, and usually judged correctly in the end. After a period suited to its difficulty, almost everyone will finally understand what the clear mind saw at once. Meanwhile, of course, we must be patient. A person with correct insight among the deluded is like someone whose watch keeps the right time in a city where all the tower clocks are set wrong. He alone knows the true time, but what good does it do him? Everyone follows the wrongly set city clocks, even those who know that his watch alone gives the true time.

²⁸ People are like children in becoming ill-behaved when spoiled. So we must not be too yielding or affectionate toward anyone. As a rule, we will not lose a friend by refusing him a loan, but may very easily lose him by granting it. Likewise, we will not easily lose one through a proud and somewhat neglectful manner, but often will through too much friendliness and helpfulness. These

make him arrogant and unbearable, bringing about the break. Above all, people simply cannot handle the thought that we need them. Insolence and presumption follow it inseparably. In some, this thought arises to a degree merely because we have dealings with them, perhaps speaking to them often or in a familiar way. They immediately think we must put up with something from them too, and will try to stretch the boundaries of politeness. That is why so few people are suited to any closer relationship, and why we should be especially careful not to become familiar with low natures. If someone actually gets the idea that I need him far more than he needs me, he immediately feels as if I had stolen something from him. He will try to take revenge and get it back. *Superiority* in dealing with others arises only from not needing them in any way, and showing it. For this reason it is advisable to let everyone, man or woman, feel from time to time that we could very well do without them. This strengthens friendship. Indeed, with most people it can do no harm to mix in a grain of disregard now and then. They value our friendship all the more. *Someone who shows no regard is held in regard* (one who does not respect is respected), as a subtle Italian proverb says. But if someone really means a great deal to us, we must hide it from him as though it were a crime. This is not exactly pleasant, but it is true. Even dogs can barely tolerate great friendliness, let alone people.

- ²⁹ People of nobler character and greater gifts so often reveal a striking lack of knowledge of people and worldly wisdom, especially in youth. As a result, they are easily deceived or otherwise misled, while low natures find their way in the world much faster and better. The reason is that without experience we must judge *in advance of experience*, and no experience can ever match *that prior understanding*. Ordinary people find *this prior understanding* in their own selves, but noble and outstanding people do not, precisely because they are so different from the others. So when they calculate other people's thinking and actions on the basis of their own, the calculation is wrong.

Even if such a person has finally learned *from experience*, through instruction by others and his own experience, what to expect from people in general, he will still hardly ever gain an *adequate* idea of their pettiness and wretchedness. He has learned, that is, that about 5/6 of them are so constituted, morally or intellectually, that anyone not linked to them by circumstances does better to avoid them from the start and, as far as possible, stay out of all contact with them. Yet throughout his life he will have to keep extending and completing that idea, and in the meantime will very often miscalculate to his own harm. And even after really taking the lesson to heart, he will still sometimes enter a gathering of people he does not yet know and find himself wondering how, from their speech and expressions, they all seem entirely reasonable, honest, sincere, honorable, and virtuous, and perhaps clever and intelligent as well. But this should not mislead him. It happens only because nature does not work like bad poets. When they portray scoundrels or fools, they do it so clumsily and deliberately that we seem to see the poet standing behind every such character, constantly disowning his attitudes and speech and calling out in warning: "This is a scoundrel, this is a fool; pay no attention to what he says." Nature, on the other hand, works like Shakespeare and Goethe. In their works every character, even the devil himself, is in the right while he stands before us and speaks. He is conceived so objectively that we are drawn into his interests and forced to share in them. Like nature's works, he has developed from an inner principle by which his words and actions appear natural, and therefore necessary.—So anyone who expects devils to walk around with horns and fools with bells will always be their prey or their plaything. Besides, in company people act like the moon and people with hunched backs: they always show only one side. Everyone even has an inborn talent for using facial expression to turn his face into a mask representing exactly what he really *ought* to be. Because it is designed exclusively for his individuality, it fits and suits him so closely that the effect is extraordinarily deceptive. He puts it on whenever it matters to win someone's favor. We should give it no more credit than if it were made of oil-cloth, remembering the excellent Italian proverb: *No dog is so vicious that it does not wag its tail* (no dog is so bad that it would not wag its tail).

In any case, be very careful not to form a very favorable opinion of someone you have just met. In most cases you will be disappointed, to your own embarrassment or even harm. This is also worth remembering: people show their character precisely in small matters, where they are not watching themselves. In trivial actions or mere manners, you can often easily observe a boundless selfishness that gives no consideration at all to others. Later it will reveal itself in major matters too, though in disguise. Do not let such an opportunity pass. Suppose someone acts inconsiderately in the small daily events and relationships of life, in matters to which the saying *the law does not concern itself with trifles* applies. He pursues only his own advantage or convenience at others' expense; he takes for himself what is there for everyone, and so on. Then be sure that there is no justice in his heart. He will be a scoundrel in major matters too, whenever the law and force do not tie his hands. Do not trust him an inch. Indeed, someone who has no qualms about breaking his club's rules will also break the state's laws as soon as he can do so without danger[Q].

[Q] If the good outweighed the bad in people as most of them are, it would be wiser to rely on their justice, fairness, gratitude, loyalty, love, or compassion than on their fear. But since the reverse is true of them, the reverse is wiser.

When someone we deal with or spend time with has done something unpleasant or annoying to us, we only need to ask ourselves one question. Is he worth so much to us that we are willing to put up with the same thing again and repeatedly, even in a somewhat worse form—or not? (Forgiving and forgetting means throwing costly experience out the window.) If the answer is yes, there is little to say about it, since talking does little good. We must let the matter pass, with or without a warning. But we should know that by doing so we have asked him to do it to us again. If the answer is no, we must break with our dear friend immediately and forever, or dismiss him if he is a servant. For when the occasion arises, he will inevitably do exactly the same thing, or something entirely similar, even if he now solemnly and sincerely assures us otherwise. A person can forget anything at all, but not himself, not his own nature. Character simply cannot be corrected. All human actions flow from an inner principle that makes a person always act the same way under the same circumstances. He can-

not do otherwise. Read my prize essay on so-called freedom of the will, and free yourself from this delusion. For the same reason, making up with a friend you have broken with is a weakness you will pay for. At the first opportunity he will do precisely the same thing that caused the break. Indeed, he will do it even more brazenly, secretly aware that you cannot do without him. The same applies to dismissed servants whom you take back. For the same reason, we must no more expect someone to do the same thing as before under *changed* circumstances. On the contrary, people change their attitudes and behavior just as quickly as their interests change. Indeed, their self-interest draws bills payable at such short notice that we would have to be even more shortsighted ourselves not to refuse payment.

Suppose, then, we want to know how someone will act in a position we are thinking of putting him in. We must not rely on his promises and assurances. Even if he speaks sincerely, he is speaking about something he does not know. We must instead work out how he will act solely by considering the circumstances he will enter and how they will interact with his character.

To gain the clear and thorough understanding we so badly need of people's true and very sad nature, as most of them are, it is extremely instructive to use their activities and behavior in literature as a commentary on their activities and behavior in practical life, and *the other way around*. This helps us avoid losing confidence in either our own judgment or our judgment of them. But no instance of particular baseness or stupidity that we come across in life or literature should ever become a source of annoyance and anger. It should only add to our knowledge. We should see it as another contribution to our understanding of the human race's character and remember it accordingly. We will then view it much as a mineralogist views a very characteristic mineral specimen he has found. There are exceptions—yes, incomprehensibly great ones—and the differences between individuals are enormous. But taken as a whole, as people have long said, the world lies in evil. Savages eat one another, and civilized people cheat one another, and that is called the way of the world. What are states, with all their elaborate machinery directed outward and inward, and all their instruments of force, but arrangements for setting limits to people's boundless

injustice? Throughout history, don't we see every king, once he is securely established and his country enjoys some prosperity, use it to invade neighboring states with his army as if it were a band of robbers? Aren't almost all wars basically raids for plunder? In early antiquity, and to some extent in the Middle Ages too, the defeated became the victors' slaves. That basically means they had to work for them. But people who pay war contributions have to do the same: they hand over the proceeds of earlier work. *In every war, the only aim is robbery*, says Voltaire, and the Germans should take this to heart.

- 30 No character is such that it can be left to itself and allowed to let itself go completely. Every character needs guidance from concepts and principles. But if you want to go very far in this—to develop a character that does not spring from your inborn nature, but solely from rational reflection, a truly acquired and artificial character—you will very soon find the following confirmed: You may drive nature out with a pitchfork, but it will keep coming back. You may understand a rule for dealing with others perfectly well. You may even discover it yourself and express it accurately. Yet in actual life you may break it the very next moment. Still, do not let this discourage you into thinking it is impossible to guide your behavior in the world by abstract rules and principles, and that it is therefore best simply to let yourself go. It is the same here as with all theoretical rules and instructions for practical matters. Understanding the rule comes first; learning to apply it comes second. Reason gives us the first all at once; practice gives us the second gradually. You show a student the finger positions on an instrument, or the parries and thrusts with a rapier. Despite his best intentions, he immediately gets them wrong. He now thinks it is almost impossible to observe them while quickly reading music or in the heat of combat. Yet through practice he gradually learns, stumbling, falling, and getting up again. It is the same with the rules of grammar in writing and speaking Latin. In just this way a clumsy fellow becomes a courtier, a hothead becomes a polished man of the world, an open person becomes reserved, and a noble person becomes ironic. Yet self-training acquired through long habit will always work like a constraint imposed from outside. Nature never entirely stops resisting it

and sometimes unexpectedly breaks through. Acting on abstract principles stands to acting from an original, inborn inclination as a human artifact—say, a clock—stands to a living organism. In the clock, form and movement are forced on matter foreign to them. In the organism, form and matter permeate each other and are one. This relationship between acquired and inborn character therefore confirms Emperor Napoleon's saying: *Everything that is not natural is imperfect*. This is, in fact, a rule that applies to absolutely everything, physical or moral. The only exception I can think of is natural aventurine, familiar to mineralogists, which is inferior to the artificial kind.

