



On the Basis of Morality

ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA



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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Independent, machine-assisted Plain English translation made directly from the complete 1860 German edition and its embedded passages. Source-language reviewed.

TRANSLATOR

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THE WORK

Written 1840 · Moral philosophy

SOURCE

Original text from archive.org.

Mouseia · mouseia.org

Edition dated 26 October 2026

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Prize Question



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

Motto:

Preaching morality is easy; giving it a foundation, hard.

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

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

The original idea of morality, or the basic concept of the highest moral law, appears with a necessity of its own that is not at all logical. It appears both in the discipline whose purpose is to explain our knowledge of what is moral and in life: partly in conscience's judgment of our own actions, partly in our moral judgment of other people's actions. Several basic moral concepts, such as duty and accountability, are inseparable from that idea and look to it as their source. They too assert their force with the same necessity and over the same range. Yet, given the courses and paths taken by philosophical thought in our time, it seems very important to reopen this subject for discussion. The Society therefore wishes the following question to be carefully considered and examined:

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

In German:

The original idea of morality, or the basic concept of the highest moral law, appears with a necessity of its own that is not at all logical. It appears both in the science whose purpose is to set out our knowledge of what is moral and in real life, where it shows itself partly in conscience's judgment of our own actions and partly in our moral judgment of other people's actions. Several basic moral concepts, such as the concept of duty and that of accountability, are inseparable from that idea and arise from it. They too assert themselves with the same necessity and over the same range. Yet, given the paths taken by philosophical inquiry in our time, it seems very important to reopen this subject for investigation. The Society therefore 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 the analysis of the other basic moral concepts that arise from it, or in some other ground of knowledge?

Section 1



I. Introduction.

About the Problem.

A prize question set by the Royal *Dutch* Society in Haarlem in 1810 and answered by J. C. F. Meister asked: “Why do philosophers differ so much about the first principles of morality, yet agree about the conclusions and duties they derive from those principles?” That was a very easy task compared with this one. For:

1) The Royal Society’s present question asks for nothing less than the objectively true foundation of moral philosophy and therefore of morality itself. An academy is asking the question. As an academy, it does not want a practical appeal to honesty and virtue, backed by reasons whose plausibility is emphasized and whose weakness is hidden, as happens in talks for the public. Its aims as an academy are theoretical, not practical. It therefore wants a purely philosophical account of the ultimate basis of all morally good conduct: an objective, uncovered, naked account, independent of all established decrees, all unproved assumptions, and thus all metaphysical or mythical entities assumed to exist. But this problem is extraordinarily difficult. The evidence is not just that philosophers of every time and country have blunted their teeth on it. Even all the gods of East and West owe their existence to it. So if it is solved on this occasion, the Royal Society will certainly have spent its gold well.

2) A theoretical investigation of morality's foundation also faces a peculiar disadvantage. It can easily be mistaken for an attempt to undermine that foundation, which might bring down the building itself. Practical concerns lie so close to theoretical ones here that their well-meaning zeal is hard to keep from interfering at the wrong time. Not everyone can clearly distinguish a purely theoretical search for objective truth, detached from every interest, even a moral and practical one, from a wicked attack on deeply held, sacred convictions. So anyone who sets to work here must always keep something in mind for encouragement. Nothing is further from people's activities and dealings, or from the bustle and noise of the marketplace, than the academy's sanctuary, withdrawn into deep silence. No sound from outside may enter it, and no gods have statues there except exalted, naked truth alone.

The conclusion from these two premises is that I must be allowed complete freedom to speak openly, along with the right to doubt everything. And if, even with that freedom, I accomplish anything real in this matter, it will be a great deal.

But other difficulties stand in my way. The Royal Society also asks for the foundation of ethics to be presented on its own, separately, in a short monograph. That means taking it out of its connection with a whole philosophical system, that is, with metaphysics proper. This must not only make the task harder but necessarily make the result incomplete. Christian Wolf already says: "The darkness in practical philosophy is not dispelled unless the light of metaphysics shines on it" (Phil. pract., P. II. §. 28). And Kant says: "Metaphysics must come first, and without it there can be no moral philosophy at all." (Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals. Preface.) Every religion on earth, when it prescribes morality, does not leave it to stand on its own. It supports it with a body of doctrine whose main purpose is precisely that. In the same way, whatever foundation ethics has in philosophy must itself find support and a point of attachment in some metaphysics: in the explanation given of the world and existence in general. The final, true account of the inner nature of all things must necessarily be closely connected with the account of the ethical meaning of human action. In any case, what is proposed as morality's foundation cannot be a mere

abstract proposition floating freely in the air, with no support in the real world. It must be some fact found either in the objective world or in human consciousness. As such, it can itself only be a phenomenon. Like all phenomena in the world, it therefore needs a further explanation, which must then be sought from metaphysics. Philosophy as a whole is so interconnected that it is impossible to give an exhaustive account of any part without including all the rest. So Plato is quite right to say: “Do you think it is possible to understand the nature of the soul adequately without understanding the nature of the whole?” (“Do you really think the nature of the soul can be known sufficiently 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. Only together do they complete the explanation of the nature of things and of existence in general. So anyone who had followed one of these three down to its ultimate basis would necessarily have drawn the others into the explanation too. Similarly, anyone with an exhaustive understanding of any *one* thing in the world, clear down to its ultimate basis, would also have understood the whole remaining world completely.

