



On the Basis of Morality

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Musean Translation

MOUSEIA



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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

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TRANSLATOR

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Prize Question



Prize Essay on the Basis of Morality,
not awarded the prize by the Royal Danish Society of Sciences in Copenhagen,
on January 30, 1840.

Motto:

Preaching morality is easy; grounding it, hard.

(Schopenhauer, *On the Will in Nature*, S. 128.)

The question posed by the Royal Society, with its prefatory introduction,
reads:

Since the original idea of morality, or the fundamental conception of the supreme moral law, manifests itself with a necessity peculiar to it and by no means logical, both in the discipline whose purpose is to set out knowledge of the ethical and in life, partly in conscience's judgment of our own actions, partly in our moral assessment of the actions of other people; and since several fundamental ethical concepts inseparable from that idea and looking to it as their origin, such as the concepts of duty and accountability, assert their force with the same necessity and over the same range—and yet, amid the courses and paths pursued by the philosophical thought of our age, it seems a matter of great importance to reopen this subject for discussion—the Society wishes the following question to be carefully considered and examined:

Are the source and foundation of moral philosophy to be sought in an exposition of the idea of morality immediately contained in consciousness, and of the other fundamental concepts that arise from it, or in some other principle of knowledge?

In German:

Since the original idea of morality, or the principal conception of the supreme moral law, emerges with a necessity peculiar to it, yet by no means logical, both in the science whose purpose is to set out knowledge of the moral and in actual life, where it appears partly in conscience's judgment of our own actions, partly in our moral assessment of the actions of others; and since, further, several fundamental moral concepts inseparable from that idea and arising from it, such as the concepts of duty and accountability, assert themselves with the same necessity and over the same range—and since, given the paths pursued by the philosophical inquiry of our age, it nevertheless seems very important to bring this subject under examination once again—the Society wishes the following question to be carefully considered and discussed:

Are the source and foundation of morality to be sought in an idea of morality immediately present in consciousness (or conscience), and in an analysis of the other fundamental moral concepts arising from it, or in some other ground of knowledge?

Section 1



I. Introduction.

On the Problem.

A prize question posed by the Royal *Dutch* Society at Haarlem in 1810 and answered by J. C. F. Meister—“Why do philosophers differ so greatly in the first principles of morality, yet agree in the conclusions and duties they derive from those principles?”—was a very easy task compared with the present one.

For:

1) The Royal Society’s present question aims at nothing less than the objectively true foundation of ethics, and consequently of moral worth as well. It is an academy that raises the question. As such, it wants no exhortation to integrity and virtue directed toward practical ends, supported by reasons whose plausibility is heightened and whose weakness is concealed, as happens in addresses to the public. Rather, since an academy recognizes only theoretical, not practical, ends, it wants a purely philosophical account—independent, that is, of all established precepts, all unproved assumptions, and therefore all metaphysical or even mythical entities posited as real—an objective, unveiled, naked account of the ultimate ground of all morally good conduct.—But this is a problem whose immense difficulty is attested not only by the philosophers of every age and country who have blunted their teeth on it, but also by all the gods of East and West, who owe their very existence to it. If it is solved on this occasion, then the Royal Society will certainly not have spent its gold badly.

2) Moreover, theoretical inquiry into the foundation of morality suffers from the peculiar disadvantage that it can easily be taken for an undermining of that foundation, which might bring down the building itself. Here practical concerns lie so close to theoretical ones that their well-intentioned zeal can scarcely be kept from untimely interference. Not everyone can clearly distinguish a purely theoretical search for objective truth, detached from every interest, even the moral and practical, from a sacrilegious attack on the heart's sacred convictions. Anyone who sets to work here must therefore always keep this thought before him for encouragement: nothing stands farther from human activity and bustle, or from the marketplace's tumult and noise, than the academy's sanctuary, withdrawn into profound stillness, where no sound from outside may enter and no deity has a statue except sublime, naked truth alone.

The conclusion from these two premises is that I must be allowed complete freedom of speech, together with the right to doubt everything; and that if, even on these terms, I accomplish anything real in this matter, much will have been accomplished.

But other difficulties still confront me. In addition, the Royal Society requires the foundation of ethics to be set out on its own, in isolation, in a short monograph, and thus apart from its connection with the complete system of any philosophy—that is, with metaphysics proper. This must not only make the task harder but necessarily make its fulfillment imperfect. Christian Wolf already says: “The darkness in practical philosophy is dispelled only when the light of metaphysics shines upon it” (*Phil. pract.*, P. II. §. 28), and Kant: “Metaphysics must come first, and without it there can be no moral philosophy at all.” (*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*. Preface.) For just as every religion on earth, when it prescribes morality, does not leave morality to stand on its own but supports it with dogma, whose chief purpose is precisely this, so in philosophy the ethical foundation, whatever it may be, must itself find its anchor and support in some metaphysics—that is, in the account given of the world and of existence in general. The final and true explanation of the inner nature of things as a whole must necessarily be closely connected with the explanation of the ethical significance of human action. In any event, whatever

is put forward as the foundation of morality, if it is not to be a mere abstract proposition floating freely in the air without a foothold in the real world, must be some fact located either in the objective world or in human consciousness. As such, it can itself be only a phenomenon and consequently, like all phenomena in the world, requires a further explanation, which must then be sought from metaphysics. Indeed, philosophy is so thoroughly an interconnected whole that it is impossible to give an exhaustive account of any part without including all the rest. Plato therefore says quite rightly: "Do you think it possible to understand the nature of the soul adequately without understanding the nature of the whole?" ("But do you think the nature of the soul can be sufficiently known without the nature of the whole?"—Phaedr., p. 371, Bip.) The metaphysics of nature, the metaphysics of morals, and the metaphysics of beauty presuppose one another, and only in their connection do they complete the explanation of the nature of things and of existence in general. Anyone who had pursued one of these three to its ultimate ground would therefore necessarily have drawn the others into his explanation as well; just as anyone who had an exhaustive understanding of any *one* thing in the world, clear down to its ultimate ground, would also have understood the whole rest of the world completely.

Starting from a given metaphysics accepted as true, one would arrive at the foundation of ethics by the synthetic method. This foundation would itself have been built from the ground up, and ethics would accordingly stand firmly supported. But since the question requires ethics to be separated from all metaphysics, nothing remains but the *analytical* method, which begins with facts either of external experience or of consciousness. It can indeed trace the latter back to their deepest root in the human mind; but that root must then be left standing as a fundamental fact, a primal phenomenon, without being traced back to anything further. The entire explanation thus remains merely *psychological*. At most, its connection with some general metaphysical view can be indicated as a supplement. That fundamental fact, that primal ethical phenomenon, could, by contrast, itself be given a foundation if one were permitted to treat metaphysics first and derive ethics from it by the synthetic method. But

this would mean setting out a complete system of philosophy, far exceeding the limits of the question posed. I am therefore compelled to answer the question within the limits it has itself drawn by being isolated in this way.

Finally, the foundation on which I intend to place ethics will prove very narrow. Of the many human actions that conform to law and deserve approval and praise, only the smaller part will turn out to spring from purely moral incentives; the larger part will be attributable to motives of another kind. This is less satisfying and less dazzling to the eye than, say, a categorical imperative that is always at your command, ready in turn to command what is to be done and what left undone—not to mention other, substantive foundations of morality. All I can do here is recall the saying of Ecclesiastes (4, 6): “Better one handful with peace than both fists full with toil and vanity.” In all knowledge, what is genuine, stands the test, and cannot be destroyed is always little; just as a sample of ore conceals a few ounces of gold in a hundredweight of stone. But whether people will indeed join me in preferring *secure possession* to *great possessions*, the little gold left in the crucible to the great mass hauled in—or will instead accuse me of having taken away morality’s foundation rather than given it one, insofar as I show that human actions which conform to law and deserve praise often contain no purely moral substance at all, and usually only a *small* amount, while otherwise resting on motives whose efficacy can ultimately be traced back to the agent’s egoism—all this I must leave open, not without apprehension, indeed with resignation. For I have long agreed with *the knight von Zimmermann* when he says: “Hold this thought in your heart until death: nothing in the world is so rare as a good judge.” (On Solitude, Th. I, Cap. 3, S. 93.) Indeed, I already see in my mind’s eye how poor and subdued my account will look, with only so narrow a basis to offer for all genuine, freely chosen right conduct, all human kindness, all nobility of heart, wherever they may be found, beside the accounts of my competitors. They confidently erect broad foundations of morality, capable of bearing any burden and, with a threatening side-long glance at the doubter’s own morality, of being pressed upon his conscience. My account will stand beside theirs like Cordelia before King Lear, with her few words affirming her dutiful devotion beside the extravagant

protestations of her more eloquent sisters.—Here one surely needs to fortify the heart with a learned hunter's motto, such as: "Great is the power of truth, and it will prevail"—though this no longer gives much encouragement to anyone who has lived and accomplished something. Still, I will venture out with truth for once: for whatever happens to me will have happened to it as well.

Section 2



General Retrospect.

For the people, morality is grounded in theology, as the declared will of God. Philosophers, by contrast, with few exceptions, take pains to exclude this kind of foundation altogether; indeed, simply to avoid it, they would rather take refuge in sophistical arguments. Why this opposition? Certainly no more effective foundation for morality can be imagined than a theological one: who would be so presumptuous as to resist the will of the Almighty and All-knowing? Certainly no one—if only that will had been proclaimed in a wholly authentic way, leaving no room for doubt, officially, so to speak. But this is precisely the condition that cannot be fulfilled. Instead, the process is reversed: people try to authenticate the law proclaimed as God's will by showing that it agrees with our moral insights from other sources, which are therefore natural. They thus appeal to these insights as the more immediate and certain authority. Added to this is the recognition that moral action brought about merely by threatened punishment and promised reward would be moral more in appearance than in truth, since at bottom it would rest on egoism. What ultimately tipped the scales would be the greater or lesser readiness of one person, compared with another, to believe on insufficient grounds. But ever since *Kant* destroyed the foundations of *speculative theology*, previously regarded as secure, and then sought to support theology—which until then had supported ethics

—on ethics instead, thus securing for it an existence, even if only in thought, there has been less reason than ever to consider grounding ethics in theology. For now we no longer know which is to be the burden and which the support, and would end up in a vicious circle.

Through the influence of *Kantian philosophy*, then through the simultaneous impact of the unprecedented advances in all the natural sciences, beside which every earlier age seems an age of childhood compared with our own, and finally through acquaintance with Sanskrit literature, Brahmanism, and Buddhism—these oldest and most widespread religions, and thus the foremost religions of humanity in time and space, which are also the original, native religions of our own stock, known to be Asian, now receiving belated news of them once more in its foreign homeland—through all this, I say, the fundamental philosophical convictions of Europe’s scholars have undergone a transformation in the course of the last fifty years. Some may admit it to themselves only reluctantly, but it cannot be denied. As a result, the old supports of ethics have also grown rotten; yet the confidence remains that ethics itself can never fall. From this comes the conviction that it must have supports other than those it has had until now, supports suited to the advanced understanding of the age. It was undoubtedly recognition of this increasingly felt need that prompted the Royal Society to pose the present important prize question.—

In every age, much good morality has been preached; but its foundation has always been in a sorry state. On the whole, efforts to establish it show a search for some objective truth from which ethical precepts could be logically derived. People have looked for it in the nature of things or in human nature, but in vain. The result was always that the human will aims only at its own well-being, the sum of which is conceived under the term *happiness*; and this striving leads it along a very different path from the one morality would like to prescribe. Attempts were then made to present *happiness* now as *identical* with virtue, now as its *consequence* and *effect*. Both attempts have always failed, though there has been no shortage of sophistry. Next came attempts with purely objective, abstract propositions, discovered sometimes through experience, sometimes independently of it, from which morally good conduct could at least be

inferred. But these lacked any anchor in human nature that could have given them the power to guide a person's endeavors against his egoistic inclination. I consider it unnecessary to substantiate all this here by enumerating and criticizing every previous foundation of morality—not only because I share Augustine's view that "what people have thought is not to be considered of great importance, but rather what the truth of the matter is," but also because it would mean "carrying owls to Athens." The Royal Society is sufficiently familiar with earlier attempts to ground ethics, and by posing the prize question itself shows that it too is convinced of their inadequacy. The less learned reader will find an account of previous attempts, incomplete but sufficient in its essentials, in *Garve's* "Survey of the Chief Principles of Ethics," as well as in *Stäudlin's* "History of Moral Philosophy" and similar books.—

It is certainly disheartening to reflect that ethics, the science that bears directly on life, has fared no better than abstruse metaphysics: continually pursued ever since Socrates founded it, it is still searching for its first principle. On the other hand, far more than in any other science, what is essential in ethics is contained in its first principles, since the deductions here are so easy that they make themselves. For everyone is capable of *drawing conclusions*, but few are capable of *judgment*. This is precisely why lengthy textbooks and lectures on morality are as superfluous as they are tedious. Meanwhile, it is a relief to me that I may assume familiarity with all the earlier foundations of ethics. For anyone who surveys the extraordinarily varied and sometimes bizarre arguments to which philosophers both ancient and modern have resorted—the Middle Ages were content with the Church's faith—in order to provide a demonstrable foundation for the so universally acknowledged demands of morality, and with such plainly poor results, will appreciate the difficulty of the problem and judge my achievement accordingly. And anyone who has seen how every path taken so far has failed to reach the goal will be more willing to join me on a very different one, a path previously either overlooked or scornfully passed by, perhaps because it was the most natural.¹ In fact, my solution to the problem will remind some people of Columbus's egg.

Only the *most recent* attempt to ground ethics, the *Kantian* one, will receive a critical examination from me, and a particularly thorough one. This is partly because *Kant's* great reform of morality gave this science a foundation with genuine advantages over its predecessors, and partly because it is still the last significant event in ethics. Hence *Kant's* foundation of ethics remains generally accepted and is taught everywhere to this day, even if dressed up differently through a few changes in presentation and expression. It is the ethics of the last sixty years, and must be cleared away before we strike out on another path. Moreover, examining it will give me occasion to investigate and discuss most of the fundamental ethical concepts, so that I can later take the results for granted. Above all, since opposites illuminate each other, a critique of *Kant's* foundation of morality will be the best preparation and guide, indeed the direct path, to my own, which is diametrically opposed to *Kant's* in the most essential points. For this reason, it would be entirely misguided to skip the critique that follows and go straight to the positive part of my account, which would then be only half intelligible.

Indeed, it is now high time for ethics to be seriously called to account. For more than half a century it has lain on the comfortable cushion *Kant* laid beneath it: the categorical imperative of practical reason. In our day, however, this is usually introduced under the less imposing but smoother and more readily accepted title of “the *moral law*,” under which, after a slight bow to reason and experience, it slips through unexamined. Once inside the house, however, there is no end to its orders and commands, though it never offers any further account of itself.—It was right and necessary that *Kant*, as its inventor, should have rested content with it after using it to displace cruder errors. But now to have to watch even the donkeys rolling on the cushion he laid down, trampled ever wider since then—that is hard. I mean the everyday writers of compendiums, who, with the serene assurance of incomprehension, imagine they have given ethics a foundation if they merely appeal to that “*moral law*” supposedly dwelling in our reason. They then confidently pile onto it that long-winded, confused web of phrases with which they know how to make life's clearest and simplest relations unintelligible—without ever seriously asking themselves in

the course of this undertaking whether such a “*moral law*” really is inscribed in our heads, breasts, or hearts, as a convenient lure for morality. I therefore confess the particular pleasure with which I now set about pulling this broad cushion out from under morality. I openly declare my intention to show that *Kant’s* practical reason and categorical imperative are wholly unwarranted, groundless, fabricated assumptions; to demonstrate that *Kant’s* ethics, too, lacks a solid foundation; and thus to return morality to its old state of utter helplessness, in which it must stand before I set about presenting the true moral principle of human nature, rooted in our being and unquestionably effective. For since this principle offers no foundation as broad as that cushion, those accustomed to greater comfort in the matter will not abandon their old resting place until they clearly perceive the deep hollow beneath the ground on which it stands.

¹ I could not tell you by what mischance,

Or rather by what fatality,

Deceit wins greater credit among us

Than simple and naked truth.—

Casti.

(I cannot say by what accident, or rather by what misfortune, deception finds readier belief among us than simple and naked truth.)

Section 3



II.

Critique of the Foundation *Kant* Gave to Ethics.

Overview.

Kant's great service to ethics was to purify it of all *eudaimonism*. The ethics of the ancients was a theory of happiness; that of the moderns was mostly a doctrine of salvation. The ancients sought to prove virtue and happiness identical, but these were like two figures that can never be made to coincide, however they are placed. The moderns sought to connect the two not through the *principle of identity*, but through the *principle of sufficient reason*, thus making happiness the consequence of virtue. To do so, however, they had to enlist either a world other than the one that can possibly be known, or sophistries. Among the ancients, *Plato* alone is an exception: his ethics is not eudaimonistic, but instead becomes mystical. Even the ethics of the Cynics and Stoics, however, is only a special kind of *eudaimonism*. To prove this I lack neither reasons nor evidence, but, in my present undertaking, space.²—Among both ancients and moderns, then, *Plato* alone excepted, virtue was merely a means to an end. Admittedly, if we wished to be strict, *Kant* too would have banished eudaimonism from ethics more in appearance than in reality. For he still leaves a secret connection between virtue and happiness in his doctrine of the highest good, where they meet in a remote and obscure chapter, while in public virtue acts as a complete stranger to happiness. Apart from this, in *Kant* the ethical

principle appears as wholly independent of experience and its instruction, as a transcendental or metaphysical principle. He recognizes that human conduct has a significance that reaches beyond all possible experience and, for that very reason, is the true bridge to what he calls the intelligible world, the world of noumena, the world of things in themselves.

Besides the merits just touched on, Kant's ethics owes its fame to the moral purity and sublimity of its results. Most people fastened on these without troubling themselves much about their foundation, which is highly complex and abstract, and presented in an exceedingly contrived form. Kant had to bring all his acuteness and ingenuity to bear on this form to give it an appearance of solidity. Fortunately, he devoted a separate work to setting out the *foundation* of his ethics apart from ethics itself: the "*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*," whose subject is therefore exactly the same as that of our prize question. For he says there, S. XIII of the preface: "The present *Groundwork* is nothing more than the search for and establishment of the supreme principle of morality, which alone constitutes a task complete in its purpose and to be separated from every other moral inquiry." In this book we find the foundation, and thus the essential substance, of his ethics presented with a rigorous system, concision, and precision found in none of his other works. It also has the considerable advantage of being the earliest of his moral works, only four years later than the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and thus dating from a time when, although he was already 61, the harmful influence of age on his mind was not yet noticeable. By contrast, that influence can already be clearly felt in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which appeared in 1788, a year after the unfortunate revision of the *Critique of Pure Reason* for its second edition, through which he plainly spoiled this immortal masterpiece. The preface to the new edition prepared by *Rosenkranz* gives us an account of this with which, after examining the matter for myself, I can only agree.³ The *Critique of Practical Reason* contains essentially the same material as the "*Groundwork*" mentioned above; only the latter gives it in a concise and more rigorous form, while the former elaborates it at great length, interrupts it with digressions, and reinforces it with a few moral declamations to heighten the effect. When Kant

wrote this, he had finally, late in life, attained his well-deserved fame. Assured by this of boundless attention, he gave the loquacity of age more scope. As distinctive features of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, however, we must mention, first, its account of the relation between freedom and necessity, beyond all praise and certainly written earlier (S. 169–179 of the fourth edition, and S. 223–231 in *Rosenkranz*). This agrees entirely, however, with the account he gives in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (S. 560–586; R., S. 438 ff.). Second, there is its moral theology, which will increasingly be recognized as what Kant really intended it to be. Finally, in the “*Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue*,” the counterpart to his deplorable “*Doctrine of Right*,” written in 1797, the influence of senile weakness predominates. For all these reasons I take the first-mentioned “*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*” as my guide in the present critique, and all page numbers I cite without further qualification refer to it; I ask the reader to bear this in mind. I shall consider the other two works only incidentally and secondarily.

It will greatly assist the *understanding* of the present critique, which undermines Kant’s ethics at its deepest foundation, if the reader will first attentively reread Kant’s “*Groundwork*,” to which it chiefly refers, and thus bring its contents fully back to mind—especially since it occupies only 128 and XIV pages (only 100 pages in all in *Rosenkranz*). I cite it from the third edition of 1792 and add the page number in *Rosenkranz*’s new collected edition, preceded by R.

² The detailed account will be found in “The World as Will and Representation”, Bd. 1, §. 16, S. 103 ff., and Bd. 2, Kap. 16, S. 166 ff., of the third edition.

³ I wrote it myself; but here I am speaking incognito.

Section 4



On the Imperative Form of Kantian Ethics.

Kant's fundamental error lies in his very conception of ethics, which we find most clearly expressed on p. 62 (R., p. 54): "In practical philosophy, the task is not to give reasons for what happens, but laws for *what ought to happen, even if it never does.*"—This already plainly begs the question. Who tells you that there are laws to which our conduct ought to submit? Who tells you that *what never happens ought to happen?*—What entitles you to assume this in advance, and then immediately impose on us an ethics in a legislative, imperative form as the only possible one? In opposition to Kant, I maintain that the moral philosopher, like the philosopher generally, must content himself with explaining and interpreting what is given—that is, what actually exists or happens—in order to reach an *understanding* of it; and that this gives him more than enough to do, far more than has been done to this day, after thousands of years. In keeping with this *Kantian* begging of the question, the preface, which is entirely relevant to the subject, assumes before any investigation that purely *moral laws* exist. This assumption then stands unchallenged as the deepest foundation of the entire system. But let us first examine the concept of a *law*. Its proper and original meaning is confined to civil law—law or statute, a human institution resting on human choice. The concept acquires a second, derivative sense, a figurative or metaphorical one, when applied to nature, whose unvarying modes

of operation—some known independently of experience, others learned by empirical observation—we metaphorically call laws of nature. Only a very small portion of these natural laws can be discerned independently of experience; these constitute what Kant so acutely and admirably distinguished and brought together under the name *Metaphysics of Nature*. There is indeed also a law for the *human will*, insofar as the human being belongs to nature: a law that can be rigorously demonstrated, inviolable, without exception, rock-solid, and entailing necessity not merely in a manner of speaking, as the categorical imperative does, but in reality. It is the *law of motivation*, a form of the law of causality: namely, causality mediated by cognition. This is the only demonstrable law for the *human will* to which it is subject *as such*. It states that every action can occur only as the consequence of a sufficient motive. Like the law of causality generally, it is a law of nature. Moral laws, by contrast, independent of human enactment, political institutions, or religious doctrine, cannot be assumed to exist without proof. Kant therefore begs the question by assuming them in advance. The assumption appears all the bolder because he immediately adds, on p. VI of the preface, that a moral law must entail “*absolute necessity*.” Yet the mark of such necessity is always that its effect cannot fail to occur. How, then, can there be any talk of absolute necessity in these alleged moral laws—of which he gives as an example “you shall not lie,” with the wording “*du sollst* (sic)” —when, as everyone knows and he himself admits, they mostly, indeed as a rule, remain without effect? Before admitting into a scientific ethics any laws for the will besides the law of motivation—laws that are original and independent of all human enactment—we must prove and derive their very existence, if we intend not merely to recommend honesty in ethics but also to practice it. Until that proof has been supplied, I recognize no other source for the introduction into ethics of the concepts of law, precept, and ought than one foreign to philosophy: the Mosaic Decalogue. Even the spelling “*du sollst*” —“you shall” —naively betrays this origin in the example above, the first moral law Kant puts forward. But a concept that can point to no other origin than this cannot simply force its way into philosophical ethics; it must be

turned away until legitimate proof has authenticated it and secured its admission. In Kant it constitutes the first instance of begging the question, and a large one.

Just as Kant, by this means, had simply taken the concept of the *moral law* in the preface as given and indisputably real, so on p. 8 (R., p. 16) he treats the closely related concept of *duty*, admitting it into ethics without further examination of its credentials. But here I must once again enter a protest. This concept, together with its relatives—those of *law*, *command*, *ought*, and the like—when taken in this unconditional sense, originates in theological morality and remains a stranger to philosophical morality until it has produced valid credentials drawn from the essential nature of humanity or of the objective world. Until then, I recognize no other origin for it and its relatives than the Decalogue. Throughout the Christian centuries, philosophical ethics has, in general, unconsciously taken its form from theological ethics. Since the latter is essentially *commanding*, philosophical ethics too has appeared in the form of precepts and a doctrine of duties, in all innocence, without suspecting that it first needed an independent warrant for doing so; rather, it supposed this to be its own natural form. The metaphysical ethical significance of human conduct—its significance extending beyond this phenomenal existence and touching eternity—is undeniable, and is recognized by all peoples, ages, and religions, as well as by all philosophers except the thoroughgoing materialists. Yet it is by no means essential to this significance that it be conceived in terms of commanding and obeying, of law and *duty*. Moreover, detached from the theological premises from which they arose, these concepts really lose all meaning. If, like Kant, we think we can replace those premises by speaking of an *absolute ought* and *unconditional duty*, we are fobbing the reader off with words, indeed giving him a contradiction in terms to digest. Every *ought* derives all its sense and meaning solely from a threatened punishment or a promised reward. Hence, long before anyone thought of Kant, Locke had already said: “For since it would be utterly in vain, to suppose a rule set to the free actions of man, without annexing to it some enforcement of good and evil to determine his will; we must, where-ever we suppose a law, suppose also some reward or punishment

annexed to that law.” (On Understanding, Bk. II, c. 33, §. 6.)⁴ Every ought is therefore necessarily conditioned by punishment or reward and thus, in Kant’s language, is essentially and inescapably *hypothetical*, never, as he claims, *categorical*. But if those conditions are thought away, the concept of ought is left devoid of meaning; an *absolute ought* is therefore indeed a contradiction in terms. It is quite impossible to conceive of a commanding voice, whether it comes from within or without, as anything but threatening or promising. Obedience to it will then, according to circumstances, be wise or foolish, but always self-interested and therefore without moral worth. The utter inconceivability and absurdity of this concept of an *unconditional ought*, on which Kant’s ethics rests, later emerges within his system itself, in the Critique of Practical Reason, just as a concealed poison cannot remain within an organism but must finally break out and find an outlet. For this supposedly *unconditional ought* subsequently postulates a condition after all, indeed more than one: a reward, the immortality of the person to be rewarded, and someone to confer the reward. This is of course necessary once *duty* and *ought* have been made the fundamental concepts of ethics, since these concepts are essentially relative and acquire all their meaning through threatened punishment or promised reward. But this reward, postulated after the event for virtue, which had thus only appeared to labor without payment, makes its entrance respectably veiled under the name of the *highest good*: the union of virtue and happiness. At bottom, however, this is nothing other than a morality aimed at happiness and therefore founded on self-interest, or eudaimonism, which Kant had solemnly thrown out through his system’s front door as heteronomous, and which now slips back in through the rear door under the name of the *highest good*. Thus the assumption of an *unconditional, absolute ought*, harboring a contradiction, takes its revenge. A *conditional ought*, on the other hand, can certainly be no fundamental ethical concept, because everything done with a view to reward or punishment is necessarily egoistic action and, as such, without purely moral worth.—All this makes clear that a more expansive and

unprejudiced conception of ethics is needed if we are serious about truly fathoming the eternal significance of human conduct, which reaches beyond appearance.

Just as every *ought* is wholly bound to a condition, so is every *duty*. For the two concepts are very closely related and almost identical. The sole difference between them may be that an *ought* can also rest on mere coercion, whereas *duty* presupposes *obligation*, that is, the acceptance of a *duty*. Such an obligation exists between master and servant, superior and subordinate, government and subject. Precisely because no one accepts a *duty* for nothing, every *duty* also confers a right. The slave has no *duty*, because he has no right; but there is an *ought* for him, resting on mere coercion. In the following part I shall establish the only meaning the concept of *duty* has in ethics.

The conception of ethics in an *imperative* form, as a *doctrine of duties*, and the conception of the moral worth or unworthiness of human actions as the fulfillment or violation of *duties*, together with the *ought*, undeniably derive solely from theological morality and ultimately from the Decalogue. Accordingly, this conception rests essentially on the assumption that the human being depends on another will, which commands him and announces reward or punishment; it cannot be separated from that assumption. However firmly established the assumption of such a will may be in theology, it cannot simply and silently be imported into philosophical morality. Nor, then, may we assume in advance that the *imperative form*, the laying down of commandments, laws, and duties, is self-evident in philosophical morality and essential to it. It is a poor expedient to replace the external condition intrinsically attached to such concepts by the word “absolute” or “categorical,” thereby producing, as I have said, a contradiction in terms.

But once Kant had silently and uncritically borrowed this *imperative form* of ethics from theological morality—whose premises, that is, theology, actually underlie that form and, as the sole source of its sense and meaning, are inseparable from it, indeed implicitly contained in it—he then had an easy task at the end of his exposition in developing a theology out of his morality in turn: the familiar moral theology. He needed only to bring expressly to light the concepts

which the *ought* implicitly posited, and which lay concealed beneath his morality, and now set them forth explicitly as postulates of practical reason. Thus, to the world's great edification, there appeared a theology supported solely by morality, indeed born from it. But this happened because that morality itself rested on concealed theological premises. I intend no mocking comparison, but in its form the affair resembles the surprise a performer of natural magic prepares for us when he has us find something in the place where he had prudently planted it beforehand.—Stated in the abstract, Kant's procedure is this: he made into the result what ought to have been the principle or premise—theology—and took as the premise what ought to have been derived as the result—the commandment. But once he had stood the thing on its head in this way, no one, not even he himself, recognized it for what it was: the old, familiar theological morality. We shall examine the execution of this trick in the sixth and seventh sections.

Even before *Kant*, to be sure, the conception of morality in the imperative form and as a doctrine of duties had frequently been used in philosophy as well. But morality itself was then also founded on the will of a God already proved by other means, and so remained consistent. Once, however, one undertook, as Kant did, to establish an independent foundation and to secure ethics without metaphysical premises, one was no longer entitled to take that imperative form, that “you shall” and “it is your duty,” as the basis without deriving it independently.

- ⁴ “For since it would be utterly futile to assume a guiding rule laid down for a person's free actions without attaching something to it that gave it force by determining his will through well-being and suffering, wherever we assume a law we must also assume some reward or punishment attached to that law.” (On Understanding, vol. II, c. 33, §. 6.)

Section 5



On the Assumption of Duties to Ourselves in Particular.

Kant also left this form of a doctrine of duties, so welcome to him, untouched in its application insofar as, like his predecessors, he laid down duties to ourselves alongside duties to others. Since I reject this assumption outright, I shall insert my explanation here as a digression, where it best suits the course of the argument.

Duties to ourselves, like all duties, must be either duties of justice or duties of love. *Duties of justice* to ourselves are impossible, by the self-evident principle that no wrong is done to one who consents: for since what I do is always what I will, what I do to myself is likewise always only what I will, and therefore never a wrong. As for *duties of love* to ourselves, morality finds its work already done and arrives too late. The impossibility of violating the duty of self-love is already presupposed by the supreme commandment of Christian morality: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Here the love each person bears himself is assumed in advance as the maximum and the condition of every other love. By no means is it added: “Love yourself as your neighbor”—for everyone would feel that this asked too little. It would also be the one duty in which doing more than was required would be the order of the day. Even Kant says, in the “Metaphysical Foundations of the Doctrine of Virtue,” p. 13 (R., p. 230): “What everyone inevitably already wills of his own accord does not fall under the con-

cept of duty.” Nevertheless, this concept of duties to ourselves has retained its standing and enjoys particular favor everywhere, which is hardly surprising. But it has an amusing effect when people begin to fear for their own safety and then speak in all seriousness of the duty of self-preservation, although it is plain enough that fear will set them running without any command of duty to give them a push.

What is usually set forth as duties to ourselves consists, first of all, in an argument against *suicide*, deeply entangled in prejudices and conducted on the shallowest grounds. The human being alone is exposed not merely, like the animal, to *bodily* sufferings confined to the present, but also to the incomparably greater sufferings of the *mind*, which borrow from the future and the past. As compensation, nature has granted him the privilege of ending his life at will, even before she herself sets its limit: thus, unlike the animal, he need not live as long as he can, but only as long as he *wants* to. Whether ethical grounds require him to renounce this privilege is a difficult question, one that certainly cannot be settled by the customary shallow arguments. Even the reasons against suicide which Kant does not disdain to advance on p. 53 (R., p. 48) and p. 67 (R., p. 57) I cannot in good conscience call anything but paltry things that do not even deserve an answer. One cannot help laughing at the thought that reflections of this kind were supposed to have wrested the dagger from the hands of Cato, Cleopatra, Cocceius Nerva (Tac. Ann., VI, 26), or Arria, the wife of Paetus (Plin. Ep., III, 16). If genuinely moral motives against suicide do exist, they lie very deep in any case and cannot be reached by the plumb line of ordinary ethics; rather, they belong to a higher mode of reflection than even the standpoint of the present essay permits.⁵

What is usually presented besides this under the heading of duties to oneself consists partly of rules of prudence, partly of precepts for healthy living, neither of which belongs to morality proper. Finally, the prohibition of unnatural sexual pleasure is also placed here: masturbation, pederasty, and bestiality. Of these, masturbation is chiefly a vice of childhood, and combating it is far more a matter of health regimens than of ethics. That is precisely why the books against it have been written by physicians, such as Tissot and others, not by

moralists. Once the science of health regimens and hygiene have done their part in this matter and struck it down with irrefutable arguments, if morality now wishes to take it in hand, it finds the work so thoroughly done that little remains for it.—Bestiality, in turn, is a wholly abnormal offense, very rarely encountered, and thus truly exceptional; it is also so profoundly repugnant and contrary to human nature that it speaks against itself and deters more powerfully than any rational arguments could. Moreover, as a degradation of human nature, it is quite properly an offense against the species as such and in the abstract, not against individual human beings.—Of the three sexual offenses under discussion, then, only pederasty falls within the province of ethics, where it will naturally find its place in the treatment of justice. For it violates justice, and the principle that no wrong is done to one who consents cannot be invoked against this: the wrong lies in seducing the younger, inexperienced party, who is thereby corrupted physically and morally.