For this reason, let me also warn against every kind of *affectation*. It always arouses contempt. First, it is a deception, and as such cowardly, because it rests on fear. Second, it is a judgment people pass against themselves: they want to appear to be what they are not, and therefore consider it better than what they are. Pretending to have a quality and showing it off is an admission that you lack it. Whether someone boasts of courage, learning, intelligence, wit, success with women, wealth, high rank, or anything else, you can conclude that this is precisely where he falls somewhat short. Someone who really possesses a quality in full does not think of displaying it and pretending to it. He is quite at ease about it. This is also the meaning of the Spanish proverb: *A rattling horseshoe is missing a nail* (a rattling horseshoe lacks a nail). Of course, as I said at the start, no one should give himself completely free rein and show himself entirely as he is. Much that is bad and beastly in our nature needs covering up. But this justifies only the negative act of hiding something, not the positive act of pretending. You should also know that affectation is recognized even before it becomes clear what exactly someone is pretending to. And finally, it does not hold up over time: one day the mask falls off. *No one can keep up an assumed character for long. Things that are false soon fall back into their own nature.* (Seneca de Clementia, L. I, c. 1.)

- ³¹ We carry the weight of our own body without feeling it, though we feel the weight of any other body we try to move. In the same way, we notice other people's faults and vices, but not our own. Yet in other people each of us has a mir-

ror where we can clearly see our own vices, faults, bad habits, and every kind of unpleasant trait. But we usually behave like a dog barking at a mirror. It does not know it is seeing itself and thinks it is another dog. Someone who picks apart other people is working on improving himself. People who have the habit and inclination to subject others' outward behavior, and their actions and inaction in general, to careful and *sharp criticism*, silently and privately, are thereby working on their own improvement and development. They will have either enough fairness, or at least enough pride and vanity, to avoid doing what they so often condemn severely. The opposite applies to tolerant people: *We grant this indulgence and ask for it in return*. The Gospel moralizes very nicely about the speck in someone else's eye and the beam in your own. But the eye's nature makes it look outward, not at itself. So noticing and criticizing our faults in others is a very suitable way to become aware of them in ourselves. We need a mirror to improve ourselves.

This rule also applies to style and writing. Anyone who admires a new foolishness in them, instead of criticizing it, will imitate it. That is why every such foolishness spreads so quickly in Germany. Germans are very tolerant: it shows. *We grant this indulgence and ask for it in return* is their motto.

- 32 In his youth, a person of nobler character believes that the essential and decisive relationships between people, and the bonds arising from them, are *ideal* ones. That is, they rest on similar attitudes, ways of thinking, tastes, intellectual abilities, and so on. Later he discovers that they are *material* ones: those based on some material interest. These underlie almost all connections. In fact, most people have no idea of any other relationships. Accordingly, everyone is judged by his office, occupation, nationality, or family—in short, by the position and role that convention has assigned him. He is sorted accordingly and treated as if on a production line. What he is in himself, as a human being with personal qualities, comes up only when someone chooses, and thus only exceptionally. Everyone sets it aside and ignores it whenever convenient, which is most of the time. But the more substance a person has in himself, the less he will like this

arrangement, and the more he will try to escape its reach. Yet it rests on the fact that in this world of hardship and need, the means of meeting them are everywhere the essential thing, and therefore the dominant one.

- 33 Just as paper money circulates instead of silver, outward displays and gestures imitated as naturally as possible circulate in the world instead of true respect and true friendship. On the other hand, we might also ask whether there are people who really deserve them. In any case, I value an honest dog's wagging tail more than a hundred such displays and gestures.

True, genuine friendship requires a strong, purely objective, and entirely unselfish concern for another person's well-being and suffering. That in turn requires really identifying yourself with your friend. The selfishness of human nature is so opposed to this that true friendship is like gigantic sea serpents: we do not know whether it is mythical or exists somewhere. Still, there are various bonds between people that, though based mainly on hidden selfish motives of the most varied kinds, contain a grain of that true and genuine friendship. This ennobles them enough that, in this world of imperfections, they may with some justice bear the name of friendship. They stand far above everyday connections. Those are such that we would never speak another word to most of our good acquaintances if we heard how they talk about us in our absence.

Apart from occasions when you need serious help and considerable sacrifices, the best opportunity to test whether a friend is genuine is the moment you tell him about a misfortune that has just struck you. His face will then show either true, heartfelt, unmixed sorrow, or else, through its composed calm or a fleeting secondary expression, it will confirm *Rochefoucauld's* familiar saying: *In the misfortunes of our best friends, we always find something that does not displease us*. On such occasions ordinary so-called friends can often barely suppress the twitch of a faint, pleased smile. Few things put people in a good mood as reliably as telling them about a serious misfortune that recently struck you, or openly revealing some personal weakness. How characteristic!

Distance and long absence damage every friendship, however reluctantly we admit it. Over the years, people we do not see gradually dry up into abstract concepts, even if they are our dearest friends. Our concern for them becomes increasingly a matter of reason alone, or even merely of tradition. Lively and deeply felt concern is reserved for those we have before our eyes, even if they are only beloved animals. Human nature depends that much on the senses. So Goethe's saying proves true here too:

"The present is a mighty goddess."

(Tasso, Aufzug 4, Auftr. 4.)

Friends of the house usually deserve that name: they are more attached to the house than to its master, and so are more like cats than dogs.

Friends call themselves sincere; enemies are sincere. So we should use their criticism to gain self-knowledge, like a bitter medicine.

Friends in need are rare? Quite the opposite! You have barely made friends with someone before he is already in need and wants to borrow money.

- ³⁴ What a novice someone must be to imagine that showing intelligence and understanding is a way to make himself popular in company! On the contrary, in the overwhelmingly vast majority it arouses hatred and resentment. These are all the more bitter because the person feeling them has no right to complain of their cause, and even hides it from himself. More precisely, this is what happens. When someone notices and feels the great intellectual superiority of the person he is talking to, he silently and without clear awareness concludes that the other person is equally aware of his inferiority and limitations. This unspoken inference arouses his bitterest hatred, resentment, and fury. (Vergl. Welt als Wille und Vorstellung., 3. Aufl., Bd. II, 256, the quoted words of Dr. *Johnson* and *Merck*, Goethe's friend in his youth.) *Gracián* therefore rightly says: "*To be well liked, the only way is to dress in the skin of the stupidest animal.*" (S. Oráculo manual, y arte de prudencia, 240. [Obras, Amberes 1702, P. II, p. 287.]) After all, displaying intelligence and understanding is merely an indirect way of reproaching everyone else for their incompetence and dullness. Besides, an ordinary nature rebels when it sees its opposite, and envy is the secret instigator of

the rebellion. As we can see every day, satisfying their vanity is a pleasure people prize above all others. Yet it is possible only by comparing themselves with others. And people are prouder of intellectual advantages than of any others: these alone give them their superiority over animals[R]. So confronting someone with your clear superiority in this respect, especially before witnesses, is the height of rashness. He feels challenged to take revenge. Usually he will look for an opportunity to do so by insulting you. In this way he moves from the territory of intelligence to that of the will, where in this respect we are all equal. So while rank and wealth can always count on high respect in society, intellectual advantages can expect nothing of the sort. At best they are ignored. Otherwise they are seen as a kind of impertinence, or as something their owner has acquired without permission and now has the nerve to parade. To pay him back, everyone secretly plans to humiliate him in some other way and waits for the chance. Even the humblest behavior will scarcely succeed in begging forgiveness for intellectual superiority. Sadi says in the *Gulistan* (S. 146 der Übersetzung von Graf): “You should know that an unintelligent person feels a hundred times more hostility toward an intelligent one than an intelligent person feels dislike toward an unintelligent one.” Intellectual *inferiority*, on the other hand, is a real recommendation. The comforting feeling of superiority is to the mind what warmth is to the body. So everyone approaches whatever promises that feeling as instinctively as they approach a stove or sunshine. Only someone distinctly inferior can promise it: inferior in mental qualities among men, and in beauty among women. Admittedly, with some people, it takes some doing to demonstrate inferiority without pretending. But look at the warm friendliness with which a passably attractive girl greets a thoroughly ugly one. Physical advantages do not count for much among men, though a man does feel more comfortable beside someone shorter than beside someone taller. Consequently, stupid and ignorant men, and ugly women, are universally popular and sought after. They easily acquire a reputation for having an extremely good heart, because everyone needs an excuse for their affection, both to themselves and to others. For that very reason, intellectual superiority of every kind is a very isolating quality. People avoid and hate it, and invent all sorts of faults

in its owner to justify doing so[S]. Beauty has exactly the same effect among women. Very beautiful girls find no female friend, not even a companion. They would do better not even to apply for jobs as companions. The moment they enter, the face of their hoped-for new mistress darkens: neither for herself nor for her daughters does she need such a foil. Advantages of rank, on the other hand, have the opposite effect. Unlike personal advantages, they do not work through contrast and distance, but through reflection, as the colors of the surroundings do on a face.