Starting from a given metaphysics accepted as true, we could reach the foundation of ethics by a synthetic method. We would then have built that foundation from the bottom up, and ethics would stand firmly supported. But this task requires us to separate ethics from all metaphysics. That leaves only the *analytic* method, which starts from facts of either external experience or consciousness. It can indeed trace these latter facts back to their ultimate root in the human mind. But that root must then remain as a basic fact, a primary phenomenon, without being traced back to anything further. The whole explanation thus remains merely *psychological*. At most, we can add an indication of its connection with some general, basic metaphysical view. By contrast, that basic fact, that primary ethical phenomenon, could itself be given a foundation if we were allowed to discuss metaphysics first and then derive ethics from it by a synthetic method. But that would mean setting out a complete system of philosophy, going far beyond the bounds of the question. So I am forced to answer the question within the limits it has set for itself by isolating its subject.

Finally, the foundation on which I intend to place ethics will turn out to be very narrow. Of the many human actions that conform to the law and deserve approval and praise, only a smaller part will prove to come from purely moral motives. The greater part will be assigned to motives of other kinds. This is less satisfying and less impressive than, say, a categorical imperative, always ready to take orders so it can itself give orders about what to do and what to avoid—not to mention other foundations of morality based on its content. Here I can only recall the saying of Ecclesiastes (4, 6): “One handful with peace is better than both fists full with toil and emptiness.” In all knowledge there is always little that is genuine, stands the test, and cannot be destroyed, just as a lump of ore hides a few ounces of gold in a hundredweight of stone. Will people actually join me in preferring a *secure possession* to a *large one*, the little gold left in the crucible to the great mass dragged in? Or will they instead accuse me of taking away morality’s foundation rather than giving it one? For I show that people’s lawful and praiseworthy actions often have no purely moral content at all and usually have only a *small* share of it. For the rest, they rest on motives whose effectiveness can ultimately be traced back to the agent’s egoism. I must leave all this open, not without anxiety, indeed with resignation. I have long agreed with *the knight von Zimmermann* when he says: “Keep this thought in your heart until death: nothing in the world is as rare as a good judge.” (On Solitude, Th. I, Cap. 3, S. 93.) In fact, I can already picture my account, with only so narrow a basis to offer for all genuine, voluntary right action, all love of humanity, and all noble-mindedness, wherever they may be found. Beside it stand my competitors’ accounts. They confidently set up broad foundations for morality, able to bear any load, and able to be pressed on any doubter’s conscience with a threatening sideways glance at his own morality. Beside them my account looks as poor and subdued as Cordelia before King Lear, with her few words assuring him of her dutiful feelings, beside the extravagant declarations of her more eloquent sisters. That certainly calls for a scholarly hunter’s motto to strengthen the heart, such as: “Great is the power of truth, and it will prevail.” Yet that no

longer gives much encouragement to someone who has lived and accomplished things. Still, I will venture out with the truth for once. For whatever happens to me will have happened to it too.

Section 2



General Review.

For the public, theology provides morality's foundation by presenting it as God's declared will. Philosophers, by contrast, with few exceptions, carefully try to exclude this kind of foundation altogether. Rather than use it, they even prefer to resort to deceptive arguments. Why this opposition? Certainly no more effective foundation for morality can be imagined than a theological one. Who would be so reckless as to resist the will of the almighty and all-knowing? Certainly no one—if only that will had been announced in a completely authentic way that left no room for doubt, an official way, so to speak. But that condition cannot be met. Instead, people try to prove that a law proclaimed as God's will really is his will by showing that it agrees with our moral insights gained elsewhere, and therefore naturally. So they appeal to those insights as something more immediate and more certain. There is also the recognition that moral action brought about merely by threatened punishment and promised reward would be moral more in appearance than in reality. At bottom it would rest on egoism. The deciding factor would ultimately be how much more or less readily one person than another believed on insufficient grounds. Then *Kant* destroyed the foundations of *speculative theology*, which until then had been considered secure. After that, he wanted to reverse the relationship and support theology, formerly the support of ethics, on ethics instead, giving it an

existence even if only in thought. Since then, there is less reason than ever to consider founding ethics on theology. We no longer know which is to be the load and which the support, and would end up in a vicious circle.

Through the influence of *Kant's philosophy*, through the simultaneous effect of unprecedented advances in all the natural sciences—advances that make every earlier age look like childhood beside ours—and finally through acquaintance with Sanskrit literature, Brahmanism, and Buddhism, the basic philosophical convictions of European scholars have changed over the last fifty years. Brahmanism and Buddhism are humanity's oldest and most widespread religions, and therefore its foremost in time and space. They are also the original native religions of our own people, who, as we know, came from Asia and now, in their foreign homeland, receive belated news of them again. All this, I say, has brought about a change that some may hesitate to admit to themselves but that cannot be denied. As a result, the old supports of ethics have also become rotten. Yet the confidence remains that ethics itself can never fall. This gives rise to the conviction that it must have supports other than the old ones, suited to our age's more advanced understanding. No doubt the Royal Society's recognition of this increasingly felt need led it to pose the important prize question before us.