- ⁵ These are ascetic grounds: they can be found in the fourth book of my principal work, vol. I, §. 69.

Section 6



On the Foundation of Kantian Ethics.

Closely bound up with the *imperative form* of ethics, shown in §. 4 to beg the question, is a favorite conception of Kant's, which may be excused but cannot be accepted.—We sometimes see a physician who, having used a remedy with brilliant success, proceeds to prescribe it for almost every illness: I compare Kant to such a physician. By separating the a priori from the a posteriori in human knowledge, he made the most brilliant and consequential discovery of which metaphysics can boast. What wonder that he should now seek to apply this method and distinction everywhere? Thus *ethics*, too, is to consist of a pure part, that is, one knowable a priori, and an empirical part. He rejects the latter as inadmissible for *establishing the foundation* of ethics. To discover the former and present it separately is his purpose in the “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” which is accordingly to be a science entirely a priori, in the same sense as his “Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science.” Thus this *moral law*, assumed in advance to exist without warrant, derivation, or proof, is also to be knowable a priori, independent of all *inner as well as outer experience*, “*resting solely on concepts of pure reason*; it is to be a *synthetic proposition a priori*” (Critique of Practical Reason, S. 56 of the fourth edition;—R., S. 142). Closely connected with this is the requirement that, like everything known a priori, it must be merely *formal*, and thus concern only the *form*, not the *con-*

tent, of actions.—Consider what that means!—He expressly adds (S. VI of the preface to the Groundwork;—R., S. 5) that it “must not be sought in human nature (the subjective), nor in the circumstances of the world (the objective),” and (in the same place, S. VII; R., S. 6) that “*not the slightest thing may be borrowed here from knowledge of the human being*, that is, from *anthropology*.” He repeats (S. 59;—R., S. 52) “that one must not so much as entertain the thought of deriving the reality of one’s moral principle from the particular constitution of human nature”; likewise (S. 60;—R., S. 52), that “anything derived from a particular natural predisposition of humanity, from certain feelings and inclinations, or even, if possible, from a particular tendency peculiar to human nature that need not necessarily hold for the will of *every rational being*,” can furnish no foundation for the moral law. This proves beyond dispute that he does *not present the alleged moral law as a fact of consciousness*, something empirically demonstrable—as the philosophizers of more recent times, one and all, would like to make it out to be. As he rejects all inner experience, so he rejects all outer experience still more decisively, repudiating every empirical foundation of morality. Thus—and I ask that this be carefully noted—he does not base his moral principle on any demonstrable *fact of consciousness*, such as an inner predisposition, any more than on some objective relation between things in the external world. No! That would be an empirical foundation. Instead, *pure concepts a priori*, that is, concepts which as yet have no content whatever drawn from outer or inner experience, and are therefore mere shells without kernels, are to be the foundation of morality. Consider how much this means: human consciousness, together with the entire external world and all the experience and facts within them, has been pulled away from beneath our feet. We have nothing to stand on. But what are we to hold on to? A pair of wholly abstract concepts, still entirely devoid of substance, themselves suspended in midair. From these—indeed, strictly speaking, from the mere form of their combination into judgments—a *law* is to emerge, one that is to hold with so-called *absolute necessity*, and to have the power to bridle and curb the pressure of desires, the storm of passion, the gigantic force of egoism. We shall see about that.

Closely linked to this preconceived notion that the foundation of morality must possess *a priori character* and purity from everything empirical is a second favorite conception of Kant's: namely, since the moral principle to be established must be a *synthetic proposition a priori, with merely formal content*, and thus wholly a matter of *pure reason*, it is as such to hold not for *human beings* alone, but *for all possible rational beings*, and "for that reason alone"—thus incidentally and by accident—for human beings as well. For that is why it is based on pure reason, which knows nothing but itself and the principle of contradiction, rather than on any feeling. Here, then, this *pure reason* is not taken as a human faculty of knowledge, which is all it actually is; instead, it is *hypostatized as something existing in its own right*, without any warrant, and as a most pernicious example and precedent—as our present wretched philosophical age can testify. Yet this establishment of morality not for human beings as human beings, but for *all rational beings* as such, is so central a concern and so cherished a conception for *Kant* that he never tires of repeating it at every opportunity. Against this I maintain that we are never entitled to establish a genus given to us in only a single species. We could put absolutely nothing into its concept except what we had drawn from this *one* species; hence whatever we asserted of the genus would still have to be understood as applying only to the *one* species. Meanwhile, by unwarrantedly thinking away what belongs to this species in order to form the genus, we might have abolished precisely the condition that makes possible the remaining properties hypostatized as a genus. Just as we know *intelligence in general* only as a property of animal beings, and are therefore never entitled to think of it as existing apart from and independently of animal nature, so we know *reason* only as a property of the human race, and are absolutely not entitled to think of it as existing outside that race, or to establish a genus, "rational beings," distinct from its sole species, "human being"; still less are we entitled to lay down laws for such imaginary *rational beings in the abstract*. To speak of rational beings other than human beings is no different from speaking of *heavy beings* other than bodies. One cannot escape the suspicion that *Kant* was thinking a little of the dear little angels here, or at least counting on their help in persuading the reader. At any rate, this tacitly presup-

poses the rational soul, which, wholly distinct from the sentient soul and the vegetative soul, would remain after death and then be nothing more than rational. Yet in the Critique of Pure Reason he himself explicitly and at length put an end to this wholly transcendent hypostasis. Meanwhile, in Kantian ethics, especially in the Critique of Practical Reason, the thought that the inner and eternal essence of the human being consists in *reason* can always be seen hovering in the background. Here, where the matter arises only incidentally, I must content myself with merely asserting the opposite: namely, that reason, like the faculty of knowledge in general, is something secondary, something belonging to appearance, indeed something conditioned by the organism, whereas the true core, the sole metaphysical and therefore indestructible element in the human being, is *the will*.

Thus, wishing to transfer to practical philosophy the method he had applied with such success in theoretical philosophy, and accordingly to separate pure a priori knowledge from empirical a posteriori knowledge here as well, Kant assumed that, just as we know the laws of space, time, and causality a priori, so too, or at least in an analogous manner, the moral standard for our conduct is given to us before all experience and expresses itself as a categorical imperative, as an absolute ought. But what a world of *difference* there is between those theoretical cognitions a priori and this alleged moral law a priori! The former rest on their expressing the mere forms, that is, functions, of our intellect, through which alone we are capable of apprehending an objective world, and in which that world therefore *must* present itself. For this very reason those forms legislate absolutely for it, so that all experience must invariably conform to them exactly, just as everything I see through blue glass *must* appear blue. The latter, by contrast, is mocked by experience at every turn; indeed, according to *Kant* himself, experience leaves it doubtful whether it has ever actually conformed to this law even once. What utterly disparate things are brought together here under the concept of a *a priori character*! Moreover, Kant overlooked the fact that, according to his own doctrine in theoretical philosophy, it is precisely the *a priori character* of the cognitions just mentioned, their independence of experience, that restricts them to mere *appearance*, that is, to the representation of

the world in our heads, and entirely deprives them of all validity with regard to the *essence in itself* of things, that is, what exists independently of our apprehension. Accordingly, in practical philosophy too, his alleged moral law, if it arises a priori in our heads, would likewise have to be merely a form of *appearance*, leaving the essence in itself of things untouched. But this consequence would stand in the sharpest contradiction both to the matter itself and to Kant's views of it, since he consistently presents precisely the *moral element in us* as most intimately connected with the true *essence in itself* of things, indeed as directly reaching it (for example, Critique of Practical Reason, S. 175;—R., S. 228). In the Critique of Pure Reason, too, wherever the mysterious *thing in itself* emerges at all more distinctly, it reveals itself as *the moral element* in us, as *will*. —But he passed over this.

I showed in §. 4 that Kant simply took the *imperative form* of ethics, and thus the concepts of ought, law, and duty, from theological morality, while having to leave behind what alone gives those concepts force and meaning there. Yet to provide a foundation for these concepts nonetheless, he goes so far as to demand that the *concept of duty* itself should also be the *ground of its fulfillment*, and thus *what obligates us*. An action, he says (S. 11;—R., S. 18), has genuine moral worth only when it is done solely from *duty* and merely for the sake of *duty*, without any inclination toward it. The worth of character begins only when someone without sympathy in his heart, cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others, and *not really born a friend of humanity*, nevertheless bestows benefits merely for the sake of tiresome duty. This assertion, which outrages genuine moral feeling; this apotheosis of lovelessness, directly opposed to Christian moral teaching, which places love above all else and allows nothing to count without it (1 Corinthians, 13, 3); this tactless moral pedantry was satirized by *Schiller* in two apt epigrams entitled “Scruples of Conscience and Decision.” Their immediate occasion seems to have been certain passages of the Critique of Practical Reason that belong entirely to the present discussion, for example, S. 150;—R., S. 211: “The disposition incumbent on a human being in obeying the moral law is to obey it from *duty*, not from *voluntary affection*, nor even from some endeavor gladly undertaken of one's own accord and *with-*

out being commanded.”—It must be *commanded*! What a slave morality! And in the same work, S. 213;—R., S. 257, we read “that feelings of compassion and tenderhearted sympathy would be burdensome even to right-minded people, because they would throw their considered maxims into confusion and thus produce the wish to be rid of them and subject to legislative reason alone.” I confidently maintain that what opens the hand of the loveless benefactor described above (S. 11;—R., S. 18), indifferent to the sufferings of others—unless he has ulterior motives—can never be anything but slavish *superstitious fear*, whether he calls his fetish the “categorical imperative” or Fitzlipuzli.⁶ What else could move a hard heart but fear alone?

In keeping with the foregoing views, according to S. 13;—R., S. 19, the moral worth of an action is by no means to lie in the *intention* with which it was done, but in the maxim one followed. Against this I submit that the *intention alone* decides the moral worth or unworthiness of a deed, which is why the same deed can be reprehensible or praiseworthy according to its intention. Thus, whenever people discuss an action of any moral significance, everyone inquires into the *intention* and judges the action by this alone; conversely, everyone appeals to the *intention* alone to justify himself when he sees his action misconstrued, or to excuse himself when it has had a harmful outcome.

On page 14;—R., S. 20, we finally receive the definition of the fundamental concept of all Kantian ethics, *duty*: it is “*the necessity of an action from respect for the law.*”—But what is *necessary* happens and is inevitable; whereas actions from pure duty not only fail to occur in most cases, but Kant himself even admits, S. 25;—R., S. 28, that we have *no certain examples at all* of the disposition to act from pure duty; and on S. 26;—R., S. 29, “it is absolutely impossible through experience to establish with certainty *a single case* in which an action conforming to duty rested solely on the representation of duty”; likewise S. 28;—R., S. 30, and S. 49;—R., S. 50. In what sense, then, can *necessity* be ascribed to such an action? Since it is only fair always to interpret an author as favorably as possible, let us say he means that an action conforming to duty is *objectively* necessary but *subjectively* contingent. Yet precisely this is not as easy to conceive as to say: where is the *object* of this *objective* necessity, whose effect in objective

reality fails to appear in most cases, and perhaps always? With all fairness of interpretation, I still cannot help saying that the expression “*necessity of an action*” in the definition is nothing but an artfully concealed, highly strained paraphrase of the word *ought*. This purpose becomes clearer still when we notice that the same definition uses the word *respect* where *obedience* was meant. For the note on S. 16;—R., S. 20, says: “*Respect* means merely the subordination of my will to a law. The immediate determination by the law, and the consciousness of it, is called *respect*.” In what language? In German, what is described here is called *obedience*. But since the word *respect* cannot have been substituted so inappropriately for the word *obedience* without a reason, it must serve some purpose; and this is plainly none other than to obscure the descent of the imperative form and the concept of duty from theological morality. We saw above, similarly, that the expression *necessity of an action*, which takes the place of *ought* in so strained and clumsy a fashion, was chosen only because *ought* is precisely the language of the *Decalogue*. The foregoing definition, “Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law,” would therefore read, in natural and undisguised language, that is, without a mask: “Duty means an action that *ought* to be done in *obedience* to a law.”—That is “the poodle’s core.”

But now for the *law*, this final foundation stone of Kantian ethics! *What is its content? And where is it written?* This is the chief question. I note first that these are *two* questions: one concerns the *principle*, the other the *foundation* of ethics—two entirely different things, though they are usually, and sometimes perhaps deliberately, confused.

The *principle*, or supreme *fundamental proposition*, of an ethics is the shortest and most concise expression of the conduct it prescribes, or, if it had no imperative form, of the conduct to which it attributes genuine moral worth. It is therefore its direction toward virtue in general expressed in *one* proposition, and thus the what of virtue.—The *foundation* of an ethics, by contrast, is the why of virtue, the *ground* of that obligation, recommendation, or praise, whether this is sought in human nature, in the external circumstances of the world, or anywhere else. In ethics, as in all sciences, one should clearly distin-

guish the what from the why. Most writers on ethics, however, deliberately blur this distinction, probably because the what is so easy to state, while the why is so terribly difficult. Hence they gladly seek to compensate for poverty on the *one* side with riches on the *other*, and, by combining both in *one* proposition, to bring about a happy marriage of Penia (Poverty) with Poros (Resource). This usually happens by not stating the what, familiar to everyone, in its simplicity, but forcing it into an artificial formula from which it must first be inferred as the conclusion from given premises. The reader then feels as though he had learned not merely the matter itself, but also its ground. Most of the well-known moral principles readily bear this out. But since, in the following part, I do not intend to perform such tricks myself, but to proceed honestly—not to pass off the *principle* of ethics as its *foundation* at the same time, but to distinguish the two quite clearly—I will here and now reduce that what, that is, the *principle*, the *fundamental proposition* on whose content all writers on ethics are really agreed, however variously they clothe it, to the expression I consider the simplest and purest of all: Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can. This is really the proposition that all moral teachers labor to *establish*: the common result of their very diverse deductions. It is the what for which the why is still being sought, the consequence for which the ground is demanded, and thus itself only the given, for which the sought-for answer is the problem of every ethics, as of the present prize question. The solution of this problem will provide the true *foundation* of ethics, sought for thousands of years like the philosopher's stone. That the given, the what, the principle, really finds its purest expression in the formula above is evident from the fact that this formula stands to every other moral principle as the conclusion to the premises, and thus as the point one actually wishes to reach. Every other moral principle must therefore be regarded as a paraphrase, an indirect or veiled expression, of that simple proposition. This applies, for example, even to the commonplace principle regarded as simple: What you do not want done to you, do not do to another⁷. Its deficiency—that it expresses only duties of justice, not duties of virtue—is easily remedied by repeating it without the two negatives. For then it too really means: Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can. But

it reaches this by a detour, thereby acquiring the appearance of having also supplied the real ground, the why, of that precept. This is not the case, since it by no means follows from my not wanting something done to me that I ought not to do it to others. The same applies to every *principle* or supreme *fundamental proposition* of morality put forward so far.

If we now return to our earlier question—what does the *law* say, obedience to which constitutes duty according to Kant, and on what is it founded?—we shall find that Kant too has closely bound the *principle* of morality to its *foundation* in a highly artificial manner. I now recall Kant's demand, considered at the outset, that the moral principle should be purely a priori and purely formal, indeed a synthetic proposition a priori, and therefore must have no material content and rest on nothing empirical whatever: neither on anything objective in the external world nor on anything subjective in consciousness, such as a feeling, inclination, or drive. Kant was clearly aware of the difficulty of this task, for on S. 60;—R., S. 53, he says: "Here we now see philosophy placed in a precarious position indeed, one that is supposed to be firm although it neither hangs from nor rests on anything in heaven or on earth." All the more eagerly, then, must we look forward to the solution of the task he has set himself, and await with curiosity how something is now to arise from nothing—that is, how laws of material human action are to take solid form out of purely a priori concepts, without any empirical or material content at all. As a symbol of this process we may take the chemical one through which solid sal ammoniac forms before our eyes from three invisible gases (nitrogen, hydrogen, chlorine), and thus in apparently empty space.—But I will present the process by which Kant solves this difficult task more clearly than he himself wished or was able to do. This may be all the more necessary since it seems seldom to have been properly understood. For almost all Kantians have fallen into the error of supposing that Kant directly presents the categorical imperative as a fact of consciousness. But then it would have an *anthropological* foundation, established through *experience*, albeit inner experience, and thus *empirically*—which runs directly counter to Kant's view and is repeatedly rejected by him. Accordingly, on S. 48;—R., S. 44, he says that "it cannot be determined empirically whether any such

categorical imperative exists at all”; and likewise on S. 49;—R., S. 45, that “the possibility of the categorical imperative must be investigated entirely *a priori*, since here we do not have the advantage of its actuality being given in experience.” Yet already his first disciple, *Reinhold*, is caught in this error, saying in his “Contributions to a Survey of Philosophy at the Beginning of the 19th Century,” issue 2, S. 21: “Kant assumes the moral law as an immediately certain fact, as an original fact of moral consciousness.” But had Kant wished to establish the categorical imperative as a fact of consciousness, and thus empirically, he would not have failed at least to demonstrate it as such. Yet nothing of the kind is found anywhere. To my knowledge, the categorical imperative makes its first appearance in the Critique of Pure Reason (S. 802 of the first and S. 830 of the fifth edition), where it appears entirely out of the blue, unannounced and connected with the preceding sentence only by a wholly unwarranted “therefore.” It is first formally introduced in the “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,” to which we are here giving particular attention, and introduced entirely by an *a priori* route, through a deduction from concepts. By contrast, a “Formula of Concord for Critical Philosophy” in the fifth issue of *Reinhold’s* journal just mentioned, so important for critical philosophy, even advances the following proposition on S. 122: “We distinguish moral self-consciousness from the *experience* with which it is connected in human consciousness as an original *fact* beyond which no knowledge can go; and by that self-consciousness we understand the *immediate consciousness of duty*, that is, of the *necessity* of adopting the will’s conformity to law, independent of pleasure and displeasure, as the incentive and guiding standard of acts of will.”—There indeed we would have “a substantial proposition, yes, and one that really posits something.” (Schiller.)

But seriously: into what an impudent begging of the question do we see Kant’s moral law grown here! If this were true, ethics would indeed have a foundation of incomparable solidity, and no prize questions would be needed to encourage the search for it. But then the greatest wonder would also be that such a fact of consciousness had been discovered so late, while for thousands of years people had been earnestly and laboriously seeking a foundation for morality. How

Kant himself gave occasion for the error censured here I shall show below. One might nevertheless wonder at the unchallenged reign of such a fundamental error among the Kantians. Yet while writing countless books about Kant's philosophy, they did not even notice the disfigurement suffered by the *Critique of Pure Reason* in its second edition, which made it an incoherent, self-contradictory book. This has only now come to light and has, I think, been explained entirely correctly in Rosenkranz's preface to the second volume of the collected edition of Kant's works. We must remember that, for many scholars, incessant teaching from the lectern and in print leaves little time for thorough learning. "By teaching I learn" is not unconditionally true; rather, one might sometimes parody it: "By always teaching I learn nothing." There is even some justification for what *Diderot* puts into the mouth of Rameau's nephew: "And these teachers—do you think they will understand the sciences they teach? Nonsense, my dear sir, nonsense. If they possessed enough knowledge to teach them, they would not teach them."—"And why?"—"They would have spent their lives studying them." (Goethe's translation, S. 104.)—Lichtenberg too says: "I have noticed this often before: the professionals frequently do not know the best of it." But as for the public—to return to Kantian morality—most people, provided only that the result accords with their moral feelings, immediately assume that its derivation must be sound. If it looks difficult, they will not probe it deeply, but rely in this on the people "in the field."

Kant's grounding of his moral law is therefore by no means its empirical demonstration as a fact of consciousness, nor an appeal to moral feeling, nor a begging of the question under the fashionable, imposing name of an "absolute postulate." Rather, it is a very subtle process of thought, which he presents to us twice, S. 17 and 51;—R., S. 22 and 46, and of which the following is a clarified account.

Since Kant, in disdaining all empirical incentives of the will, has removed in advance as empirical everything objective and everything subjective on which a law for it could be founded, nothing remains to him as the *matter* of this *law* but its own *form*. This, however, is merely *lawfulness*. But *lawfulness* consists in holding for everyone, and thus in *universal validity*. This, then, becomes the

matter. Consequently, the content of the law is nothing other than its own *universal validity*. Accordingly, it will read: "Act only on the maxim that you can at the same time will to become a universal law for all rational beings."—This, then, is Kant's actual *grounding of the moral principle*, so generally misunderstood, and thus the *foundation* of his entire ethics.—Compare also Critique of Practical Reason, S. 61;—R., S. 147, the end of note 1.—I offer my sincere admiration for the great ingenuity with which Kant has performed this feat, but continue my earnest examination by the standard of truth. I merely note further, with a view to taking it up again later, that *reason*, when and insofar as it carries out the particular reasoning just set forth, receives the name *practical reason*. The categorical imperative of practical reason, however, is the law that results from the process of thought described. Thus practical reason is by no means, as most people, and already Fichte, regarded it, a special faculty that cannot be traced further back, a hidden quality, a kind of instinct for morality resembling Hutcheson's moral sense. Rather, it is—as Kant also says in the preface, S. XII;—R., S. 8, and often enough elsewhere—one and the same as *theoretical reason*: it is precisely theoretical reason itself insofar as it carries out the process of thought described. For Fichte calls Kant's categorical imperative an *absolute postulate* (Foundation of the Entire Science of Knowledge, Tübingen 1802, S. 240, note). This is the modern euphemistic expression for begging the question, and this is how he himself consistently understood the categorical imperative; he is therefore also caught in the error censured above.

The first and most direct objection to this foundation Kant has given morality is that such an origin for a moral law within us is impossible: it presupposes that a human being would quite spontaneously conceive the idea of looking and asking for a *law* for his will, to which that will would have to submit and conform. Yet this cannot possibly occur to him of its own accord, but at most only after some other moral incentive—positively effective, real, and as such making itself known of its own accord, acting upon him unbidden, indeed pressing in upon him—had supplied the first impulse and occasion. But anything of this kind would conflict with Kant's assumption that the process of

thought described above is *itself* supposed to be the origin of all moral concepts, the first vital impulse of morality. So long, then, as this is *not* the case, since by hypothesis there is no moral incentive other than the process of thought set out above, egoism alone remains the guiding rule of human action, following the law of motivation. That is, in every individual case, the particular motives, entirely empirical and egoistic, determine human action alone and undisturbed. For on this assumption there is nothing to prompt a person, and no reason whatever why it should occur to him to ask after a law that would restrict his willing and to which he would have to subject it, let alone to investigate and ponder over such a law—which alone would first make it possible for him to arrive at the peculiar train of thought of the foregoing reflection. It makes no difference here what degree of clarity one wishes to assign to Kant's reflective process, or whether one would prefer to tone it down into a merely dimly felt deliberation. No alteration on this point affects the fundamental truths that nothing comes from nothing and that an effect requires a cause. The moral incentive, like every motive that moves the will, must absolutely be something that makes itself known of its own accord, and therefore acts positively, and is consequently *real*. And since, for human beings, only what is empirical, or at least presupposed as possibly existing empirically, has reality, the moral incentive must in fact be *empirical*, and as such make itself known unbidden, come to us without waiting for us to inquire after it, press in upon us of its own accord—and with such force that it can at least possibly overcome the opposing egoistic motives, powerful as giants. For morality concerns human beings' *actual* conduct, not the building of houses of cards a priori, whose results no one would heed amid the gravity and urgency of life, and whose effect against the storm of the passions would therefore be that of an enema syringe against a conflagration. I have already mentioned that Kant regards it as a great merit of his moral law that it rests solely on abstract, pure concepts a priori, hence on *pure reason*, and is thereby valid not merely for human beings but for all rational beings as such. We must regret all the more that pure, abstract concepts a priori, without real content and without any empirical foundation whatever, can never set *human beings*, at least, in motion;

of other rational beings I cannot speak. The second defect in Kant's foundation of morality is therefore its lack of real content. This has hitherto escaped notice because probably very few of those who have celebrated and propagated Kant's morality have ever thoroughly understood its actual *foundation*, clearly set out above. The second defect, then, is a complete lack of reality and consequently of any possible efficacy. It hangs in the air, a cobweb of the subtlest and emptiest concepts, resting on nothing, and therefore able to support nothing and move nothing. And yet Kant has loaded it with a burden of infinite weight: the presupposition of freedom of the will.

Despite his repeatedly expressed conviction that freedom cannot possibly occur in human actions, that theoretically not even its possibility can be understood (Critique of Practical Reason, S. 168;—R., S. 223), and that, given exact knowledge of a person's character and of all the motives acting upon him, his conduct could be calculated as certainly and precisely as a lunar eclipse (in the same work, S. 177;—R., S. 230), freedom is nevertheless assumed, if only in idea and as a postulate, solely on the credit of this foundation of morality that hangs so unsupported in the air, through the famous inference: "You can, because you ought." But once we have clearly recognized that something does not and cannot exist, what good is any amount of postulating? Rather, we should reject that on which the postulate rests, because it is an impossible presupposition, following the rule that the inference from impossibility to nonexistence is valid, and by a proof by contradiction—which here would overthrow the categorical imperative. Instead, one false doctrine is built upon another.

Kant himself must secretly have been aware of the inadequacy of a foundation of morality consisting solely of a few entirely abstract and empty concepts. For in the Critique of Practical Reason, where, as I have said, his procedure is already less rigorous and methodical overall, and the fame he has now won has made him bolder, the foundation of ethics very gradually changes its nature, almost forgets that it is a mere web of combinations of abstract concepts, and seems to aspire to something more substantial. Thus, for example, in that work, S. 81;—R., S. 163, "the moral law" is "*as it were a fact of pure reason.*" What are we to make of this strange expression? Everywhere else, the factual is contrasted

with what can be known through pure reason.—Likewise, in the same work, S. 83;—R., S. 164, there is talk of “a reason that determines the will *immediately*,” and so on.—Here we should remember that in the *Groundwork* he expressly and repeatedly rejects any anthropological grounding, any demonstration of the categorical imperative as a fact of consciousness, because it would be *empirical*.—Yet, emboldened by such incidental remarks, Kant’s successors went much farther down this path. *Fichte* (System of Ethics, S. 49) warns outright “that we should not allow ourselves to be tempted to explain further the consciousness that we have duties, or to seek to derive it from grounds outside itself, because this would impair the dignity and absoluteness of the law.” A fine excuse!—And then, in the same work, S. 66, he says that “the principle of morality is a thought grounded in the *intellectual intuitive perception* of the absolute activity of intelligence, and is pure intelligence’s immediate concept of itself.” What phrases a windbag like this uses to conceal his helplessness!—Anyone wishing to see how completely the Kantians gradually forgot and ignored Kant’s original grounding and derivation of the moral law should consult a very readable essay in *Reinhold’s* Contributions to a Survey of Philosophy at the Beginning of the 19th Century, issue 2, 1801. There, S. 105 and 106, it is asserted “that in Kantian philosophy autonomy (which is one with the categorical imperative) is a fact of consciousness and cannot be traced back to anything further, since it makes itself known through an immediate consciousness.”—In that case it would have an anthropological, hence empirical, foundation, contrary to Kant’s explicit and repeated declarations.—Nevertheless, in the same work, S. 108, we read: “Both in the practical philosophy of criticism and in the whole of purified or higher transcendental philosophy, autonomy is that which grounds itself and supplies a ground, which is neither capable of nor in need of any further grounding, the absolutely original, the true and certain through itself, the primal truth, the prior in the highest sense, the absolute principle.—Anyone, therefore, who suspects, demands, or seeks a ground for this autonomy outside itself—of him the Kantian school must believe either that he lacks moral consciousness⁸ or that he misconstrues it in speculation through false fundamental concepts. The Fichte-Schelling school declares him afflicted with

that lack of spirit which makes a person incapable of philosophizing and constitutes the character of the unholy rabble and sluggish cattle—or, as Schelling puts it more gently, of the profane crowd and the sluggish herd.” Everyone can feel what the truth of a doctrine must amount to when people seek to extort assent to it with such trump cards. Yet it is from the respect these inspired that we must explain the truly childlike credulity with which the Kantians accepted the categorical imperative and thereafter treated it as an established fact. For since disputing a theoretical assertion could here readily be confused with moral depravity, everyone, even if he discerned little of the categorical imperative in his own consciousness, preferred to keep quiet about it, secretly supposing that in others it must be more strongly developed and emerge more distinctly. For no one gladly turns the inside of his conscience outward.

Thus, increasingly, practical reason with its categorical imperative appears in the Kantian school as a hyperphysical fact, as a Delphic temple in the human mind, from whose dark sanctuary oracles infallibly announce—not, unfortunately, what *will* happen, but at least what *ought* to happen. Once assumed—or rather smuggled in and wrung out by sheer defiance—this *immediacy of practical reason* was later unfortunately transferred to *theoretical* reason as well, especially since Kant himself had often said that the two were, after all, one and the same reason (for example, Preface, S. XII;—R., S. 8). For once it had been conceded that in *practical* matters there was a reason issuing decrees from the prophetic tripod, it was a very short step to grant the same privilege to its sister—indeed, strictly speaking, its consubstantial sister—*theoretical reason*, and to declare it equally free of intermediate authority. The advantage of this was as immeasurable as it was obvious. Now all the sham philosophers and fantasists, led by J. H. Jacobi, the denouncer of atheists, streamed toward this little door that had unexpectedly opened for them, to bring their trifles to market, or at least to rescue their favorite pieces from the old inheritance that Kant’s doctrine threatened to grind to dust.—Just as in an individual’s life a single youthful misstep often ruins the whole course of life, so *Kant’s* one false assumption of a practical *reason* equipped with entirely transcendent credentials and deciding, like the highest courts of appeal, “without grounds,” had the consequence that

doctrines utterly foreign to the rigorous, sober critical philosophy sprang from it: doctrines of a *reason* that at first merely had a faint “*presentiment*” of the “*supersensible*,” then distinctly “*apprehended*” it, and finally even “*intellectually intuited*” it in person. Any fantasist could now pass off his dreams as this reason’s “absolute” pronouncements and revelations—that is, pronouncements delivered from the prophetic tripod. This new privilege was conscientiously exploited. Here, then, lies the origin of that philosophical method which appeared immediately after Kant’s doctrine and consists in mystifying, overawing, deceiving, throwing dust in people’s eyes, and windbagery, whose era the history of philosophy will one day list under the title “Period of Dishonesty.” For the *character of honesty*, of investigating in company with the reader, which marks the writings of all earlier philosophers, has vanished here: the sham philosopher of this age seeks not to instruct his reader but to befool him; every page bears witness to it. *Fichte* and *Schelling* shine as the heroes of this period, but finally so does *Hegel*, the clumsy, witless charlatan, wholly unworthy even of them and standing far below these men of talent. The chorus was supplied by all manner of professors of philosophy who, with solemn faces, told their public stories about the Infinite, the Absolute, and many other things of which they could know absolutely nothing.