[R] We can say that a person has given himself his *will*, because that *is* what he himself is. But his *intellect* is an endowment he has received from heaven—that is, from eternal, mysterious fate and its necessity, of which his mother was merely the instrument.

[S] Friendships and comradeships are by far the chief means of *getting ahead in the world*. But *great abilities* always make people proud, and so ill suited to flattering people with only slight abilities—people from whom they are supposed to hide and deny their own great ones. Awareness of having only slight abilities works in the opposite way. It fits perfectly with humility, friendliness, helpfulness, and respect for what is bad, and so gains friends and patrons.

This applies not only to government service, but also to honorary positions, distinctions, and even fame in the scholarly world. Thus, for example, in academies dear mediocrity always has the upper hand, while people of merit get in late or never. And so it goes with everything.

- ³⁵ Laziness, selfishness, and vanity very often play the greatest part in our trust in others. Laziness does so when we would rather trust someone else than investigate, keep watch, or act ourselves. Selfishness does so when our need to talk about our own affairs leads us to confide something to another person. Vanity does so when it is something we take pride in. Nevertheless, we demand that people honor our trust.

On the other hand, we should not be angry at mistrust. It contains a compliment to honesty: the sincere admission that honesty is so very rare that it belongs among the things whose existence people doubt.

³⁶ I gave *one* reason for *politeness*, that Chinese cardinal virtue, in my *Ethics*, S. 201 (2. Aufl. 198). The other is as follows. It is a tacit agreement to ignore each other's wretched moral and intellectual condition and not reproach one another for it. This makes that condition somewhat less likely to come to light, to the advantage of both parties.

Politeness is good sense; consequently, rudeness is stupidity. Making enemies through needless, willful rudeness is madness, like setting fire to your own house. Politeness is like counting tokens: it is an openly counterfeit currency. Being stingy with such a currency shows a lack of sense; being generous with it shows sense. Every nation ends its letters with *your very humble servant—your most obedient servant—your most devoted servant*. Only the Germans hold back from “servant”—because it is not true, after all! But someone who carries politeness so far as to sacrifice real interests is like someone who gives real gold coins instead of counting tokens. Wax, naturally hard and brittle, becomes so pliable with a little heat that it takes any shape you wish. In the same way, a little politeness and friendliness can make even stubborn and hostile people flexible and obliging. So politeness is to people what heat is to wax.

Politeness is admittedly a difficult task in that it demands that we show everyone the greatest respect, though the vast majority deserve none. It also demands that we pretend to take the liveliest interest in them, though we should be glad to have no interest in them at all. Combining politeness with pride is a masterstroke.

We would be much less upset by insults, which really always consist in expressions of disrespect, if we did not, on the one hand, have a completely exaggerated idea of our own high worth and dignity, and thus boundless arrogance; and if, on the other, we had made clear to ourselves what people generally think and feel about one another in their hearts. What a glaring contrast there is between most people's sensitivity to the slightest hint of criticism directed at them and what they would hear if they eavesdropped on their acquaintances' conversations about them! We should instead keep in mind that ordinary politeness is only a grinning mask. Then we would not raise an outcry when it shifts a little or is taken off for a moment. But when someone becomes down-

right rude, it is as if he has thrown off his clothes and stands there *completely naked*. Admittedly, like most people in that condition, he makes a poor showing.

37 Do not take anyone else as a model for what you do or leave undone. Situation, circumstances, and relationships are never the same. And differences in character give an action a different coloring too. Hence, *when two people do the same thing, it is not the same*. After careful consideration and close thought, you must act in accordance with your own character. So *originality* is essential in *practical matters* too. Otherwise, what you do does not fit what you are.

38 Do not dispute anyone's opinion. Instead, remember that if you wanted to talk him out of all the absurdities he believes, you could reach Methuselah's age without finishing.

In conversation, you should also avoid all corrective remarks, however well meant. It is easy to hurt people, but hard, if not impossible, to improve them.

When the absurdities of a conversation we have to listen to begin to annoy us, we must imagine it is a scene in a comedy between two fools. *Tried and tested*. Anyone who has come into the world to *teach* it seriously and in the most important matters can count himself lucky if he escapes with his skin intact.

39 If you want your judgment to be believed, state it coolly and without passion. All vehemence springs from the will, so people will attribute the judgment to *that*, not to knowledge, which is cool by nature. The will is what is fundamental in a person; knowledge is only secondary, something added. So people will be more likely to believe that the judgment arose from an excited will than that the will's excitement arose solely from the judgment.

40 Even if you have every right to do so, do not let yourself be drawn into praising yourself. Vanity is so common, and merit so uncommon, that whenever we seem to praise ourselves, even indirectly, everyone will bet a hundred to one that it is vanity speaking through us—vanity too unintelligent to see how

ridiculous the thing is. Still, Bacon of Verulam may not be entirely wrong when he says that *something always sticks* applies to self-praise just as it does to slander, and therefore recommends it in moderate doses.

41 If you suspect someone is lying, pretend to believe him. Then he will become bold, lie more extravagantly, and expose himself. But if you notice that part of a truth he wants to conceal is slipping out, pretend not to believe it. Provoked by your contradiction, he will then bring up the rear guard of the whole truth.

42 We must regard all our personal affairs as secrets. Beyond what our good acquaintances see with their own eyes, we must remain complete strangers to them. Their knowledge of the most innocent things can harm us as time and circumstances change. In general, it is wiser to show your intelligence by what you keep to yourself than by what you say. The first is a matter of prudence, the second of vanity. Opportunities for both come equally often. Yet we frequently prefer the fleeting satisfaction the second gives to the lasting benefit the first brings. We should even deny ourselves the relief of occasionally saying a word aloud to ourselves, as lively people sometimes do, so that it does not become a habit. It makes thought and speech so familiar and closely allied that talking with others gradually becomes thinking aloud as well. Prudence, meanwhile, commands us to keep a wide gap open between what we think and what we say. Sometimes we imagine that others cannot possibly believe something about us, when it has never occurred to them to doubt it. But if we make that thought occur to them, they can no longer believe it either. We often give ourselves away simply because we imagine it is impossible for people not to notice. It is like throwing ourselves down from a height through vertigo—that is, through the thought that it is impossible to stand firm here, and that the agony of standing here is so great that it would be better to cut it short. This delusion is called vertigo.

On the other hand, we should know that people, even those who otherwise show no particular sharpness, are excellent algebraists when it comes to other people's personal affairs. With a single given quantity they solve the most complicated problems. For example, suppose you tell them about some past event,

leaving out all names and other ways of identifying the people. Be careful not to include any definite, individual detail, however slight: a place, a time, the name of a minor participant, or anything else even directly connected with it. This immediately gives them a definite known quantity, from which their algebraic sharpness works out everything else. Their curiosity is so excited here that they will dig its spurs into the intellect and drive it on until it reaches the most distant conclusions. For people are as eager for individual truths as they are unreceptive and indifferent to *general* ones.

In keeping with all this, every teacher of worldly wisdom has recommended keeping quiet in the strongest terms and with the most varied arguments. So I can leave it at what I have said. I will just add a few Arabic maxims that are particularly striking and little known. “Do not tell your friend what your enemy must not know.”—“If I keep my secret, it is my prisoner; if I let it escape, I am its prisoner.”—“On the tree of silence hangs its fruit: peace.”

- 43 No money is put to better use than the money we have let ourselves be cheated out of. In exchange for it, we have directly acquired good sense.
- 44 If possible, we should bear no one any hostility. But we should carefully note and remember how each person *behaves*, so as to establish his worth, at least toward us, and regulate our own conduct and behavior toward him accordingly. We must always remain convinced that character does not change. Ever forgetting a bad trait in someone is like throwing away hard-earned money. In this way we protect ourselves from foolish intimacy and foolish friendship. “Neither love nor hate” contains half of all worldly wisdom; “say nothing and believe nothing” contains the other half. Admittedly, we will gladly turn our backs on a world that makes rules like these and the next ones necessary.
- 45 Letting anger or hatred show in words or facial expressions is useless, dangerous, unwise, ridiculous, and vulgar. So you should never show anger or hatred except in deeds. The more completely you have avoided the former, the more completely you will be able to do the latter. Only cold-blooded animals are venomous.

⁴⁶ *Speak without emphasis*: this old rule of people of the world aims to leave it to other people's understanding to work out what you have said. Their understanding is slow, and before it has finished you are gone. But *speaking with emphasis* means speaking to their feelings, and then everything turns out the other way around. With a polite gesture and a friendly tone, you can even say truly insulting things to some people without immediate danger.

D. Concerning our behavior toward the course of the world and fate.

⁴⁷ Whatever form human life takes, its elements are always the same. So it is essentially the same everywhere, whether lived in a hut or at court, in a monastery or in the army. However varied its events, adventures, strokes of good fortune and misfortunes may be, they are like confectionery. There are many different, intricate, brightly colored shapes, but all are kneaded from one dough. What happens to one person is much more like what happened to another than the latter thinks when he hears the story. The events of our lives also resemble the images in a kaleidoscope. With every turn we see something different, yet we actually always have the same thing before our eyes.