Much good morality has been preached in every age, but its foundation has always been in bad shape. In general, attempts to provide it show an effort to find some objective truth from which ethical rules could be logically derived. People have looked for that truth in the nature of things or in human nature, but in vain. It always turned out that the human will aims only at its own well-being, the totality of which we call *happiness*. This pursuit leads it down a very different path from the one morality would like to lay out for it. People then tried to present *happiness* sometimes as *identical* with virtue and sometimes as its *consequence* and *effect*. Both attempts have always failed, despite no shortage of deceptive reasoning. Next they tried purely objective, abstract propositions, found sometimes through experience and sometimes independently of it, from which morally good conduct might possibly be deduced. But these propositions lacked a point of attachment in human nature that could give them the

power to direct people's efforts against their egoistic inclination. I think it unnecessary to substantiate all this here by listing and criticizing every foundation of morality proposed so far. This is not just because I share Augustine's view that "what people have thought should not count for much; what matters is the truth of the matter." It would also mean "bringing owls to Athens." The Royal Society knows the earlier attempts to found ethics well enough. By its prize question itself, it shows that it too is convinced of their inadequacy. The less learned reader will find an account of previous attempts that, though incomplete, covers the essentials adequately in *Garve's* "Survey of the Chief Principles of Ethics," in *Stäudlin's* "History of Moral Philosophy," and in similar books.

It is certainly discouraging to consider that ethics, a science directly concerned with life, has fared no better than abstruse metaphysics. Although continuously pursued since Socrates founded it, ethics is still looking for its first principle. On the other hand, far more of what is essential is contained in the first principles of ethics than in those of any other science. The deductions here are so easy that they make themselves. Everyone can *draw conclusions*; few can *judge*. That is precisely why long textbooks and lectures on morality are as unnecessary as they are boring. Meanwhile, it is a relief that I may assume all the earlier foundations of ethics are known. Consider how the philosophers of antiquity and modern times—the Middle Ages were satisfied with church doctrine—have reached for the most varied, sometimes strangest arguments to provide a demonstrable foundation for morality's universally accepted demands, yet with obviously poor results. Anyone who surveys this will appreciate the difficulty of the problem and judge my achievement accordingly. Anyone who has seen that all the paths taken so far have failed to reach the goal will be more willing to join me on a very different one. Until now, people either failed to see it or passed it by with contempt, perhaps because it was the most natural one.¹ In fact, my solution to the problem will remind some people of Columbus's egg.

I will devote a critical examination only to the *most recent* attempt to found ethics, *Kant's*, and it will be all the more detailed. One reason is that *Kant's* great reform of morality gave this science a foundation with real advantages over earlier ones. Another is that it remains the last significant development in ethics. That is why *Kant's* foundation is still generally accepted and taught everywhere today, even when dressed up differently through some changes in presentation and wording. It is the ethics of the last sixty years, and it must be cleared away before we take another path. Examining it will also give me a chance to investigate and discuss most of the basic ethical concepts, so I can later take the results for granted. Above all, since opposites clarify one another, criticizing *Kant's* foundation of morality will be the best preparation and guide, indeed the direct path, to my own. Mine is directly opposed to *Kant's* on the most essential points. So it would be completely misguided to skip the criticism that follows and go straight to the positive part of my account. It would then be only half understandable.

In general, it really is time to subject ethics to serious questioning. For more than half a century it has rested on the comfortable cushion *Kant* laid beneath it: practical reason's categorical imperative. These days, however, this is usually introduced under the less grand but smoother and more familiar title of "the *moral law*." Under that name, after a slight bow to reason and experience, it slips through without inspection. Once inside the house, however, it never stops issuing orders and commands, without ever answering any further questions. It was right and necessary for *Kant*, who invented it and used it to displace cruder errors, to be satisfied with it. But it is hard to have to watch even the donkeys now rolling on the cushion he laid down, which has been trodden ever wider since. I mean the everyday writers of handbooks. With the calm confidence of people who do not understand, they imagine they have founded ethics if they merely appeal to that "*moral law*" supposedly living in our reason. They then confidently pile onto it the long-winded, confused web of phrases with which they manage to make the clearest and simplest relationships in life incomprehensible. Yet in doing this, they have never seriously asked themselves whether such a "*moral law*," as a convenient bait for morality, is

really written in our heads, chests, or hearts. So I admit the particular pleasure with which I now set about pulling this broad cushion out from under morality. I openly state my intention to show that practical reason and *Kant's* categorical imperative are completely unjustified, groundless, invented assumptions; to demonstrate that *Kant's* ethics too lacks a solid foundation; and thus to return morality to its old condition of complete helplessness. It must stand in that condition before I begin to set out human nature's true moral principle, which is rooted in our being and unquestionably effective. For this principle offers no foundation as broad as that cushion. People used to a more comfortable arrangement will not leave their old resting place until they clearly see the deep hollow in the ground beneath it.

¹ I cannot tell you through what misfortune,
Or rather through what twist of fate,
Deception wins more belief among us
Than simple, naked truth.
Casti.