Even the paltry witticism that because the word “*Vernunft*” (“*reason*”) comes from “*Vernehmen*” (“*apprehending*”), it means that *reason* is a faculty for apprehending that so-called “*supersensible*” (Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, Cloud-Cuckoo-Land), had to serve as a stepping-stone to this *prophethood of reason*. The notion met with boundless applause and was incessantly repeated in Germany for 30 years with unspeakable satisfaction, indeed made the cornerstone of philosophical systems—although it is plain that “*Vernunft*” does indeed come from “*Vernehmen*”, but only because it gives human beings the advantage over animals of not merely *hearing* but also *apprehending*: not, however, what goes on in Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, but what one rational person says to another. This is *apprehended* by the other, and the capacity to do so is called *reason*. Thus have all peoples, all ages, and all languages understood the concept of *reason*: as the faculty of universal, abstract, nonperceptual representations, called *concepts*,

which are designated and fixed by words. This faculty alone is what human beings really possess beyond animals. For these *abstract* representations, *concepts*—that is, collective representations of many individual things—make language possible; through language, thinking proper; through thinking, consciousness not merely of the present, which animals too possess, but of the past and future as such; and through this in turn, distinct recollection, reflection, foresight, intention, the planned cooperation of many, the state, trades, arts, sciences, religions, and philosophies—in short, everything that so strikingly distinguishes human life from animal life. For animals there are only *perceptual* representations and therefore only *perceptual* motives: the dependence of their acts of will on motives is consequently obvious. This dependence is no less present in human beings, and motives move them too, given their individual characters, with the strictest necessity. Yet these motives are mostly not *perceptual* but *abstract* representations—that is, *concepts*, *thoughts*, which are nevertheless the result of earlier intuitive perceptions, hence of influences acting on them from outside. But this gives human beings a *relative* freedom, namely in comparison with animals. For they are determined not, like animals, by their *perceptually given*, present surroundings, but by their *thoughts*, drawn from earlier experiences or received through instruction. Hence the motive that moves them too with necessity is not before the spectator's eyes together with the deed: they carry it around in their heads. This gives not only their conduct and activity as a whole, but even all their movements, a character visibly different from those of animals: they are drawn, as it were, by finer, invisible threads. Hence all their movements bear the stamp of deliberateness and intention, giving them an appearance of independence that visibly distinguishes them from those of animals. Yet all these great differences depend entirely on the capacity for *abstract representations*, concepts. This capacity, therefore, is the essence of *reason*, that is, of the faculty distinguishing *human beings*, called the rational faculty, the reasoning faculty, reason, reason, discourse, reason, reason, discourse of reason.—But if I am asked what, in contrast, *understanding*—mind, intellect, understanding, understanding—is, I say: it is the cognitive faculty that animals also possess, though to varying degrees, and we possess to the highest degree; name-

ly, the immediate consciousness, preceding all experience, of the *law of causality*, which constitutes the very form of understanding and in which its entire essence consists. On it depends, first of all, *intuitive perception* of the external world. For the senses by themselves are capable only of *sensation*, which is far from being *intuitive perception*, but is merely its material: the mind sees and the mind hears; all else is deaf and blind (mind sees, mind hears; the rest is deaf and blind). *Intuitive perception* arises when we immediately refer the *sensation* of the sense organs to its *cause*, which, through precisely this act of intelligence, presents itself as an *external object* in space, our form of intuitive perception. This proves that we are conscious of the law of causality a priori and that it does not come from experience, since experience itself, presupposing *intuitive perception*, becomes possible only through that law. In the *perfection* of this entirely immediate apprehension of *causal relations* lies all superiority of understanding, all cleverness, sagacity, penetration, and acuteness: for it underlies all knowledge of the *connections* between things, in the widest sense of the word. Its acuity and accuracy make *one* person *stronger in understanding*, cleverer, shrewder than *another*. By contrast, the person called *rational* in every age has been *one* who lets himself be guided not by perceptual impressions but by *thoughts and concepts*, and therefore always proceeds with deliberation, consistency, and reflection. Such conduct is everywhere called *rational conduct*. Yet it by no means implies integrity and human kindness. On the contrary, we can proceed with the utmost rationality, hence deliberately, reflectively, consistently, according to plan and method, while following the most selfish, unjust, even depraved maxims. Hence before *Kant* it never occurred to anyone to identify just, virtuous, and noble conduct with *rational* conduct: the two were perfectly well distinguished and kept separate. The one rests on the *manner of motivation*, the other on the *difference between fundamental maxims*. Only according to *Kant*, since virtue is supposed to spring from pure reason, are virtuous and rational one and the same—in defiance of the usage of all peoples, which is not accidental but the work of universal human knowledge and is therefore concordant. Rational and vicious can very well be combined; indeed, only through their combination do great, far-reaching crimes become possible. Likewise, irra-

tional and noble can very well coexist: for example, when today I give a person in need what I myself will need tomorrow even more urgently than he does; when I let myself be carried away into giving a sufferer the sum my creditor is waiting for; and in very many other cases.

But, as I have said, this elevation of reason into the source of all virtue—resting on the assertion that, as *practical reason*, it oracularly issues unconditional imperatives purely a priori, and combined with the false explanation of *theoretical reason* advanced in the Critique of Pure Reason, that it is a faculty essentially directed toward the *unconditioned*, which takes shape in three alleged ideas (whose impossibility the understanding at the same time recognizes a priori)—led the babbling philosophers, with Jacobi at their head, through the example it offered for imitation in its faults, to their reason that immediately *apprehends* the “*supersensible*,” and to the absurd assertion that reason is a faculty essentially designed for things beyond all experience, hence for *metaphysics*, and immediately and intuitively knows the ultimate grounds of all things and all existence, the supersensible, the Absolute, the Deity, and so forth.—Had people been willing to use *their reason* instead of deifying it, such assertions should long ago have been met by the simple observation that if human beings, by virtue of a special organ for solving the riddle of the world, constituting *their reason*, carried within themselves an innate metaphysics needing only development, there would have to be as complete agreement among them about the objects of metaphysics as about the truths of arithmetic and geometry. It would then be quite impossible for a great number of fundamentally different religions and an even greater number of fundamentally different philosophical systems to exist on earth. Rather, anyone who differed from the rest in religious or philosophical views would at once have to be regarded as someone not quite right in the head.—The following simple observation should have been no less compelling. If we discovered a species of ape that intentionally made itself tools for fighting, building, or some other use, we would immediately grant it *reason*. Yet when we find savage peoples without any metaphysics or religion, as such peoples do exist, it does not occur to us to deny them *reason* on that account. Through his critique, *Kant* confined to its limits the *reason* that *proves* its

alleged supersensible knowledge; but Jacobi's *reason* that immediately *apprehends* the supersensible he would truly have found beneath all criticism. Meanwhile, a *reason* of this kind, exempt from intermediate authority, is still being foisted on innocent young men at the universities.

Note.

If we wish to get to the very bottom of the assumption of practical *reason*, we must trace its genealogy a little farther back. We then find that it descends from a doctrine that *Kant* himself thoroughly refuted, but which nevertheless secretly, indeed without his own awareness, underlies his assumption of practical reason with its imperatives and autonomy, as a reminiscence of an earlier way of thinking. This is rational psychology, according to which a human being is composed of two entirely heterogeneous substances, the material body and the immaterial soul. *Plato* was the first to establish this dogma formally and attempt to prove it as an objective truth. *Descartes*, however, brought it to the summit of perfection and pushed it to its extreme by giving it the most precise elaboration and scientific rigor. Yet this very development brought its falsity to light, which was successively demonstrated by *Spinoza*, *Locke*, and *Kant*. By *Spinoza*—whose philosophy consists chiefly in refuting his teacher's twofold dualism—when, in direct and explicit opposition to *Descartes's* two substances, he made this his principal proposition: thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, comprehended now under one attribute, now under the other. By *Locke*, when he contested innate ideas, derived all knowledge from sensory knowledge, and taught that it was not impossible for matter to think. By *Kant*, through the critique of rational psychology as it stands in the first edition. On the other side, however, *Leibniz* and *Wolff* championed the bad cause: this earned Leibniz the undeserved honor of being compared to the great *Plato*, so utterly different from him. This is not the place to elaborate all this. Now, according to this rational psychology, the soul was originally and essentially a *knowing* being, and only as a consequence of this also a *willing* one. Depending on whether, in these fundamental activities, it acted purely on its own and unmixed with the body, or in conjunction with it, the soul had a higher and a lower faculty of cognition, and likewise a higher

and lower faculty of will. In the higher faculty, the immaterial soul acted entirely on its own, without the body's cooperation: here it was pure intellect, dealing solely with representations belonging to it alone, hence not sensory at all but purely spiritual, and with acts of will of the same kind, all of which were supposed to contain nothing sensory, since that originated in the body.⁹ Here it knew nothing but pure abstractions, universals, innate concepts, eternal truths, and the like. Accordingly, its *willing* too stood solely under the influence of such purely spiritual representations. By contrast, the *lower* faculty of cognition and will was the work of the soul acting in conjunction with the body and its organs and closely bound to them, but thereby impaired in its purely spiritual efficacy. This was supposed to include all *intuitively perceptual* cognition, which accordingly was supposed to be obscure and confused, while *abstract* cognition, consisting of abstracted concepts, was supposed to be distinct! The will determined by such sensorially conditioned cognition was the lower and generally bad one: for to it belonged *willing* guided by sensory stimulation, while the other was pure *willing*, guided by pure reason and belonging to the immaterial soul alone. The Cartesian *De la Forge* developed this doctrine most clearly in his *Treatise on the Human Mind*. There, c. 23, he says: It is only one and the same will that is called sensitive appetite when it is aroused by judgments formed as a consequence of the perceptions of the senses, and that is called rational appetite when the mind forms judgments concerning its own ideas, independently of the confused thoughts of the senses that are the causes of its inclinations.—What gave occasion for these two different propensities of the will to be taken for two different appetites is that very often one opposes the other, because the purpose the mind builds upon its own perceptions does not always agree with the thoughts suggested to the mind by the disposition of the body, through which it is often compelled to will one thing while its reason makes it desire another.—From the dimly conscious reminiscence of such views ultimately comes *Kant's* doctrine of the *autonomy* of the will, which, as the voice of pure practical reason, legislates for all rational beings

as such and recognizes only *formal* determining grounds, in contrast to the *material* ones, which alone determine the lower faculty of desire, opposed by the higher.

Incidentally, this whole view, first given a properly systematic presentation by *Descartes*, can already be found in Aristotle, who sets it out clearly enough in *On the Soul*, I, 1. Even *Plato* had already prepared the way for it and hinted at it in the *Phaedo* (S. 188 and 189, Bip.).—As a consequence of its Cartesian systematization and consolidation, however, a hundred years later we find it grown quite bold, pushed to its extreme, and thereby led toward disillusionment. Thus Muratori's *On the Power of the Imagination*, cap. 1–4 and 13, offers us a summary of the view then prevailing. Here imagination, whose function is the entire intuitive perception of the external world on the data of the senses, is a purely material, bodily, cerebral organ—the lower cognitive faculty—and the immaterial soul is left only thinking, reflecting, and deciding.—But this makes the matter distinctly questionable, and people must have felt it. For if matter is capable of the highly complicated apprehension of the world in intuitive perception, it is impossible to see why it should not also be capable of abstraction from that intuitive perception, and thereby of everything else. Clearly, abstraction is nothing more than dropping the determinations unnecessary to the purpose at hand, hence the individual and specific differences: for example, when I disregard what is peculiar to the sheep, the ox, the deer, the camel, and so on, and thus arrive at the concept of a ruminant. In this operation the representations lose their perceptual character, and precisely as merely abstract, nonperceptual representations—concepts—now need the word in order to be fixed and handled in consciousness.—For all this, however, we still see *Kant* under the lingering influence of that old doctrine when he establishes his practical reason with its imperatives.

⁶ More correctly Huitzilopochtli, a Mexican deity.

⁷ Hugo Grotius traces it back to Emperor Severus.

- ⁸ Just as I thought! When they have nothing reasonable left to reply,
They promptly shift it into your conscience.
Schiller.
- ⁹ Pure intellection is intellection concerned with no bodily images. *Cart., Medit.*,
p. 188.

Section 7



On the Supreme Principle of Kantian Ethics.

Having examined the actual foundation of Kantian ethics in the preceding section, I now turn to the *supreme principle* of morality that rests on this foundation and is intimately connected, indeed fused, with it. We recall its wording: “Act only on a maxim that you can at the same time will to hold as a universal law for all rational beings.”—Let us overlook the curious procedure of telling someone who is, by assumption, seeking a law for his own conduct that he must first seek one for the conduct of every possible rational being; let us confine ourselves to the fact that this fundamental rule proposed by *Kant* is plainly not yet the moral principle itself, but only a heuristic rule for finding it—that is, an instruction on where to look for it. It is thus not yet ready money, but a sound bill of exchange. Who, then, is actually to redeem it? To speak the truth outright: a paymaster quite unexpected here—none other than *egoism*, as I shall immediately make clear.

The maxim itself, then, according to which I *can will* everyone to act, would alone be the true moral principle. My *ability to will* is the hinge on which the instruction turns. But what, precisely, *can I* will, and what can I not? Plainly, to determine what I *can will* in the sense intended, I again need a standard; only with this would I possess the key to an instruction delivered like a sealed order. Where, then, is this standard to be found?—Nowhere but in my *egoism*: the

nearest, ever-ready, original, living norm of every act of will, which has at least the right of first occupancy over any moral principle.—For the instruction contained in Kant’s supreme rule for discovering the actual moral principle rests on the tacit assumption that I *can will* only what leaves me best off. Now, in establishing a maxim to be followed universally, I must necessarily regard myself not merely as always the *active* party, but also as the potentially and sometimes *passive* one. From this standpoint, therefore, my *egoism* decides in favor of justice and human kindness—not because it wishes *to practice* them, but because it wishes *to receive* them, in the spirit of the miser who, after listening to a sermon on charity, exclaims:

“How thoroughly argued, how fine!—
—I almost wish to beg.”

Kant himself cannot avoid supplying this indispensable key to the instruction that constitutes his supreme moral principle. Yet he does not do so at once, when setting it out, since that might cause offense, but at a respectable distance from it, deeper in the text. In this way it does not leap to the eye that, despite the sublime preparations a priori, egoism actually occupies the judgment seat and casts the deciding vote; and that, once it has decided from the standpoint of the potentially *passive* side, its decision is made binding on the *active* one. Thus on S. 19;—R., S. 24, we read: “I *cannot will* a universal law of lying, because people would then no longer believe me, or would repay me *in kind*.”—S. 55;—R., S. 49: “The universality of a law permitting everyone to promise whatever occurs to him, with the intention of not keeping it, would make promising itself, and whatever purpose one might have in it, impossible, since *no one would believe* it.”—On S. 56;—R., S. 50, concerning the maxim of unkindness, we read: “A will that resolved on this would contradict itself, since *cases may arise* in which it needs the love and sympathy of others, and in which, through such a law of nature issuing from its own will, it would rob itself of all *hope of the assistance* it desires.”—Likewise in the Critique of Practical Reason, Th. I, B. 1, Hauptst. 2, S. 123;—R., S. 192: “If everyone viewed the distress of others with complete indifference, and you belonged to such an *order of things*, would you be in it with the consent of your will?”—How rashly we enact an

unjust law against ourselves! would be the answer. These passages sufficiently explain the sense in which “*being able to will*” is to be understood in Kant’s moral principle. But the true character of that principle is expressed most clearly of all in the “Metaphysical Foundations of the Doctrine of Virtue,” §. 30: “For everyone wishes *to be helped*. But if he openly declared his maxim of being unwilling to help others, everyone would be entitled to refuse him assistance. Thus the self-interested maxim contradicts itself.” *Be entitled*, it says, *be entitled*! Here, then, it is stated as plainly as can be that moral obligation rests entirely on an assumed *reciprocity*, and is therefore wholly egoistic, receiving its interpretation from egoism, which prudently agrees to a compromise on the *condition* of *reciprocity*. This would serve to establish the principle of political association, but not the moral principle. Thus, when the “Groundwork,” S. 81; —R., S. 67, says: “The principle: Always act on a maxim whose universality as a law you can at the same time will—is the sole *condition* under which a will can never come into conflict with itself,” the true interpretation of the word conflict is this: if a will had sanctioned the maxim of injustice and unkindness, it would later, should it become the *suffering party*, revoke that maxim and thereby *contradict* itself.

This explanation makes it perfectly clear that the Kantian fundamental rule is not, as he incessantly maintains, a *categorical* imperative, but in fact a *hypothetical* one. For it tacitly rests on the *condition* that the law I establish for my *acting*, by raising it to a *universal* law, also becomes a law for my *suffering*; and under this *condition*, as the potentially *passive* party, I certainly *cannot will* injustice and unkindness. But if I remove this *condition* and, perhaps in reliance on my superior powers of mind and body, regard myself, in choosing a universally valid maxim, as always the *active* party and never the *passive* one, then—assuming that morality has no foundation other than Kant’s—I can very well will injustice and unkindness as a universal maxim, and accordingly order the world upon the simple plan,

That they should take, who have the power,
And they should keep, who can.¹⁰

Wordsworth.

Thus, to the lack of a *real foundation* for Kant's supreme moral principle demonstrated in the preceding section, there is added, contrary to *Kant's* express assurance, its concealed *hypothetical* character. By virtue of this it is even based on mere *egoism*, the secret interpreter of the instruction it contains. Moreover, considered simply as a formula, it is only a paraphrase, a dressing-up, a veiled expression of the familiar rule: Do not do to another what you do not wish done to yourself—provided, that is, that by repeating it without the two negatives, we free it from the defect of containing duties of justice alone and not those of loving-kindness. For this is plainly the only maxim according to which I can will everyone to act—taking into account, of course, my possibly *passive* role, and thus my *egoism*. Yet this rule, Do not do to another what you do not wish, etc., is itself only a paraphrase, or, if one prefers, a premise, of the proposition I have put forward as the simplest and purest expression of the conduct unanimously demanded by all moral systems: Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can. This is and remains the true, pure content of all morality. But on what is it founded? What is it that gives this demand its force? That is the old, difficult problem confronting us again today. For on the other side *egoism* cries out in a loud voice: Help no one; rather, harm everyone if it happens to serve your interests. Indeed, malice supplies the variant: Rather, harm everyone as much as you can. To set against this *egoism*, and against malice as well, a champion who is their match and even their superior—that is the problem of all ethics. Here is Rhodes; jump here!—

On S. 57;—R., S. 60, *Kant* intends to give his proposed moral principle further confirmation by attempting to derive from it the long-recognized division of duties, truly grounded in the nature of morality, into duties of justice—also called perfect, indispensable, or strict duties—and duties of virtue—also called imperfect, wide, or meritorious duties, but best called duties of loving-kindness. Yet the attempt is so strained and so plainly unsuccessful that it bears strong witness against the supreme principle proposed. Duties of justice are supposed to rest on a maxim whose opposite, taken as a universal law of nature, *cannot even be conceived* without contradiction; duties of virtue, on a maxim whose opposite can indeed be *conceived* as a universal law of nature, but cannot

possibly be *willed*.—Now I ask the reader to consider that the maxim of injustice, the rule of force in place of right—which, accordingly, is supposed to be impossible even *to conceive* as a law of nature—is precisely the law that actually and factually rules in nature, not merely in the animal world but in the human world as well. Civilized nations have sought to prevent its harmful consequences by establishing the state; but whenever this institution is abolished or evaded, wherever and however that happens, the law of nature immediately returns. Between nation and nation, however, it rules continually: as everyone knows, the jargon of justice customary among them is merely the official style of diplomacy; brute force decides. Genuine—that is, uncoerced—justice, by contrast, certainly does occur, but always only as an exception to that law of nature. Furthermore, in the examples preceding his division, *Kant* first illustrates duties of justice (S. 53;—R., S. 48) with the so-called duty to oneself not to end one's life voluntarily when its evils outweigh its pleasures. This maxim, then, is supposed to be impossible even *to conceive* as a universal law of nature. I say that, since the power of the state cannot intervene here, precisely this maxim manifests itself, unhindered, as an *actually existing law of nature*. For it is most certainly a general rule that a person actually resorts to suicide as soon as the innate, immensely powerful drive to preserve life is decisively overwhelmed by the magnitude of his suffering: daily experience shows this. But to suppose that any thought at all could restrain him after the fear of death—so powerful and so intimately bound up with the nature of every living thing—has proved powerless to do so; that there is, in other words, a thought still stronger than this fear, is a bold assumption. All the more so when we see that this thought is so difficult to discover that moralists still cannot identify it precisely. At any rate, arguments of the kind *Kant* advances against suicide on this occasion, S. 53;—R., S. 48, and also S. 67;—R., S. 57, have certainly never held back anyone weary of life for even a moment. Thus a law of nature that indisputably exists in fact and operates every day is declared impossible *even to conceive* without contradiction, for the sake of deriving the division of duties from Kant's moral principle!—I confess that it gives me some satisfaction, from this point, to look ahead to the foundation of morality I shall set out in the follow-

ing part. From it the division into duties of justice and duties of loving-kindness—more properly, into justice and human kindness—emerges entirely without strain, through a principle of division arising from the nature of the matter and drawing a sharp boundary of its own accord. My foundation of morality can therefore actually show the confirmation that *Kant* here claims for his own without any grounds.

- 10 “By this simple plan,
Let whoever has the power take,
And whoever can, keep.”

Section 8



On the Derived Forms of the Supreme Principle of Kantian Ethics.

As is well known, *Kant* also presented the supreme principle of his ethics in a second, entirely different expression, in which it is stated not merely indirectly, as in the first, through instructions on how to find it, but directly. He begins preparing the way for this on S. 63;—R., S. 55, through exceedingly strange, strained, indeed distorted definitions of the concepts of *end* and *means*, which can surely be defined far more simply and correctly as follows: an *end* is the direct motive of an act of will; a *means*, the indirect one—simplicity is the seal of truth. Yet through his curious definitions he creeps toward the proposition: “The human being, and every rational being in general, exists as an *end in itself*.”—But I must say outright that “*existing as an end in itself*” is an inconceivable notion, a contradiction in terms. To be an *end* means *to be willed*. Every *end* is such only in relation to a will whose *end* it is—that is, as just stated, whose direct motive. Only in this *relation* does the concept of an *end* have any sense; torn from it, it loses that sense. But this *relation*, essential to the concept, necessarily excludes anything “in itself.” An “*end in itself*” is exactly like a “friend in himself”—an enemy in himself, an uncle in himself, north or east in itself, above or below in itself, and so on. At bottom, however, the “*end in itself*” stands on the same footing as the “absolute ought”: both secretly, even unconsciously, rest on the same thought as their condition—the theological

one.—The “*absolute value*” supposedly belonging to such an alleged but inconceivable *end* in itself fares no better. For I must brand this, too, without mercy, a contradiction in terms. Every value is a comparative magnitude, and indeed necessarily stands in a double *relation*: first, it is *relative*, since it is for someone; second, it is *comparative*, since it exists in comparison with something else by which it is assessed. Removed from these two relations, the concept of value loses all sense and meaning. This is too clear to need further explanation.—Just as those two definitions offend logic, so the proposition (S. 65;—R., S. 56) that beings without reason—that is, animals—are *things*, and may therefore be treated merely as *means* that are not also *ends*, offends genuine morality. In keeping with this, the “Metaphysical Foundations of the Doctrine of Virtue,” §. 16, expressly states: “A human being can have no duty toward any being except a human being”; and then, in §. 17: “Cruel treatment of animals is contrary to a human being’s duty *to himself*, because it deadens in him sympathy with their suffering, thereby weakening a natural disposition very serviceable to morality in his relations *with other human beings*.”—Thus we are to have compassion for animals merely as *practice*; they are, so to speak, the medical training mannequin for *practicing* compassion toward human beings. Along with all non-Islamized—that is, non-Judaized—Asia, I find such propositions outrageous and abhorrent. Here again it becomes evident how entirely this philosophical morality, which, as shown above, is merely a disguised theological morality, actually depends on biblical morality. Because Christian morality takes no account of animals—a subject to which I shall return—they are immediately outlawed in philosophical morality as well: mere “*things*,” mere *means* to whatever ends one pleases, such as vivisection, hunts to exhaustion, bull-fights, races, being whipped to death before an immovable cart loaded with stone, and the like.—Shame on such a morality of pariahs, Chandalas, and Mlecchas, which fails to recognize the eternal essence present in everything that has life, shining forth with unfathomable significance from every eye that sees the sunlight! Yet that morality knows and considers only its own precious species, whose defining characteristic, *reason*, is for it the condition under which a being can be an object of moral consideration.

By so rough a road, indeed by fair means and foul, *Kant* then arrives at the second expression of the fundamental principle of his ethics: “Act so that you always use humanity, both in your own person and in the person of every other, at the same time as an end, never merely as a *means*.” In an exceedingly artificial way, and by a long detour, this says: “Consider not yourself alone, but others as well.” This, in turn, is a paraphrase of the proposition: Do not do to another what you do not wish done to yourself. As already stated, this itself contains only the premises for the conclusion that is the ultimate true goal of all morality and all moralizing: Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can—a proposition that, like everything beautiful, looks best naked.—Only, into this second moral formula of *Kant*’s, the alleged duties to oneself have been dragged as well, deliberately and clumsily enough. I have already given my views on these.

One might also object to this formula that a criminal facing execution is treated, quite rightly and justifiably, solely as a *means* and not as an end: namely, as the indispensable *means* of preserving the law’s power to deter by carrying it out, for in this deterrence its purpose consists.

Although this second formula of *Kant*’s neither contributes anything to the *foundation* of morality nor can count as the adequate and immediate expression of its precepts—the supreme principle—it has, on the other hand, the merit of containing a subtle psychological and moral insight. For it identifies *egoism* by a highly characteristic trait that well deserves fuller development here. This *egoism*, with which we all overflow, and which we invented *politeness* to conceal as our private shame, generally peeps out from all the veils thrown over it in this way: almost instinctively, we first look in everyone we encounter for a possible *means* to one of our ever-numerous ends. With each new acquaintance, our first thought is usually whether the man might prove useful to us in some way; if he cannot, then, once convinced of this, most people find him nothing in himself either. To look in every other person for a possible *means* to our ends, and thus for a tool, is almost inherent in the human gaze. But whether the tool may have to *suffer* more or less in being used is a thought that follows much later, and often not at all. That we assume this disposition in oth-

ers is evident in many ways: for example, when we ask someone for information or advice, we lose all trust in his statements as soon as we discover that he might have some interest in the matter, however small or remote. For we immediately assume that he will make us the *means* to his ends, and will therefore give his advice in accordance not with his insight but with his intent, however great the former and however small the latter. For we know all too well that a cubic line of intent outweighs a cubic rod of insight. On the other hand, in such a case, when we ask, "What should I do?" the other person often thinks of nothing but what we would have to do to suit *his* ends. This, then, is what he will answer immediately and mechanically, without even thinking of *our* ends: he will directly dictate the answer before the question can so much as reach the tribunal of his actual judgment. Thus he seeks to guide us in accordance with *his* ends without even becoming aware of it, himself believing that he speaks from *insight*, while only his *intent* speaks through him. Indeed, he can go so far in this as actually to lie without noticing it himself. So overwhelming is the influence of the will compared with that of knowledge. Accordingly, as to whether someone speaks from *insight* or from *intent*, not even the testimony of his own consciousness is valid, but that of his interest generally is. To take another case: someone pursued by enemies, in mortal terror, who asks a peddler he encounters for a side road may find the man answering with the question, "Could you use anything from my stock?" This is not to say that things always happen so. On the contrary, many a person will indeed take a genuine and immediate interest in another's welfare and suffering, or, in *Kant's* language, regard him as an end and not as a means. But how near to or far from each individual lies the thought of regarding another person, for once, as an end instead of, as usual, a means—this is the measure of the great ethical differences among characters. And what ultimately determines this will be the true foundation of ethics, to which I shall turn only in the following part.

In his second formula, then, *Kant* has identified egoism and its opposite by a highly characteristic trait. I have been all the more glad to single out this bright point and bring it fully into the light through explanation because, otherwise, I can unfortunately accept very little of the foundation of his ethics.

The third and final form in which *Kant* presented his moral principle is the *autonomy* of the will: “The will of every rational being legislates universally for all rational beings.” This does, of course, follow from the first form. But from the present one it is now supposed to follow (according to S. 71;—R., S. 60) that the specific distinguishing mark of the categorical imperative is this: in willing from duty, the will *renounces all interest*. All earlier moral principles are said to have failed because “they always based actions on an *interest*, whether as constraint or inducement, *whether this was one’s own interest or another’s*” (S. 73;—R., S. 62)—another’s as well: please note this. “A universally legislating will, by contrast, prescribes actions from duty that are *based on no interest at all*.” But now I ask you to consider what this actually means: in fact, nothing less than willing without a *motive*, and thus an effect without a cause. *Interest* and *motive* are interchangeable concepts: does not *interest* mean what concerns me, what matters to me? And is this not, in general, everything that stimulates and moves my will? What, then, is an *interest* but the action of a motive on the will? Wherever a *motive* moves the will, it has an *interest*; but where no *motive* moves it, it can surely no more act than a stone can move from its place without being pushed or pulled. I hardly need to demonstrate this to learned readers. But it follows that every action, since it must necessarily have a *motive*, also necessarily presupposes an *interest*. *Kant*, however, proposes a second, entirely new kind of action, performed without any *interest* at all—that is, without a *motive*. And these are supposed to be the actions of justice and human kindness! To refute this monstrous assumption, one need only reduce it to its actual meaning, which a play on the word *interest* had concealed.—Meanwhile *Kant* celebrates (S. 74 ff.;—R., S. 62) the triumph of his autonomy of the will by establishing a moral Utopia under the name of a *kingdom of ends*. It is populated entirely by *rational beings* in the abstract, who one and all continually will, without *willing anything* whatever—that is, without an *interest*. They will only this one thing: that everyone should always will according to a maxim—that is, autonomy. It is difficult not to write satire.

But his *autonomy* of the will leads *Kant* to something else, with more troublesome consequences than this little innocent kingdom of ends, which, being perfectly harmless, may be left undisturbed: namely, the concept of *human dignity*. This rests solely on a human being's *autonomy*, and consists in his having himself given the law he is to obey—so that his relation to it is like that of subjects under a constitution to their law.—As an embellishment of the Kantian moral system, this might well be allowed to stand. Yet once *Kant* had uttered the expression “*human dignity*,” it became the shibboleth of all helpless and thoughtless moralists. They concealed their lack of a real foundation for morality, or at least of one that said anything at all, behind that imposing expression “*human dignity*,” shrewdly counting on their readers' pleasure in seeing themselves clothed in such *dignity*, and thus being satisfied with it.¹¹ Let us nevertheless examine this concept a little more closely and test its reality.—*Kant* (S. 79;—R., S. 66) defines *dignity* as “an unconditional, incomparable *value*.” This is an explanation whose sublime sound is so imposing that scarcely anyone ventures to approach and examine it at close range. If he did, he would find that it, too, is merely a hollow hyperbole, with a contradiction in terms nesting within it like a gnawing worm. Every *value* is the assessment of one thing in comparison with another, and is thus a comparative concept, hence relative; this relativity constitutes the very essence of the concept of *value*. The Stoics already taught correctly (according to Diog. Laert., L. VII, c. 106): value is an appraiser's exchange valuation, as determined by someone experienced in such matters; it is like saying that wheat is exchanged for barley together with a mule (valuation is the recompense for something appraised, whatever an expert in such matters may determine; this is like saying that wheat is exchanged for barley with a mule added). An *incomparable, unconditional, absolute value*, such as dignity is supposed to be, is accordingly, like so much in philosophy, a task set in words for a thought that *cannot* be thought at all, any more than the highest number or the largest space.

“Yet just where concepts fail,
A *word* arrives at the right time.”

So here, too, “human dignity” had put a most welcome *word* into circulation, on which any moral system, spun out through every class of duties and every case of casuistry, now found a broad foundation from which it could comfortably continue preaching.

At the close of his exposition (S. 124;—R., S. 97), *Kant* says: “But how *pure reason*, without other incentives taken from anywhere else, can be *practical* by itself; that is, how the mere principle of the *universal validity of all its maxims* as laws, without any object of the will in which one could take an interest in advance, can by itself supply an incentive and produce an interest that would be called purely moral—or, in other words, how *pure reason* can be *practical*—this is something all human reason is powerless to explain, and all effort and labor are lost.”—Now one would think that if something whose existence is asserted *cannot* even be conceived as possible, its actuality must at least have been established as a fact. Yet the categorical imperative of practical reason is expressly *not* put forward as a fact of consciousness or otherwise grounded in experience. On the contrary, we are warned often enough that it is *not* to be sought by such an anthropological and empirical route—for example, S. VI of the preface;—R., S. 5, and S. 59, 60;—R., S. 52. Furthermore, we are repeatedly assured—for example, S. 48;—R., S. 44—“that no example, and thus no empirical means, can establish whether there is any such imperative at all.” And on S. 49;—R., S. 45, “that the actuality of the categorical imperative is *not* given in experience.”—Taking all this together, one really might begin to suspect that *Kant* is making fools of his readers. Although this might well be permissible and right when dealing with today’s German philosophical public, in *Kant*’s time that public had not yet distinguished itself as it has since; and, besides, ethics was precisely the subject least suited to a joke. We must therefore hold to the conviction that what can neither be conceived as *possible* nor demonstrated as *actual* has no warrant for its existence.—But even if we merely try to grasp it through imagination, picturing a person whose mind is possessed, as if by a demon, by an *absolute ought* speaking entirely in categorical imperatives and continually demanding to direct his actions against his inclinations and desires,

we see in this no true image of human nature or of what takes place within us. Rather, we recognize an artificial substitute for theological morality, related to it as a wooden leg is to a living one.

Our result, then, is that Kantian ethics, like all earlier ethics, lacks any secure foundation. As I showed by examining its *imperative form* at the very outset, it is at bottom merely a reversal of theological morality and a disguise of it in highly abstract formulas apparently discovered a priori. This disguise had to be all the more artful and unrecognizable because *Kant* was assuredly deceiving even himself, and *really* believed he could establish the concepts of the *command of duty* and of *law*—which plainly have meaning only in theological morality—independently of all theology and ground them in pure knowledge a priori. Against this I have sufficiently demonstrated that, in his hands, these concepts float freely in the air, lacking any real foundation. Under his own hands, indeed, the disguised *theological morality* unveils itself toward the end, in the doctrine of the *highest good*, in the postulates of *practical reason*, and finally in moral theology. Yet none of this disabused either him or the public about the true connection of the matter. On the contrary, both rejoiced to see all these articles of faith now grounded in ethics, if only ideally and for practical purposes. For in all innocence they took the consequence for the ground and the ground for the consequence, failing to see that all these alleged deductions from that ethics already underlay it as tacit and hidden, yet indispensable, presuppositions.