⁴⁸ There are three powers in the world, an ancient writer very aptly says: understanding, strength, and luck—prudence, strength, and luck. I believe the last of these is the most powerful. Our path through life can be compared to a ship's course. Fate, luck, *favorable or unfavorable fortune*, plays the role of the wind, carrying us quickly far ahead or throwing us far back. Our own efforts and activity can do little against it. They play the role of the oars. After many hours of work have taken us some distance forward, a sudden gust throws us just as far back. But if the wind is favorable, it carries us along so well that we do not need the oars. A Spanish proverb expresses this power of luck unsurpassably: *Give your son good luck and throw him into the sea* (give your son good luck and throw him into the sea).

Chance is certainly a wicked power, and we should leave as little as possible to it. Yet who, of all givers, is the only one who, as he gives, shows us with complete clarity that we have no claim at all to his gifts? Who shows us that we owe them not to our worthiness, but solely to his kindness and grace, and that pre-

cisely for this reason we may draw the joyful hope of humbly receiving many more undeserved gifts? It is chance. It understands the royal art of making clear that against its favor and grace all merit is powerless and counts for nothing.

When we look back over our path through life and survey its “labyrinthine, wandering course,” we see so much happiness we missed, so much misfortune we brought on ourselves, that we can easily go too far in blaming ourselves. For our life’s course is by no means entirely our own work. It is the product of two factors: the series of events and the series of our decisions. These always interact and modify each other. Besides, in both our outlook is always very limited. We cannot predict our decisions far ahead, and still less can we foresee events. In fact, only the present ones of either kind are properly known to us. So as long as our goal is still far away, we cannot even steer straight toward it. We can only direct our course approximately, by conjecture, and must often tack. All we can do is make our decisions according to the circumstances of the moment, hoping to hit on something that will bring us closer to our main goal. Thus events and our fundamental intentions can usually be compared to two forces pulling in different directions. The resulting diagonal is our life’s course. *Terence* said: *Human life is like playing dice: if the throw you most need does not fall, you must use skill to correct the throw that chance has given you.* He must have been thinking of a kind of backgammon. We can put it more briefly: fate shuffles the cards, and we play. But the following comparison would best express my present thought. Life is like chess. We draw up a plan, but it remains dependent on what the opponent chooses to do in chess, and fate in life. The changes our plan undergoes as a result are usually so great that, when carried out, it can barely be recognized by a few basic features.

There is, however, something else in our life’s course that goes beyond all this. That we are often more foolish than we think is a commonplace truth, confirmed all too often. But that we are often wiser than we ourselves imagine is a discovery made only by those who have experienced it—and even they make it only late. There is something in us wiser than our head. In the broad outlines and main steps of our lives, we act less from a clear knowledge of what is right than from an inner impulse. We might call it instinct, coming from the deepest

ground of our being. Afterward, we find fault with our actions according to clear but also meager concepts, acquired or even borrowed, according to general rules, other people's examples, and so on. We do not give enough thought to "One thing does not suit everyone," and so we easily become unjust to ourselves. But in the end it becomes clear which was right. Only old age, when we have been fortunate enough to reach it, is qualified both subjectively and objectively to judge the matter.

Perhaps that inner impulse is guided, without our awareness, by prophetic dreams forgotten on waking. In this way they may give our lives a consistency of tone and dramatic unity that our conscious brain could not provide, wavering and wandering as it so often does, and so easily changing its mind. Because of this, for example, someone called to great achievements of a particular kind feels it inwardly and secretly from youth onward, and works toward it as bees work at building their hive. For everyone, though, it is what *Baltasar Gracián* calls *the great power of sound judgment*: the great instinctive care for oneself without which one goes under. Acting on *abstract principles* is difficult. It succeeds only after much practice, and even then not every time. Besides, such principles are often inadequate. On the other hand, everyone has certain *inborn, concrete principles* that are in his blood, since they are the result of all his thinking, feeling, and willing. Usually he does not know them *in the abstract*. Only when looking back over his life does he become aware that he has always followed them and been drawn along by them as by an invisible thread. Depending on what they are, they will lead him to happiness or unhappiness.

- 49 We should constantly keep in view the effects of time and the changeability of things. Whatever is happening now, we should therefore immediately imagine its opposite. In good fortune we should vividly picture misfortune; in friendship, hostility; in fine weather, bad weather; in love, hatred; in trust and openness, betrayal and regret; and likewise the other way around. This would provide a lasting source of true worldly wisdom. We would always remain level-headed and would not be so easily deceived. Usually we would merely have anticipated the effects of time. But perhaps no understanding needs experience

so indispensably as a correct estimate of the instability and change of things. Every condition, for as long as it lasts, exists necessarily and therefore with the fullest right. So every year, month, and day looks as though it were finally the one that intended to remain right for all eternity. But none does, and change alone is constant. The wise person is the one not deceived by apparent stability, who also foresees the direction change will take next[T]. People generally regard the present state of things, or the direction they are taking, as permanent because they see the effects but do not understand the causes. Yet it is the causes that carry the seed of future changes within them. The effect, which alone exists for these people, contains none of this. They cling to it and assume that the causes unknown to them, which were able to produce it, will also be able to preserve it. They have the advantage that when they are mistaken, they are always mistaken *in unison*. So the calamity that strikes them as a result is always general, while the thinking person, if mistaken, is alone into the bargain. Incidentally, this confirms my proposition that error always arises from reasoning backward from a consequence to its ground. See “Welt als W. u. V.” Bd. 1, S. 90. (3. Aufl. 94.)

[T] *Chance* has such wide scope in all human affairs that, if we immediately try to prevent a danger threatening from afar by making sacrifices, that danger often disappears through an unforeseen turn of events. Then not only are the sacrifices wasted, but the change they brought about is now a downright disadvantage under the altered circumstances. So our precautions must not reach too far into the future. We should also count on chance, and boldly face some dangers in the hope that, like so many dark storm clouds, they will pass over.

But we should *anticipate time* only in theory, by foreseeing its effects—not in practice, by trying to get ahead of it and demanding *before* the time what only time can bring. Anyone who does this will find that there is no worse or more relentless usurer than time itself. When forced to make advances, it charges heavier interest than any Jew. For example, with quicklime and heat you can force a tree so strongly that it puts out leaves, flowers, and fruit within a few days. But then it dies. If a youth wants to exercise a man’s reproductive power already, even if only for a few weeks, and perform at nineteen what he could

very well do at thirty, time may indeed make the advance. But the interest is part of the strength of his future years, even part of his life itself. There are illnesses from which we recover properly and completely only by letting them run their natural course, after which they disappear of themselves without leaving a trace. But if we demand to be healthy immediately, now, this very moment, time must make an advance here too. The illness is driven off, but the interest is weakness and chronic ailments for life. If we need money in times of war or unrest, and need it immediately, this very moment, we are forced to sell real estate or government securities for 1/3 of their value or even less. We would receive their full value if we gave time its due and waited a few years. Instead, we force it to make an advance. Or we need a sum of money for a long journey. We could save it from our income within one or two years, but we do not want to wait. So we borrow it or take it provisionally from our capital: that is, time must advance it. Its interest here is disorder that has taken hold in our finances, a permanent and growing deficit we never get rid of. Such is time's usury. Everyone who cannot wait becomes its victim. Trying to speed up the measured course of time is the costliest undertaking. So take care not to owe time interest.

- 50 One characteristic difference between ordinary and intelligent minds shows itself very often in everyday life. When considering and assessing possible dangers, ordinary minds always ask and consider only what of the kind has already *happened*. Intelligent minds, by contrast, think for themselves about what *could possibly happen*. They remember that, as a Spanish proverb says, *What does not happen in a year happens in a moment* (what does not happen within a year happens within a few minutes). This difference is admittedly natural. Surveying what *can* happen requires understanding; surveying what *has* happened requires only the senses.

But let our principle be: sacrifice to the evil demons! That is, we should not shrink from a certain expenditure of effort, time, inconvenience, trouble, money, or self-denial to shut the door on the possibility of a misfortune. The greater

the misfortune would be, the smaller, more remote, and less probable that possibility may be. The clearest example of this rule is the insurance premium. It is a sacrifice everyone openly makes on the altar of the evil demons.

- 51 No event should make us burst into great rejoicing or great lamentation. This is partly because everything is changeable and can alter at any moment, and partly because our judgment of what benefits or harms us is unreliable. As a result, almost everyone has at some time lamented something that later proved to be truly best for him, or rejoiced over something that became the source of his greatest suffering. Shakespeare beautifully expressed the attitude I recommend instead:

I have felt so many twists of joy and grief
That neither, at its first appearance,
Can sweep me away like a woman.[U]
(All's well, A. 3. sc. 2.)

[U] I have already felt so many fits of joy and grief that I no longer let the first sight of a cause for either immediately sweep me away like a woman.

In general, someone who remains calm in every misfortune shows that he knows how enormous and varied life's possible evils are. He therefore regards the one that has now arrived as a very small part of what could come. This is the Stoic attitude. In keeping with it, we should never be *forgetful of the human condition*, but always remember what a sad and miserable lot human existence is in general, and the countless evils to which it is exposed. To refresh this understanding, we need only look around us anywhere. Wherever we are, we will soon see this struggling, wriggling, and tormenting ourselves for a wretched, bare existence that yields nothing. We will then lower our expectations, learn to accept the imperfection of all things and conditions, and always anticipate misfortunes so as to avoid or endure them. For misfortunes, large and small, are the very element of our lives. We should always keep this in mind. But that is no reason to behave like a grouch, lamenting and pulling faces with *Beresford* over the hourly *miseries of human life*, still less to *call on God over a flea bite*. Instead, as a cautious person, we should carry our care in anticipating

and preventing misfortunes—whether they come from people or things—so far, and refine it so much, that like a clever fox we neatly avoid every great or small mishap, which is usually only clumsiness in disguise.