(I cannot say through what accident, or rather through what misfortune, deception is more readily believed among us than simple, naked truth.)

Section 3



II.

Criticism of the Foundation *Kant* Gave Ethics.

Overview.

Kant's great achievement in ethics was to clear it of every form of *making happiness the goal*. Ancient ethics was a theory of happiness; modern ethics was mostly a doctrine of salvation. The ancients wanted to show that virtue and happiness were identical. But they were like two shapes that never match, however you position them. Modern thinkers wanted to connect the two not through the *law of identity* but through the *principle of sufficient reason*, making happiness a consequence of virtue. To do this, however, they had to turn either to a world other than the one we can possibly know or to deceptive arguments. Among the ancients, *Plato* alone is an exception. His ethics does not make happiness the goal, but it becomes mystical instead. Even the ethics of the Cynics and Stoics, by contrast, is only a special kind of *happiness-centered ethics*. I lack neither reasons nor evidence to prove this, but I do lack the space for it in my present undertaking.² So for both ancient and modern thinkers, with *Plato* alone excepted, virtue was only a means to an end. Strictly speaking, even *Kant* banished the pursuit of happiness from ethics more in appearance than in reality. He still leaves a secret connection between virtue and happiness in his doctrine of the highest good. There they meet in a remote, obscure chapter, while in public virtue acts as if happiness were a complete stranger. Apart from this,

Kant's ethical principle appears as something entirely independent of experience and its lessons: something transcendental or metaphysical. He recognizes that human conduct has a meaning that goes beyond all possible experience. For that very reason, it is the actual bridge to what he calls the intelligible world, the world of noumena, the world of things in themselves.

Besides the advantages just mentioned, Kant's ethics owes its fame to the moral purity and loftiness of its results. Most people held on to these without troubling much about their foundation. That foundation is very complex and abstract, and presented in an extremely artificial form. Kant had to use all his insight and ability to combine ideas to make it look sound. Fortunately, he devoted a separate work to presenting the *foundation* of his ethics apart from the ethics itself: the "*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*." Its subject is therefore exactly the same as that of our prize question. He says there, S. XIII of the preface: "The present *Groundwork* is nothing more than the search for and establishment of the highest principle of morality. This alone constitutes a task complete in its purpose and to be separated from every other moral investigation." In this book we find the foundation, and thus the essential part, of his ethics presented with strict organization, conciseness, and precision, as in no other. The book also has the important advantage of being his earliest work on morality, only four years later than the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It therefore comes from a time when, although he was already 61, age had not yet noticeably harmed his mind. That influence is already clearly felt, however, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*, which dates from 1788. That is one year after the unfortunate revision of the *Critique of Pure Reason* for its second edition, through which he plainly spoiled his immortal masterpiece. The preface to the new edition prepared by *Rosenkranz* gives us an account of this with which, after examining the matter myself, I can only agree.³ The *Critique of Practical Reason* contains essentially the same material as the "*Groundwork*" mentioned above. But the latter gives it in a concise and more rigorous form, while the former treats it at great length, interrupted by digressions and reinforced with some moral speeches to heighten the effect. By the time Kant wrote it, he had finally, late in life, achieved his well-earned fame. Sure of unlimited attention as

a result, he already gave more room to the talkativeness of old age. As distinctive features of the *Critique of Practical Reason*, however, we should first mention the account of the relationship between freedom and necessity, which is beyond all praise and was certainly written earlier (S. 169–179 of the fourth edition, and S. 223–231 in *Rosenkranz*). This nevertheless agrees completely with the account he gives in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (S. 560–586; R., S. 438 ff.). Second comes its moral theology, which people will increasingly recognize as what Kant really intended by it. Finally, in the “*Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue*,” the companion to his deplorable “*Doctrine of Right*,” written in 1797, the influence of mental decline in old age predominates. For all these reasons, I take the first work mentioned, the “*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*,” as my guide in the present criticism. All page numbers I cite without further qualification refer to it; please keep this in mind. I will consider the other two works only as supplementary and secondary material.

It will greatly help the reader’s *understanding* of this criticism, which undermines Kant’s ethics at its deepest foundation, to first reread attentively that “*Groundwork*” of *Kant’s* to which it primarily refers. This will 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 the third edition of 1792 and add the page number in *Rosenkranz’s* new collected edition, preceded by R.

² The detailed account can 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 It is by me; but here I am speaking incognito.

Section 4



The imperative form of *Kant's* ethics.