If, now, at the close of this searching examination, taxing even for the reader, I may be permitted a playful, indeed frivolous analogy to lighten the mood, I would compare Kant, in his self-mystification, to a man at a masked ball who spends the entire evening courting a masked beauty, imagining he is making a conquest, until at last she unmask and reveals herself—as his wife.

- 11 The first to make the concept of “*human dignity*” expressly and exclusively the cornerstone of ethics, and to develop his ethics accordingly, seems to have been G. W. Block, in his “New Groundwork of Moral Philosophy,” 1802.

Section 9



Kant's doctrine of conscience.

The supposed practical reason, with its categorical imperative, is plainly most closely related to *conscience*, though it differs essentially from conscience, first, in this: the categorical imperative, as a command, necessarily speaks *before the deed*, whereas *conscience* properly speaks only afterward. *Before the deed* it can speak, at most, *indirectly*, through reflection, which holds before it the memory of earlier cases in which similar deeds afterward met with conscience's disapproval. Even the etymology of the word "*Gewissen*" (*conscience*) seems to me to rest on this, since only what has already happened is "*gewiß*" (*certain*). For in every person, even the best, impure, base, malicious thoughts and wishes arise through some outward occasion, a passion aroused, or an inward ill humor. Yet he is not morally responsible for these, nor may they burden his *conscience*. They show only what *a human being in general* might be capable of doing, not what the person who thinks them could do. For in him other motives oppose them, though these do not enter consciousness at that very moment and together with them; thus they can never become deeds. They resemble, therefore, the outvoted minority of an assembly passing a resolution. Only through *deeds* does each person come to know himself empirically, as he does others, and only deeds burden the *conscience*. They alone are not problematic, as thoughts are, but, in contrast to them, *certain*: they stand unalterably, are not merely thought but *known*. It is the same with the Latin *conscientia*, "con-

science”: it is Horace’s “to know oneself guilty, to pale with guilt.” So too with the Greek συνείδησις, “conscience.” It is a person’s knowledge of what he has done. Second, *conscience* always draws its material from experience, which the supposed categorical imperative cannot do, since it is purely a priori.—Meanwhile, we may presume that *Kant’s* doctrine of *conscience* will also cast light back upon that concept he newly introduced. His principal account of conscience appears in the “Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue,” §. 13; in the criticism that now follows, I *assume that the reader has these few pages at hand*.

This Kantian account of conscience makes an extraordinarily imposing impression, before which people stood in reverent awe, all the less daring to raise an objection because they had to fear that a theoretical objection would be mistaken for a practical one, and that anyone who denied the correctness of Kant’s account would be thought to have no conscience. That cannot disconcert me, since the question here is one of theory, not practice, and our aim is not to preach morality but rigorously to examine the ultimate grounds of ethics.

To begin with, *Kant* continually employs *Latin legal expressions*, which seem ill suited to rendering the most secret stirrings of the human heart. Yet he retains this language and this judicial presentation from beginning to end: they therefore seem essential and peculiar to the matter. Within the mind we are shown a complete court of law, with trial, judge, prosecutor, defense counsel, and verdict. If the inward process really took place as *Kant* describes it, we would have to wonder that anyone could still be, I will not say so *wicked*, but so *stupid* as to act against *conscience*. For such a supernatural institution of a wholly singular kind within our self-consciousness, such a masked Vehmic tribunal in the mysterious darkness of our interior, would have to fill everyone with horror and superstitious dread. This would surely deter him from snatching brief, fleeting advantages against the prohibition and under the threats of fearful supernatural powers announcing themselves so plainly and so close at hand.—In reality, by contrast, we find the power of conscience generally considered so weak that all peoples have taken care to reinforce it through positive religion, or even to

replace it altogether in this way. Nor, if conscience were constituted in this manner, could the Royal Society ever have conceived the present prize question.

On closer examination of Kant's account, however, we find that its imposing effect is achieved chiefly by *Kant's* assigning to moral self-judgment, as something peculiar and essential to it, a form that is nothing of the kind. This form can merely be fitted to it, just as to any other rumination, wholly foreign to morality proper, upon what we have done and might have done differently. For not only will an obviously spurious, artificial conscience founded on mere superstition—for instance, when a Hindu reproaches himself for having occasioned the murder of a cow, or a Jew remembers having smoked a pipe in his house on the Sabbath—occasionally assume the same form of accusation, defense, and judgment; even a self-examination proceeding from no ethical standpoint whatever, indeed, one of an immoral rather than a moral kind, will often appear in this form. Suppose, for example, that, good-naturedly but thoughtlessly, I have stood surety for a friend, and now, in the evening, I realize what a grave responsibility I have assumed and how easily it may bring me the great loss foretold by the ancient voice of wisdom: "Stand surety, and ruin is at hand!" Then the prosecutor likewise appears within me, and opposite him the advocate, who tries to put a favorable face on my rash undertaking by pleading the pressure of circumstances and obligations, the harmlessness of the matter, even by praising my good nature. Finally the judge appears too, and implacably pronounces the verdict "A stupid move!" beneath which I collapse.

And what holds for the judicial form *Kant* favors holds also for most of the rest of his description. For example, what he says at the very beginning of the paragraph about conscience, as something peculiar to it, applies equally to every scruple of an entirely different kind. It can be understood quite literally of a person living on investments who secretly knows that his expenses far exceed the interest, that he is drawing on his capital, and that it must gradually melt away: "It follows him like his shadow when he thinks of escaping; he can indeed numb himself or lull himself to sleep through pleasures and distractions, but he cannot avoid coming to himself or awakening now and then,

when he at once hears its terrible voice,” and so on.—Having now described that judicial form as essential to the matter, and therefore retained it from beginning to end, Kant uses it for the following cunningly contrived sophism. He says: “But to represent the person accused by his conscience as *one and the same person as the judge* is an absurd way of representing a court of law; for then the prosecutor would always lose.” He elucidates this further in a very convoluted and obscure note. From this he concludes that, to avoid contradiction, we must think of the inward judge—in that courtroom drama of conscience—as distinct from ourselves, as *someone else*, and think of this other as a knower of hearts, all-knowing, binding everyone to duty, and, as the executive power, almighty. Thus, on an entirely smooth road, he now leads his reader from conscience to superstitious dread as its wholly necessary consequence, secretly trusting that the reader will follow him there all the more willingly because his earliest upbringing has made such concepts familiar, indeed second nature. Here, then, *Kant* has an easy game—one he should have scorned, taking care not merely to *preach* honesty here, but to *practice* it.—I flatly deny the proposition quoted above, on which all those conclusions rest; indeed, I declare it a subterfuge. It is not true that the prosecutor must always lose if the accused and the judge are one person—at least not in the inward court. Did the prosecutor lose in my example of standing surety?—Or, to avoid contradiction, did we have to introduce such a personification here too, necessarily imagining *someone else*, objectively, as the one whose verdict was that thunderous “A stupid move!”? Perhaps a Mercury in the flesh? Or a personification of the Metis (“cunning”) recommended by Homer (Il., 23, 313 seq.), and thus take the road of superstitious dread here too, though of a pagan kind?

That *Kant*, in his account, takes care to disclaim any objective validity for his moral theology, already briefly indicated here in its essentials, and presents it only as a subjectively necessary form, does not absolve him of the arbitrariness with which he constructs it, even if only as subjectively necessary; for he does so by means of entirely groundless assumptions.

This much, then, is certain: the whole judicial and dramatic form in which *Kant* presents conscience, retaining it throughout and to the very end as one with the matter itself in order finally to draw conclusions from it, is wholly inessential to conscience and in no way peculiar to it. Rather, it is a much more general form, readily assumed by deliberation on any practical concern, and arising chiefly from the conflict of opposing motives that usually occurs in such cases, whose weight reflective reason successively examines. It makes no difference whether these motives are moral or egoistic, or whether the matter is a deliberation on what remains to be done or a rumination on what has already been accomplished. But strip *Kant's* account of this dramatic and judicial form, arbitrarily bestowed upon it, and the halo surrounding it disappears along with its imposing effect. All that remains is this: when reflecting on our actions, we are sometimes seized by a dissatisfaction with ourselves of a special kind. Its peculiarity is that it concerns not the outcome but the action itself, and does not rest, like every other dissatisfaction in which we regret the imprudence of our conduct, on *egoistic grounds*. For here we are dissatisfied precisely because we acted too egoistically, considered our own welfare too much and that of others too little, or even, without advantage to ourselves, made others' suffering an end for its own sake. That we can be dissatisfied with ourselves over this, and grieve over sufferings we have not *undergone* but *caused*, is the naked fact, and no one will deny it. Later we shall examine its connection with the only basis of ethics that stands the test. *Kant*, however, like a shrewd advocate, has sought, by embellishing and magnifying the original fact, to make as much of it as possible, so as to secure in advance a very broad basis for his morality and moral theology.

Section 10



Kant's doctrine of the intelligible and empirical character.—Theory of freedom.

Having, in the service of truth, made attacks on Kantian ethics that do not, like earlier attacks, merely strike its surface but undermine its deepest foundation, I think justice requires that I not take leave of it without recalling *Kant's* greatest and most brilliant contribution to ethics. This consists in the doctrine of the coexistence of freedom and necessity, which he first sets out in the Critique of Pure Reason (S. 533–554 of the first and S. 561–582 of the fifth edition), but presents still more clearly in the Critique of Practical Reason (fourth edition, S. 169–179; R., S. 224–231).

First *Hobbes*, then *Spinoza*, then *Hume*, also *Holbach* in *Syst. d. la nat.*, and finally, most fully and thoroughly, *Priestley*, had so clearly proved and placed beyond doubt the complete and strict necessity of acts of will when motives arise that it must be counted among the fully demonstrated truths. Only ignorance and crudity, therefore, could continue to speak of freedom in individual human actions, of a free will of indifference. *Kant* too, in consequence of his predecessors' irrefutable arguments, accepted the complete necessity of acts of will as a settled matter, no longer open to doubt, as is proved by all the passages in which he speaks of freedom from the *theoretical* standpoint alone. Yet it remains true that our actions are accompanied by a consciousness of acting on our own authority and of originating them ourselves, through which we recog-

nize them as our work, and each person feels, with unerring certainty, that he is the actual doer of his deeds and morally *responsible* for them. But since *responsibility* presupposes a possibility of having acted otherwise, and thus freedom in some form, the consciousness of *responsibility* also contains, indirectly, that of freedom. The key, at last discovered, to resolving this contradiction arising from the matter itself was Kant's profound distinction between appearance and thing in itself, the innermost core of his entire philosophy and its chief merit.

The individual, with its unalterable, inborn character, strictly determined in all its expressions by the law of causality—which here, being mediated by the intellect, is called motivation—is only the appearance. The thing in itself underlying this appearance, being outside space and time, is free of all succession and multiplicity of acts, one and unalterable. Its constitution in itself is the *intelligible character*, equally present in all the individual's deeds and impressed upon them all like a signet in a thousand seals. It determines the *empirical character* of this appearance, which manifests itself in time and in the succession of acts. Hence the appearance must display the constancy of a law of nature in all its expressions, called forth by motives; and all its acts therefore occur with strict necessity. In this way, that unalterability, that inflexible rigidity of every person's empirical character, which thoughtful minds had always perceived—while the rest supposed that a person's character could be transformed through rational representations and moral admonitions—was traced to a rational ground, and thus established for philosophy as well. Philosophy was thereby brought into accord with experience, so that it was no longer put to shame by popular wisdom, which had long expressed that truth in the Spanish proverb: "What enters with the baby's cap leaves with the shroud" (What comes in with the infant's cap goes out again with the burial cloth), or: "What is suckled with the milk is poured out into the shroud" (What is imbibed with the milk is poured out again into the burial cloth).

I regard this doctrine of *Kant's* concerning the coexistence of freedom and necessity as the greatest of all achievements of profound human thought. It and the Transcendental Aesthetic are the two great diamonds in the crown of

Kant's fame, which will never cease to resound.—As is well known, *Schelling*, in his treatise on freedom, gave a paraphrase of that doctrine of *Kant's* whose vivid coloring and concrete presentation make it more accessible to many. I would praise it if *Schelling* had had the honesty to say that he was presenting *Kant's* wisdom here, not his own, for which part of the philosophical public still takes it today.

But this Kantian doctrine, and the nature of freedom in general, can also be made more comprehensible by connecting them with a universal truth whose most concise expression I find in a proposition often stated by the Scholastics: *operari sequitur esse*—acting follows being. That is, everything in the world acts according to what it is, according to its constitution, in which all its expressions are therefore already contained potentially, though they emerge in actuality when external causes call them forth; and in this way that very constitution reveals itself. This is the *empirical character*, while its inward, ultimate ground, inaccessible to experience, is the *intelligible character*, that is, the essence in itself of the thing. In this respect the human being is no exception to the rest of nature: he too has his unalterable character, though it is wholly individual and different in each person. For our apprehension this character is precisely *empirical*, but for that very reason only appearance; what it may be in its essence in itself, however, is called the *intelligible character*. All his actions, determined in their outward constitution by motives, can never turn out otherwise than in accordance with this unalterable individual character: as a person is, so he must act. Thus, for a given individual in any given particular case, only one action is possible at all: acting follows being. Freedom belongs not to the empirical but solely to the intelligible character. A given person's *operari*, his acting, is necessarily determined from without by motives, from within by his character; hence everything he *does* occurs necessarily. But in his *esse*, his being, lies freedom. He could have been someone else; and in what he is lie guilt and merit. For everything he *does* follows from it of itself, as a mere corollary.—*Kant's* theory really turns us back from the fundamental error that placed necessity in being and freedom in acting, and leads us to recognize that the relation is exactly the reverse. Thus a person's moral responsibility concerns, at first and

ostensibly, what he *does*, but at bottom what he *is*; for, given this, his conduct, when the motives arose, could never have turned out otherwise than it did. Yet however strict the necessity with which motives call forth deeds in a given character, it will never occur to anyone, not even to someone convinced of this necessity, to try to exculpate himself by it and shift the blame onto the motives. For he clearly recognizes that, as far as the matter and its occasions were concerned, thus objectively, a quite different, even an opposite action was perfectly possible, and indeed would have occurred if only *he had been someone else*. But that, as the action reveals, *he is such a person and not another*—this is what he feels responsible for. Here, in being, lies the spot struck by the sting of conscience. For conscience is nothing but an acquaintance with one's own self, arising from one's own manner of acting and growing ever more intimate. Thus, though acting occasions conscience's accusation, being is what it really accuses. Since we are conscious of *freedom* only through *responsibility*, freedom must lie where responsibility lies: in being. Acting falls to necessity. But we come to know ourselves, like others, only *empirically*, and have no knowledge of our character prior to experience. Rather, we begin by holding a very high opinion of it, since the maxim "Everyone is presumed good until the contrary is proved" holds even before the inward tribunal.

Note.

Anyone capable of recognizing the essential content of a thought beneath quite different forms of expression will see with me that this Kantian doctrine of intelligible and empirical character is an insight, raised to abstract clarity, that Plato already possessed. Yet because he had not recognized the ideality of time, he could present it only in a temporal form, thus only mythically and in connection with the transmigration of souls. Our recognition of the identity of the two doctrines is greatly clarified by the explanation and elaboration of the Platonic myth that Porphyry gave with such clarity and precision that its agreement with Kant's abstract doctrine emerges unmistakably in his account. Stobaeus has preserved this discussion in full from a work of Porphyry's no longer extant, in the second book of his *Eclogues*, Kap. 8, §§. 37–40. In it Porphyry comments closely and in detail on the myth in question here, given

by Plato in the second half of the tenth book of the Republic; this passage is well worth reading. As a sample I quote its short §. 39, to encourage the interested reader to take up Stobaeus himself. He will then recognize that this Platonic myth can be regarded as an allegory of the great and profound insight that Kant set forth in its abstract purity as the doctrine of intelligible and empirical character; consequently, that Plato had already attained it in its essentials thousands of years ago, and indeed that it reaches back much further still, since Porphyry believes that Plato received it from the Egyptians. But it is already contained in Brahmanism's doctrine of the transmigration of souls, from which the wisdom of the Egyptian priests most probably descends.—The §. 39 in question reads:

“For Plato's entire intention seems to be this: before falling into bodies and differing lives, souls have the power of self-determination to choose this life or another, which they are to live out with a certain form of life and a body suited to that life (for it is in their power to choose the life of a lion or of a human being). Yet that power of self-determination is fettered as soon as they fall into one of these lives. For when they have descended into bodies and, from being unfettered souls, have become the souls of living creatures, they possess a power of self-determination suited to the creature's constitution: in some it is many-sided in thought and movement, as in the human being; in others, limited in movement and confined to a single course, as in almost all other living creatures. This power of self-determination depends upon the constitution: its movement comes from itself, but it is carried along according to the inclinations arising from that constitution.” (For Plato's view as a whole seems to be this: before entering bodies and definite kinds of life, souls have the power to choose either this life or another, which they are to live in a body suited to that life [for they may choose the life of a lion as well as that of a human being]; but as soon as a particular life is attained, that freedom is taken away. Once they have descended into bodies and, from being free souls, have become the souls of animals, they acquire a freedom suited to the animal's organic constitution. In some creatures this freedom is highly intelligent and mobile, as in the human being; in others it is simple and little mobile, as in almost all other animals. This

freedom depends upon the animal's organic constitution in such a way that, though it moves of itself, it is carried along in accordance with that constitution's appetites.)

Section 11



Fichte's Ethics as a Magnifying Mirror for the Errors of Kant's.

Just as, in anatomy and zoology, certain things are less apparent to the student in preparations and natural specimens than in engravings that portray them with some exaggeration, so I can recommend Fichte's "System of Ethics" to anyone who, after the critique given in the preceding sections, has not yet fully grasped the worthlessness of Kant's foundation of ethics, as a means of making this insight clear.

In the old German puppet play, the emperor, or whatever other hero appeared, was always accompanied by the buffoon Hanswurst, who afterward repeated, in his own manner and with exaggeration, everything the hero had said or done; and so, behind the great *Kant*, stands the originator of the "Wissenschaftslehre"—the "doctrine of knowledge," or, more properly, "Wissenschaftsleere," the "emptiness of knowledge." This man's plan—to attract attention by a philosophical mystification and thereby establish his own and his family's prosperity—was entirely suited to the German philosophical public and, in dealing with it, quite commendable. He carried it out chiefly by *outbidding* Kant in every respect, presenting himself as Kant's living superlative and, by enlarging the prominent features, producing a caricature of Kantian philosophy in the strictest sense; and he accomplished the same in ethics. In his "System of Ethics" we find the categorical imperative grown into a despotic impera-

tive: the absolute ought, legislative reason, and the command of duty have developed into a *moral fate*, an unfathomable necessity that the human race act in strict accordance with certain maxims (S. 308–309). Judging by the moral preparations, a great deal must depend on this, although nowhere do we actually learn what. All we see is that, just as bees have an innate drive to build cells and a hive together, human beings supposedly have an innate drive to perform together a great, rigorously moral world comedy, in which we would be mere marionettes and nothing more; though with the significant difference that the beehive really does come into being, whereas, instead of the moral world comedy, a supremely immoral one is actually performed. Here, then, we see the imperative form of Kantian ethics, the moral law and absolute ought, carried further until it has become a system of *moral fatalism*, whose elaboration sometimes passes into comedy.¹²

If a certain moral pedantry can be detected in *Kant's* ethics, in *Fichte* the most ridiculous moral pedantry provides abundant material for satire. Read, for example, S. 407–409, the decision in the familiar casuistic example in which one of two human lives must be lost. Likewise, we find all *Kant's* errors raised to the superlative: for example, S. 199: “To act according to the impulses of sympathy, compassion, and human kindness is absolutely not moral, but to that extent contrary to morality.”!—S. 402: “The incentive to helpfulness must never be an unreflecting good nature, but the clearly conceived purpose of furthering the causality of reason as much as possible.”—Yet amid these pedantries, *Fichte's* real philosophical crudity—as one would expect in a man whose teaching never left him time to learn—plainly shows through: he seriously asserts freedom of indifferent choice and supports it with the most commonplace arguments (S. 160, 173, 205, 208, 237, 259, 261).—Anyone not yet fully convinced that a motive, though acting through the medium of cognition, is a cause like any other, and consequently entails the same necessity of its effect as any other, so that all human actions occur with strict necessity, is still philosophically crude and unschooled in the elements of philosophical knowledge. Insight into the strict necessity of human actions is the dividing line separating philosophical minds from the rest; and on reaching it, *Fichte* clearly showed

that he belonged to the rest. That he then, following *Kant's* lead (S. 303), again says things directly contradicting the passages above proves, like so many other contradictions in his writings, only that, as someone never serious about investigating truth, he had no settled fundamental conviction at all; nor was one in the least necessary for his purposes. Nothing is more ridiculous than the praise bestowed on this man for the strictest consistency: his pedantic tone, demonstrating trivialities at length, was duly mistaken for it.

The fullest development of *Fichte's* system of *moral fatalism* is found in his last work, "The Doctrine of Knowledge Presented in Its General Outline," Berlin 1810—which has the advantage of being only 46 S. 12° long while containing his entire philosophy in a nutshell. It is therefore recommended to all who consider their time too precious to squander on this man's larger productions, composed with Christian Wolff's prolixity and tediousness and really intended to deceive the reader, not to instruct him. In this little work, then, we read on S. 32: "The intuition of a world of sense existed only so that, in this world, the I might become visible to itself as *absolutely subject to an ought*."—S. 33 even gives us "the ought of the visibility of the ought," and S. 36 "an ought to perceive that I ought."—This, then, is where, as an example imitable in its faults, the *imperative form* of *Kant's* ethics led immediately after *Kant*, with its unproven ought, which it had begged for as a most convenient place to stand.

For the rest, nothing said here overturns *Fichte's* achievement: by windbag superlatives, by extravagances, and by the nonsense masquerading as profundity in his "Foundation of the Entire Doctrine of Knowledge," he obscured, indeed displaced, *Kant's* philosophy, that late masterpiece of human depth of thought, among the nation in which it appeared. He thereby showed the world irrefutably just how competent the German philosophical public is, making it play the part of a child coaxed into giving up a precious jewel by the offer of a Nuremberg toy. The fame he thereby acquired lives on to this day, on credit, and to this day *Fichte* is always named alongside *Kant*, as another of the same kind (Heracles and an ape!—i. e. Hercules and an ape!), and indeed is often placed above him.¹³ His example has therefore also called forth those successors in the art of philosophically mystifying the German public, animated by the

same spirit and crowned with the same success, whom everyone knows and whom this is not the place to discuss at length; although their respective opinions are still expounded at length and seriously discussed by philosophy professors, as though we really were dealing with philosophers. It is thus to Fichte that we owe the existence of clear documentary evidence to be reviewed one day before the tribunal of posterity, that court of cassation for the judgments of contemporaries, which, in almost every age, has had to be for genuine merit what the Last Judgment is for the saints.

- ¹² To substantiate what I have said, I will make room here for just a few passages. S. 196: "The moral drive is absolute; it demands unconditionally, without any end outside itself."—S. 232: "Now, according to the moral law, the empirical being existing in time ought to become an exact impression of the original I."—S. 308: "The whole human being is a vehicle of the moral law."—S. 342: "I am only an instrument, a mere tool of the moral law, absolutely not an end."—S. 343: "Everyone is an end as a means of realizing reason: this is the ultimate end of his existence; for this alone he is here, and if this were not to happen, he need not exist at all."—S. 347: "I am a tool of the moral law in the world of sense!"—S. 360: "It is an ordinance of the moral law to nourish the body and promote its health: it goes without saying that this may be done in no sense and for no other purpose than to be an effective tool for furthering the end of reason."—(Vergl. S. 371) S. 376: "Every human body is a tool for furthering the end of reason: hence the greatest possible fitness of every tool for this purpose must be an end for me; I must therefore care for everyone."—This is his derivation of human kindness!—S. 377: "I can and may care for myself solely because, and insofar as, I am a tool of the moral law."—S. 388: "To defend a persecuted person at the risk of one's own life is an absolute duty:—as soon as human life is in danger, you no longer have the right to think of the safety of your own."—S. 420: "Within the domain of the moral law there is no view of my fellow human being at all except that he is a tool of reason."

¹³ I substantiate this with a passage from the very latest philosophical literature. Mr. Feuerbach, a Hegelian (that says it all), expresses himself as follows in his book “P. Bayle, A Contribution to the History of Philosophy,” 1838, S. 80: “Yet more sublime than *Kant’s* are *Fichte’s* ideas, which he expressed in his ethics and here and there in his other writings. In sublimity, Christianity has nothing it could set beside *Fichte’s* ideas.”

Section 12



III.

The Foundation of Ethics.

Requirements.

Thus *Kant's* foundation of ethics, too, held for sixty years to be its firm bedrock, sinks before our eyes into the deep, perhaps unfillable abyss of philosophical errors, proving to be an inadmissible assumption and a mere disguise for theological morality.—As I have said, I may take it as known that earlier attempts to establish a foundation for ethics are still less satisfactory. For the most part, they consist of unproven assertions plucked out of thin air, and at the same time, like *Kant's* own foundation, artificial subtleties demanding the finest distinctions and resting on the most abstract concepts, difficult combinations, heuristic rules, propositions balancing on a needlepoint, and maxims on stilts, from whose height actual life and its bustle can no longer be seen. They are therefore indeed admirably suited to echoing through lecture halls and providing an exercise in acuteness: but such things cannot produce the summons to do right and do good that nonetheless really exists in every human being, nor can they counterbalance the powerful impulses toward injustice and harshness, nor yet underlie the reproaches of conscience; to try to trace these back to the violation of such hair-splitting maxims can serve only to make them ridiculous. Artificial combinations of concepts of that kind, then, if we take the matter seriously, can never contain the true *impulse* toward justice and human kind-

ness. Rather, this must be something that requires little reflection and still less abstraction and combination, something that, independent of the cultivation of the understanding, speaks to everyone, even the most uncultivated person, rests solely on perceptual apprehension, and presses itself upon us directly from the reality of things. Until ethics can exhibit a foundation of this kind, it may dispute and parade in lecture halls: actual life will mock it. I must therefore offer moral philosophers the paradoxical advice to begin by taking a little look around at human life.

Section 13



The Skeptical View.

Or might it perhaps follow, from a look back at the attempts made in vain for more than two thousand years to find a secure foundation for morality, that there is no natural morality at all, none independent of human ordinance, but that morality is through and through an artifact, a device invented for the better taming of the selfish and malicious human race, and that without the support of the positive religions it would therefore fall away, since it would have no inner warrant and no natural foundation? Justice and police cannot suffice everywhere: there are offenses whose detection is too difficult, and even some whose punishment is a delicate matter, so that here public protection leaves us. Moreover, civil law can compel at most justice, but not loving-kindness and beneficence, if only because in these everyone would wish to be the passive party and no one the active. This has given rise to the hypothesis that morality rests on religion alone, and that the purpose of the two is to be the complement to the necessary insufficiency of the state's institutions and legislation. A natural morality, that is, one founded merely on the nature of things or of human beings, could therefore not exist; which would explain why philosophers strive in vain to seek its foundation. This opinion is not without plausibility: the Pyrrhonists already put it forward: Nothing is good by nature, and nothing bad,

but these things are decided by human beings, through opinion,

according to Timon (nothing is good by nature, nor anything bad, “but these things are decided by human discretion,”—according to Timon). Sext. Emp. adv. Math., XI, 140, and in more recent times, too, distinguished thinkers have declared for it. It therefore deserves careful examination, even if it would be more comfortable to dispose of it with an inquisitorial sidelong glance at the conscience of those in whom such a thought could arise.

One would be caught in a great and very youthful error to believe that all just and lawful actions of human beings are of moral origin. Rather, between the justice that people practice and genuine *uprightness* of heart there is for the most part a relation analogous to that between the expressions of politeness and genuine love of one’s neighbor, which, unlike politeness, overcomes egoism not in appearance but in fact. The rectitude of disposition displayed everywhere, which wants to stand above every doubt, together with the lofty indignation that the faintest hint of suspicion in this regard arouses, and that is ready to flare into the most fiery wrath—all this only the inexperienced and simple will at once take for hard coin and the effect of a delicate moral feeling or conscience. In truth, the rectitude that is general, practiced in human intercourse and asserted as a rock-solid maxim, rests chiefly on two external necessities: first, on legal order, by which public power protects everyone’s rights; and second, on the recognized necessity of a good name, or civic honor, for getting on in the world, by which everyone’s steps are kept under the supervision of public opinion—which, inexorably strict, never forgives even a single misstep in this matter, but holds it against the guilty as an indelible stain until death. In this it is truly wise: for it proceeds from the principle that acting follows being (*operari sequitur esse*), and hence from the conviction that character is unchangeable, and that what someone has done once, they will inevitably do again under entirely identical circumstances. These two guardians, then, are what keep watch over public rectitude, and without them we should, frankly speaking, be in a bad way, above all with regard to property, that chief point in human life around which its doings and dealings mainly turn. For the purely ethical motives for honesty, supposing they exist, can in most cases find their application to civil property only after a long detour. They can, that is, relate

first and immediately only to *natural* right, and to *positive* right only indirectly, namely insofar as the former underlies it. But *natural* right attaches to no property other than what has been acquired by one's own effort, an attack on which also attacks the powers the owner expended on it, and so robs the owner of them.—The theory of prior occupation I reject unconditionally, but I cannot enter here into its refutation.¹⁴—Now, to be sure, every possession founded on positive right is supposed, however many intermediate links there may be, to rest in the end and at its first source on the natural right of property. But in most cases, how far our civil possessions lie from that primal source of the natural right of property! For the most part they have with it a connection very hard or quite impossible to demonstrate: our property is inherited, married into, won in the lottery, or, if not that, then acquired not by real labor in the sweat of one's brow but by clever thoughts and notions, for example in speculative trading, and sometimes even by stupid notions which, by way of chance, the god of Outcome (Deus Eventus) has crowned and glorified. In the fewest cases is it really the fruit of actual effort and work, and even then this is often only mental, like that of lawyers, physicians, officials, teachers, which in the eyes of the crude person seems to cost little exertion. It takes considerable education to recognize the ethical right in all such property and, accordingly, to respect it from a purely moral impulse.—Accordingly, many quietly regard the property of others as held by positive right alone. If they therefore find means to wrest it from them by exploiting, or even merely circumventing, the laws, they have no scruples: for it seems to them that the others would be losing it by the same road by which they had earlier gained it, and so they regard their own claims as just as well founded as those of the former owner. From their standpoint, in civil society the right of the shrewder has taken the place of the right of the stronger.—Meanwhile the rich are often truly of an inviolable rectitude, because they are devoted with all their hearts to a rule and uphold a maxim on whose observance their entire property, with the many advantages it gives them over others, rests; hence they profess the principle “to each what is theirs” in full earnest and do not depart from it. There really is such an *objective* attachment to good faith, with the resolve to hold it sacred, resting merely on this:

that good faith is the foundation of all free intercourse among human beings, of good order and of secure property, so that it very often benefits ourselves and in this respect must be upheld even at some sacrifice, just as one, after all, puts some expense into a good field. Yet uprightness so grounded will, as a rule, be found only among people who are well off, or at least engaged in a profitable occupation, most of all among merchants, who have the plainest conviction that trade and traffic find their indispensable support in mutual trust and credit; which is why mercantile honor is quite a special kind.—The poor, by contrast, who have come off short in the business and, by virtue of the inequality of possessions, see themselves condemned to want and heavy labor while others, before their eyes, live in abundance and idleness, will hardly recognize that a corresponding inequality of merit and honest earnings underlies this inequality. But if they do not recognize this, where are they then to get the purely ethical impulse to honesty that keeps them from stretching out a hand toward another's abundance? Mostly it is legal order that holds them back. But when once the rare opportunity comes in which, safe from the operation of the law, they could by a single deed roll off themselves the crushing burden of want, which the sight of another's abundance makes still more palpable, and put themselves too in possession of the pleasures so often envied, what will hold their hand back then? Religious dogmas? Faith is seldom so firm. A purely moral motive for justice? Perhaps in isolated cases; but in the great majority it will be only the concern for their good name, their civic honor—a concern that matters greatly even to the lowly—the evident danger of being cast out forever, by such a deed, from the great Masonic lodge of honest people, who follow the law of rectitude and, in accordance with it, have divided property among themselves over the whole earth and administer it; the danger of being, as a result of a single dishonest act, a pariah of civil society for life, one whom no one trusts any longer, whose company everyone flees, and to whom all advancement is thereby cut off—that is, in a word, “a fellow who has stolen,”—and to whom the proverb applies: “Whoever steals once is a thief for life.”