A misfortune is easier to bear if we have considered it possible beforehand and, as people say, prepared ourselves for it. This may chiefly be because, when we calmly think about it before it occurs, as a mere possibility, we clearly survey the extent of the misfortune on every side. We recognize it at least as something finite and understandable. As a result, when it actually strikes, it can affect us with no more than its real weight. But if we have not done this and are struck unprepared, our frightened mind cannot accurately measure the misfortune's size at the first moment. It cannot now take it all in, so it easily seems immeasurable, or at least much greater than it really is. In the same way, darkness and uncertainty make every danger seem greater. Of course, there is also the fact that for a misfortune anticipated as possible, we have thought over grounds for comfort and ways of remedying it, or at least become accustomed to the idea of it.

But nothing will better enable us to endure calmly the misfortunes that strike us than conviction of the truth I derived from its ultimate grounds and established in my prize essay on freedom of the will. As it says there, S. 62 (2. Aufl. S. 60): "Everything that happens, from the greatest to the smallest, happens *necessarily*." People soon learn to accept what is unavoidably necessary. This understanding lets them see everything, even what the strangest coincidences bring about, as just as necessary as what follows the most familiar rules and is fully foreseen. Here I refer to what I said (Welt als W. u. V. Bd. 1, S. 345 u. 46 [3. Aufl. 361]) about the calming effect of understanding what is inevitable and necessary. Anyone thoroughly convinced of this will first do what he can, and then willingly suffer what he must.

We can regard the small misfortunes that vex us every hour as intended to keep us in practice, so that good fortune does not entirely weaken our power to endure great ones. Toward daily annoyances, petty friction in dealing with people, insignificant slights, others' improper behavior, gossip, and the like, we must be a horn-skinned Siegfried. That is, we should not feel them at all, much

less take them to heart and brood over them. We should let none of this reach us, but kick it aside like little stones in our path, and never admit it into our inward reflection and brooding.

- 52 What people commonly call fate is usually only their own stupid behavior. So we cannot take too much to heart the fine passage in Homer (JL. XXIII, 313 sqq.) where he recommends resourcefulness, that is, careful thought. For even if we pay for our worst acts only in the next world, we pay for our stupid ones already in this world—though now and then mercy may take the place of justice.

It is not someone with a fierce look, but someone with a clever look, who seems frightening and dangerous—as surely as a human brain is a more terrible weapon than a lion’s claw.

The most accomplished person of the world would be someone who never stalled in indecision and never rushed into anything.

- 53 Along with prudence, courage is a quality very essential to our happiness. Admittedly, we cannot give ourselves either: we inherit the first from our mother and the second from our father. Yet determination and practice can strengthen what we have of them. This world, where “the dice fall like iron,” calls for a spirit of iron, armored against fate and armed against people. For all of life is a struggle; every step is contested. Voltaire rightly says: *In this world we succeed only at sword point, and we die with weapons in our hands*. So it is a cowardly soul that shrinks, starts losing heart, and whines as soon as clouds gather, or even merely appear on the horizon. Instead, let our motto be:

Do not give in to evils, but advance against them more boldly.

As long as the outcome of a dangerous affair is still uncertain, as long as a happy outcome remains possible, we must think not of losing courage, but only of resistance. In the same way, we must not despair of the weather as long as there is still a patch of blue in the sky. Indeed, we should reach the point of saying:

If the shattered world should fall upon him,

Its ruins will strike him unafraid.

Not even life as a whole, let alone its possessions, is worth such cowardly trembling and shrinking of the heart:

So live bravely,

And set brave hearts against adversity.

Yet excess is possible here too, for courage can degenerate into recklessness. In fact, a certain amount of fear is necessary for our survival in the world. Cowardice is merely going beyond that amount. Bacon of Verulam expressed this very aptly in his explanation of the origin of the term *panic terror*. It far surpasses the older explanation preserved for us by Plutarch (de Iside et Osir. c. 14). Bacon derives it from *Pan*, as nature personified, and says: *For the nature of things has implanted fear and dread in all living beings, to preserve their life and existence and to avoid and ward off approaching evils. Yet this same nature does not know how to keep within bounds. It always mixes vain and empty fears with beneficial ones, so that all things, if we could see into them, would be found full of panic terrors, especially human beings.* (De sapientia veterum VI.)

Incidentally, the characteristic thing about panic is that it is not clearly aware of its reasons. It assumes them rather than knows them, and if necessary actually treats fear itself as a reason for fear.

Chapter 6



On the differences between the stages of life.

Voltaire put it beautifully:

Whoever lacks the spirit of his age

Has all the unhappiness of his age.

So it will be appropriate, at the close of these reflections on happiness, to look at the changes the different stages of life bring about in us.

Throughout our whole life, we possess only the *present*, and never anything more. What distinguishes it is merely that at the beginning we see a long future ahead of us, while toward the end we see a long past behind us. Also, our temperament, though not our character, undergoes some familiar changes, giving the present a different coloring each time.

In my main work, Bd. 2, Kap. 31, S. 394 ff. (3. Aufl. 499 ff.), I explained that in *childhood* we are engaged much more in *knowing* than in *willing*, and why this is so. This is precisely the basis of the happiness of the first quarter of our lives, which afterward lies behind us like a lost paradise. In childhood we have few relationships and few needs, so there is little to stimulate the will. The greater part of our being is therefore absorbed in *knowing*. The intellect develops early, though it is not yet mature, just as the brain reaches its full size as early as the 7th year. It constantly seeks nourishment in a whole world of existence that is still new, where everything, everything is coated with the charm of novelty. That is why our childhood years are one continuous poem. The essence of

poetry, like all art, consists in grasping the Platonic Idea in each individual thing: what is essential and therefore common to the whole *kind*. Each thing then appears as a representative of its class, and *one* instance stands for a thousand. It may seem that in the scenes of our childhood we are always occupied only with the particular object or event before us, and only insofar as it concerns our momentary desires. But fundamentally this is not so. Life in all its significance still stands before us so new and fresh, its impressions undulled by repetition, that amid our childish activities we are always silently and without any clear intention trying to grasp, in individual scenes and events, the essence of life itself, the basic types of its forms and appearances. As Spinoza puts it, we see all things and people *from the standpoint of eternity*. The younger we are, the more each individual thing represents its whole class. This decreases more and more each year. It accounts for the great difference between the impression things make on us in youth and in old age. So the experiences and acquaintances of childhood and early youth later become the fixed types and headings of all subsequent knowledge and experience, their categories, as it were. We place everything later under them, though not always with clear awareness. Thus the firm foundation of our view of the world is laid in childhood, including its shallowness or depth. Later it is developed and completed, but not essentially changed. This purely objective and therefore poetic way of seeing is characteristic of childhood. Supported by the fact that the will is still far from appearing with its full energy, it makes us, as children, far more purely knowing than willing. Hence the serious, contemplative look of some children, which Raphael used so successfully for his angels, especially those of the Sistine Madonna. For this very reason, too, childhood is so happy that remembering it is always accompanied by longing. While we are so seriously occupied with first understanding things *through direct perception*, education, on the other hand, tries to give us *concepts*. But concepts do not provide what is truly essential. That—the foundation and genuine content of all our knowledge—lies instead in our grasp of the world *through direct perception*. We can gain this only for ourselves; it cannot be *taught* to us in any way. So our intellectual worth, like our moral worth, does not come into us from outside, but arises from the

depths of our own being. No educational arts of Pestalozzi can turn a born fool into a thinking person: never! He was born a fool and must die a fool. The deeply absorbed way we first grasp the external world through perception also explains why our childhood surroundings and experiences imprint themselves so firmly on memory. We gave ourselves to them undividedly; nothing distracted us. We looked at the things before us as though they were the only ones of their kind, indeed the only things in existence at all. Later, the multitude of objects we then know takes away our courage and patience. Now recall what I demonstrated at S. 372 ff. (3. Aufl. 423 ff.) of the volume of my main work mentioned above: the *objective* existence of all things, their existence in mere *representation*, is thoroughly enjoyable, while their *subjective* existence, which consists in *willing*, is heavily mixed with pain and sorrow. You will then probably accept this brief expression of the matter: all things are splendid to *see*, but terrible to *be*. According to what I have said, in childhood we know things much more from the side of *seeing*—representation, objectivity—than from the side of *being*, which is that of the will. Since the former is the enjoyable side of things, while the subjective and terrible side is still unknown to us, the young intellect takes all the figures that reality and art present to it for so many happy beings. It thinks that, beautiful as they are to see, it would be just as beautiful, and much more beautiful, to *be* them. So the world lies before it like an Eden: this is the Arcadia in which we are all born. A little later this gives rise to the thirst for real life, the urge for action and suffering that drives us into the world's bustle. There we come to know the other side of things: being, that is, willing, which is thwarted at every step. Then the great disillusionment gradually approaches. Once it has arrived, we say *the age of illusions is over*. Yet it keeps going, becoming ever more complete. We can therefore say that in childhood life appears to us like stage scenery seen from a distance; in old age, like the same scenery seen from very close up.

Finally, something else contributes to childhood's happiness. Just as all the leaves have the same color and almost the same shape at the beginning of spring, so in early childhood we are all alike and therefore get along wonderful-

ly. But with puberty the divergence begins and grows ever greater, like the radii of a circle.