Kant's first falsehood lies in his idea of ethics itself. We find that idea stated most clearly on S. 62 (R., S. 54): “In practical philosophy the task is not to give reasons for what happens. The task is to give laws for *what ought to happen, even if it never happens*.” This is already a flat case of assuming what has to be proved. Who tells you that there are laws that our actions ought to obey? Who tells you that *what never happens ought to happen*? What gives you the right to assume this from the start? And what gives you the right to push on us right away an ethics in a legislating, commanding form, as the only possible one? I say, against Kant, that the ethicist, like the philosopher in general, must be content with explaining and interpreting what is given, that is, what actually exists or happens, in order to reach an *understanding* of it. I also say that this task keeps the ethicist fully occupied. There is far more to do than has been done to this day, after thousands of years have passed. In line with this *Kantian* assumption of what has to be proved, the preface, which is entirely part of the subject matter, assumes right away, before any investigation, that there are purely *moral laws*. That assumption then stays in place. It is the deepest foundation of the whole system. But first let us examine the concept of a *law*. Its proper and original meaning is limited to civil law—lex, νόμος—a human institution that rests on human choice. The concept of law has a second meaning, a derived, figurative, metaphorical one, when it is applied to nature. Nature has ways of pro-

ceeding that always stay the same. Some of these we know independently of experience, and some we have noticed in nature through experience. These we call, metaphorically, laws of nature. Only a very small part of these laws of nature can be seen independently of experience. That part makes up what Kant keenly and admirably separated out and put together under the name Metaphysics of Nature. For the *human will* there is indeed a law too, insofar as the human being belongs to nature. It is a law that can be strictly proved, one that cannot be broken, has no exceptions, and stands solid as rock. It does not carry necessity merely “so to speak,” as the categorical imperative does. It carries real necessity. It is the *law of motivation*, a form of the law of causality, namely causality that works through cognition. This is the only provable law for the *human will*, and the will is subject to it *as such*. It says that any action can occur only as the result of a sufficient motive. Like the law of causality in general, it is a law of nature. Moral laws, on the other hand, that are independent of human enactment, state institutions, or religious teaching may not be assumed to exist without proof. So by taking them for granted in advance, Kant assumes what has to be proved. This looks all the bolder because Kant adds right away, on S. VI of the preface, that a moral law is supposed to carry “*absolute necessity*” with it. But such necessity always has this mark: the result cannot fail to appear. So how can anyone speak of absolute necessity for these supposed moral laws? As an example of them, Kant gives “*du sollt* (sic) nicht lügen,” that is, “you shall not lie.” After all, it is well known, and he admits it himself, that such laws mostly, indeed as a rule, remain without effect. Suppose one wants to assume, in scientific ethics, other laws for the will besides the law of motivation, laws that are original and independent of all human enactment. Then one has to prove and derive their whole existence. That holds if one cares not only to recommend honesty in ethics but also to practice it. Until that proof has been given, I recognize no other origin for bringing the concept of law, precept, and ought into ethics than one that is foreign to philosophy: the Ten Commandments of Moses. The spelling “*du sollt*” even betrays this origin naively, in the example above, the first example of a moral law that Kant sets up. A concept that can show no origin other than this may not simply push its way

into philosophical ethics. It is turned away until valid proof has vouched for it and introduced it. In Kant, this concept gives us the first case of assuming what has to be proved, and it is a big one.

By that same step, Kant in the preface had taken the concept of the *moral law* without further ado as given and unquestionably present. He does the same on S. 8 (R., S. 16) with the closely related concept of *duty*. This concept is let into ethics as belonging there, without having to pass any further test. But I am forced to enter a protest again here. This concept, together with its relatives, that is, the concepts of *law*, *command*, *ought*, and the like, has its origin in theological morality when it is taken in this unconditional sense. In philosophical morality it stays a stranger until it brings a valid credential from the nature of human beings or from the nature of the objective world. Until then I recognize no other origin for it and its relatives than the Ten Commandments. In general, during the Christian centuries, philosophical ethics took its form unconsciously from theological ethics. Theological ethics is essentially *commanding*. So philosophical ethics also appeared in the form of precept and doctrine of duties. It did so in all innocence, without suspecting that some other authorization was needed first. It thought, rather, that this was simply its own natural shape. Human action has an ethical significance that is metaphysical, that is, it reaches beyond this world of appearance and touches eternity. No one can deny this significance. All peoples, ages, and creeds recognize it, and so do all philosophers except the true materialists. But it is not essential to this significance that it be understood in the form of commanding and obeying, of law and *duty*. Besides, once these concepts are cut off from the theological assumptions they came from, they really lose all meaning. Kant thinks he can replace those assumptions by speaking of *absolute ought* and *unconditional duty*. But this fobs the reader off with words. In fact, it gives the reader a contradiction in terms to digest. Every *ought* has sense and meaning only in relation to a threatened punishment or a promised reward. That is why Locke already said, long before anyone thought of Kant: 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 So every ought is necessarily conditioned by punishment or reward. In Kant's language, then, it is essentially and unavoidably *hypothetical*, and never, as he claims, *categorical*. But if we take those conditions away in thought, the concept of ought is left empty of sense. That is why *absolute ought* is indeed a contradiction in terms. A commanding voice, whether it comes from within or from outside, simply cannot be imagined except as threatening or promising. But then obeying it will be wise or foolish, depending on circumstances, yet always selfish, and so without moral worth. The complete unthinkability and absurdity of this concept of an *unconditional ought*, which underlies Kant's ethics, comes out later in his own system, in the Critique of Practical Reason. It is like a hidden poison in the body: it cannot stay there, but must finally break out and find an outlet. For that *unconditional ought*, unconditional though it was, afterward postulates a condition for itself after all, and in fact more than one: a reward, and also the immortality of the one to be rewarded, and a rewarder. Of course this is necessary once one has made *duty* and *ought* the basic concept of ethics, since these concepts are essentially relative and have meaning only through threatened punishment or promised reward. This payment is postulated afterward for virtue, which therefore only seemed to work for nothing. But it appears decently veiled, under the name of the *highest good*, which is the union of virtue and happiness. At bottom, however, this is nothing other than the morality that aims at happiness and therefore rests on self-interest, that is, eudemonism. Kant had solemnly thrown it out the main door of his system as heteronomous. Now it sneaks back in by the back door under the name *highest good*. This is how the assumption of an *unconditional, absolute ought*, which hides a contradiction, takes its revenge. The *conditional ought*, on the other hand, can of course not be a basic ethical concept. Everything done with an eye to reward or punishment is necessarily egoistic action, and as such it has no purely moral worth. All this shows that ethics needs a grander and more unprejudiced view, if we are serious about wanting to get to the bottom of the eternal significance of human action, which reaches beyond appearance.