These, then, are the guardians of public rectitude; and whoever has lived with open eyes will admit that by far the greater part of honesty in human intercourse is owed to them alone—indeed, that there is no lack of people who hope to slip even their vigilance, and who therefore regard justice and uprightness merely as a shop sign, as a flag under whose protection one carries out one's privateering with all the better success. We need not, then, flare up at once in holy zeal and fly into a rage if a moralist once raises the problem whether all uprightness and justice might not at bottom be merely conventional, and then, pursuing this principle further, strives to trace the whole remainder of morality back to remoter, indirect, but in the end still egoistic grounds, as Holbach, Helvetius, d'Alembert and others of their time have acutely attempted. Of the greater part of just actions this is in fact really true and correct, as I have shown above. That it is true also of a considerable part of the actions of loving-kindness admits of no doubt; for they often spring from ostentation, very often from belief in a future retribution, which would be paid out perhaps even in the square or, better still, the cube, and they admit still other egoistic grounds besides. But it is just as certain that there are actions of disinterested loving-kindness and wholly voluntary justice. Proofs of the latter—so that I appeal not to facts of consciousness but only to experience—are the isolated but undoubted cases in which not only the danger of legal prosecution but also that of discovery, and even of any suspicion, was wholly excluded, and yet even the poor gave the rich what was theirs: for example, where something lost and found, or something deposited by a third party who had since died, was brought to its owner; where a deposit made in secret by a fugitive from the country with a poor man was faithfully kept and returned. Cases of this kind exist, without doubt; but the surprise, the emotion, the esteem with which we receive them plainly attest that they belong among unexpected things, rare exceptions. There truly are genuinely honest people—just as there truly is four-leaf clover; but Hamlet speaks without hyperbole when he says: To be honest, as this world goes, is to be one man pick'd out of ten thousand.¹⁵—Against the objection that the actions mentioned above ultimately rested on religious dogmas, and thus on regard for punishment and reward in another world, cases

could also be adduced in which those who performed them clung to no religious belief whatever; which is far less rare than the public admission of the fact.

Against the skeptical view, people appeal first of all to *conscience*. But doubts are raised against its natural origin as well. At the least, there is also a spurious conscience, which is often confused with it. The remorse and anguish that many feel over what they have done is often at bottom nothing other than fear of what may happen to them for it. The violation of external, arbitrary, and even absurd statutes torments many with inward reproaches, quite in the manner of conscience. Thus, for example, some bigoted Jews are genuinely weighed down in heart because, although the second Book of Moses, Kap. 35, 3, says: "You shall kindle no fire on the Sabbath day in all your dwellings," they have nonetheless smoked a pipe at home on a Saturday. Many nobles and officers are gnawed by the secret self-reproach that, on some occasion, they have not duly complied with the laws of that fool's code which is called chivalrous honor; and this goes so far that some of this class, when placed in the impossibility of keeping their given word of honor, or merely of satisfying the said code in quarrels, will shoot themselves dead. (I have witnessed both.) The same man, on the other hand, will break his word every day with a light heart, provided only that the shibboleth "honor" was not attached to it.—In general, every inconsistency, every thoughtlessness, every act against our resolutions, principles, convictions, of whatever kind, indeed every indiscretion, every blunder, every gaffe, rankles in us afterward in silence and leaves a sting in the heart. Many would be astonished to see what their conscience, which strikes them as quite stately, is actually composed of: perhaps 1/5 fear of people, 1/5 superstitious dread, 1/5 prejudice, 1/5 vanity, and 1/5 habit; so that at bottom they are no better than that Englishman who said bluntly: I cannot afford to keep a conscience (to keep a conscience is too costly for me).—Religious people of every faith very often mean by *conscience* nothing other than the dogmas and precepts of their religion and the self-examination undertaken in relation to them; in this sense, after all, the expressions *coercion of conscience* and *freedom of conscience* are also taken. The theologians, scholastics, and casuists of the middle and later periods

took it likewise: everything that a person knew of the statutes and precepts of the church, together with the resolve to believe and obey them, made up that person's conscience. Accordingly there was a doubting conscience, an opining conscience, an erring conscience, and the like, for whose correction one kept a counselor of conscience. How little the concept of conscience, like other concepts, is fixed by its object itself, how differently it has been grasped by different people, how wavering and uncertain it appears among the writers, can be seen briefly from Stäudlin's "History of the Doctrine of Conscience." All this is not suited to vouch for the reality of the concept, and has therefore occasioned the question whether there is indeed a genuine, innate conscience at all. I have already been led, in §. 10, in the doctrine of freedom, to give my concept of conscience briefly, and I shall return to it further below.

All these skeptical misgivings are by no means enough to deny the existence of all genuine morality, but they are certainly enough to temper our expectations of the moral predisposition in human beings, and hence of the natural foundation of ethics; since so much that is ascribed to it demonstrably stems from other incentives, and contemplation of the moral corruption of the world proves sufficiently that the incentive to the good cannot be a very powerful one, especially because it often fails to act even where the motives opposing it are not strong; although in this the individual difference of characters retains its full validity. Meanwhile, knowledge of that moral corruption is made harder by the fact that its manifestations are checked and concealed by legal order, by the necessity of honor, and even by politeness besides. Finally there is this to add: in education one supposes that one promotes the morality of one's pupils by presenting rectitude and virtue to them as the maxims universally followed in the world; if experience later teaches them otherwise, and often to their great harm, then the discovery that their teachers in youth were the first to deceive them can work more harmfully on their own morality than if those teachers had themselves given them the first example of candor and uprightness and had said without disguise: "The world lies in wickedness, people are not as they ought to be; but do not let it lead you astray, and be better yourself."—All this, as said, makes it harder for us to know the real immorality of the human race. The

state, this masterpiece of the self-understanding, rational, summed-up egoism of all, has placed the protection of everyone's rights in the hands of a power which, infinitely superior to the might of any individual, compels each to respect the rights of all others. There the boundless egoism of nearly all, the malice of many, the cruelty of some cannot show itself: compulsion has tamed everyone. The illusion arising from this is so great that when, in isolated cases where state power cannot protect or is evaded, we see the insatiable avarice, the base greed for money, the deeply hidden falsity, the insidious malice of human beings come forth, we often recoil and raise a hue and cry, imagining that some monster never seen before has crossed our path; yet without the compulsion of the laws and the necessity of civic honor, such occurrences would be quite the order of the day. One must read criminal histories and descriptions of anarchic conditions to recognize what the human being, in moral respects, really is. These thousands who jostle one another there before our eyes in peaceful traffic are to be regarded as so many tigers and wolves whose bite is secured by a strong muzzle. Hence, when one imagines state power once abolished, that is, that muzzle thrown off, everyone of insight recoils from the spectacle to be expected; thereby revealing how little effect they at bottom credit to religion, to conscience, or to the natural foundation of morality, whatever it may be. But precisely then, confronted with those unleashed immoral powers, the true moral incentive in human beings would also show its efficacy uncovered, and consequently could be most easily recognized; whereby at the same time the incredibly great moral difference of characters would step forth unveiled and be found just as great as the intellectual difference of heads; which surely says a great deal.

Perhaps it will be objected to me that ethics has nothing to do with how human beings actually act, but is the science that states how they *ought* to act. But this is precisely the principle I deny, having shown sufficiently in the critical part of this treatise that the concept of the ought, the *imperative form* of ethics, holds only in theological morality, and outside it loses all sense and meaning. I, on the contrary, set ethics the task of interpreting and explaining the conduct of human beings, so extremely various in moral respect, and of tracing it back

to its ultimate ground. Hence for the discovery of the foundation of ethics no other path remains than the empirical one, namely to inquire whether there are any actions at all to which we must ascribe *genuine moral worth*—which will be the actions of voluntary justice, pure loving-kindness, and real magnanimity. These are then to be regarded as a given phenomenon, which we have to explain correctly, that is, to trace back to its true grounds, and thus to demonstrate the incentive—in any case a peculiar one—which moves human beings to actions of this kind, specifically different from every other. This incentive, together with receptivity to it, will be the ultimate ground of morality, and knowledge of it the foundation of morality. This is the modest path to which I direct ethics. Whoever finds it, being no construction a priori and containing no absolute legislation for all rational beings in the abstract, not lofty, professorial, and academic enough, may go back to the categorical imperatives, to the shibboleth of the “dignity of man”; to the hollow phrases, the chimeras and soap bubbles of the schools, to principles which experience mocks at every step and of which, outside the lecture halls, no one knows anything or has ever felt anything. The foundation of morality that results on my path, by contrast, has experience at its side, which bears its silent witness to it daily and hourly.

¹⁴ See “The World as Will and Representation,” Bd. 1, §. 62, S. 396 ff., and Bd. 2, Kap. 47, S. 682.

¹⁵ As this world goes, to be honest means to be one chosen out of ten thousand.

Section 14



Antimoral¹⁶ Incentives.

The chief and fundamental incentive in human beings, as in animals, is *egoism*, that is, the urge toward existence and well-being.—The German word *Selbstsucht* (self-sickness) carries with it a false side-notion of sickness. The word *Eigennutz* (self-interest), however, designates *egoism* insofar as it stands under the guidance of reason, which enables it, by means of reflection, to pursue its ends methodically; hence one may well call animals egoistic, but not self-interested. So for the more general concept I shall keep the word *egoism*.—This *egoism* is, in the animal as in the human being, most closely bound up with its innermost core and essence—indeed, properly speaking, identical with it. Hence all its actions, as a rule, spring from *egoism*, and it is from this that the explanation of any given action is always first to be attempted; just as the calculation of all the means by which one seeks to steer human beings toward some goal is likewise grounded throughout upon it. *Egoism* is by its nature boundless: human beings want unconditionally to preserve their existence, want it unconditionally free of pains, among which all want and privation are counted, want the greatest possible sum of well-being, and want every enjoyment of which they are capable, and even seek, where possible, to develop in themselves new capacities for enjoyment. Whatever opposes the striving of their *egoism* arouses their displeasure, anger, hatred: they will try to destroy it as their ene-

my. They want, if possible, to enjoy everything, to have everything; but since that is impossible, at least to rule everything: “Everything for me, and nothing for the others” is their motto. Egoism is colossal: it towers over the world. For if each individual were given the choice between their own destruction and that of the rest of the world, I need not say which way it would tip for the vast majority. Accordingly everyone makes themselves the center of the world, refers everything to themselves, and whatever takes place—the greatest changes in the fate of nations, for example—they will first relate to their own interest in it and, however small and indirect that interest may be, think of that above all. There is no greater contrast than that between the intense and exclusive interest each takes in their own self and the indifference with which, as a rule, all others regard that very self; as each, in turn, regards theirs. It even has its comic side to see the countless individuals, each of whom, at least in practical respects, takes only themselves to be *real* and regards the others, in a manner, as mere phantoms. This rests ultimately on the fact that each is given to themselves *immediately*, but the others only *mediately*, through the representation of them in their head; and immediacy asserts its right. For by reason of the subjectivity essential to every consciousness, everyone is the whole world to themselves: for everything objective exists only *mediately*, as mere representation of the subject; so that everything always hangs upon self-consciousness. The only world that anyone really knows and is aware of they carry within themselves, as their representation, and they are therefore its center. That is precisely why each is all in all to themselves: they find themselves the possessor of all reality, and nothing can matter more to them than they themselves. While in their subjective view the self presents itself in this colossal size, in the objective view it shrinks to almost nothing, namely to about 1/1000,000,000 of the humanity now living. And at the same time they know with perfect certainty that this very self, important above all else, this microcosm, of which the macrocosm appears as a mere modification or accident—their whole world, that is—must perish in death, which is therefore for them equivalent to the end of the world. These, then, are the elements out of which, on the basis of the will to life, egoism grows, which always lies like a wide ditch between one human being and

another. If someone really does once leap across it to help another, it is like a miracle, which arouses astonishment and reaps applause. Above, in §. 8, in expounding the Kantian principle of morals, I had occasion to set out how egoism shows itself in everyday life, where, despite the politeness that is pinned before it as a fig leaf, it nonetheless always peeps out from some corner. Politeness, namely, is the conventional and systematic disavowal of egoism in the trifles of daily intercourse, and is, to be sure, acknowledged hypocrisy; yet it is demanded and praised, because what it hides, egoism, is so ugly that one does not want to see it, though one knows that it is there: just as one wants repulsive objects at least known to be covered by a curtain.—Since egoism, wherever it is not counteracted either by external force—to which every fear, whether of earthly or unearthly powers, is to be added—or by the genuine moral incentive, pursues its ends unconditionally, the war of all against all would, given the countless multitude of egoistic individuals, be the order of the day, to the ruin of all. Hence reflective reason very soon invents the institution of the state, which, springing from mutual fear of mutual violence, forestalls the harmful consequences of universal egoism as far as can be done by the *negative* way. Where, on the other hand, those two powers opposed to it do not come into effect, it will show itself at once in all its terrible magnitude, and the phenomenon will not be a pretty one. When, in order to express without prolixity the strength of this antimoral power, I was intent on marking the magnitude of egoism in a single stroke and therefore looked for some thoroughly emphatic hyperbole, I at last hit upon this one: many a person would be capable of beating another to death merely to grease their boots with that person's fat. Yet a scruple remained with me whether it really was a hyperbole.—*Egoism*, then, is the first and chief, though not the only, power that the *moral incentive* has to combat. One sees already here that this incentive, to take the field against such an adversary, must be something more real than a hairsplitting sophistry or an aprioristic soap bubble.—Meanwhile, the first thing in war is to reconnoiter the enemy. In the coming struggle egoism, as the main force on its side, will oppose itself above all to the virtue of *justice*, which, in my view, is the first and truly proper cardinal virtue.

The virtue of *loving-kindness*, by contrast, will more often be confronted by *ill will* or *malignity*. We shall therefore first consider the origin and gradations of these. Ill will in the lower degrees is very frequent, indeed almost commonplace, and it easily reaches the higher. Goethe is surely right in saying that in this world indifference and aversion are quite properly at home. (*Elective Affinities*, Th. 1, C. 3.) It is very fortunate for us that prudence and politeness cast their cloak over it and do not let us see how universal mutual ill will is, and how the war of all against all is carried on at least in thought. But occasionally it does come to light, for example in the so frequent and so merciless backbiting; quite visibly, though, in outbursts of anger, which mostly exceed their occasion many times over and could not turn out so violent had they not been compressed, like gunpowder in the barrel, as long-cherished hatred brooding within.—For the most part ill will arises from the unavoidable collisions of egoism that occur at every step. Then it is also aroused objectively, by the sight of the vices, faults, weaknesses, follies, defects, and imperfections of every kind which each person, more or less, at least occasionally, presents to others. It can go so far that to some, especially in moments of hypochondriac ill humor, the world, viewed from the aesthetic side, appears as a cabinet of caricatures, from the intellectual side as a madhouse, and from the moral side as a den of rogues. If such ill humor becomes permanent, misanthropy arises.—Finally, a chief source of ill will is envy; or rather, envy itself is already ill will, aroused by another's good fortune, possessions, or advantages. No one is wholly free of it, and Herodotus (III, 80) already said so: Envy grows in a human being from the very beginning (envy has been implanted in man from the origin). Its degrees, however, are very different. It is most implacable and most venomous when directed at personal qualities, because here no hope is left to the envious, and at the same time most base, because it hates what it ought to love and revere; but so it is: Of these, more than of others, envy seems to be felt, Who by themselves have risen into flight, Issuing forth from the common cage.¹⁷

So Petrarch already laments. More extensive reflections on envy are to be found in the second volume of the *Parerga*, §. 114.—In a certain respect the opposite of envy is *Schadenfreude*. Yet to feel envy is human; to relish *Schadenfreude* is diabolical. There is no more infallible sign of a thoroughly bad heart and profound moral worthlessness than a trait of pure, hearty *Schadenfreude*. One should avoid forever anyone in whom one has perceived it: This man is black-hearted; Roman, beware of him.—Envy and *Schadenfreude* are in themselves merely theoretical; practically they become malice and cruelty. Egoism can lead to crimes and misdeeds of every kind; but the harm and pain thereby caused to others are for it merely a means, not an end, and so occur only incidentally. For malice and cruelty, by contrast, the sufferings and pains of others are an end in themselves, and attaining it is enjoyment. On this account the latter constitute a higher power of moral badness. The maxim of extreme egoism is: Help no one; rather, if it should happen to pay (thus still conditional), harm everyone. The maxim of malice is: Harm everyone, as far as you can.—As *Schadenfreude* is only theoretical cruelty, so cruelty is only practical *Schadenfreude*, and *Schadenfreude* will appear as cruelty as soon as opportunity comes.

To demonstrate the special vices springing from the two fundamental powers named would be in place only in a fully worked-out ethics. Such an ethics would derive from *egoism*, say, greed, gluttony, lust, self-interest, stinginess, avarice, injustice, hardheartedness, pride, arrogance, and so forth—and from *malignity* it would derive grudging, envy, ill will, malice, *Schadenfreude*, prying curiosity, slander, insolence, petulance, hatred, anger, treachery, insidiousness, vindictiveness, cruelty, and so forth.—The first root is more bestial, the second more diabolical. The predominance of the one or the other, or else of the moral incentive, still to be demonstrated further on, gives the main line in the ethical classification of characters. No human being is wholly without something of all three.

With this, then, I have completed the review, admittedly a dreadful one, of the antimoral powers, which recalls that of the princes of darkness in Milton's *Pandemonium*. My plan, however, required that I first take into consideration

this gloomy side of human nature, whereby my path certainly departs from that of all other moralists and becomes like Dante's, which leads first into hell. The survey of the antimoral powers given here makes plain how hard the problem is: to find an incentive that could move human beings to a mode of action opposed to all those inclinations rooted deep in their nature, or, should such a mode of action perhaps be given in experience, to give a sufficient and unforced account of it. So hard is the problem that, for its solution for humanity at large, people everywhere have had to call in machinery from another world. People pointed to gods whose will and command the mode of action demanded here would be, and who lent force to this command by punishments and rewards, either in this world or in another, to which we would be transferred by death. Suppose that belief in a doctrine of this kind, as is indeed possible through very early imprinting, took root generally, and also—though this is much harder and has much less confirmation in experience—that it produced the intended effect; then legality of actions would indeed be brought about, even beyond the limit to which justice and police can reach; but everyone feels that this would by no means be what we properly mean by morality of disposition. For plainly all actions called forth by motives of such a kind would always be rooted only in sheer egoism. How, indeed, could there be any talk of disinterestedness where reward lures me, or threatened punishment deters me? A firmly believed reward in another world is to be regarded like a perfectly safe bill of exchange, but one drawn at very long sight. The promise, so common everywhere among satisfied beggars, that the giver will be repaid the gift a thousandfold in that other world may move many a miser to give lavish alms, which they gladly dispense as a sound investment, firmly convinced that they will now rise again in that world, too, at once as people of immense wealth.—For the great mass of the people it may perhaps have to be left at impulses of this kind; and accordingly the various religions, which are precisely the metaphysics of the people, hold them up before it. Here, however, it should be noted that we are sometimes just as much mistaken about the true motives of our own doing as about those of another's; hence surely many a person, though able to give an account of their noblest actions only through motives of the above kind, nonetheless

acts from far nobler and purer incentives, though ones much harder to make clear, and truly does from immediate love of neighbor what they can explain only by their God's command. Philosophy, by contrast, here as everywhere seeks the true, ultimate disclosures about the problem at hand, grounded on the nature of the human being and independent of all mythical interpretations, religious dogmas, and transcendent hypostases, and demands to see them demonstrated in outer or inner experience. Our present task, however, is a philosophical one; we therefore have to disregard entirely all solutions of it conditioned by religions, which I have recalled here merely to bring the great difficulty of the problem to light.

¹⁶ I allow myself the irregular formation of this word, since "antiethical" would not be descriptive here. The now fashionable "sittlich and unsittlich," however, is a poor substitute for "moral and immoral": first, because "moral" is a scientific concept, to which as such a Greek or Latin designation is due, for reasons to be found in my principal work, Bd. 2, Kap. 12, S. 134 ff.; and second, because "sittlich" is a weak and tame expression, hard to tell from "sittsam" (demure), which the common speech calls "zimperlich" (prim). No concessions should be made to Teutomania.

¹⁷ One seems, more than others, to envy those
Who, lifted by the strength of their own wings,
Depart from the common cage of all.

Section 15



The criterion of actions with moral worth.

The first task now would be to settle the empirical question: do acts of freely chosen justice and unselfish love of humanity—which may rise to nobility and magnanimity—occur in experience? Unfortunately, the question cannot be decided on purely empirical grounds. Experience always gives us only the deed; its impulses remain hidden. The possibility therefore always remains that an egoistic motive influenced a just or good action. I will not resort to the illegitimate device of appealing to the reader's conscience here, in a theoretical inquiry. But I believe very few will doubt, or lack the conviction from their own experience, that people often act justly solely to keep another from suffering an injustice. Indeed, there are people in whom the principle of allowing others their due is, as it were, *inborn*: they deliberately wrong no one; they do not pursue their own advantage without qualification, but consider the rights of others as well; when obligations have been undertaken on both sides, they watch not only to see that the other person performs his part, but also that he receives his due, sincerely wishing that no one who deals with them should lose by it. These are the *truly honest people*, the few just people among the countless unjust. But such people do exist. Likewise, I think it will be granted that many a person helps and gives, works and forgoes, with no further intention in his heart than to help another whose need he sees. And that Arnold von Winkelried, when he cried, "Faithful, beloved confederates, remember my wife

and child,” and then gathered into his arms as many enemy spears as he could hold, had some selfish purpose in mind—let anyone imagine it who can: I cannot. In §. 13 above I have already pointed to instances of freely chosen justice that cannot be denied without quibbling and obstinacy. But if someone should nevertheless insist on denying that any such actions occur, then, on his account, morality would be a science with no real object, like astrology and alchemy, and further debate over its foundation would be time lost. With him, then, I would be finished; I speak to those who acknowledge the reality of the matter.

It is therefore only actions of the kind described that are accorded *moral worth* in the proper sense. Their distinctive, characteristic feature is the exclusion of the kind of motive that otherwise calls forth all human actions: *self-interested* motives, in the broadest sense of the word. That is precisely why discovering a self-interested motive wholly destroys an action’s moral worth if it was the only motive, and diminishes that worth if it played a supporting part. The absence of all egoistic motivation is therefore the *criterion of an action with moral worth*. One might object that acts of pure malice and cruelty are not self-interested either. Yet it is obvious that these cannot be meant here, since they are the opposite of the actions under discussion. Anyone who insists on a rigorous definition may expressly exclude those actions by their essential feature: that they aim at another’s suffering. An additional mark of actions with moral worth, wholly inward and therefore less evident, is that they leave us with a certain satisfaction with ourselves, called the approval of conscience. Correspondingly, the opposite actions—acts of injustice and unkindness, and still more those of malice and cruelty—meet with the opposite inward judgment of ourselves. A further, secondary and incidental outward mark is that actions of the first kind win the approval and respect of uninvolved witnesses, while those of the second call forth the reverse.

We must now take actions with moral worth, defined in this way and acknowledged as facts, as the phenomenon before us that requires explanation. We must accordingly investigate what can move a human being to actions of this

kind. If successful, this inquiry must necessarily bring the genuine moral incentive to light; and since all ethics must rest on that incentive, our problem would then be solved.

Section 16



Statement and proof of the only genuine moral incentive.

After these indispensable preparations, I come to demonstrating the true incentive underlying every action of genuine moral worth. We shall find it to be something that, in its seriousness and unquestionable reality, stands far apart from all the subtleties, overingenious reasonings, sophisms, groundless assertions, and a priori soap bubbles that earlier systems have sought to make the source of moral action and the foundation of ethics. I do not intend merely to *propose* this moral incentive for acceptance at will, but actually to *prove* that it is the only possible one. Since this proof requires many thoughts to be brought together, I will begin with several premises that state the assumptions of the argument. They may quite properly be regarded as axioms, except for the last two, which refer back to explanations already given.

- 1) No action can occur without a sufficient motive, any more than a stone can move without a sufficient push or pull.
- 2) Equally, an action for which a motive sufficient for the agent's character is present cannot fail to occur unless a stronger countervailing motive makes its omission necessary.
- 3) What moves the will is solely well-being and suffering, taken in general and in the broadest sense of the words; conversely, well-being and suffering mean "in accordance with, or contrary to, a will." Every motive must therefore bear some relation to well-being and suffering.

- 4) Consequently, every action has as its ultimate end a being capable of well-being and suffering.
- 5) This being is either the agent himself or someone else, who then has a passive part in the action, since it is done to his harm or for his benefit and welfare.
- 6) Every action whose ultimate end is the agent's own well-being and suffering is *egoistic*.
- 7) Everything said here about actions holds equally for the omission of actions for which both a motive and a countervailing motive are present.
- 8) As explained in the preceding section, *egoism* and an action's *moral worth* are absolutely incompatible. If an action has an egoistic end as its motive, it can have no moral worth; if an action is to have moral worth, no egoistic end, direct or indirect, near or distant, may be its motive.
- 9) Since the supposed duties to ourselves were eliminated in §. 5, an action's moral significance can lie only in its relation to others. Only with respect to them can it have moral worth or be morally reprehensible, and thus be an act of justice or love of humanity, or the opposite of either.

The following is evident from these premises. The well-being and suffering that, according to premise 3, must underlie every action or omission as its ultimate end belong either to the agent himself or to someone else passively involved in the action. In the first case, the action is necessarily egoistic, because a self-interested motive underlies it. This applies not only to actions openly undertaken for one's own benefit and advantage, as the vast majority are. It applies just as much whenever one expects any distant result for oneself from an action, whether in this world or another; or has in view one's honor, one's reputation among others, someone's esteem, the sympathy of onlookers, and the like. It applies no less when an action is intended to uphold a maxim from whose general observance one expects some possible advantage for oneself—for example, the maxim of justice, of mutual assistance for all, and so on. It applies equally if one thinks it advisable to obey some absolute command issued by a power that, though unknown, is evidently superior: for then nothing but fear of the harmful consequences of disobedience can move one to obey, even if those consequences are conceived only generally and vaguely. The same holds

if, through an action or omission, one seeks to uphold one's own high opinion of oneself, of one's worth or dignity, whether clearly or dimly conceived—an opinion one would otherwise have to surrender, thereby wounding one's pride. Finally, it also holds if one wishes in this way to work toward one's own perfection, on *Wolffian* principles. In short, whatever one posits as the ultimate moving cause of an action, it will always turn out that, by some roundabout path, the *agent's own well-being and suffering* are ultimately the real incentive; the action is therefore egoistic and consequently without moral worth. There is only one case in which this does not hold: when the ultimate moving cause of an action or omission lies directly and exclusively in the *well-being and suffering* of someone else passively involved. The active party, in acting or refraining, then has in view solely the well-being and suffering *of another*, and aims at absolutely nothing but that the other should remain unharmed, or indeed receive help, support, and relief. *This end alone* stamps an action or omission with *moral worth*. That worth therefore rests exclusively on the action's being performed or omitted solely for another's benefit and welfare. For as soon as this is not the case, the well-being and suffering that impel every action or restrain us from it can only be the agent's own. But then the action or omission is invariably *egoistic*, and thus *without moral worth*.

But if my action is to be done solely *for the other person's sake*, then *his well-being and suffering must be my immediate motive*, just as my own are in all other actions. This gives our problem a narrower formulation: how is it possible for another's well-being and suffering to move my will immediately—that is, just as ordinarily only my own do—and thus become my direct motive, sometimes even to such a degree that I more or less subordinate my own well-being and suffering, ordinarily the sole source of my motives, to his? Plainly, only by that other person's becoming the ultimate end of my will, just as ordinarily I myself am: in other words, by my directly willing his well-being and not willing his suffering, as directly as I ordinarily will only my own. But this necessarily presupposes that I directly share in his suffering as such, feel his suffering as I ordinarily feel only my own, and therefore directly will his well-being as I ordinarily will only my own. This, however, requires that I should in some way

be *identified* with him—that the complete distinction between me and everyone else, on which my egoism rests, should be abolished at least to a certain degree. Yet since I do not inhabit the other person's skin, it is only through the *knowledge* I have of him—that is, the representation of him in my head—that I can identify myself with him so far that my deed declares that distinction abolished. The process analyzed here is not dreamed up or plucked out of the air. It is entirely real, and by no means rare: it is the everyday phenomenon of *compassion*—the wholly immediate participation, independent of every other consideration, first in another's suffering, and thereby in the prevention or removal of that suffering, in which all satisfaction, well-being, and happiness ultimately consist. This compassion alone is the real basis of all freely chosen justice and all genuine love of humanity. Only insofar as an action springs from it does that action have moral worth; any action arising from any other motives has none. As soon as this compassion awakens, the other person's well-being and suffering lie immediately at my heart, in just the same way, though not always to the same degree, as ordinarily only my own do. Thus the distinction between him and me is no longer absolute.

This process is certainly astonishing—indeed, mysterious. In truth it is the great mystery of ethics, its primal phenomenon and the boundary beyond which only metaphysical speculation may venture a step. In this process we see the partition that, by the light of nature—as the old theologians call reason—completely separates one being from another fall away, and the not-I become, in a certain sense, the I. For now, however, we will leave the metaphysical interpretation of the phenomenon untouched and first see whether all actions of freely chosen justice and genuine love of humanity really flow from this process. Our problem will then be solved, since we shall have demonstrated the ultimate foundation of morality in human nature itself. This foundation cannot in turn be a problem for *ethics*, though it may well be one for *metaphysics*, as is everything that exists, considered simply as existing. But the metaphysical interpretation of the primal ethical phenomenon already goes beyond the Royal Society's question, which concerns the foundation of ethics. At most it

can be appended as a supplement that one is free to offer and free to accept. Before I proceed to derive the cardinal virtues from the fundamental incentive established here, I must add two essential remarks.

1) To make the argument easier to grasp, I simplified the preceding derivation of compassion as the sole source of actions with moral worth by deliberately leaving aside the incentive of *malice*, which, like compassion, is unselfish, but makes another's pain its ultimate end. By including it now, we can restate the proof more completely and rigorously as follows:

There are only *three fundamental incentives* of human action, and every possible motive works solely by arousing them. They are:

- a) Egoism, which wills one's own well-being (has no limits).
- b) Malice, which wills another's suffering (extends to the utmost cruelty).
- c) Compassion, which wills another's well-being (rises to nobility and magnanimity).

Every human action must be traceable to one of these incentives, though two of them may also work together. Since we have assumed that actions with moral worth are given as facts, they too must arise from one of these fundamental incentives. But according to premise 8, they cannot spring from the *first* incentive, still less from the *second*, since all actions arising from the second are morally reprehensible, while the first produces some that are morally indifferent. They must therefore proceed from the *third* incentive; and this will receive a posteriori confirmation in what follows.

2) Immediate participation in another's condition is confined to his *suffering*. It is not also aroused, at least not directly, by his *well-being*; rather, his well-being in itself leaves us indifferent. J. J. Rousseau says the same in *Emile* (liv. IV): "First maxim: It is not in the human heart to put ourselves in the place of people happier than we are, but only of those who are more to be pitied." etc. The reason is that pain, suffering—which includes every lack, deprivation, need, indeed every wish—is what is *positive*, what is immediately felt. By contrast, the nature of satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness consists solely in a deprivation's being removed, a pain's being stilled. Their effect is therefore *negative*. This is precisely why need and desire are the condition of every enjoy-

ment. Plato already recognized this, making exceptions only for pleasant scents and the joys of the mind. (De Rep., IX, p. 264 sq. Bip.) Voltaire too says: There are no true pleasures without true needs. Thus what is positive, what makes itself known through itself, is pain; satisfaction and pleasures are what is *negative*, the mere removal of the former. This is the immediate basis for the fact that only another's suffering, lack, danger, and helplessness arouse our sympathy directly and as such. The happy, contented person as such leaves us indifferent, precisely because his condition is a negative one: the absence of pain, lack, and distress. We can certainly rejoice in the happiness, well-being, and enjoyment of others. But this is then secondary, mediated by the fact that their suffering and deprivation had previously saddened us. Or we take an interest in someone happy and enjoying himself, not *as such*, but insofar as he is our child, father, friend, relative, servant, subject, and so on. But it is not the happy person enjoying himself *purely as such* who arouses our immediate sympathy, as the suffering, deprived, unhappy person does *purely as such*. Even in our own case, it is really only our suffering—which includes every lack, need, wish, and even boredom—that spurs us to activity, while a state of contentment and happiness leaves us inactive, in languid repose. How could it be otherwise with regard to others, since our participation in their condition rests on identification with them? The sight of someone happy and enjoying himself, purely as such, may even very easily arouse our envy, a disposition present in every human being, which found its place above among the antimoral powers.

In consequence of the account given above of compassion as being moved immediately by another's suffering, I must also criticize Cassina's error, so often repeated since (Analytical Essay on Compassion, 1788; German translation by Pockels, 1790). He thinks compassion arises through a momentary deception of the imagination: we put ourselves in the sufferer's place and then fancy that we are undergoing his pains in *our own* person. It is not so at all. Rather, at every moment it remains clear and present to us that he is the sufferer, not we; and it is directly in *his* person, not in *ours*, that we feel the suffering, to our sorrow. We suffer with him, and thus in him: we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine it to be our own. Indeed, the happier our own condition, and

thus the more our awareness of it contrasts with the other person's situation, the more receptive we are to compassion. But explaining how this supremely important phenomenon is possible is not so easy, nor can it be achieved by the merely psychological route Cassina attempted. The explanation can only be metaphysical; I shall try to give such an explanation in the final part.