What darkens the rest of the first half of life—which has so many advantages over the second—that is, our youth, and even makes it unhappy, is the chase after happiness in the firm belief that it must be found in life. This produces hope that is continually disappointed, and disappointment produces dissatisfaction. Elusive images of a dreamed-of, undefined happiness float before us in whimsically chosen forms, and we search in vain for their original. So in our youthful years we are usually dissatisfied with our situation and surroundings, whatever they may be. We blame them for what belongs everywhere to the emptiness and poverty of human life, with which we are now becoming acquainted for the first time, after expecting quite different things. Much would be gained if timely instruction could root out young people's delusion that there is a great deal to be had in the world. But the opposite happens, because we usually come to know life through imaginative literature before we know it through reality. The scenes literature portrays shine before our eyes in the dawn of our own youth. Now we are tormented by the longing to see them made real—to grasp the rainbow. A young person expects his life to take the form of an interesting novel. Thus arises the illusion I have already described at S. 347 (3. Aufl. 428) of the second volume already mentioned. For what gives all those images their charm is precisely that they are mere images and not real. In looking at them, we are therefore in the peace and complete self-sufficiency of pure knowing. To become real means to be filled with willing, and willing brings unavoidable pains. The interested reader is also referred here to the passage at S. 427 (3. Aufl. 488) of that volume.

So if the first half of life is characterized by an unsatisfied longing for happiness, the second is characterized by fear of misfortune. For by then we have come to recognize, more or less clearly, that all happiness is imaginary, while suffering is real. Now, therefore, at least the more reasonable characters aim more at mere freedom from pain and an undisturbed condition than at enjoyment[V]. When the bell rang at my door in my youthful years, I was pleased: I thought, now it is coming. But in later years, on the same occasion, my feeling was much closer to

fear. I thought: "Here it comes." There are also two opposite feelings about the human world for distinguished and gifted individuals. Precisely because they are such, they do not quite belong to it and therefore stand alone, more or less according to the degree of their advantages. In youth they often feel *abandoned* by it; in later years they feel they have *escaped* it. The first feeling is unpleasant and rests on not knowing the world; the second is pleasant and rests on knowing it. Consequently, the second half of life, like the second half of a musical period, contains less striving but more calm than the first. This is generally because in youth we think the world contains wonders of happiness and enjoyment, only they are hard to reach. In old age we know there is nothing to be had there. So, completely at peace on that score, we enjoy a tolerable present and even take pleasure in little things.

[V] In old age we are better at preventing misfortunes; in youth, at enduring them.

What a mature man has gained from his experience of life, and what makes him see the world differently from a youth or boy, is above all *freedom from preconceptions*. Only he sees things quite simply and takes them for what they are. For the boy and the youth, a deceptive image made up of self-created fancies, inherited prejudices, and strange fantasies covered or distorted the real world. For the first task experience finds waiting for it is to free us from the fantasies and false concepts that took hold in youth. Protecting young people from these would certainly be the best education, though only a negative one. But it is very difficult. To do this, we would have to keep the child's field of view as narrow as possible, while giving him nothing but clear and correct concepts within it. Only after he had correctly understood everything within that field should we gradually expand it, always making sure that nothing obscure, half understood, or misunderstood remained. As a result, his concepts of things and human relationships would still be limited and very simple, but they would be clear and correct. They would always need only expanding, not correcting. This would continue into youth. In particular, this method requires not allowing novels, but replacing them with suitable biographies, such as *Franklin's*, Moritz's Anton Reiser, and the like.

When we are young, we imagine that the events and people important to our life's course, and far-reaching in their consequences, will appear with drums and trumpets. But in old age, looking back shows that they all slipped in quite quietly through the back door, almost unnoticed.

From the point of view considered so far, we can also compare life to an embroidered fabric. In the first half of our time, we see the front; in the second, the reverse. The latter is not as beautiful, but it teaches us more, because it lets us see how the threads connect.

In conversation, intellectual superiority, even the greatest, will assert its decisive advantage only after the age of forty. It may often surpass the maturity of years and the fruit of experience, but it can never replace them. These give even the most ordinary person a certain counterweight to the powers of the greatest mind while that mind is young. I mean only personal interaction here, not works.

Anyone with any outstanding qualities, anyone who does not belong to the 5/6 of humanity so sadly endowed by nature, will scarcely remain free of a certain touch of misanthropy after forty. Naturally, he had judged others by himself, and has gradually been disappointed. He has realized that in either head or heart, and usually both, they fall short of him and cannot give him an equal return. So he prefers to avoid dealing with them. In general, everyone will love or hate solitude—that is, his own company—in proportion to his inner worth. *Kant* also discusses this kind of misanthropy in the *Krit. der Urteilkraft*, toward the end of the general remark on § 29 of the first part.

In a *young person*, it is a bad sign both intellectually and morally if he knows very early how to *find his way* in people's activities, immediately feels at home in them, and enters them as if prepared. It indicates an ordinary, low nature. On the other hand, behavior in this respect that is bewildered, hesitant, awkward, and mistaken points to a nature of a nobler kind.

The cheerfulness and high spirits of our youth rest partly on the fact that, as we climb uphill, we do not see death: it lies at the foot of the other side of the mountain. But once we have crossed the summit, we actually catch sight of death, which until then we knew only by hearsay. Since our vital strength

begins to ebb at the same time, our zest for life also sinks. A somber seriousness now displaces youthful exuberance and stamps itself on our face too. As long as we are young, whatever people may tell us, we regard life as endless and treat time accordingly. The older we get, the more carefully we manage our time. For in later life, each day lived through arouses a feeling akin to what a condemned criminal feels at every step as he is led to execution.

Seen from youth, life is an endlessly long future; seen from old age, a very short past. So at first it appears to us as things do when we put the objective lens of opera glasses to our eye, but at last as they do when we use the eyepiece. We must have grown old, and therefore lived a long time, to recognize how short life is. The older we get, the smaller all human things appear. Life, which stood firm and stable before us in youth, now reveals itself as the swift flight of fleeting appearances. The nothingness of the whole becomes evident. Time itself moves much more slowly in our youth. So the first quarter of our lives is not only the happiest but also the longest. It leaves behind far more memories, and anyone, if it came to that, would have more to tell from it than from two of the following quarters. Indeed, in the spring of life, as in the spring of the year, the days eventually become tiresomely long. In the autumn of both, they become short, but brighter and steadier.

But why, in old age, do we see the life behind us as so short? Because we take it to be as short as our memory of it. Everything insignificant, and much that was unpleasant, has fallen out of that memory, so little remains. Just as our intellect in general is very imperfect, so is our memory. What we have learned must be practiced, and the past must be thought over repeatedly, if both are not gradually to sink into the abyss of oblivion. Yet we do not usually think repeatedly about insignificant things, nor, for the most part, about unpleasant ones, though this would be necessary to keep them in memory. But more and more becomes insignificant. Through frequent and finally countless repetition, many things that at first seemed important gradually become unimportant. So we remember earlier years better than later ones. The longer we live, the fewer events seem important or significant enough to think over afterward, which alone could fix them in memory. So they are forgotten as soon as they are past.

Time thus passes leaving ever fewer traces. Furthermore, we do not like to think over unpleasant things, least of all when they wound our vanity, as is usually the case, since few sufferings have struck us entirely without our fault. So much that is unpleasant is also forgotten. These two losses make our memory so short, and proportionately shorter and shorter as its material grows longer. Objects on the shore become ever smaller, harder to recognize, and harder to distinguish as we sail away from it. So do our past years, with their experiences and actions. In addition, memory and imagination sometimes bring a scene from our life long ago before us as vividly as yesterday. It then comes quite close to us. This happens because we cannot picture the long time elapsed between then and now with equal vividness. We cannot survey it in a single image; besides, most of its events have been forgotten. Only a general knowledge of it *in the abstract* remains—a mere concept, not a perception. Thus a particular event from long ago seems as close to us as if it had happened only yesterday, while the time in between disappears, and the whole of life seems incomprehensibly short. Indeed, in old age the long past behind us, and with it our own age, can sometimes seem almost mythical for a moment. This is chiefly because we still see the same, unchanged present immediately before us. Such inner processes ultimately rest on the fact that not our being in itself, but only its appearance, lies in time, and that the present is the point of contact between object and subject. And why, conversely, in youth do we see the life still before us as so immeasurably long? Because we must have room for the boundless hopes with which we populate it, whose fulfillment would find even Methuselah dying too young. Also, we measure it by the few years already behind us. Their memory is always rich in material, and therefore long, since novelty made everything seem significant. So it was thought over afterward, repeated often in memory, and thereby imprinted on it.

Sometimes we think we long to return to a distant *place*, when really we long only for the *time* we spent there, when we were younger and fresher. Time then deceives us under the mask of space. If we travel there, we become aware of the deception.

There are two ways to reach a great age, with a sound constitution as an *indispensable condition*. We can illustrate them through the burning of two lamps. One burns a long time because, though it has little oil, it has a very thin wick. The other does so because, along with a thick wick, it has plenty of oil. The oil is vital force; the wick is the consumption of it in every possible way.