Just as every *ought* is bound to a condition without exception, so is every *duty*. The two concepts are very close relatives and almost identical. The only difference between them may be this: *ought* in general can rest on mere compulsion, while *duty* presupposes *obligation*, that is, the taking on of the *duty*. Obligation takes place between master and servant, superior and subordinate, government and subjects. Precisely because no one takes on a *duty* for nothing, every *duty* also gives a right. A slave has no *duty*, because a slave has no right. But there is an *ought* for a slave, and it rests on mere compulsion. In the next part I will set out the only meaning that the concept *duty* has in ethics.

Casting ethics in an *imperative* form, as a *doctrine of duties*, and thinking of the moral worth or worthlessness of human actions as the fulfilling or violating of *duties*, comes, together with the *ought*, undeniably only from theological morality, and then from the Ten Commandments. Accordingly, it rests essentially on the assumption that human beings depend on another will, one that commands them and announces reward or punishment. It cannot be separated from that assumption. Theology takes the assumption of such a will as settled. But that does not mean it may be drawn quietly and without further ado into philosophical morality. And then one also may not assume in advance that the *imperative form*, the setting up of commands, laws, and duties, goes without saying in philosophical morality and is essential to it. It is a poor makeshift to replace the outer condition that by its nature clings essentially to such concepts with the word “absolute” or “categorical.” As already said, that produces a contradiction in terms.

Kant had borrowed this *imperative form* of ethics from theological morality, silently and without examining it. The assumptions of theological morality, that is, theology, really underlie that morality. They are the very thing that alone gives it meaning and sense. They cannot be separated from it, and they are contained in it implicitly. So afterward, at the end of his exposition, Kant had an easy time of it. He could develop a theology out of his morality in turn, the well-known moral theology. He only had to bring out into the open the concepts that the *ought* had implicitly posited and that lay hidden under his morality, and now to set them up explicitly as postulates of practical reason. So,

to the great edification of the world, a theology appeared that was supported by morality alone, and had even come out of it. But this happened because that morality itself rests on hidden theological assumptions. I do not intend a mocking comparison. But in form the matter is like the surprise that a conjuror prepares for us, by letting us find an object in the very place where it had been cleverly planted beforehand. Stated in the abstract, Kant's procedure is this: he made into the result what should have been the principle or assumption (theology), and he took as the assumption what should have been derived as the result (the command). Once he had turned the thing on its head in this way, no one recognized it for what it was, not even he himself, namely the old, well-known theological morality. We will look at how this trick was carried out in the sixth and seventh sections.

It is true that even before *Kant* the casting of morality in the imperative form, as a doctrine of duties, was in frequent use in philosophy too. But then people also based morality itself on the will of a God who had already been proved by other means, and so they stayed consistent. But as soon as someone undertook, like Kant, to give a basis independent of this, and wanted to establish ethics without metaphysical assumptions, that person was no longer entitled to lay that imperative form at the foundation, that "you shall" and "it is your duty," without deriving it some other way.

- ⁴ "For since it would be completely pointless to assume a rule laid down for the free actions of human beings without attaching to it something that gave it force, by determining their will through well-being and pain, we must, wherever we assume a law, also assume some reward or punishment attached to that law." (On the Understanding, Bd. II, c. 33, §. 6.)

Section 5



The assumption of duties to ourselves, in particular.

But *Kant* left this form of the doctrine of duties, which was so welcome to him, untouched even when he worked it out, in that he, like his predecessors, set up duties to ourselves alongside duties to others. I flatly reject this assumption. So here, where the context best allows it, I will insert my explanation of it as a side episode.

Duties to ourselves, like all duties, must be either duties of right or duties of love. *Duties of right* to ourselves are impossible, because of the self-evident principle that no wrong is done to someone who is willing. What I do is always what I want. So what happens to me from myself is also always only what I want, and therefore never an injustice. As for *duties of love* to ourselves, morality finds its work already done here and arrives too late. The highest commandment of Christian morality already takes for granted that the duty of self-love cannot be violated: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” By this commandment, the love that everyone has for themselves is assumed in advance as the maximum and the condition of every other love. It is by no means added as a command: “Love yourself as your neighbor.” Then everyone would feel that too little was being demanded. This would also be the only duty for which doing more than duty requires would be an everyday matter. Even Kant says, in the “Metaphysical First Principles for the Doctrine of Virtue,” S. 13 (R., S. 230): “What everyone unavoidably wants already of their own accord does not

belong under the concept of duty.” Still, this concept of duties to ourselves has kept its standing, and it is generally in special favor. There is no reason to be surprised at that. But it has an amusing effect in cases where people begin to worry about their own person and then speak in all seriousness of the duty of self-preservation. Meanwhile it is plain enough that fear will get them moving on its own, and that no command of duty is needed to give them a shove from behind.