For now, however, I turn to deriving actions of genuine moral worth from the source we have demonstrated. In the preceding part I already established, as the general maxim of such actions and therefore the highest principle of ethics, the rule: Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can. Since this maxim contains *two* propositions, the actions corresponding to it naturally fall into two classes.

Section 17



The Virtue of Justice.

A closer look at the process of compassion established above as the primal ethical phenomenon reveals at once two clearly distinct degrees in which another person's suffering can become my immediate motive—that is, determine what I do or refrain from doing. In the first, it merely counteracts selfish or malicious motives and keeps me from causing another person suffering: from bringing about what does not yet exist, from becoming the cause of someone else's pain. In the second and higher degree, compassion works positively and moves me to active help. The distinction between so-called duties of right and duties of virtue—or, more accurately, between justice and loving-kindness—which emerged so awkwardly in *Kant*, arises here entirely of itself, and thereby attests the soundness of the principle. It is the natural, unmistakable, sharp boundary between the negative and the positive, between not harming and helping. The terminology used until now—duties of right and duties of virtue, the latter also called duties of love or imperfect duties—has, first, the defect of placing genus and species on the same level, since justice, too, is a virtue. It also rests on a far too extensive use of the concept of *duty*, which I will later restore to its true limits. In place of those two kinds of duty, I therefore put two virtues, justice and loving-kindness, which I call cardinal virtues because all the others proceed from them in practice and can be derived from them in theory. Both are rooted

in natural compassion. But compassion itself is an undeniable fact of human consciousness and belongs essentially to it. It does not depend on assumptions, concepts, religions, dogmas, myths, upbringing, or education. It is original and immediate, inherent in human nature itself, and for that very reason holds good under every circumstance and appears in every country and age. Everywhere, then, people confidently appeal to it as something necessarily present in every human being; nowhere does it belong among the “foreign gods.” Someone who seems to lack it, by contrast, is called inhuman; and “humanity” is often used as a synonym for compassion.

The first degree in which this genuine and natural moral incentive operates is therefore merely *negative*. We are all originally inclined to injustice and violence, because our needs, desires, anger, and hatred enter consciousness immediately and thus have the right of first occupation. By contrast, the sufferings our injustice and violence cause others enter consciousness only by the secondary route of *representation*, and only through experience—that is, *indirectly*. Hence *Seneca* says: “A good disposition comes to no one before a bad one” (Ep. 50). The first degree of compassion’s effect, then, is to check the suffering I would otherwise cause others through the antimoral powers dwelling within me. It calls “Stop!” and stands before the other person like a rampart, shielding him from the injury my selfishness or malice would otherwise drive me to inflict. From this first degree of compassion springs the maxim “Harm no one”: the principle of *justice*. Here alone, and nowhere else, does this virtue have its pure, wholly moral, unalloyed origin, since otherwise it would have to rest on selfishness. If my heart is receptive to compassion to this degree, it will hold me back whenever and wherever I might wish to use another’s suffering as a means to my own ends, whether that suffering comes at once or later, directly or indirectly through intermediate links. I will therefore no more attack another’s property than his person, no more cause him mental than bodily suffering. I will refrain not only from all physical injury, but equally from causing pain by mental means: through affronts, intimidation, vexation, or slander. The same compassion will keep me from seeking the satisfaction of my desires at the expense of women’s happiness in life, from seducing another man’s wife, or

from corrupting young men morally and physically by enticing them into pederasty. Yet compassion by no means needs to be aroused in every individual case; often it would come too late. Rather, the knowledge gained once and for all of the suffering every unjust act necessarily brings upon others—suffering sharpened by the feeling of enduring wrong, of being overpowered by someone else—gives rise in noble hearts to the maxim “Harm no one.” Rational reflection raises it into a firm resolve, made once and for all: to respect everyone’s rights, permit oneself no encroachment on them, remain free of the self-reproach of having caused another’s suffering, and thus not shift onto others, by force or cunning, the burdens and sufferings of life that circumstances bring to each of us, but bear one’s allotted share oneself, so as not to double someone else’s. For although *principles*, and abstract knowledge in general, are by no means the primal source or first foundation of morality, they are indispensable to a moral life. They are the receptacle, the reservoir, in which the disposition flowing from the source of all morality—a source that does not flow at every moment—is stored, ready to be conducted through channels to wherever a case calls for its use. In morality, then, matters stand as they do in physiology, where, for example, the gallbladder is necessary as a reservoir for what the liver produces, and in many similar cases. Without firmly held *principles*, we would be helplessly abandoned to the antimoral incentives whenever external impressions inflamed them into passions. Holding to principles and following them despite the motives working against them is *self-control*. Here, too, lies the reason why women, who because of the weakness of their reason are far less capable than men of understanding general *principles*, holding to them, and taking them as a guide, generally fall short of men in the virtue of justice, and thus also in honesty and conscientiousness. Hence injustice and deceit are their most frequent vices, and lying is their true element. In the virtue of *loving-kindness*, on the other hand, they surpass men, since its occasion is usually *directly perceived* and thus speaks immediately to compassion, to which women are decidedly more receptive. But only what is directly perceived, present, and immediately real has true existence for them. What is distant, absent, past, or future, and can be known only through concepts, is not readily grasped by them. Here, then,

there is compensation as well: justice is more the masculine virtue, loving-kindness more the feminine. The thought of seeing women serve as judges provokes laughter; but the Sisters of Mercy surpass even the Brothers of Mercy. The *animal*, in turn, lacking abstract or rational knowledge altogether, is incapable of any resolutions, much less principles, and therefore of any *self-control*: it is defenseless against impressions and passions. For this very reason it has no conscious *morality*, although species show great differences in the malice and goodness of their characters, and among the highest genera even individuals do so.—According to what has been said, compassion operates in the just person's individual actions only indirectly, through principles, and not so much actually as potentially. Something similar happens in statics: the greater *velocity* produced by the greater length of one arm of a balance, by which a smaller mass counterbalances a larger one, operates in a state of rest only potentially, yet quite as effectively as it would actually. But compassion always remains ready to emerge in actuality as well. Thus, when in particular cases the chosen maxim of justice begins to falter, no motive—selfish motives aside—is more effective in supporting it and reviving just resolutions than one drawn from the primal source itself, compassion. This holds not merely where the injury concerns someone's person, but where it concerns his property as well. If, for example, someone feels tempted to keep a valuable object he has found, nothing—excluding every consideration of prudence and religion—will bring him back to the path of justice so readily as imagining the loser's anxiety, heartache, and lamentation. A sense of this truth often leads people, in a public appeal for the return of lost money, to add the assurance that the loser is poor, a servant, or the like.

These reflections will, I hope, make it clear that, unlikely as it may seem at first glance, justice too, as a genuine, freely practiced virtue, does indeed originate in compassion. Anyone who still finds this soil too meager for that great and truly cardinal virtue to take root in it alone should recall from the foregoing how little genuine, voluntary, unselfish, undisguised justice is found among human beings; how it appears only as a surprising exception, and how, in quality and quantity alike, it stands to its counterfeit—the justice founded on mere prudence and loudly proclaimed everywhere—as gold to copper. I would call the

latter “common justice” and the former “heavenly justice,” since it is she who, according to Hesiod, leaves the earth in the Iron Age to dwell among the heavenly gods. The root we have identified is strong enough for this rare plant, always an exotic on earth.

Injustice, or *wrong*, therefore always consists in *injuring* another. The concept of *wrong* is consequently *positive* and precedes that of *right*, which is *negative* and merely designates the actions one can perform without injuring others—that is, without doing *wrong*. It is easy to see that these also include every action whose sole purpose is to ward off an attempted wrong. For no sympathy with another, no compassion for him, can require me to let him injure me—that is, to suffer wrong. That the concept of *right* is *negative*, in contrast to the *positive* concept of *wrong*, is also apparent in the first explanation given by the father of the philosophical theory of right, *Hugo Grotius*, at the beginning of his work: “Right here means nothing other than what is just, and that in a negative rather than an affirmative sense, so that right is what is not unjust” (On the Law of War and Peace, L. I, c. 1, §. 3). The negative character of justice is confirmed, appearances notwithstanding, even in the commonplace definition “To give everyone his own.” If it is his own, there is no need to give it to him; the meaning, then, is “To take from no one what is his own.”—Because the demand of justice is merely negative, it can be enforced: everyone can practice “Harm no one” at the same time. The institution that enforces it is the *state*, whose sole purpose is to protect individuals from one another, and the whole from external enemies. Some German philosophizers of this venal age would like to distort it into an institution for moral education and edification. In the background lurks the Jesuitical aim of abolishing the individual’s personal freedom and development, making him a mere cog in a Chinese machine of state and religion. But that is the road that once led to inquisitions, autos-da-fé, and religious wars. Frederick the Great’s words, “In my country everyone should be able to attend to his salvation in his own fashion,” declared that he would never take it. Yet even now we see the state everywhere—with North America more an apparent exception than a real one—undertaking to provide for its members’ metaphysical need as well. Governments seem to have chosen as their prin-

ciple the saying of Quintus Curtius: "Nothing rules the multitude more effectively than superstition. Otherwise unruly, savage, and fickle, once it is captivated by an empty religion it obeys its prophets more readily than its leaders."

The concepts of *wrong* and *right*, as equivalents of injury and noninjury—the latter including the warding off of injury—are plainly independent of all positive legislation and precede it. There is therefore a purely ethical right, or natural law, and a pure theory of right, independent, that is, of all enacted law. Its principles do have an empirical origin insofar as they arise on the occasion of the concept of *injury*. In themselves, however, they rest on the pure understanding, which supplies a priori the principle "The cause of a cause is the cause of its effect." Here this means that the other person, not I, is himself the cause of what I must do to ward off his injury to me; I can therefore resist every encroachment on his part without wronging him. It is, so to speak, a moral law of recoil. Thus the combination of the empirical concept of injury with the rule supplied by the pure understanding gives rise to the fundamental concepts of wrong and right, which everyone grasps a priori and immediately applies as experience provides occasion. An empiricist who denies this, since experience alone counts for him, need only be referred to the savages, all of whom distinguish wrong from right quite correctly, often with subtlety and precision. This is strikingly evident in their barter and other agreements with the crews of European ships, and in their visits aboard them. They are bold and confident when they are in the right, but anxious when right is not on their side. In disputes they accept a just settlement, whereas unjust treatment provokes them to war.—The *theory of right* is a part of morality that establishes which actions one may not perform unless one wishes to injure others—that is, to do wrong. Morality here has the *active* side in view. Legislation, however, takes this chapter of morality and uses it with regard to the *passive* side, thus in reverse, considering these same actions as things no one need suffer, since no one should have wrong done to him. Against these actions the state now erects the bulwark of laws, as positive law. Its purpose is that no one should *suffer* wrong; the purpose of the moral theory of right, by contrast, is that no one should *do* wrong.¹⁸

In every unjust action, the wrong is the same in *quality*: injury to another, whether in his person, freedom, property, or honor. But in *quantity* it can differ greatly. This difference in the *magnitude of wrong* seems not yet to have been adequately investigated by moralists; yet it is acknowledged everywhere in actual life, since the degree of blame expressed corresponds to it. The same holds for the *justice* of actions. To illustrate: someone who steals a loaf of bread when close to starvation does wrong; but how slight is his injustice beside that of a rich man who in some way deprives a poor man of his last possession. A rich man who pays his day laborer acts justly; but how slight is that justice beside that of a poor man who voluntarily returns to a rich man a purse of gold he has found. The measure of this highly significant difference in the *quantity* of justice and injustice—the quality always remaining the same—is not direct and absolute, like a ruler's, but indirect and relative, like that of sines and tangents. I propose the following formula: the magnitude of the injustice of my action equals the magnitude of the harm I thereby inflict on another, divided by the magnitude of the advantage I myself thereby gain; and the magnitude of the justice of my action equals the magnitude of the advantage injuring the other person would bring me, divided by the magnitude of the harm he would thereby suffer.—But beyond this there is also a *double injustice*, different in kind from every single injustice, however great. This is shown by the fact that the indignation of an uninvolved witness, which is always proportional to the magnitude of the injustice, reaches its highest degree only in the case of double injustice. He abhors it as something outrageous and crying out to heaven: an atrocity, a sacrilege, at which the gods themselves seem to veil their faces. This *double injustice* occurs where someone has expressly undertaken an obligation to protect another in a particular respect, so that merely failing to fulfill that obligation would already injure the other person and thus be wrong; but then, beyond this, he himself attacks and injures that person in the very matter in which he should have protected him. This happens, for example, when an appointed watchman or escort becomes a murderer, an entrusted custodian becomes a thief, a guardian deprives his wards of their property, an advocate betrays his client's cause, a judge takes a bribe, or someone asked for advice

deliberately gives the questioner ruinous counsel. All these are comprehended in the concept of *betrayal*, which the world abhors. Accordingly, *Dante* places traitors at the very bottom of hell, where Satan himself resides (Inf., XI, 61–66).

Now that the concept of *obligation* has come up, this is the place to define the concept of *duty*, so frequently used in ethics and in life, yet given too broad an extension. We have found that wrong always consists in injuring another, whether in his person, freedom, property, or honor. This seems to imply that every wrong must be a positive attack, a deed. But there are actions whose mere *omission* is a wrong: such actions are called *duties*. This is the true philosophical definition of the concept of *duty*. It loses all its distinctiveness and is thereby lost altogether when, as in previous moral theories, one chooses to call every praiseworthy way of acting a *duty*, forgetting that what is a *duty* must also be *owed*. *Duty—what is required, what one owes, duty—is therefore an action by whose mere omission one injures another, that is, does wrong.* Clearly, this can be the case only because the person omitting it has pledged himself to such an action—that is, has *undertaken an obligation*. All duties, then, rest on an obligation that has been undertaken. As a rule, this is an express, reciprocal agreement, as, for example, between prince and people, government and official, master and servant, advocate and client, physician and patient; in general, between anyone who has undertaken a service of any kind and the person commissioning it, in the broadest sense of the word. Every duty therefore confers a right, since no one can bind himself without a motive—which here means without some advantage to himself. I know of only *one* obligation undertaken *not* through an agreement but directly through a mere action, because the person toward whom one has it did not yet exist when one undertook it: the obligation of parents toward their children. Whoever brings a child into the world has the *duty* to support it until it can support itself. And should that time *never* come, as with someone blind, crippled, afflicted with cretinism, or the like, the duty never ends either. For merely withholding help—an omission—would injure his child, indeed bring it to destruction. Children's moral duty toward their parents is not so immediate and definite. It rests on the fact that, since

every duty confers a right, parents too must have a right against their children. This establishes the children's duty of obedience, which, however, later ends along with the right from which it arose. Gratitude will then take its place for whatever the parents have done beyond their strict duty. Yet however ugly and often even outrageous a vice ingratitude may be, gratitude cannot be called a duty, because its absence is no injury to another and hence no *wrong*. Otherwise the benefactor would have to have supposed that he was tacitly striking a bargain.—At most, compensation for damage done might be put forward as an obligation arising directly from an action. Yet this, as the undoing of the consequences of an unjust action, is merely an effort to efface it: something purely negative, resting on the fact that the action itself should not have occurred.—Let it also be noted here that equity is the enemy of justice and often does it grave injury; one should therefore not concede too much to it. The German is a friend of equity; the Englishman sides with justice. The law of motivation is just as strict as that of physical causality and therefore carries an equally irresistible compulsion. Accordingly, there are two ways of doing wrong: *force* and *cunning*. Just as I can kill or rob another, or compel him to obey me, by force, I can accomplish all this by cunning as well, by placing false motives before his intellect, in consequence of which he must do what he would otherwise not do. This happens through the *lie*. Its wrongfulness rests on this alone and thus attaches to it only insofar as it is an instrument of cunning—that is, of coercion through motivation. As a rule, however, it is precisely this. For, first, my lying itself cannot happen without a motive; and, with the rarest exceptions, that motive will be an unjust one: the intention of directing others, over whom I have no power, according to my will—that is, coercing them through motivation. This intention underlies even a mere braggart's lie, since whoever uses it seeks to gain greater standing with others than he deserves.—The binding force of a *promise* or *contract* rests on the fact that, if unfulfilled, they are the most solemn lies. Their intention to exert moral coercion over others is all the more evident here because the motive for the lie—the performance demanded of the other party—is expressly stated. Fraud is contemptible because it disarms its victim with a show of sincerity before attacking

him. *Betrayal* is its summit, and is deeply abhorred because it belongs to the category of *double injustice*. But just as I can repel force by force without wrong, and thus rightfully, so I can also do so by cunning, where I lack force or find cunning more convenient. In cases where I have a right to force, then, I also have a right *to lie*: against robbers, for example, and every kind of unjust aggressor, whom I may accordingly lure into a trap by cunning. For this reason, a promise extorted by force is not binding.—But *the right to lie* in fact goes further. It arises with every wholly unauthorized question concerning my personal or business affairs, and is therefore impertinent, where not only answering it but even merely rejecting it with “I won’t say” would arouse suspicion and place me in danger. Here lying is self-defense against unauthorized curiosity, whose motive is usually not benevolent. For I have the right to oppose the presumed ill will of others, and the physical force consequently to be expected from them, with physical resistance in advance, at the intruder’s own risk: as a preventive measure I may top my garden wall with sharp spikes, let vicious dogs loose in my courtyard at night, and, according to circumstances, even set caltrops and spring guns, whose harmful consequences the intruder has himself to blame for. In the same way, I have the right to keep secret, by every means, anything whose disclosure would expose me to attack by others. I have reason to do so as well, because here too I must regard others’ ill will as quite possible and take precautions against it beforehand. Hence Ariosto says:

Although dissembling is most often
 Condemned, and signals an ill-intentioned mind,
 Still, in many matters, many times,
 It has plainly brought about much good,
 And warded off harm, disgrace, and death:
 For we do not always speak with friends
 In this mortal life, far more dark than bright,
 So full of envy.¹⁹
 (Orl. fur., IV, 1.)

Thus, without doing wrong, I may forestall even a merely presumed injury by cunning with cunning of my own. I therefore need neither answer someone who peers without warrant into my private affairs nor, by replying "I want to keep that secret," indicate the place where a secret lies that would endanger me, perhaps benefit him, and in any case give him power over me:

"They want to know the household's secrets, and through them to be feared."

Instead, I am then entitled to put him off with a lie, at his own risk should it lead him into a harmful error. For here a lie is the only means of meeting this prying and suspicious curiosity: I am therefore acting in self-defense. "Ask me no questions, and I'll tell you no lies"²⁰ is the right maxim here. Among the English, who regard the accusation of lying as the gravest insult and for that very reason really do lie less than other nations, all unauthorized questions about another person's affairs are accordingly regarded as an impertinence, designated by the expression "to ask questions."—Every sensible person acts on the principle stated above, even if he is of the strictest integrity. If, for example, he is returning from a distant place where he has collected money, and an unknown traveler joins him, asking, as people commonly do, first *where he is going*, then *where he has come from*, and gradually what might have taken him there, he will answer with a lie to forestall the danger of robbery. A man found in the house where the father of the daughter he is courting lives, and asked the reason for his unexpected presence, will, unless he is a fool, give a false one without hesitation. And so there are very many cases in which every reasonable person lies without the least scruple of conscience. This view alone removes the glaring contradiction between the morality that is taught and the morality practiced daily, even by the most honest and the best. Yet the stated restriction to cases of self-defense must be strictly maintained; otherwise this doctrine would stand open to appalling abuse, for a lie is in itself a very dangerous instrument. But just as, despite the public peace, the law permits everyone to carry and use weapons, namely in self-defense, so morality permits the use of a lie in the same case, and likewise *only* in that case. Apart from this case of self-defense against force or cunning, every lie is a wrong; justice therefore demands truthfulness toward everyone. But against the wholly unconditional, exception-

less condemnation of lying as something inherently reprehensible stands the fact that there are cases where lying is even a *duty*, notably for physicians; that there are *generous* lies, such as the Marquis of Posa's in Don Carlos, the one in Jerusalem Delivered, II, 22, and, in general, all those cases where someone wishes to take another's guilt upon himself; and finally, that even Jesus Christ once deliberately spoke an untruth (Joh. 7, 8). Accordingly, *Campanella*, in his Philosophical Poems, madr. 9, says outright: "Lying is beautiful when it brings about great good."²¹ By contrast, the current doctrine of the lie of necessity is a wretched patch on the garment of a miserable morality.—The attempts, prompted by *Kant* and offered in various compendiums, to derive the wrongfulness of lying from the human *capacity for speech* are so shallow, childish, and absurd that, merely to mock them, one might be tempted to throw oneself into the devil's arms and say with *Talleyrand*: "Man was given speech so that he could conceal his thoughts."—*Kant's* unconditional, boundless abhorrence of lying, paraded on every occasion, rests either on affectation or on prejudice. In the chapter on lying in his "Doctrine of Virtue," he heaps every dishonorable epithet upon it, yet supplies no real reason for its reprehensibility, though a reason would have been more effective. Declaiming is easier than proving, and moralizing easier than being sincere. *Kant* would have done better to unleash that particular zeal against *delight in others' suffering*: this, not lying, is the truly diabolical vice. For it is the direct opposite of compassion, and nothing other than impotent cruelty: unable itself to bring about the sufferings it so delights to see in others, it thanks chance for doing so in its stead.—That, under the principle of chivalric honor, the accusation of lying is taken so gravely and held to require washing away with the accuser's blood does not arise from the fact that lying is *wrong*. If it did, an accusation of wrong committed by force would have to wound just as deeply, which, as everyone knows, it does not. Rather, it arises because, under the principle of chivalric honor, force is what actually establishes right. Anyone who resorts to a lie to commit a wrong thereby proves that he lacks either force or the courage needed to use it. Every lie bears witness to fear: that condemns him.

- ¹⁸ The full theory of right can be found in “The World as Will and Representation,” Bd. 1, §. 62.
- ¹⁹ However often dissembling is condemned and shows bad intentions, it has plainly done good in very many matters by averting harm, disgrace, and death: for we do not always speak with friends in this mortal life, far more dark than bright, which teems with envy.
- ²⁰ Do not question me, and I will not lie to you.
- ²¹ Lying is beautiful when it brings about much good.

Section 18



The Virtue of Loving-Kindness.

Justice, then, is the first and fundamentally essential cardinal virtue. The philosophers of antiquity recognized it as such, though they placed beside it three others ill-chosen for that rank. Loving-kindness—charity, love—they had not yet established as a virtue. Even *Plato*, who reaches the greatest moral heights, goes no further than voluntary, unselfish justice. In practice and in fact, loving-kindness has certainly existed at every time. But it was Christianity that first brought it into theoretical discussion and formally established it as a virtue, indeed the greatest of all, extending it even to enemies. Here lies Christianity's very greatest merit, though only with respect to Europe: in Asia, a thousand years earlier, boundless love of one's neighbor had already been as much a subject of teaching and precept as of practice. The Vedas and the Dharma-Shastra, the Itihasas and the Puranas, as well as the teaching of the Buddha Shakyamuni, never tire of preaching it.—And if we wish to be exact, traces of the recommendation of loving-kindness can also be found among the ancients, for example in *Cicero*, *De finib.*, V, 23, and even as early as Pythagoras, according to Iamblichus, *On the Life of Pythagoras*, c. 33. My task now is to derive this virtue philosophically from my principle.

The second degree in which another's suffering, in itself and as such, becomes my immediate motive through the process of *compassion* established above as a fact, though mysterious in its origin, is clearly distinguished from the first by the *positive character* of the actions that arise from it. Compassion then not only keeps me from injuring another but even impels me to help him. According both to the vividness and depth of this immediate sympathy and to the magnitude and urgency of the other's distress, this purely moral motive will move me to make a greater or lesser sacrifice to his need or hardship. It may consist in exerting my bodily or mental powers on his behalf, or in sacrificing my property, health, freedom, even my life. Here, then, in this immediate sympathy, supported by no argument and requiring none, lies the sole pure origin of loving-kindness—charity, love: the virtue whose maxim is "Help everyone as much as you can," and from which flows everything ethics prescribes under the names duties of virtue, duties of love, and imperfect duties. This wholly immediate, indeed instinctive sympathy with another's suffering—compassion, then—is the sole source of such actions if they are to *have moral worth*: that is, to be free of every selfish motive and, for that very reason, awaken in us the inner satisfaction called a good, satisfied, approving conscience. It is likewise the sole source if these actions are to evoke in the spectator that distinctive assent, esteem, admiration, and even humbling reflection on himself that is an undeniable fact. If, on the other hand, a beneficent action has any other motive, it can only be selfish, unless it is actually malicious. For, corresponding to the primal incentives of all actions established above—selfishness, malice, compassion—the *motives* capable of moving human beings at all can be brought under three wholly general and highest classes: 1) one's own well-being, 2) another's suffering, 3) another's well-being. If the motive of a beneficent action is *not from the third class*, it must necessarily belong to the *first* or the *second*. The *latter* does sometimes occur: for example, when I benefit one person in order to wound another, whom I do not benefit, or make his suffering more keenly felt; or to shame a third person who did not help the person I am helping; or, finally, to humiliate the very person I benefit. The *former* case, however, is far more frequent. It occurs whenever, in doing a good deed, I have *my own well-being* in

view, however remotely and by however circuitous a route: when I am moved by the prospect of a reward in this world or another, by the esteem I may gain and the reputation of having a noble heart, or by the thought that the person I help today may one day help me in return, or otherwise be useful and render me service. It also occurs when I am moved by the thought that the maxim of generosity or beneficence must be upheld because it may someday benefit me too. In short, it occurs whenever my purpose is anything other than the purely *objective* one alone: that I want to know the other person has been helped, rescued from his need and hardship, freed from his suffering—and nothing beyond this, and nothing beside it! Only then, and then alone, have I truly shown that loving-kindness—charity, love—whose preaching is Christianity’s great and distinguishing merit. Yet the very precepts the Gospel adds to its commandment of love, such as “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (“Let your left hand not know what the right does”), and others like it, rest on a sense of what I have derived here: that another’s need alone, and no other consideration, must be my motive if my action is to have moral worth. The same passage quite rightly says (Matth. 6, 2) that those who give ostentatiously have already received their reward. But here too the Vedas confer, as it were, a higher consecration upon us, repeatedly declaring that whoever desires any reward for his works is still on the path of darkness and is not ripe for deliverance.—If someone giving alms were to ask me what he gets out of it, my conscientious answer would be: “This: that the poor man’s lot is lightened by that much; beyond this, absolutely nothing. If that does not serve your purpose, and you really care nothing about it, then you did not really want to give alms, but to make a purchase: in that case, you have been cheated of your money. But if you care that this man, oppressed by want, should suffer less, then you have achieved your very purpose. What you get out of it is that he suffers less, and you see exactly how far your gift has rewarded you.”

But how is it possible that a suffering which is not *mine*, which does not befall *me*, should nevertheless become my motive just as immediately as otherwise only my own does, and move me to act? As I have said, only because, though it is given to me merely as something external, solely through outward perception

or report, I nevertheless *share the feeling* of it, *feel it as mine*, and yet not *in myself* but *in someone else*. Thus what *Calderón* already expressed comes to pass:

that between seeing

Someone suffer and suffering

There was no distance.

“The Worst Is Not Always Certain,” *Jorn. II*, p. 229.

(that there is no difference between seeing suffering and suffering.)

But this presupposes that I have to some degree identified myself with the other person, and that consequently the barrier between I and not-I has been suspended for the moment. Only then do the other’s concerns, his need, his distress, his suffering become immediately my own. I no longer see him as empirical perception presents him: as something alien to me, indifferent to me, utterly different from me. Instead, I share his suffering *in him*, even though his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way can *his* pain, *his* distress, become a motive for *me*; otherwise only my own can do so. This *process*, I repeat, is *mysterious*: it is something of which reason can give no immediate account, and whose grounds cannot be discovered by way of experience. And yet it is an everyday occurrence. Everyone has often experienced it in himself; even the hardest-hearted and most selfish have not remained strangers to it. It happens daily before our eyes, in individual cases, in small things, wherever one person, on an immediate impulse and without much reflection, helps and comes to the aid of another—indeed, sometimes puts his own life in the most obvious danger for someone he sees for the first time, with no further thought than that he sees the other’s great distress and peril. It happens on a grand scale when, after long deliberation and strenuous debate, the noble-hearted British nation gives 20 million pounds sterling to purchase freedom for the Black slaves in its colonies, to the cheers of a whole world. Anyone who would deny compassion as the incentive of this beautiful action on the grand scale, in order to ascribe it to Christianity, should consider that not a word against slavery is said in the

entire New Testament, however widespread it was at that time; and that, on the contrary, even in 1860, in North America, someone debating slavery appealed to the fact that Abraham and Jacob had also kept slaves.

What the practical results of this mysterious inner process will be in each particular case, ethics may set out in chapters and sections on duties of virtue, duties of love, imperfect duties, or whatever else it calls them. The root, the foundation of it all, is the one set forth here, from which springs the principle “Help everyone as much as you can.” Everything else is very easily derived from this, just as all duties of justice are derived from the first half of my principle, “Harm no one.” Ethics is in truth the easiest of all sciences, as indeed one would expect, since everyone has the responsibility to construct it himself: to derive for himself, from the highest principle rooted in his heart, the rule for every case that arises. For few have the leisure and patience to learn an ethics already constructed. All virtues flow from justice and loving-kindness; these, then, are the cardinal virtues, and their derivation lays the foundation stone of ethics.—Justice is the whole ethical content of the Old Testament, and loving-kindness that of the New. This is the “new commandment” (Joh. 13, 34), in which, according to Paul (Röm. 13, 8–10), all Christian virtues are contained.

Section 19



Confirmations of the Foundation of Morality Set Out Above.

The truth just stated—that compassion, as the only incentive free of egoism, is also the only genuinely moral one—is, strangely, indeed almost incomprehensibly, paradoxical. I will therefore try to make it less alien to the reader's convictions by showing that it is confirmed by experience and by the testimony of universal human feeling.

1) To this end, I will first take an invented case as an example, one that may serve as a decisive experiment in this inquiry. But to avoid making things easy for myself, I will choose not an act of loving-kindness but a violation of rights, and the gravest one at that.—Imagine two young men, Caius and Titus, both passionately in love, though each with a different girl; each has a rival who, favored by outward circumstances, stands squarely in his way. Both resolve to rid the world of their respective rivals, and both are entirely safe from discovery, even from suspicion. Yet when each comes to make the actual preparations for murder, both, after a struggle with themselves, abandon it. They must give us an honest and clear account of their reasons for relinquishing their resolve.—Now the account Caius gives may be left entirely to the reader's choice. Perhaps religious reasons held him back: the will of God, retribution in the world to come, the Last Judgment, and the like. Or he may say: "I considered that the maxim of my conduct in this case would not have been fit to serve as a

universally valid rule for all possible rational beings, since I would have treated my rival merely as a means, and not at the same time as an end.”—Or he may say with Fichte: “Every human life is a means to the realization of the moral law; therefore, unless I am indifferent to the realization of the moral law, I cannot destroy someone destined to contribute to it.” (System of Ethics, S. 373.)—(He might, incidentally, meet this scruple by hoping that, once he possesses his beloved, he will soon produce a new instrument of the moral law.)—Or he may say, following *Wollaston*: “I reflected that such an action would express a false proposition.”—Or, following *Hutcheson*: “The moral sense, whose sensations, like those of any other sense, admit of no further explanation, determined me to leave it undone.”—Or, following *Adam Smith*: “I foresaw that my action would awaken no sympathy with me in those who witnessed it.”—Or, following *Christian Wolff*: “I recognized that I would thereby work against my own perfection and do nothing to advance anyone else’s.”—Or, following *Spinoza*: “Nothing is more useful to a human being than another human being; therefore I did not wish to kill one.”—In short, let him say whatever you please.—But *Titus*, whose account I reserve for myself, is to say: “When it came to making the preparations, and I therefore had to concern myself for the moment not with my passion but with my rival, I first saw clearly what was really about to happen to him. But now compassion and pity seized me; my heart ached for him; I could not bring myself to do it; I was not able to do it.”—Now I ask every honest and impartial reader: Which of the two is the better man?—To which would he rather entrust his own fate?—Which was held back by the purer motive?—Where, then, does the foundation of morality lie?

2) Nothing outrages our moral feeling to its very depths as cruelty does. We can forgive any other crime, but not cruelty. The reason is that cruelty is compassion’s direct opposite. When we hear of some act of extreme cruelty—for example, the one the newspapers are reporting just now, of a mother who murdered her five-year-old boy by pouring boiling oil down his throat, and her younger child by burying it alive; or the one just reported from Algiers, where, after a chance quarrel and fight between a Spaniard and an Algerian, the latter, being the stronger, tore the other’s entire lower jaw clean out and carried it off as a

trophy, leaving him alive—we are seized with horror and cry: “How is it possible to do such a thing?”—What does this question mean? Does it perhaps mean: How is it possible to have so little fear of punishment in the life to come?—Hardly.—Or: How is it possible to act on a maxim so utterly unfit to become a universal law for all rational beings?—Certainly not.—Or: How is it possible to neglect one’s own perfection and that of others so grievously?—No more than the others.—The question quite certainly means only this: How is it possible to be so utterly without compassion?—Thus it is the greatest lack of compassion that stamps an act with the deepest moral depravity and abhorrence. Consequently, compassion is the true moral incentive.