In terms of *vital force*, until the age of 36 we can be compared to people living on their interest: what is spent today is back again tomorrow. But from that point on, our counterpart is the person of independent means who begins drawing on his capital. At first it is not noticeable at all. Most of the expenditure still replaces itself, and a small deficit goes unnoticed. But it gradually grows and becomes noticeable. Its increase itself increases with every day; it eats in more and more. Each today is poorer than yesterday, with no hope of a halt. So the decline accelerates more and more, like a falling body, until at last nothing is left. It is a very sad case when the two things compared here, vital force and property, really are melting away together. This is precisely why love of possessions grows with age. At the beginning, however, until adulthood and a little beyond, we are, in terms of vital force, like people who still add some of their interest to their capital. Not only does expenditure replace itself, but the capital grows. And again, through the care of an honest guardian, this sometimes happens with money at the same time. Oh, happy youth! Oh, sad old age! Nevertheless, we should conserve the strength of youth. Aristotle notes (Polit. L. ult. c. 5) that only two or three Olympic victors had won once as boys and then again as men. The early exertion required by preliminary training exhausts their strength so much that later, in manhood, it is lacking. What is true of muscular strength is even truer of nervous strength, of which all intellectual achievements are expressions. So *precocious talents*, child prodigies, the products of hothouse education who amaze people as boys, later become very ordinary minds. Even the early, forced effort to learn the ancient languages may be to blame for the later mental sluggishness and lack of judgment of so many scholarly minds.

I have observed that almost everyone's character seems especially suited to one stage of life, so that he appears to better advantage in it. Some are lovable youths, and then it is over. Others are vigorous, active men whom old age robs of all worth. Some show themselves to greatest advantage in old age, when they are gentler because they are more experienced and calm. This is often the case with French people. It must be because character itself has something youthful, manly, or elderly about it, with which the particular stage of life either agrees or acts as a corrective.

On a ship, we notice our forward movement only through objects on the shore receding and therefore growing smaller. In the same way, we become aware that we are growing older and older because people of increasingly advanced years seem young to us.

We have already discussed how and why everything we see, do, and experience leaves fewer traces in the mind the older we get. In this sense we could claim that we live with full awareness only in youth, and in old age with only half. The older we get, the less consciously we live. Things hurry past without making an impression, just as a work of art we have seen a thousand times makes none. We do what we have to do and afterward do not know whether we have done it. As life thus becomes increasingly unconscious the more it hurries toward complete unconsciousness, time's course also becomes ever faster. In childhood, the novelty of every object and event brings everything into consciousness. So the day seems endlessly long. The same happens when we travel, which is why *one* month there seems longer than four at home. Yet the novelty of things does not prevent the time that seems longer in both cases from often genuinely "dragging" in both, more than in old age or at home. Gradually, however, long familiarity with the same perceptions wears the intellect so smooth that more and more everything glides over it without effect. The days then become ever less significant and therefore shorter. A boy's hours are longer than an old man's days. Thus the time of our lives moves with increasing speed, like a ball rolling downhill. And just as every point on a rotating disk moves faster the farther it is from the center, so time passes faster and faster for each of us in proportion to our distance from life's beginning. Accordingly, we may

assume that in our mind's immediate estimate, the length of a year stands in inverse proportion to the number of times it divides into our age. For example, when a year amounts to $1/5$ of our age, it seems ten times as long as when it amounts to only $1/50$. This difference in the speed of time has the most decisive influence on our whole manner of existence at each stage of life. First, it makes childhood, even if it covers only about 15 years, the longest period of life, and therefore the richest in memories. Second, it makes us subject to boredom in inverse proportion to our age. Children constantly need something to pass the time, whether play or work. If it stops, terrible boredom instantly seizes them. Young people are still very subject to it too, and look with concern at unoccupied hours. In manhood boredom dwindles more and more. For old people time is always too short, and the days fly past as fast as arrows. Of course, I am speaking of human beings, not cattle that have grown old. Because time's course speeds up, boredom thus mostly disappears in later years. And since, on the other hand, the passions and their torment also fall silent, the burden of life, provided health has been preserved, is on the whole really lighter than in youth. So people call the period before the onset of the weakness and troubles of advanced age "the best years." In terms of our comfort, they may really be so. Youth, however, when everything makes an impression and everything enters consciousness vividly, retains the advantage of being the fruitful time for the mind, its budding spring. Deep truths can only be seen, not calculated. That is, our first knowledge of them is immediate and is brought about by the impression of the moment. It can therefore occur only while that impression is strong, lively, and deep. So in this respect everything depends on how we use our youthful years. In later years we can have more effect on others, indeed on the world, because we ourselves are complete and settled and no longer subject to impressions. But the world has less effect on us. These years are therefore the time for action and achievement; the earlier ones are the time for original perception and knowledge.

In youth, perception predominates; in old age, thought. So youth is the time for poetry, old age more for philosophy. In practical matters too, in youth we let ourselves be guided by what we see and its impression; in old age, only by

thinking. This is partly because only in old age have enough directly perceived instances occurred and been placed under concepts to give these their full meaning, content, and authority, while at the same time familiarity moderates the impression of what we perceive. In youth, on the other hand, especially for lively and imaginative minds, the impression of what is seen, and thus also of the outward side of things, is so overwhelming that they see the world as a picture. So their chief concern is how they figure in it and how they look—more than how they feel inwardly. This already shows itself in young people's personal vanity and fondness for dressing up.

The greatest energy and highest intensity of mental powers undoubtedly occur in youth, up to the age of 35 at the latest. From then on they decline, though very slowly. Yet later years, even old age, have intellectual compensation for this. Only now have experience and learning become truly rich. We have had time and opportunity to look at and think about things from every side, to compare each with all the others and discover their points of contact and connecting links. Only now do we really understand them in their context. Everything has become clear. So even what we already knew in youth we now know much more thoroughly, since we have far more evidence for every concept. What we thought we knew in youth, we really know in old age. Besides, we really know much more, and possess knowledge thought through on every side and therefore genuinely connected, while in youth our knowledge is always full of gaps and fragmentary. Only *someone who grows old* gains a complete and adequate idea of life. He surveys it in its entirety and natural course, and especially not just from the entrance, like everyone else, but also from the exit. This lets him fully recognize its nothingness in particular, while the others remain trapped in the delusion that the real thing is still to come. Youth, however, has more creative conception, so we can then make more out of the little we know. But old age has more judgment, insight, and thoroughness. The material of his own distinctive knowledge, his original basic views—in short, what an exceptional mind is destined to give the world—is gathered already in youth. But he becomes master of his material only in later years. Accordingly, we will usually find that great writers produced their masterpieces around the age of fifty.

Nevertheless, youth remains the root of the tree of knowledge, even though only the crown bears fruit. But just as every historical age, even the most wretched, considers itself far wiser than the one immediately before it and all earlier ones, so does every stage of a person's life. Yet both are often mistaken. In the years of bodily growth, when our mental powers and knowledge also increase daily, today gets into the habit of looking down on yesterday with contempt. This habit takes root and remains even when mental powers have begun to decline and today ought instead to look at yesterday with reverence. So we then often undervalue both the achievements and the judgments of our younger years.

In general, we should note here that although the intellect—the head—is inborn in its basic qualities, just as a person's character or heart is, it by no means remains as unchangeable as character. It undergoes many changes, which even occur regularly on the whole. This is partly because it has a physical foundation and partly because it has material supplied by experience. Thus its own power gradually grows to its peak, and then gradually declines into mental incapacity. On the other hand, the material that occupies all these powers and keeps them active—the content of thought and knowledge, experience, information, practice, and the resulting perfection of understanding—is a constantly growing quantity, until perhaps the onset of pronounced weakness makes everything fall away. A person thus consists of something absolutely unchangeable and something that changes regularly in two opposite ways. This explains the differences in how he appears and how he is regarded at different stages of life.

In a broader sense, we can also say that the first forty years of our life provide the text, and the following thirty its commentary. Only the commentary teaches us to understand properly the text's true meaning and connections, together with its moral and all its subtleties.

Toward the end of life, things are just like the end of a masked ball, when the masks are removed. We now see who the people we came into contact with during our lives really were. Their characters have revealed themselves; their deeds have borne fruit; their achievements have received their proper assessment; and

all deceptive images have collapsed. All this required time. But the strangest thing is that only toward the end of life do we really recognize and understand even ourselves, our own aims and purposes, especially in relation to the world and to others. Often, though not always, we will have to assign ourselves a lower place than we previously imagined. Sometimes, however, it will be a higher one. This happens because we had no adequate idea of the world's low level and therefore set our goal above it. Along the way, we find out what we are worth.

People usually call youth the happiest time of life, and old age the sad one. That would be true if the passions made us happy. They drag youth back and forth, with little joy and much pain. They leave cool old age in peace, and it immediately takes on a contemplative character: knowledge becomes free and gains the upper hand. Since knowledge in itself is painless, consciousness becomes happier the more it predominates. We need only consider that all enjoyment is negative in nature, while pain is positive, to understand that the passions cannot make us happy, and that old age is not to be pitied because some pleasures are denied it. Every enjoyment is always only the satisfaction of a need. When the enjoyment disappears along with the need, this is no more regrettable than someone's being unable to eat more after a meal, or having to stay awake after a full night's sleep. Plato judges far more correctly, at the beginning of the *Republic*, that old age is happy insofar as it is finally rid of the sex drive that until then has constantly troubled us. We could even claim that the varied and endless fancies generated by the sex drive, and the emotions arising from them, keep a constant mild madness alive in a person as long as he remains under the influence of that drive, or that devil which continually possesses him. He would become entirely rational only after it had died out. But it is certain that, in general and apart from all individual circumstances and conditions, a certain melancholy and sadness belong to youth, and a certain cheerfulness to old age. The reason is simply that youth is still under the rule, indeed in the forced service, of that demon, who scarcely grants it a free hour and is at the same time the direct or indirect author of almost every evil that strikes or threatens human beings. Old age, however, has the cheerfulness of someone freed from a long-

worn shackle, now moving freely. Yet on the other hand, we could say that once the sex drive has died out, the real core of life has been consumed and only its shell remains. Indeed, life would then resemble a comedy begun by human beings and afterward played to the end by automatons in their clothes.