What people usually set up as duties to ourselves is first of all an argument against *suicide*. It is deeply caught up in prejudices and conducted on the shallowest grounds. Human beings alone are exposed not only to *bodily* suffering, as animals are, which is limited to the present. They are also exposed to *mental* suffering, which is incomparably greater and which borrows from the future and the past. To humans alone nature has granted, as compensation, the privilege of ending their life at will, even before nature itself sets an end to it. So a human being, unlike an animal, does not necessarily live as long as possible, but only as long as that human being *wants* to. Whether a person must give up this privilege again, on ethical grounds, is a difficult question. At the least, it cannot be decided by the usual shallow arguments. As for the reasons against suicide that Kant does not disdain to give, on S. 53 (R., S. 48) and S. 67 (R., S. 57), in good conscience I cannot call them anything but wretched trifles that do not even deserve an answer. One has to laugh at the thought that such reflections were supposed to wrest the dagger from the hands of Cato, of Cleopatra, of Cocceius Nerva (Tac. Ann., VI, 26), or of the Arria of Paetus (Plin. Ep., III, 16). If there really are genuine moral motives against suicide, they lie, in any case, very deep. The plumb line of ordinary ethics cannot reach them. They belong to a higher way of looking at things than even the standpoint of the present treatise is suited for.⁵

What else is usually presented under the heading of duties to oneself consists partly of rules of prudence and partly of rules for healthy living. Neither kind belongs to morality proper. Finally, people also bring in here the ban on unnatural lust, that is, masturbation, pederasty, and bestiality. Of these, first, masturbation is mainly a vice of childhood, and fighting it is far more a matter for the

science of healthy living than for ethics. That is why the books against it were written by physicians (such as Tissot and others), not by moralists. The science of healthy living and hygiene have done their part in this matter and have crushed it with irrefutable arguments. If morality now still wants to take it in hand, it finds the work so thoroughly done already that little is left for it. Bestiality, in turn, is a completely abnormal offense that occurs very rarely, so it is truly something exceptional. It is also so outrageous and so contrary to human nature that it speaks against itself and deters, more than any arguments of reason could. Besides, as a degradation of human nature it is, strictly speaking, an offense against the species as such and in the abstract, not against human individuals. Of the three sexual offenses under discussion, then, only pederasty falls to ethics. It will find its place there naturally, in the treatment of justice. For justice is violated by it, and the principle that no wrong is done to someone who is willing cannot be raised against this, because the wrong consists in the seduction of the younger, inexperienced party, who is corrupted physically and morally by it.

⁵ They are ascetic reasons. You can find them in the fourth book of my main work, Bd. I, §. 69.

Section 6



On the Foundation of Kant's Ethics.

The *imperative form* of ethics, which §. 4. showed to assume what it must prove, is closely tied to one of Kant's favorite ideas. We can excuse this idea, but we cannot accept it.—Sometimes a doctor uses a treatment with brilliant success and then starts prescribing it for almost every illness. I compare Kant to that doctor. By separating what we know independently of experience from what we know through experience, he made the most brilliant and far-reaching discovery that metaphysics can claim. No wonder he then tried to use this method and distinction everywhere. So *ethics*, too, is to have a pure part, knowable independently of experience, and an empirical part. He rejects the latter as inadmissible for *establishing the basis* of ethics. His aim in the “Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals” is to find the former and present it separately. This is therefore meant to be a science wholly independent of experience, in the same sense as his “Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science.” Thus the *moral law*, whose existence he has already assumed without justification, deduction, or proof, is also to be knowable independently of experience. It is to be independent of all *inner and outer experience*, “*based solely on concepts of pure reason*”; it is to be a *synthetic proposition knowable independently of experience*” (Critique of Practical Reason, S. 56 of the fourth edition;—R., S. 142). Closely connected with this is the requirement that it be merely *formal*, like everything