3) In general, the foundation of morality and incentive to moral conduct that I have proposed is the only one that can claim a real, indeed an extensive, influence. Surely no one would wish to claim as much for the philosophers’ other moral principles. These consist of abstract and sometimes positively hairsplitting propositions, founded on nothing but an artificial combination of concepts, so that applying them to actual conduct would often even have a ridiculous side. A good deed done solely out of regard for Kant’s moral principle would, at bottom, be the work of philosophical pedantry; or else it would amount to self-deception, with the agent’s reason interpreting a deed prompted by other, perhaps nobler incentives as the product of the categorical imperative and of the wholly unsupported concept of duty. But not only the *philosophical* moral principles, designed for mere theory, but even the *religious* ones, framed entirely for practical purposes, can seldom be shown to have a decisive influence. We see this first in the fact that, despite the great diversity of religions on earth, the degree of morality—or rather immorality—shows no corresponding diversity whatever, but is essentially much the same everywhere. We must simply take care not to confuse coarseness and refinement with morality and immorality. Greek religion had an exceedingly slight moral tendency, almost confined to the oath; no dogma was taught, and no morality publicly preached. Yet we do not find that the Greeks were, on the whole, morally worse than the people of the Christian centuries. Christianity’s morality is of a far higher order than that of the other religions that have ever appeared in Europe. But anyone

who inferred that European moral conduct had improved in the same proportion, and now at least excelled that of its contemporaries, could soon be shown not only that Muslims, Zoroastrians, Hindus, and Buddhists display at least as much honesty, fidelity, tolerance, gentleness, charity, nobility of spirit, and self-denial as Christian peoples; indeed, the long catalogue of inhuman cruelties accompanying Christianity would rather make us fear that the scale tips against it: the countless religious wars; the indefensible Crusades; the extermination of a great part of America's Indigenous inhabitants and the peopling of that continent with Black slaves dragged over from Africa, torn without right or any semblance of right from their families, their country, their continent, and condemned to endless penal labor²²; the tireless persecutions of heretics and the Inquisition's tribunals, crying out to heaven; the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre; Alba's execution of 18000 Netherlanders; and so on, and so on.—In general, if we compare the excellent morality preached by Christianity, and more or less by every religion, with the practice of its adherents, and imagine what would become of that practice if the secular arm did not prevent crimes—indeed, what we would have to fear if all laws were suspended for even a single day—we must confess that the influence of all religions on moral conduct is really very slight. Weakness of faith is, of course, to blame. In theory, and as long as the matter rests in pious contemplation, everyone thinks his faith firm. But action is the hard touchstone of all our convictions. When the moment for it arrives, and faith must now prove itself through great renunciations and heavy sacrifices, its weakness becomes apparent. Once a person seriously contemplates a crime, he has already crossed the barrier of genuine, pure morality. After that, however, the first thing that holds him back is always the thought of the courts and the police. If he dismisses this in the hope of escaping them, the second barrier confronting him is concern for his honor. But if he passes this defense as well, the odds are heavily against any religious dogma still having enough power over him, after he has overcome those two mighty obstacles, to hold him back from the deed. For someone not deterred by dangers that are near and certain will hardly be restrained by dangers that are remote and rest on faith alone. Moreover, against every good action arising solely from religious

convictions, one may still object that it was not disinterested but done with a view to reward and punishment, and therefore has no purely moral worth. We find this insight forcefully expressed in a letter from the celebrated Grand Duke Karl August of Weimar: “Baron *Weyhers* himself thought that a man must be a wretched fellow if religion made him good and he was not naturally inclined to be so. In wine there is truth.” (Letters to J. H. Merck, Br. 229.)—Now consider, by contrast, the moral incentive I have proposed. Who would dare deny for a moment that at all times, among all peoples, in every circumstance of life, even in a lawless state, even amid the horrors of revolutions and wars, in great matters and small, every day and every hour, it exerts a decisive and truly marvelous influence; that it daily prevents much wrongdoing and calls many a good deed into being, without any hope of reward and often quite unexpectedly; and that wherever it, and it alone, has been at work, we all, moved and full of respect, unreservedly acknowledge the deed’s genuine moral worth?

4) For boundless compassion for all living beings is the firmest and surest guarantee of moral conduct, and needs no casuistry. Someone filled with it will assuredly injure no one, wrong no one, cause no one pain, but will instead show forbearance to everyone, forgive everyone, help everyone as much as he can; and all his actions will bear the stamp of justice and loving-kindness. Try saying, by contrast: “This person is virtuous, but he knows no compassion.” Or: “He is an unjust and malicious person, yet he is very compassionate.” The contradiction will make itself felt.—Tastes differ; but I know no lovelier prayer than the one that closes the ancient Indian plays, as a prayer for the king once closed the English ones. It says: “May all living beings remain free from pain.”

5) Particular features, too, reveal compassion as the true basic moral incentive. For example, it is just as wrong to use risk-free legal tricks to cheat a rich person out of a hundred thalers as a poor one. Yet the reproaches of conscience and the censure of uninvolved witnesses will be far louder and fiercer in the second case. Hence Aristotle already says: “It is more terrible to wrong an unfortunate person than a fortunate one” (“It is more unjust to inflict an injury on an unfortunate person than a fortunate one”), *Probl.*, XXIX, 2. On the other hand, the reproaches will be quieter still than in the first case if it is a public treasury one

has defrauded, since this cannot be an object of compassion. We see that it is not directly the violation of a right, but first of all the suffering this brings upon another, that furnishes the substance of our own and others' censure. Conscience and other people will indeed disapprove even of a mere violation of rights as such—for example, the one against a public treasury mentioned above—but only insofar as it breaches the maxim of respecting *every* right, the maxim that makes a person truly honest; hence indirectly and to a lesser degree. If, however, it was a treasury *entrusted* to one's care, the case is quite different: the concept of *double injustice* established above, with its distinctive properties, now applies. What has been explained here is the reason that the gravest reproach everywhere leveled against greedy extortioners and legal scoundrels is that they have seized the property of widows and orphans: precisely because these, being utterly helpless, should have aroused compassion even more than others. It is, then, the complete absence of compassion that proves a person's wickedness.

6) Compassion underlies loving-kindness even more plainly than it does justice. No one will receive evidence of genuine loving-kindness from others as long as everything is going well for him in every respect. A fortunate person may indeed experience the goodwill of his family and friends in many ways; but expressions of that pure, disinterested, objective concern for another's condition and fate which spring from loving-kindness are reserved for those suffering in some respect. For we take no sympathetic interest in the fortunate person *as such*; rather, *as such*, he remains a stranger to our hearts: let him keep what is his. Indeed, if he enjoys great advantages over others, he will readily arouse envy, which threatens to turn into malicious joy should he one day fall from the heights of good fortune. Yet this threat generally goes unfulfilled, and Sophocles' "the enemies laugh" ("the enemies laugh") does not come to pass. For as soon as the fortunate person falls, a great transformation takes place in the hearts of the others, one instructive for our inquiry. First of all, the nature of the interest his fair-weather friends took in him now becomes clear: "Friends scatter when the casks are drained, dregs and all." But on the other hand, what he feared more than misfortune itself, and could not bear to imagine—the exul-

tation of those who envied his good fortune, the mocking laughter of malicious joy—generally fails to appear. Envy is appeased; it has vanished along with its cause, and the compassion now taking its place gives birth to loving-kindness. Often, when a fortunate person has fallen, those who envied and hated him have become considerate, comforting, helpful friends. Who has not experienced something of the kind himself, at least in a milder degree, and, when struck by some misfortune, seen with surprise how people who until then had shown the greatest coldness, even ill will toward him, now approached him with unfeigned sympathy? For misfortune is the condition of compassion, and compassion the source of loving-kindness.—Related to this reflection is the observation that nothing so quickly soothes our anger, even when it is justified, as hearing these words about its object: “He is an unfortunate man.” For compassion is to anger what rain is to fire. I therefore advise anyone who would rather have nothing to regret that, when ablaze with anger against another and intending to inflict great suffering on him, he should vividly imagine that he has already done so, that he now sees the other struggling with mental or bodily pain, or with want and misery, and must say to himself: “This is my work.” If anything can subdue his anger, this can. For compassion is the true antidote to anger, and by this stratagem against ourselves we anticipate, while there is still time,

compassion, whose voice,

Once we have our revenge, makes its laws heard.

Volt., “Semiramis”, A. 5, Sc. 6.

In general, nothing so readily dispels our hostile feelings toward others as finding a point of view from which they can lay claim to our compassion.—Even the fact that parents generally love a sickly child most rests on its continually awakening compassion.

7) The moral incentive I have proposed further proves itself genuine by extending its protection to *animals*, for which the other European moral systems make such inexcusably poor provision. The supposed absence of rights in animals, the delusion that our conduct toward them has no moral significance—or, in the language of that morality, that we have no duties toward animals—is

nothing less than an outrageous coarseness and barbarity of the West, whose source lies in Judaism. In philosophy it rests on the complete difference between human beings and animals assumed in defiance of all evidence, a difference that, as is well known, *Descartes* proclaimed most emphatically and starkly, as a necessary consequence of his errors. For when the Cartesian-Leibnizian-Wolffian philosophy built rational psychology out of abstract concepts and constructed an immortal rational soul, the natural claims of the animal world plainly stood against this exclusive privilege, this patent of immortality granted to the human species; and nature, as on all such occasions, silently entered its protest. The philosophers, troubled by their intellectual consciences, now had to seek support for rational psychology in empirical psychology, and therefore strive to open a monstrous gulf, an immeasurable distance, between human beings and animals, in order to represent them, despite all evidence, as fundamentally different. *Boileau* already mocks such efforts:

Do animals have universities?

Do we see the four faculties flourishing among them?

In the end, animals were even supposed to be unable to distinguish themselves from the external world, to have no consciousness of themselves, no I! Against such absurd assertions, one need only point to the boundless egoism inherent in every animal, even the smallest and lowliest, which sufficiently attests how conscious animals are of their I in contrast to the world, or not-I. If one of these Cartesians found himself in a tiger's claws, he would become most distinctly aware of the sharp distinction the tiger draws between its I and not-I. Corresponding to these sophistries of the philosophers, we find on the popular level a peculiarity of certain languages, especially German: they have entirely separate words for animals' eating, drinking, pregnancy, giving birth, dying, and dead bodies, so as not to have to use the words denoting these acts in human beings, and thus to conceal under a diversity of words the complete identity of the thing itself. Since the ancient languages know no such duplication of expressions, but freely name the same thing with the same word, this wretched artifice is undoubtedly the work of the European priesthood, which in its profanity believes it can never go far enough in denying and reviling the

eternal essence that lives in all animals. It has thereby laid the foundation for the harshness and cruelty toward animals customary in Europe, which an inhabitant of High Asia can view only with justified abhorrence. We do not encounter this despicable artifice in English, undoubtedly because the Saxons were not yet Christians when they conquered England. We do, however, find an equivalent in the peculiarity that in English all animals are of the neuter gender and are therefore represented by the pronoun “it,” just like lifeless things. This is especially outrageous in the case of primates, such as dogs, apes, and so on, and is unmistakably a priestly trick to reduce animals to things. The ancient Egyptians, whose entire life was consecrated to religious purposes, interred the mummies of human beings and those of ibises, crocodiles, and so on in the same tombs. But in Europe it is an abomination and a crime to bury a faithful dog beside its master’s resting place, where it has sometimes awaited its own death with a fidelity and devotion not found in the human race.—Nothing leads more decisively to the recognition that the essential being is identical in the appearance of animal and human than the study of zoology and anatomy. What, then, are we to say when, in our own day (1839), a sanctimonious animal anatomist presumes to insist on an absolute and radical difference between human beings and animals, going so far as to attack and malign honest zoologists who, far from all priestcraft, servility, and Tartuffian hypocrisy, follow their path under the guidance of nature and truth?

One must truly be blind in every sense, or wholly chloroformed by the Jewish stench, not to recognize that what is essential and fundamental in animals and in human beings is the same, and that what distinguishes them lies not in what is primary, in the principle, the life force, the inner essence, the core of the two appearances—which in both is the individual’s *will*—but solely in what is secondary: the intellect, the degree of cognitive power. In human beings this is incomparably higher through the added capacity for *abstract* knowledge, called *reason*, yet demonstrably only by virtue of a greater development of the brain, and thus a bodily difference in a single part, the brain, chiefly in its size. By contrast, what animal and human being have in common, both mentally and bodily, is incomparably greater. A Judaized Western despiser of animals and idolater

of reason of this kind needs to be reminded that, just as he was suckled by *his* mother, so was the dog by *its own*. I have already censured even *Kant* for falling into this error of his contemporaries and countrymen. That Christian morality takes no account of animals is a defect better acknowledged than perpetuated. It is all the more astonishing because in other respects this morality shows the closest agreement with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism, only less forcefully expressed and not carried to its extremes. We can therefore scarcely doubt that it, like the idea of a God become human—an avatar—originated in India and may have reached Judea through Egypt; Christianity would thus be a reflection of India's primal light from the ruins of Egypt, which unfortunately fell on Jewish soil. A neat *symbol* of the defect just censured in Christian morality, despite its otherwise close agreement with Indian morality, could be found in the circumstance that John the Baptist appears entirely in the manner of an Indian sannyasi, yet—clothed in animal skins! As everyone knows, this would be an abomination to any Hindu: even the Royal Society in Calcutta received its copy of the Vedas only on promising not to have it bound in leather in the European fashion. It is therefore found in its library bound in silk. A similarly characteristic contrast is offered by the Gospel account of Peter's catch of fish, which the Savior blesses by a miracle so abundantly that the boats are filled with fish almost to the point of sinking (Luk. 5), when set against the story of Pythagoras, initiated into Egyptian wisdom, who buys the fishermen's catch while the net is still underwater, so that he can then set all the captured fish free (Apul. On Magic, p. 36. Bip.).—Compassion for animals is so closely bound up with goodness of character that we may confidently assert that anyone cruel to animals cannot be a good person. This compassion also shows itself to spring from the same source as the virtue to be practiced toward human beings. Sensitive people, for example, recalling that in a bad mood, in anger, or heated by wine they mistreated their dog, their horse, or their monkey undeservedly, needlessly, or beyond all measure, will feel the same remorse, the same dissatisfaction with themselves, as at the recollection of an injustice committed against a human being, where it is called the voice of an accusing conscience. I remember reading that an Englishman who had shot a monkey while hunting in India

could not forget the look it gave him as it died, and never shot at monkeys again. The same was true of William Harris, a veritable Nimrod, who traveled deep into the African interior in 1836 and 1837 simply for the pleasure of the hunt. In his account of the journey, published in Bombay in 1838, he relates that after killing his first elephant, a female, he went to find the fallen animal the following morning. All the other elephants had fled the area; only the dead elephant's calf had spent the night beside its mother. Now, forgetting all fear, it came toward the hunters with the most vivid and unmistakable signs of inconsolable grief and wound its little trunk around them to appeal for help. Then, Harris says, he was seized by genuine remorse for his deed and felt as though he had committed murder. We see this sensitive English nation distinguished above all others by a striking compassion for animals, which makes itself known at every opportunity. It has had the power, despite the "cold superstition" that otherwise degrades the nation, to move it to fill through legislation the gap religion left in morality. For this very gap is the reason that Europe and America need societies for the protection of animals, which themselves can act only with the help of the courts and police. In Asia the religions give animals sufficient protection, so no one there thinks of such societies. Meanwhile, a sense of animals' rights is awakening more and more in Europe too, as the strange notions of an animal world brought into existence solely for human use and amusement, in consequence of which animals are treated entirely as things, gradually fade and disappear. For these notions are the source of the brutal and utterly inconsiderate treatment of animals in Europe; I have demonstrated their Old Testament origin in the second volume of *Parerga*, §. 177. Let it be said, then, to the English people's credit that among them the law first took animals under its protection in earnest against cruel treatment, and that a villain really must pay for wronging animals, even when they belong to him. Indeed, not content with this, a voluntary association for the protection of animals exists in London, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, which privately and at considerable expense does a great deal to combat cruelty to animals. Its agents keep watch in secret, so that afterward they can come forward to denounce the tormentors of speechless, feeling beings; their presence must be

feared everywhere.²³ At steep bridges in London the society keeps a team of horses, which is harnessed free of charge in front of any heavily laden wagon. Is this not beautiful? Does it not command our approval just as a kindness to human beings does? The Philanthropic Society in London, for its part, also offered a prize of 30 pounds in 1837 for the best presentation of moral reasons against cruelty to animals, though these were to be drawn chiefly from Christianity, which certainly made the task harder: the prize was awarded to Mr. Macnamara in 1839. In Philadelphia there is an Animals friends Society with similar aims. T. Forster, an Englishman, dedicated his book *Philozoia, Moral Reflections on the Actual Condition of Animals and the Means of Improving the Same* (Brussels 1839) to its president. The book is original and well written. As an Englishman, the author naturally also seeks to ground his appeals for humane treatment of animals in the Bible, but slips off at every turn, until he finally resorts to the argument that Jesus Christ was, after all, born in a stable beside the little ox and the little donkey, symbolically indicating that we should regard animals as our brothers and treat them accordingly.—Everything cited here attests that the moral concern under discussion is at last beginning to find an answering note in the Western world as well. That compassion for animals need not go so far as to require us, like the Brahmins, to abstain from animal food rests on the fact that in nature the capacity for suffering keeps pace with intelligence. Human beings would therefore suffer more by going without animal food, especially in the North, than an animal suffers through a swift and always unforeseen death, which should nevertheless be made easier still by means of chloroform. Without animal food, moreover, the human race could not even survive in the North. By the same standard, human beings also have animals work for them; only an excessive burden of exertion becomes cruelty.

8) Let us set aside any perhaps possible metaphysical inquiry into the ultimate ground of that compassion from which alone nonegoistic actions can arise, and consider it from the empirical standpoint, simply as an arrangement of nature. Everyone will then see that, to alleviate as far as possible the countless and manifold sufferings to which our life is exposed and which no one wholly escapes,

and at the same time to counterbalance the burning egoism that fills all beings and often passes into malice, nature could have done nothing more effective than plant in the human heart that wondrous disposition by which one person shares the suffering of another. From it comes the voice that, as the occasion demands, calls strongly and unmistakably to one person, “Spare!” and to another, “Help!” Surely the mutual assistance arising from this offered more hope for everyone’s welfare than a general and abstract, stern command of duty resulting from certain rational considerations and combinations of concepts. All the less could success be expected from such a command because general propositions and abstract truths are wholly unintelligible to the uncultivated person, for whom only the concrete is anything—and all humanity, with the exception of an extremely small part, has always been uncultivated and must remain so, because the great amount of bodily labor indispensable to the whole does not permit the cultivation of the mind. To awaken compassion, by contrast, which has been demonstrated to be the *sole source of unselfish actions and therefore the true basis of morality*, requires no abstract knowledge, but only intuitive knowledge, the mere apprehension of the concrete case, to which it responds at once without any further mediation of thought.

9) We will find the following circumstance in complete agreement with this last reflection. The foundation I have given ethics does, to be sure, leave me without a predecessor among the academic philosophers; indeed, in relation to their doctrines it is paradoxical, since some of them—for example, the Stoics (Sen., *De clem.*, II, 5), Spinoza (*Eth.*, IV, prop. 50), and Kant (*Critique of Practical Reason*, S. 213;—*R.*, S. 257)—outright reject and censure compassion. Yet my foundation has on its side the authority of the greatest moralist of the entire modern age: undoubtedly J. J. Rousseau, the profound knower of the human heart, who drew his wisdom not from books but from life, and intended his teaching not for the lecture hall but for humanity. An enemy of prejudice, a pupil of nature, he alone was granted by her the gift of moralizing without being dull, because he struck the truth and moved the heart. I will therefore allow myself to add a few passages from him to confirm my view, having until now been as sparing as possible with quotations.

In the Discourse on the Origin of Inequality, S. 91 (edit. Bip.), he says: “There is another principle that Hobbes did not perceive, which, having been given to man to soften in certain circumstances the ferocity of his self-love, tempers his ardor for his own well-being with an *innate aversion to seeing his fellow creature suffer*. I do not believe I need fear any contradiction in granting man *the sole natural virtue* that even the most extreme detractor of human virtues has been forced to acknowledge. I am speaking *of compassion*, etc.”—S. 92: “Mandeville clearly saw that, for all their morality, human beings would never have been anything but monsters had nature not given them *compassion* to support reason. But he did not see that *from this one quality flow all the social virtues* he wishes to deny them. For what are generosity, clemency, humanity, if not *compassion* applied to the weak, the guilty, or the human race in general? Benevolence and even friendship, rightly understood, are the products of a constant compassion fixed on a particular object; for to wish that someone should not suffer—what else is that but to wish him happy?—Commiseration will be all the more energetic as *the observing animal identifies itself* more intimately *with the suffering animal*.”—S. 94: “It is therefore quite certain that compassion is a natural feeling which, by moderating each individual’s self-love, contributes to the mutual preservation of the whole species. In the state of nature it takes the place of laws, morals, and virtues, with this advantage: no one will be tempted to disobey its gentle voice. It is compassion that will keep any strong savage from taking from a weak child or an infirm old man the sustenance they have acquired with difficulty, if he himself hopes to find his own elsewhere. It is compassion that, instead of that sublime maxim of reasoned justice, ‘Do to others as you would have them do to you,’ inspires all people with this other maxim of natural goodness, far less perfect but perhaps more useful than the first: ‘Pursue your own good with as little harm to others as possible.’ In a word, *it is in this natural feeling, rather than in subtle arguments, that we must seek the cause of the aversion everyone would feel to doing wrong*, even independently of the maxims of education.”—Compare with this what he says in Emile, L. IV, p. 115–120 (ed. Bip.), where among other things we read: “Indeed, how do we let ourselves be moved to compassion, except by transporting

ourselves outside ourselves and *identifying with the suffering animal; by leaving our own being, so to speak, to take on its own?* We suffer only insofar as we judge that it suffers: *it is not in ourselves, but in it, that we suffer.*———Offer the young man objects on which the expansive force of his heart can act, which enlarge it, extend it to other beings, and make him everywhere *find himself again outside himself*; carefully remove those that constrict it, draw it inward, and tighten the spring *of the human ego*, etc.”—

Lacking, as I have said, authorities from the schools, I will add that the *Chinese* recognize five cardinal virtues (Tschang), among which compassion (Sin) stands first. The other four are justice, courtesy, wisdom, and sincerity.²⁴ Correspondingly, among the Hindus too, on the memorial tablets erected in remembrance of deceased princes, we see compassion for human beings and animals take first place among the virtues praised in them. In Athens compassion had an altar in the forum: “The Athenians have in their marketplace an altar to Compassion, to whom, as the divinity most helpful to human life and the changes of fortune, they alone among the Greeks pay honor.” Paus., I, 17. (“The Athenians have an altar to Compassion in the forum, for to her, who among all the gods most assists human life and its changing circumstances, the Athenians alone among the Greeks pay honor.”) Lucian also mentions this altar in Timon, §. 99.—A saying of Phocion, preserved for us by Stobaeus, presents compassion as the holiest thing in a human being: “Neither an altar from a sanctuary nor compassion from human nature should be removed” (“Neither an altar from a temple nor compassion from human life should be taken away”). In the Wisdom of the Indians, which is the Greek translation of the Panchatantra, we read (Sect. 3, p. 220): “For compassion is said to be the first of the virtues” (“Compassion is reckoned the foremost virtue”). We see that all ages and all countries have known the source of morality very well; only Europe has not. For this the Jewish stench alone is to blame, pervading everything here, everything: there must absolutely be a command of duty, a moral law, an imperative—in short, an order and a command to be obeyed. They will not budge from this, and refuse to see that anything of the kind always rests on egoism alone. In individuals, admittedly, and superior ones, the felt truth has

made itself known: in Rousseau, as quoted above; and Lessing too, in a letter of 1756, says: “The most compassionate person is the best person, the most disposed to all social virtues, to every kind of generosity.”

- ²² Even now, according to Buxton, *The African Slave Trade*, 1839, their number is increased each year by approximately 150000 newly captured Africans, while more than 200000 others perish miserably during their capture and the voyage.
- ²³ How seriously the matter is taken is shown by the following very recent example, which I translate from the *Birmingham Journal* of December 1839: “Arrest of a Party of 84 Dogfighters.—On learning that a dogfight was to take place yesterday on the ground in Fox Street, Birmingham, the Society of Friends of Animals took precautions to secure the assistance of the police. A strong detachment marched to the fighting ground and, as soon as it had been admitted, arrested the entire company present. These participants were then tied together in pairs with hand restraints, and the whole group joined by a long rope running through the middle. In this way they were led to the police office, where the mayor and magistrates were sitting. The two ringleaders were each sentenced to a fine of 1 pound sterling, together with 8½ shillings in costs, and, in default of payment, to 14 days’ hard labor in prison. The others were released.”—The dandies, who never fail to attend such noble pleasures, must have looked very embarrassed in the procession.—But we find an even sterner example from more recent times in the *Times* of April 6, 1855, S. 6, and in fact it was the newspaper itself that made the example. It reports a case brought before the courts involving the daughter of a very wealthy Scottish baronet, who had tormented her horse most cruelly with a cudgel and a knife, for which she had been fined 5 pounds sterling. But such a girl thinks nothing of that, and so would really have skipped away unpunished had the *Times* not followed it with the proper and telling chastisement. Printing the girl’s first and last names twice in large letters, it continues: “We cannot help saying that a couple of months in prison, together with a few floggings, administered in private but by the strongest-armed woman in Hampshire, would have been a much more fitting punishment for Miss N. N. A wretch of this sort has forfeited all the

considerations and privileges due to her sex: we can no longer regard her as a woman.”—I commend these newspaper reports particularly to the societies against cruelty to animals now established in Germany, so that they may see how the matter must be tackled if anything is to come of it; though I give my full recognition to the praiseworthy zeal of Court Councilor Perner in Munich, who has devoted himself entirely to this branch of charity and is spreading the impetus for it throughout Germany.

- ²⁴ Journ. Asiatique, Vol. 9, p. 62, to be compared with Mencius, ed. Stan. Julien, 1824, L. I, §. 45; also with Mencius in the Sacred Books of the Orient by Pauthier, p. 281.

Section 20



On the Ethical Difference between Characters.

The last question that must be answered to complete the foundation of ethics set out here is this: What accounts for the vast difference in people's moral conduct? If compassion is the fundamental incentive of all genuine—that is, unselfish—justice and love of humanity, why does it move one person but not another?—Can ethics, perhaps, not only uncover the moral incentive but also set it to work? Can it turn a hard-hearted person into a compassionate one, and so into someone just and benevolent?—Certainly not: differences of character are innate and ineradicable. A malicious person's malice is as inborn as a snake's fangs and venom sac; and he can change it no more than the snake can. "Willing cannot be learned," said Nero's tutor. In the *Meno*, *Plato* examines at length whether virtue can be taught. He quotes a passage from *Theognis*:

But by teaching

You will never make a bad man good.

(But by teaching you will never make a good man out of a bad one.)

And he reaches this conclusion: "Virtue, then, would come neither by nature nor through teaching, but by divine allotment, without understanding, to those who receive it" ("Virtue will come to us neither by instruction nor by nature; rather, by divine allotment, without the mind's participation, it will flow into whoever has been granted it"); here the difference between *φύσει*, "by

nature,” and *θεία μοίρα*, “by divine allotment,” seems to me roughly to mark the difference between the physical and the metaphysical. According to *Aristotle*, even the father of ethics, *Socrates*, maintained: “It is not in our power to become good or bad” (“It is not within our power to be good or bad”). (Eth. magna, I, 9.) Aristotle himself speaks in the same sense: “For everyone seems to possess each trait of character in some way by nature: from birth we are just, temperate, and so on” (“For individual traits seem in some way to belong by nature to all people: as soon as we are born, we are fitted and disposed for justice, temperance, courage, and the other virtues”). (Eth. Nicom., VI, 13.) We find the same conviction very firmly expressed in the fragments of the Pythagorean Archytas, which are certainly very old, even if they may not be authentic, and which Stobaeus preserved for us in his Anthology, Tit. I, §. 77. They are also printed in the Short Greek Works of Maxims and Morals, edited by Orelli, Vol. 2, p. 240. There, in the Doric dialect, we read: “Those virtues that employ reasoning and demonstration should be called branches of knowledge; but virtue is the moral and best disposition of the irrational part of the soul, by which we are said to be people of a certain character—for example, generous, just, and temperate.” (“Those virtues that employ reason and demonstration may properly be called branches of knowledge; but by the name of virtue we shall understand the moral and best *disposition of the part of the soul that lacks reason*, according to which we are said to have a certain moral quality, and are called, for example, generous, just, and temperate.”) If we survey all the virtues and vices that *Aristotle* brought together in a brief overview in his book On Virtues and Vices, we will find that they can all be conceived only as innate qualities, and indeed can be genuine only as such. If, on the other hand, they had been deliberately adopted through rational reflection, they would really amount to pretense and would be counterfeit; we could then place no reliance whatever on their lasting or proving themselves under the pressure of circumstances. The same holds for the virtue of love of humanity, which is absent from Aristotle, as from all the ancients. In the same spirit, though retaining his skeptical tone, *Montaigne* therefore asks: “Could it be true that to be altogether good we must be so through some hidden, natural,

and universal quality, without law, without reason, without example?” (L. II, c. 11.) *Lichtenberg* says outright: “All virtue that comes from deliberate resolve is worth little. Feeling or habit is what matters.” (Miscellaneous Writings, “Moral Observations.”) Even the original teaching of Christianity agrees with this view, for in the Sermon on the Mount itself, in Luke, Kap. 6, V. 45, we read: “The good person brings forth good from the good treasure of his heart, and the evil person brings forth evil from the evil treasure of his heart” (“The good person brings forth good from the good treasure of his soul, and the evil person brings forth evil from the evil treasure of his soul”); the two preceding verses have already offered an illustration in the fruit, which always accords with the tree. But it was *Kant* who first brought complete clarity to this important point, through his great doctrine that the *empirical character*, which as an appearance unfolds in time and in a multiplicity of actions, rests on the *intelligible character*: the constitution of the thing in itself underlying that appearance, and therefore independent of space and time, multiplicity and change. This alone explains the astonishing, rigid unchangeability of character, familiar to everyone with experience of life. Reality and experience have always triumphantly set it against the promises of an ethics that proposes to improve people morally and speaks of advances in virtue, thereby proving that virtue is inborn, not preached into us. If character, as something original, were not unchangeable and therefore inaccessible to any improvement through the correction of knowledge; if, instead, as that shallow ethics maintains, an improvement of character through morality, and thus “a steady progress toward the good,” were possible—then, unless all the many religious institutions and moralizing efforts had failed in their purpose, at least on average the older half of humanity would have to be considerably better than the younger. Yet there is so little sign of this that, on the contrary, we are more inclined to hope for something good from the young than from the old, who have been made worse by experience. It may indeed happen that one person seems somewhat better in old age, another worse, than in youth. But this is only because, as knowledge matures and is corrected in many ways, character emerges more purely and distinctly in old age; whereas in youth ignorance, errors, and fantasies sometimes put forward false

motives and sometimes concealed real ones—as follows from what was said under 3 in the preceding essay, S. 50 ff.—The fact that there are far more young than old among convicted criminals arises because, wherever a disposition to such deeds lies in the character, it soon finds an occasion to emerge in action and reaches its destination, the galley or the gallows. Conversely, someone whom the occasions of a long life have been unable to move to crime will not easily meet with motives for it later. The true reason for the respect paid to age thus seems to me to be that an old person has passed the test of a long life and kept an unblemished name: for that is the condition of this respect.—In keeping with this view, people in actual life have never let those promises of the moralists mislead them. They have never again trusted someone who once proved himself bad, and, whatever else may have changed, have always looked with confidence to the noble-mindedness of someone who once gave proof of it. “Action follows being” is a fruitful proposition of Scholasticism: everything in the world acts according to its unchangeable constitution, which makes up its being, its essence; so does the human being. As a person is, so he will, so he must act; and free choice indifferent between alternatives is a long-exploded invention from philosophy’s childhood, with which a few old women in doctoral caps may still go lumbering along.