Be that as it may, youth is the time of unrest; old age is the time of rest. From this alone we could infer their respective levels of well-being. A child stretches out eager hands into the distance toward everything colorful and varied it sees before it. It is stimulated by these things because its sensory apparatus is still so fresh and young. The same happens with greater energy in a young person. He too is stimulated by the colorful world and its many forms. His imagination immediately makes more of them than the world can ever give. So he is full of desire and undefined longing. These rob him of peace, without which there is no happiness. In old age, however, all this has settled down. This is partly because the blood has cooled and the sensory apparatus has become less excitable. It is also partly because experience has taught us the value of things and the content of pleasures. We have thereby gradually got rid of the illusions, fantasies, and prejudices that once covered and distorted a free and pure view of things. Now we understand everything more correctly and clearly, and take it for what it is. We have also come, more or less, to understand the nothingness of all earthly things. This is precisely what gives almost every old person, even one of very ordinary abilities, a certain appearance of wisdom that distinguishes him from younger people. Above all, all this has brought peace of mind. That is a great component of happiness, indeed its condition and essential element. So while a young person thinks there are wonders to be had in the world, if only he could find out where, an old person is thoroughly convinced of Ecclesiastes' "all is vanity" and knows that all the nuts are hollow, however heavily gilded they may be.

Only in later life does a person truly attain Horace's *marvel at nothing*: the immediate, sincere, and firm conviction of the vanity of all things and the hollowness of all the world's splendors. The fantasies have vanished. He no longer imagines that somewhere, whether in a palace or a hut, there lives some special happiness greater than what he too essentially enjoys everywhere whenever he is

free from bodily or mental pain. The great and the small, the distinguished and the lowly by the world's measure, no longer differ for him. This gives an old person a special peace of mind in which he looks down smiling on the world's tricks. He is completely disillusioned. He knows that, whatever we do to dress and drape human life, its poverty soon shows through all that fairground tinsel. However we color and decorate it, it is essentially the same everywhere: an existence whose true value must always be judged only by the absence of pain, not by the presence of pleasures, still less of pomp. (Hor. epist. L. I, 12, v. 1-4.) The basic characteristic of advanced age is disillusionment. Gone are the illusions that until then gave life its charm and activity its spur. We have recognized the nothingness and emptiness of all the world's splendors, especially pomp, glitter, and the appearance of grandeur. We have learned that there is very little behind most desired things and longed-for pleasures, and have thus gradually come to understand the great poverty and emptiness of our whole existence. Only at 70 do we fully understand the first verse of Ecclesiastes. But this is also what gives old age a certain grumbling quality.

People usually think that the lot of old people is illness and boredom. The first is not at all essential to old age, especially if it is to be prolonged, for *as life increases, health and illness increase*. As for boredom, I have shown above why old age is even less exposed to it than youth. Nor is boredom at all a necessary companion of solitude, toward which old age certainly leads us for easily understood reasons. It accompanies solitude only for those who have known no pleasures except sensual and social ones, and have left their minds unenriched and their powers undeveloped. Admittedly, mental powers also decline in advanced age. But where there was much, enough will always remain to fight boredom. Moreover, as shown above, correct understanding continues to increase through experience, knowledge, practice, and reflection. Judgment sharpens, and connections become clear. In everything we gain a more and more comprehensive view of the whole. Thus, through ever new combinations of accumulated knowledge and occasional additions to it, our innermost self-development still advances in every respect, occupying, satisfying, and rewarding the mind. All this compensates to some degree for the decline mentioned. Besides, as I

said, time moves much faster in old age, which counteracts boredom. The decline of physical strength does little harm if we do not need it to earn a living. Poverty in old age is a great misfortune. If it has been kept away and health remains, old age can be a very tolerable part of life. Comfort and security are its chief needs. So in old age we love money even more than before, because it replaces the strength we lack. Dismissed by Venus, we gladly seek a little cheer from Bacchus. The need to see, travel, and learn has been replaced by the need to teach and speak. But it is fortunate if an old person still retains his love for his studies, and also for music and the theater, and in general a certain receptiveness to the external world, as some people certainly do into the latest old age. What someone “has in himself” never benefits him more than in old age. Most people, admittedly, having always been dull, become more and more like automatons in advanced age. They always think, say, and do the same things. No external impression can change any of it or draw anything new from them. Speaking to such old people is like writing in sand: the impression disappears almost immediately. Old age of this kind is admittedly only the *dead residue* of life. Nature seems to want to symbolize the onset of second childhood in advanced age by the third set of teeth that appears then in rare cases.

The loss of all our powers as we grow older, ever more and more, is certainly very sad. Yet it is necessary, indeed beneficial, because otherwise death would be too hard. It prepares the way for death. So the greatest gain from reaching a very great age is an easy death: dying with extraordinary ease, not preceded by any illness, accompanied by no convulsion, and not felt at all. A description of this can be found in the second volume of my main work, Kap. 41, S. 470 (3. Aufl. 534).

In the Upanishad of the Veda (Vol. II, p. 53), *the natural span of life* is given as 100 years. I believe this is right, because I have observed that only those who have passed 90 experience an *easy death*. That is, they die without any illness, without a stroke, convulsion, or death rattle, sometimes without even turning pale, usually sitting down and after a meal. Or rather, they do not die at all, but simply stop living. At every earlier age, people die only of illnesses, and therefore prematurely[W].

[W] [Variant:] In the Old Testament (Psalm 90, 10), the human lifespan is set at 70 years, or at most 80. More importantly, *Herodotus* (I, 32 und III, 22) says the same. Yet it is wrong and is merely the result of a rough, superficial interpretation of daily experience. For if the natural lifespan were 70–80 years, people between 70 and 80 would have to die *of old age*. But that is not the case at all. Like younger people, they die *of illnesses*. Illness, however, is essentially an abnormality, so this is not the natural end. Only between 90 and 100 do people die, as a rule, *of old age*, without illness, without a death struggle, without a death rattle, without convulsion, sometimes without turning pale. This is called an *easy death*. So here too the *Upanishad* is right in setting the natural lifespan at 100 years.

Human life cannot really be called either long or short[X], because it is basically the measure by which we estimate all other lengths of time.

[X] For however long we live, we never possess more than the indivisible present. Memory, meanwhile, loses more each day through forgetting than it gains through additions.

The fundamental difference between youth and old age always remains this: youth has life in prospect; old age has death. So youth possesses a short past and a long future; old age, the reverse. Admittedly, when you are old, you have only death ahead of you. But when you are young, you have life ahead of you. The question is which of the two is more alarming, and whether, taken as a whole, life is not something better to have behind you than before you. Ecclesiastes (7, 2) already says: “The day of death is better than the day of birth.” In any case, wanting a very long life is a rash wish. For *Whoever lives a long life lives through much evil*, as the Spanish proverb says.

The course of an individual’s life is not mapped out in the planets, as astrology claimed. But the course of human life in general is, insofar as each stage of life corresponds in order to a planet, and a person’s life is thus ruled successively by all the planets. In the tenth year of life, *Mercury* rules. Like Mercury, the person moves quickly and easily within a very narrow orbit. Trifles can change his mood, but he learns a great deal and easily, under the rule of the god of cleverness and eloquence. With the twentieth year, the rule of *Venus* begins: love and

women possess him entirely. In the thirtieth year, *Mars* rules. The person is now strong, fierce, bold, warlike, and defiant. In the fortieth, the 4 *planetoids* rule. His life accordingly broadens. He is *thrifty*, that is, devoted to what is useful, through *Ceres*. He has his own hearth through *Vesta*. He has learned what he needs to know through *Pallas*. And the mistress of the house, his wife, rules as *Juno*[Y]. But in the fiftieth year, *Jupiter* rules. The person has already outlived most people, and feels superior to the present generation. Still enjoying his full strength, he is rich in experience and knowledge. According to his individuality and situation, he has authority over everyone around him. So he no longer wants to take orders, but to give them himself. He is now best suited to be a guide and ruler in his own sphere. Thus Jupiter reaches its highest point, and with it the fifty-year-old. But then, in the sixtieth year, *Saturn* follows, bringing the heaviness, slowness, and tenacity of *lead*:

Many old people act as if they were dead;

Clumsy, slow, heavy, and pale as lead[Z],

Rom. et. Jul. A. 2 sc. 5.

[Y] The roughly 60 planetoids discovered since then are an innovation I want nothing to do with. So I treat them as philosophy professors treat me: I ignore them because they do not fit my scheme.

[Z]

Many old people already seem like the dead:

Like lead, heavy, sluggish, clumsy, and pale.

Finally comes *Uranus*: then, as the saying goes, we go to heaven. I cannot include *Neptune* here—unfortunately, thoughtlessness gave it that name—because I may not call it by its true name, which is *Eros*. Otherwise I would show how the beginning joins onto the end: how Eros stands in a secret connection with death. Through this connection, Orcus, or the Egyptians' Amenthes (according to Plutarch de Iside et Os. c. 29), is the one who takes and gives, and thus not only the taker but also the giver, and death is the great *reservoir* of life. From there, then—from Orcus—everything comes, and everything now alive has already been there. If only we could understand the sleight of hand by which this happens, everything would be clear.

The end.