The three fundamental ethical incentives in human beings—egoism, malice, compassion—are present in everyone in a different and astonishingly varied proportion. According to that proportion, motives will work on a person and actions will turn out. Only egoistic motives will have power over an egoistic character; those that appeal to compassion, like those that appeal to malice, will not prevail against them. He will no more sacrifice his own interest to take revenge on an enemy than to help a friend. Another person, strongly receptive to malicious motives, will often shrink from no great loss of his own in order to harm others. For there are characters who find in causing another’s suffering a pleasure that outweighs equally great suffering of their own: “Heedless of himself, so long as he harms another” (Sen., *On Anger*, I, 1). They enter battle with passionate delight, expecting to receive injuries as great as those they inflict. Indeed, they will deliberately murder someone who has done them harm and

immediately afterward kill themselves to escape punishment, as experience has very often shown. By contrast, *goodness of heart* consists in a deeply felt, universal compassion for everything that lives, but above all for human beings; for susceptibility to suffering keeps pace with the growth of intelligence. Hence the countless mental and bodily sufferings of human beings make a much stronger claim on compassion than an animal's pain, which is bodily alone and, even as such, less keenly felt. Goodness of character will therefore first restrain us from injuring another in any way, and then urge us to help wherever another's suffering presents itself. It can go just as far in this direction as malice can in the opposite: characters of rare goodness take another's suffering more to heart than their own, and therefore make sacrifices for others that cause them more suffering than the person they helped had endured before. Where several, or even many, can be helped at once, they will, if necessary, sacrifice themselves entirely: so Arnold von Winkelried. Of *Paulinus*, Bishop of Nola in the 5th century, during the Vandals' invasion of Italy from Africa, Joh. v. Müller relates (World History, Book 10, Kap. 10): "After giving all the church's treasures, his own wealth, and that of his friends to ransom prisoners, he saw the grief of a widow whose only son was being carried away, and offered himself into servitude in the son's place. For whoever was of serviceable age and did not fall by the sword was taken captive to Carthage."

In keeping with this astonishingly great, innate, and original diversity, each person will be stirred chiefly by the motives to which he is predominantly receptive, just as *one* substance reacts only to acids, another only to alkalis; and neither can be changed. Benevolent motives, such powerful incentives to a good character, have as such no power over someone receptive only to egoistic motives. If we nevertheless wish to bring him to benevolent actions, this can happen only by holding out the prospect that relieving another's suffering will somehow, indirectly, serve *his own advantage*—as most systems of morals are, in fact, various attempts of this kind. But this merely misleads his will; it does not improve it. Real improvement would require transforming the whole nature of his receptivity to motives: making one person no longer indifferent to another's suffering as such; another no longer find pleasure in causing it; or a

third no longer let every increase in his own well-being, however slight, far outweigh and render powerless all motives of any other kind. But this is far more certainly impossible than turning lead into gold. For it would require, as it were, turning a person's heart around within his body, remaking his deepest inner being. All we can do, by contrast, is enlighten the *head*, correct the *understanding*, and bring a person to a truer grasp of what is objectively there, of the real circumstances of life. Yet this achieves nothing beyond making the constitution of his will reveal itself more consistently, distinctly, and decisively, express itself without falsification. For just as many good actions rest at bottom on false motives, on well-meant promises of personal advantage to be gained through them in this world or the next, so many misdeeds rest only on a false understanding of the circumstances of human life. This is the basis of the American penitentiary system: it aims not to improve the criminal's *heart*, but merely to set his *head* straight, so that he comes to see that work and honesty are a surer, indeed an easier, road to his own welfare than roguery.

Motives can compel *lawfulness*, not *morality*: we can reshape *action*, but not *willing* itself, to which alone moral worth belongs. We cannot change the goal toward which the will strives, only the road it takes to reach it. Instruction can change the choice of means, but not of ultimate, general ends: each will sets these for itself according to its original nature. We can show the egoist that by giving up small advantages he will gain greater ones; the malicious person, that causing others to suffer will bring greater suffering on himself. But we will talk no one out of egoism itself or malice itself, any more than we will talk a cat out of its taste for catching mice. Even goodness of character can be brought to express its nature more consistently and fully through greater understanding, through instruction in the circumstances of life—in short, by enlightening the head. We can, for example, point out the more remote consequences our actions have for others: the sufferings that indirectly, and only over time, arise for them from some action we did not consider so bad. We can likewise explain the harmful consequences of many a kind-hearted action—for example, sparing a criminal—and especially the precedence that “Harm no one” everywhere takes over “Help everyone,” and so on. In this respect there certainly is moral

education and an ethics that brings improvement: but it goes no further, and its boundary is easy to see. The head is enlightened; the heart remains unimproved. In moral matters, as in intellectual and physical ones, what is fundamental and decisive is *what is inborn*: art can only lend assistance everywhere. Each person is what he is, as it were, “by the grace of God,” by divine right, by divine allotment.

“In the end, you are—*what you are*.

Put on a wig with millions of curls,

Raise your foot on ell-high socks:

You still remain forever what you are.”

But I have long heard the reader asking: What becomes of guilt and merit?—For the answer I refer to §. 10. What would otherwise have had to be presented here has already found its place there, because it is closely connected with *Kant’s* doctrine of the coexistence of freedom and necessity. I therefore ask that what was said there be read once more. In accordance with it, action, once motives appear, is necessary throughout; hence *freedom*, which announces itself only through *responsibility*, can lie only in being. The reproaches of conscience do indeed concern, immediately and ostensibly, *what we have done*, but truly and fundamentally they concern what we *are*. Our deeds alone bear fully valid witness to this, standing to our character as symptoms do to a disease. In this being, then, in what we *are*, guilt and merit must also lie. What we either esteem and love in others, or despise and hate, is not something mutable and changeable, but something enduring, established once and for all: what they *are*. And if we happen to revise our opinion of them, we do not say they have changed, but that we were mistaken about them. Likewise, the object of our satisfaction or dissatisfaction with ourselves is *what we are*, what we irrevocably are and remain; this extends even to intellectual, indeed to physiognomic, qualities. How, then, could guilt and merit fail to lie in *what we are*?—Our ever fuller acquaintance with ourselves, the *record of deeds* that fills up more and more, is *conscience*. Its immediate subject is our actions: specifically, those in which we either refused to heed compassion, which urged us at least not to injure others, and even to give them help and support, because egoism or out-

right malice guided us; or, renouncing both, followed that call. Both cases show the magnitude of the *difference* we make *between ourselves and others*. On *this difference*, ultimately, rest the degrees of morality or immorality—that is, of justice and love of humanity, as well as their opposites. The ever richer recollection of actions significant in this respect completes more and more the picture of our character, our true acquaintance with ourselves. From this arises satisfaction or dissatisfaction with ourselves, with *what we are*, according to whether egoism, malice, or compassion has predominated—that is, whether the difference we made between our own person and everyone else was greater or smaller. By the same measure we judge others, whose characters we come to know empirically, like our own, though less perfectly. Here what revealed itself in self-judgment as satisfaction or dissatisfaction—which can reach the anguish of conscience—appears as praise, approval, esteem, or blame, indignation, and contempt. Many very common expressions bear witness that even our reproaches against others concern their deeds only *immediately*, but *actually* concern their unchangeable character, and that virtue and vice are regarded as inherent, enduring qualities. For example: “Now I see what you are like!”—“I was mistaken about you.”—“Now I see what you are!”—“So that is what you are like!”—“I’m not like that!”—“I’m not the sort of man who would be capable of deceiving you,” and the like; also, “well-born souls”; in Spanish too, *bien nacido*, “well born”; *εὐγενής*, “noble,” and *εὐγένεια*, “nobility,” used to mean virtuous and virtue; “a friend of nobler spirit,” and so on.

Conscience depends on reason only because reason alone makes a clear and connected recollection possible. It lies in the nature of the matter that conscience speaks only *afterward*, which is why it is also called the *judging* conscience. It can speak *beforehand* only in an improper sense, namely indirectly, when reflection infers from the recollection of similar cases the future disapproval of a deed still only contemplated.—This is as far as the ethical fact of consciousness extends. It itself remains a metaphysical problem, not directly part of our task, though it will be touched on in the final part.—It accords perfectly with the insight that conscience is simply the acquaintance we gain, through our deeds, with our own unchangeable character that people’s vastly

differing *receptivity* to the motives of self-interest, malice, and compassion—on which their whole moral worth rests—is not something explicable through something else, or obtainable through instruction, and thus arising and changing in time, indeed dependent on chance; rather, it is innate, unchangeable, and admits of no further explanation. Accordingly, the course of life itself, with all its varied activity, is nothing more than the outer dial of that inner, original mechanism, or the mirror in which alone each person's intellect can discover the constitution of his own will, which is his core.

Anyone who takes the trouble to think through carefully what has been said here and in the §. 10 already mentioned will discover in my foundation of ethics a consistency and rounded completeness lacking in all others, and, on the other hand, an agreement with the facts of experience that those others possess still less. For truth alone can agree throughout with itself and with nature; all false fundamental views, by contrast, are inwardly at odds with themselves and outwardly at odds with experience, which lodges its silent protest at every step.

I am very well aware, though without remorse or regret, that the truths set out here at the end, in particular, directly offend many deeply rooted prejudices and errors, especially a certain current nursery morality. For, first, I am speaking here neither to children nor to the people, but to an enlightened academy whose purely theoretical question concerns the ultimate fundamental truths of ethics, and which expects a serious answer to a most serious question. And second, I hold that there can be no privileged errors, no useful errors, not even harmless errors, but that every error does infinitely more harm than good.—If, on the other hand, existing prejudices are to be made the measure of truth, or the boundary stone beyond which its exposition may not pass, it would be more honest to abolish philosophical faculties and academies altogether: for what does not exist should not pretend to exist.

Section 21



IV.

Toward a Metaphysical Interpretation of the Primal Phenomenon of Ethics.

An Understanding About This Supplement.

So far I have established the moral incentive as a fact and shown that from it alone can arise disinterested justice and genuine human kindness, the two cardinal virtues on which all the others rest. This is sufficient to ground ethics, since ethics must necessarily rest on something that actually and demonstrably exists, whether given in the external world or in consciousness—unless, like some of my predecessors, we choose merely to assume an abstract proposition at will and derive ethical precepts from it, or, like *Kant*, to do the same with a mere concept, that of *law*. It seems to me that this answers the question posed by the Royal Society, since it asks for the foundation of ethics and does not also demand a metaphysics to ground that foundation in turn. Yet I see very well that the human mind has not found its final satisfaction and repose here. As at the end of every investigation and every empirical science, here too it confronts a primal phenomenon that explains everything falling under it and following from it, but itself remains unexplained, a riddle before us. Here too, then, the demand arises for a *metaphysics*: that is, an ultimate explanation of primal phenomena as such and, taken together, of the world. Here too this demand raises the question of why what exists and has been understood should be as it is and not otherwise, and how the character of appearance we have set out arises from

the essence of things in themselves. Indeed, in ethics the need for a metaphysical foundation is all the more urgent because philosophical and religious systems agree that the ethical significance of actions must also be metaphysical: it must reach beyond the mere appearance of things, and therefore beyond all possibility of experience, and so stand in the closest relation to the entire existence of the world and the destiny of humanity; for the final point toward which the meaning of existence as a whole converges must surely be the ethical. This last claim is also confirmed by the undeniable fact that, as death approaches, the course of every person's thoughts, whether or not that person has adhered to religious dogmas, takes a *moral* direction, and each strives to settle the account of a completed life entirely in *moral* terms. The testimony of the ancients carries particular weight here, since it is free of Christian influence. I therefore point out that we already find this fact expressed in a passage attributed to the most ancient lawgiver Zaleucus, though according to Bentley and Heyne it comes from a Pythagorean, and preserved for us by Stobaeus (Floril., Tit. 44, §. 20): "We must set before our eyes that moment when each of us reaches the end and must depart from life. For all who are about to die are seized with remorse as they remember the wrongs they have done, and with the desire that everything they had done should have been just." (We must set before our eyes that point in time when each of us must leave life: for all the dying are seized with repentance as they remember what they have done unjustly, and they long earnestly to have acted justly in everything.) Likewise, to recall a historical example, we see Pericles on his deathbed refusing to hear of all his great deeds, and wishing to hear only that he had never brought mourning upon a citizen (Plut. in Pericl.). To set a very different case beside this, I remember from a report of testimony before an English jury that an uncouth fifteen-year-old Black boy aboard a ship, about to die of an injury he had just received in a fight, hurriedly had all his shipmates called to him, to ask whether he had ever hurt or insulted any of them, and found great reassurance when they said no. Experience consistently teaches that the dying wish to be reconciled with everyone before they depart. Another kind of evidence for our proposition comes from the familiar experience that, while the author of intellectual

achievements, even the world's greatest masterpieces, very gladly accepts a reward if only one is available, almost anyone who has done something morally outstanding refuses all reward for it. This is especially true of great moral deeds: when, for example, someone has risked his own life to save another's, or even the lives of many, he generally refuses absolutely to accept a reward, even if he is poor, because he feels that it would diminish the metaphysical worth of his action. *Bürger* gives us a poetic portrayal of this at the end of his Song of the Brave Man. But it usually happens this way in real life too, and I have encountered it several times in English newspapers.—These facts are universal and occur without distinction of religion. Because life has this undeniable ethical and metaphysical tendency, no religion could gain a foothold in the world without interpreting life in these terms: for every religion finds its hold on human hearts through its ethical side. Every religion lays its dogma beneath the moral incentive that everyone feels, though without yet understanding it, and binds the two so closely together that they seem inseparable; indeed, priests strive to pass off unbelief and immorality as one and the same. This is why, for the believer, the unbeliever is identical with the morally bad person, as we can already see in the use of such expressions as godless, atheistic, unchristian, heretic, and the like as synonyms for morally bad. Religions have an easy task here, since they begin with *faith* and may demand it unconditionally for their dogma, even under threat. Philosophical systems, however, have no such easy game to play: thus an examination of all systems will show that their grounding of ethics, and likewise the point at which they connect it to their given metaphysics, are everywhere in an exceedingly sorry state. And yet the demand that ethics rest on metaphysics cannot be dismissed, as I have already affirmed in the introduction on the authority of *Wolff* and *Kant*.

But the problem of metaphysics is so far the hardest of all the problems that occupy the human mind that many thinkers regard it as utterly insoluble. In the present case I face the further, quite particular disadvantage imposed by the form of a detached monograph: I cannot begin from some definite metaphysical system to which I might subscribe, since I would either have to set it out, which would take far too long, or assume it as given and certain, which would

be highly questionable. It follows in turn that here, no less than before, I may use only the analytic method, not the synthetic: I must proceed not from the ground to its consequences, but from the consequences to their ground. This harsh necessity of proceeding without presuppositions and starting from no standpoint other than the one common to everyone has already made the exposition of the foundation of ethics so difficult for me that I now look back on it as a difficult feat successfully accomplished, much as when someone has done freehand what is otherwise done only on a firm support. Now, however, with the question of a metaphysical interpretation of the ethical foundation before us, the difficulty of proceeding without presuppositions becomes so overwhelming that I see only one way out: to be content with very general outlines; to offer suggestions rather than a full exposition; to show the path that leads to the goal without following it to the end; and, in general, to say only a very small part of what I would have to present here under other circumstances. In taking this course I appeal not only to the reasons just given, but also to the fact that the actual question has been answered in the preceding sections. Whatever I offer beyond it here is therefore a work beyond what is required, a *supplement* freely given and freely accepted.

Section 22



Metaphysical Foundation.

We must now leave the firm ground of experience that has supported every step we have taken so far, to seek our final theoretical satisfaction where no experience can ever possibly reach, fortunate if we receive even a hint, a fleeting glimpse, with which we can find some measure of peace. What must not leave us, however, is the honesty of our procedure up to this point. We will not, in the manner of so-called post-Kantian philosophy, indulge in fantasies, serve up fairy tales, seek to overawe the reader with words and throw dust in his eyes. Our promise is a little, honestly offered.

What has served until now as our ground of explanation itself becomes our problem: that natural compassion, innate in every human being and impossible to eradicate, which has proved to be the sole source of *nonegoistic actions*; and these alone possess moral worth. Many modern philosophers treat the concepts of *good* and *evil* as *simple* concepts, that is, as neither requiring nor admitting of explanation, and then generally speak with great mystery and reverence of an “*idea of the good*,” which they make the support of their ethics, or at least a cloak for its poverty.²⁵ Their practice obliges me to interpose the explanation that these concepts are anything but simple, let alone given a priori: they express a relation and are drawn from the most everyday experience. Everything that accords with the strivings of any individual will is called *good* in relation to

that will—good food, good roads, a good omen; the opposite is called *bad*, or, in living beings, *evil*. A person whose character makes him reluctant to hinder the strivings of others, and instead, so far as he reasonably can, favorable and helpful to them—who therefore does not harm others, but offers them help and support wherever he can—is called by them, in precisely the same respect, a *good person*. Thus the concept of good is applied to him from the same relative, empirical standpoint, situated in the subject who receives the action. But if we examine such a person's character not merely in relation to others, but in itself, we know from what has gone before that the virtues of justice and human kindness arise in him from an entirely immediate concern for the well-being and suffering of others, whose source we have recognized as compassion. If we return to what is essential in such a character, we undeniably find it in this: *he makes less of a distinction between himself and others than other people do*. In the eyes of a malicious character this distinction is so great that another's suffering is an immediate pleasure, which he therefore seeks without any further advantage to himself, indeed even against his own advantage. In the egoist's eyes the same *distinction* is still great enough for him to use great harm to others as a means of obtaining a small advantage for himself. For both, then, there is a wide gulf, a mighty *distinction*, between the I, which is confined to their own person, and the not-I, which embraces the rest of the world. "Let the world perish, so long as I am safe" is their maxim. For the good person, by contrast, this *distinction* is by no means so great; indeed, in acts of nobility it appears to be abolished, since another's welfare is advanced at the expense of one's own, and so the other's I is placed on an equal footing with one's own. And where *many* others are to be saved, one's own I is wholly sacrificed to them, as the individual gives his life for the many.

The question now is whether this latter conception of the relation between one's own I and another's, which underlies the actions of a good character, is mistaken and rests on an illusion; or whether this is rather true of the opposite conception, on which egoism and malice rest.—

The conception underlying egoism is strictly justified *empirically*. In experience the *distinction* between one's own person and another's appears absolute. The difference of place that separates me from the other also separates me from his well-being and suffering.—Against this, however, we should first observe that our knowledge of our own self is by no means exhaustive or clear to its deepest ground. Through the intuition that the brain carries out on the data of the senses, and thus indirectly, we know our own body as an object in space; through inner sense we know the continuous sequence of our strivings and acts of will that arise on the occasion of external motives; and finally we know the manifold movements, weaker or stronger, of our own will, to which all inward feelings can be traced. That is all: for knowing is not itself known in turn. The actual substrate of this whole appearance, however, our inner *essence in itself*, that which itself wills and knows, is inaccessible to us. We look only outward; within, it is dark. Thus our knowledge of ourselves is by no means complete and exhaustive, but very superficial; for the greater, indeed the principal, part, we are unknown to ourselves and a riddle. Or, as *Kant* says: the I knows itself only as appearance, not according to what it may be in itself. In that other part, which falls within our knowledge, each person is indeed completely different from every other; but it does not yet follow that the same holds for the great and essential part that remains hidden and unknown to each. For this part, then, at least the possibility remains that it is one and identical in all.

On what do all plurality and numerical difference among beings rest?—On space and time: through these alone are they possible, since the many can be thought and represented only as either side by side or one after another. Now, because the many of the same kind are *individuals*, I call space and time, insofar as they make *plurality* possible, the principle of individuation, without troubling over whether this is precisely the sense in which the Scholastics used the expression.

If *anything* in the revelations that *Kant's* marvelous depth of thought has given the world is indubitably true, it is the *transcendental aesthetic*: the doctrine, that is, of the ideality of space and time. Its foundation is so clear that no objection with even an appearance of validity has been brought against it. It is *Kant's*

triumph and belongs to the very few metaphysical doctrines that can be regarded as genuinely proved, as actual conquests in the field of metaphysics. According to it, then, space and time are the forms of our own faculty of intuition. They belong to that faculty, not to the things known through it, and therefore can never be determinations of things in themselves. They belong only to their *appearance*, as alone this is possible in our consciousness of the external world, a consciousness bound to physiological conditions. But if *time and space* are foreign to the thing in itself, that is, to the world's true essence, *plurality* must necessarily be foreign to it as well. Consequently, in the countless appearances of this world of the senses it can still be only one, and only that one, identical essence can manifest itself in them all. Conversely, what presents itself as a *many*, and thus in time and space, cannot be the thing in itself, but only *appearance*. As such, however, appearance exists only for our consciousness, which is restricted by many kinds of conditions and indeed rests on an organic function; it does not exist outside that consciousness.

This doctrine—that all plurality is only apparent; that in all the individuals of this world, however infinitely numerous they appear, one after another and side by side, there manifests itself only one and the same truly existing essence, present and identical in them all—this doctrine was certainly here long before *Kant*, indeed, one might say, has always been here. To begin with, it is the chief and fundamental doctrine of the oldest book in the world, the sacred *Vedas*, whose dogmatic part, or rather esoteric teaching, lies before us in the *Upanishads*.²⁶ There we find this great doctrine on almost every page, tirelessly repeated in countless turns of phrase and illustrated by manifold images and similes. That it also lay at the foundation of the wisdom of *Pythagoras* cannot be doubted, even from the meager accounts of his philosophy that have reached us. That it alone contained almost the whole philosophy of the *Eleatic* school is universally known. Later the *Neoplatonists* were imbued with it, teaching that “because of the unity of all things, all souls are one” (on account of the unity of all, all souls are one). In the 9th century we see it appear unexpectedly in Europe through *Scotus Eriugena*, who, inspired by it, strives to clothe it in the forms and expressions of the Christian religion. Among the Mohammedans we

find it again as the impassioned mysticism of the *Sufis*. But in the West *Giordano Bruno* had to pay with a shameful and agonizing death for his inability to resist the urge to proclaim this truth. Nevertheless, we also see Christian mystics become entangled in it, against their will and intention, whenever and wherever they appear. *Spinoza's* name is identified with it. Finally, in our own day, after *Kant* had destroyed the old dogmatism and the world stood aghast before its smoking ruins, this insight was revived by the eclectic philosophy of *Schelling*. Amalgamating the teachings of Plotinus, Spinoza, Kant, and Jakob Böhme with the results of modern natural science, he hastily put together a whole to meet, for the time being, his contemporaries' urgent need, and then played it out in variations. As a result, this insight has won general acceptance among Germany's scholars and has become almost universally familiar even among the merely educated.²⁷ The only exceptions are today's university philosophers, who have the difficult task of working against so-called *pantheism*. Plunged thereby into great distress and embarrassment, in their anguish they reach now for the most pitiful sophisms, now for the most bombastic phrases, to patch together some respectable masquerade costume in which to clothe a favored and imposed distaff philosophy. In short, "the one and all" has in every age been the fools' mockery and the wise person's endless meditation. Yet a strict proof of it can be given only from *Kant's* doctrine, as above—although *Kant* did not himself give it, but, in the manner of skillful speakers, offered only the premises and left his listeners the pleasure of the conclusion. If, then, plurality and separateness belong only to mere *appearance*, and it is one and the same essence that presents itself in everything alive, the conception that abolishes the distinction between I and not-I is not the mistaken one: rather, its opposite must be. We also find the Hindus giving this latter conception the name *Maya*, that is, appearance, illusion, phantasm. It is the former view that we have found underlying the phenomenon of compassion, and compassion itself to be its real expression. It would therefore be the metaphysical basis of ethics, consisting in *one* individual's immediately recognizing in the *other* his own self, his own true essence. Practical wisdom, then—acting justly and doing good—would coincide exactly in its result with the deepest teaching

of theoretical wisdom at its furthest reach; and the practical philosopher, that is, the just, the benevolent, the noble person, would merely express in action the same insight that results from the theoretical philosopher's greatest profundity and most laborious inquiry. Yet moral excellence stands higher than all theoretical wisdom, which is always only fragmentary and reaches by the slow path of inference the goal that moral excellence attains at a stroke. The morally noble person, however lacking in intellectual excellence, reveals through his actions the deepest insight, the highest wisdom, and puts the most brilliant and learned person to shame if the latter's conduct betrays that this great truth has remained foreign to his heart.

"Individuation is real; the principle of individuation, and the difference among individuals that rests on it, is the order of things in themselves. Every individual is a being fundamentally different from all others. In my own self alone do I have my true being; everything else, by contrast, is not-I and foreign to me."—This is the knowledge to whose truth flesh and bone bear witness, which underlies all egoism, and whose real expression is every unloving, unjust, or malicious act.—

"Individuation is mere appearance, arising through space and time, which are nothing more than the forms of all the objects of my cerebral faculty of cognition, conditioned by that faculty; hence the plurality and difference of individuals are also mere appearance, that is, present only in my *representation*. My true, inner essence exists in every living being as immediately as it reveals itself to me alone in my self-consciousness."—This knowledge, whose established expression in Sanskrit is the formula *tat-tvam asi*, that is, "this is you," is what breaks forth as *compassion*; on it therefore rests all genuine, that is, disinterested virtue, and its real expression is every good deed. It is this knowledge, at the deepest level, to which every appeal to gentleness, to human kindness, to mercy in place of justice is directed; for such an appeal is a reminder of the respect in which we are all one and the same being. Egoism, envy, hatred, persecution, harshness, revenge, pleasure in another's suffering, and cruelty, by contrast, appeal to that first knowledge and find reassurance in it. The emotion and delight we feel on hearing of a noble action, still more on seeing it, and most of

all on performing it ourselves, rest at the deepest level on the certainty it gives us that beyond all the plurality and difference of individuals presented to us by the principle of individuation lies a unity that truly exists and is indeed accessible to us, since it has just emerged as a fact.

Depending on which of these two ways of knowing is held to, there appears between one being and another either the love or the strife of Empedocles. But someone animated by strife who advanced in hostility upon his most hated adversary and penetrated to that adversary's deepest interior would, to his surprise, discover himself there. For just as in a dream we ourselves are within every person who appears to us, so it is when we are awake—though not so easy to see. But tat-twam asi.

The predominance of one or the other of these two ways of knowing is revealed not only in individual actions, but in the entire character of consciousness and mood, which is therefore so essentially different in the *good* character from that in the *bad*. The latter feels a strong dividing wall everywhere between himself and everything outside him. The world is for him an *absolute not-I*, and his relation to it is hostile from the outset: thus the fundamental note of his mood becomes spite, suspicion, envy, and pleasure in others' suffering.—The good character, by contrast, lives in an external world of the same nature as his own essence. Others are not for him not-I, but "I once more." His original relation to everyone is therefore friendly: he feels inwardly akin to all beings, shares immediately in their well-being and suffering, and confidently assumes the same concern in them. From this arise the deep peace within him and that confident, tranquil, contented mood through which everyone feels at ease in his presence.—The evil character does not trust in others' help when he is in need. If he calls for it, he does so without confidence; if he obtains it, he receives it without true gratitude, because he can scarcely understand it except as the effect of others' foolishness. For even after his own essence has made itself known from within another's by unmistakable signs, he remains incapable of recognizing it there. This is the real source of what is outrageous in all ingratitude. The moral isolation in which he essentially and inescapably finds himself also makes him prone to despair.—The good character will ask others for help

with as much confidence as he is conscious of his own readiness to help them. For, as I have said, to the one the human world is not-I, to the other “I once more.”—The magnanimous person who forgives his enemy and returns good for evil is sublime and receives the highest praise because he still recognized his very own essence where it decisively denied itself.

Every wholly pure act of beneficence, every completely and truly disinterested act of help, which as such has the other’s distress alone as its motive, is, when we inquire to its deepest ground, actually a mysterious action, a practical mysticism: for ultimately it springs from the same knowledge that constitutes the essence of all genuine mysticism, and it cannot truthfully be explained in any other way. For someone to give even alms without having, in the remotest way, any other aim than to lessen the want oppressing the other is possible only insofar as he recognizes that what now appears before him in that sorrowful form is he himself—that is, insofar as he recognizes his own essence in itself in the other’s appearance. That is why, in the preceding part, I called compassion the great mystery of ethics.

Someone who goes to his death for his country has freed himself from the illusion that confines existence to his own person. He extends his own essence to his countrymen, in whom he lives on, indeed to their coming generations, for whom he acts; and in doing so regards death as a blink of the eyes, which does not interrupt sight.

Someone for whom all others have always been not-I—indeed, who at bottom considered only his own person truly real, and regarded others merely as phantoms to which he granted only a relative existence, insofar as they could serve as means to his ends or stand in their way, so that an immeasurable difference, a deep gulf, remained between his person and all that not-I—someone, then, who existed exclusively in this person of his own, sees in death all reality and the whole world perish with his self. By contrast, someone who saw in all others, indeed in everything that has life, his own essence, his own self, whose existence therefore flowed together with the existence of everything alive, loses through death only a small part of his existence. He continues in all the others, in whom he has always recognized and loved his essence and his self, and the illusion van-

ishes that separated his consciousness from that of the rest. On this may rest, not entirely but to a great extent, the difference between the ways in which especially good and predominantly evil people meet the hour of death.—

In every century poor truth has had to blush because it was paradoxical, though it is not her fault. She cannot take on the shape of the universal error enthroned above her. Sighing, she looks up to her protecting god, time, who beckons her toward victory and glory, but whose wingbeats are so vast and slow that the individual dies before they are done. Thus I too am well aware of the paradoxical character this metaphysical interpretation of the primal phenomenon of ethics must have for educated Western readers, accustomed as they are to quite different foundations of ethics; yet I cannot do violence to the truth. All I can bring myself to do on this account is to show by a quotation that this metaphysics of ethics was already the fundamental view of Indian wisdom thousands of years ago. I point back to it as Copernicus pointed back to the Pythagoreans' system of the world, displaced by Aristotle and Ptolemy. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lectio 13; 27, 28, according to A. W. von Schlegel's translation, we read: "He who sees the same supreme lord abiding in all living beings, not perishing when they perish, truly sees.—And seeing the same lord everywhere present, he does not harm himself through his own fault: from there he proceeds to the highest path."

I must leave these suggestions toward a metaphysics of ethics here, although one significant step in it still remains to be taken. But that presupposes that we had also gone a step further in ethics itself, which I was not permitted to do, since in Europe the highest goal set for ethics is the doctrine of right and virtue, and anything beyond this is unknown or at least unacknowledged. It is to this necessary omission, then, that we must attribute the fact that the outlines of a metaphysics of ethics presented here do not yet reveal, even from afar, the keystone of the whole edifice of metaphysics, or the true connection of the *Divine Comedy*. But that lay neither in the question nor in my plan. For one cannot say everything in a single day, and should not answer more than one has been asked.

When we seek to advance human knowledge and insight, we will always feel the resistance of the age, like that of a load we had to pull, pressing heavily on the ground and defying every effort. Then we must console ourselves with the certainty that, though we have prejudices against us, we have truth on our side. Once her ally, time, has joined her, she is perfectly certain of victory—if not today, then tomorrow.

- ²⁵ The concept of the *good*, in its purity, is a *primal concept*, “an *absolute idea* whose content loses itself in infinity.”

Bouterweck, Practical Aphorisms, p. 54.

We see that he would like nothing better than to make the simple, indeed trivial, concept of *good* into something fallen from heaven, so he could set it up as an idol in the temple.

- ²⁶ The authenticity of the *Oupnekhat* had been challenged on the strength of a few marginal glosses added by Mohammedan copyists and incorporated into the text. But it is fully vindicated by the Sanskrit scholar *F. H. H. Windischmann* (the son) in his *Shankara, or On the Theological Doctrines of the Vedantists*, 1833, p. XIX, and likewise by *Boehinger*, *On the Contemplative Life Among the Hindus*, 1831, p. 12.—Even a reader without Sanskrit can clearly satisfy himself, by comparing the more recent translations of individual Upanishads by *Rammohun Roy*, *Poley*, and even *Colebrooke*, as well as the latest by *Röer*, that the Persian translation by Sultan *Dara Shikoh*, the martyr to this doctrine, which *Anquetil* translated into Latin with strict literalness, rested on an exact and complete understanding of the words; whereas those others largely made do with groping and guesswork, and are therefore certainly much less accurate.—Further details can be found in the second volume of *Parerga*, ch. 16, §. 184.

- ²⁷ Among our kind, for quite a time,
We can shut the door on reason.
But once she deftly makes her entrance,
She stays within the house,
And soon becomes its mistress.

Volt.

Judgment



of the Royal Danish Society of Sciences.

Only one author attempted to resolve the question proposed in 1837: “Whether the source and foundation of moral philosophy are to be sought in an exposition of the idea of morality immediately contained in the conscience, and of the other fundamental concepts that arise from it, or in some other principle of knowledge.” We could not judge his essay, written in German and bearing the motto “Preaching morality is easy; grounding morality is²⁸ hard,” worthy of the prize. For, passing over what was chiefly required, he supposed the demand was to establish some principle of ethics, and therefore treated as an appendix the part of his essay in which he sets out the connection between the principle of ethics he has proposed and his metaphysics, as though there he were providing more than had been required; yet the question itself called for a discussion in which the connection between metaphysics and ethics would receive particular, indeed foremost, consideration. As for the author’s attempt to place the foundation of ethics in sympathy, neither did the form of his argument satisfy us, nor did he in fact prove that this foundation suffices; indeed, he was himself compelled to admit the contrary. Nor, it seems, should we leave unmentioned that several of the greatest philosophers of recent times are spoken of with such indecency as to give just and grave offense.

- ²⁸ The Academy added this second “is” from its own resources, to furnish an illustration of Longinus’s teaching (*de sublim.*, c. 39) that by adding or removing *one* syllable we can destroy the entire force of a maxim.