known independently of experience. It must therefore concern only the *form* of actions, not their *content*.—Think what this 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), or in the circumstances of the world (the objective).” And he says (same place, S. VII; R., S. 6) that “*not the slightest thing may be borrowed here from knowledge of human beings*, that is, from *anthropology*.” He repeats (S. 59;—R., S. 52) “that we must never think of trying to derive the reality of our moral principle from the particular character of human nature.” Likewise (S. 60;—R., S. 52), nothing can provide a basis for the moral law if it is derived from “anything peculiar to humanity’s natural constitution, from certain feelings and tendencies, or even, if possible, from some particular bent belonging to human nature that would not necessarily apply to the will of *every rational being*.” This proves beyond dispute that he does *not present the supposed moral law as a fact of consciousness*, something that can be shown empirically to exist. Yet that is what all the philosophical dabblers of recent times would like to make it out to be. He rejects all inner experience, and rejects all outer experience still more firmly, ruling out every empirical basis for morality. Please note this carefully: he does not base his moral principle on any demonstrable *fact of consciousness*, such as an inner disposition. Nor does he base it on any objective relation between things in the outside world. No! That would be an empirical basis. Instead, morality is to rest on *pure concepts independent of experience*. These are concepts that still have no content at all from either outer or inner experience. They are empty shells without a kernel. Consider how much this means. Human consciousness and the whole outside world, with all the experience and facts they contain, have been pulled out from under our feet. We have nothing to stand on. What can we hold on to? A couple of completely abstract concepts, still entirely without substance, which also hang in midair. From these—or rather, merely from the form in which they are combined into judgments—a *law* is supposed to emerge. This law is supposed to hold with so-called *absolute necessity* and have the power to put a bridle and bit on the pressure of desires, the storm of passion, and the gigantic force of egoism. Let us see whether it can.

This preconceived idea—that the basis of morality absolutely requires *independence from experience* and freedom from everything empirical—is closely connected with a second favorite idea of Kant's. The moral principle he is to establish must be a *synthetic proposition independent of experience, with merely formal content*, and thus entirely a matter of *pure reason*. As such, it is to apply not just to *human beings*, but to *all possible rational beings*. It is to apply to human beings “only for that reason,” incidentally and by accident. That is why it rests on pure reason, which knows nothing but itself and the principle of noncontradiction, rather than on any feeling. Here, then, *pure reason* is not taken as a human power of knowing, which is all it really is. Instead, it is *treated as something that exists on its own*. There is no justification for this, and it sets a most harmful example and precedent, as our present miserable age of philosophy can show. Yet setting up morality not for human beings as human beings, but for *all rational beings* as such, is so central and dear to *Kant* that he never tires of repeating it whenever he can. Against this I say that we are never entitled to set up a genus when we know only a single species of it. We could put nothing into the concept of that genus except what we had taken from this *one* species. Anything we said about the genus would therefore still have to be understood as applying only to the *one* species. Meanwhile, to form the genus, we would have unjustifiably thought away features belonging to this species. In doing so, we might have removed the very condition that makes the remaining properties possible—the properties we then treat as a genus existing on its own. We know *intelligence in general* only as a property of animals. We are therefore never entitled to think of it as existing apart from and independently of animal nature. In the same way, we know *reason* only as a property of the human species. We have absolutely no right to think of it as existing outside that species, or to set up a genus called “rational beings” distinct from its only species, “human beings.” Still less are we entitled to make laws for such imaginary *rational beings considered in the abstract*. Talking about rational beings other than humans is like talking about *beings with weight* other than bodies. We cannot help suspecting that *Kant* was thinking a little of the dear little angels, or at least counting on their help in convincing the reader. In any case, this silently assumes a rational

soul, quite distinct from the sensing soul and the vegetative soul, that would remain after death and would then be nothing but rational. Yet he himself had expressly and thoroughly put an end to this entirely transcendent assumption of a thing's existence in the Critique of Pure Reason. Still, throughout Kant's ethics, especially in the Critique of Practical Reason, the idea always hovers in the background that the inner and eternal nature of human beings consists in *reason*. Since this subject comes up here only in passing, I must limit myself to simply asserting the opposite. Reason, like the power of knowing in general, is something secondary. It belongs to appearance and is, indeed, conditioned by the organism. The true core of a human being, the only metaphysical and therefore indestructible element, is *their will*.

Kant wanted to transfer to practical philosophy the method he had used so successfully in theoretical philosophy. Here, too, he wanted to separate pure knowledge independent of experience from empirical knowledge gained through experience. He therefore assumed that, just as we know the laws of space, time, and causality independently of experience, we are also given a moral guide for our actions before all experience, or at least in some similar way. This guide was to express itself as a categorical imperative, an absolute ought. But what an enormous *difference* there is between these two things! On one side are those kinds of theoretical knowledge independent of experience. They rest on expressing the mere forms—that is, functions—of our intellect. Only through these can we grasp an objective world, so the world *must* present itself in these forms. That is precisely why these forms lay down absolute laws for it. Every experience must always conform to them exactly, just as everything I see through blue glass *must* appear blue. On the other side is this supposed moral law independent of experience. Experience mocks it at every turn. Indeed, according to *Kant* himself, experience leaves it doubtful whether it has ever actually conformed to that law even once. What utterly different things are being brought together under the concept of *independence from experience*! Kant also overlooked a consequence of his own teaching in theoretical philosophy. The very *independence from experience* of the kinds of knowledge just mentioned restricts them to mere *appearance*: the representation of the world

in our heads. It completely deprives them of any validity concerning the *nature of things in themselves*, what exists independently of our way of grasping it. Accordingly, in practical philosophy too, his supposed moral law, if it arises in our heads independently of experience, would have to be merely a form of *appearance*. It would leave the nature of things in themselves untouched. But this consequence would flatly contradict both the subject itself and Kant's views about it. Throughout his work—for instance, Critique of Practical Reason, S. 175;—R., S. 228—he presents *the moral element in us* as most closely connected with the true *nature of things in themselves*, indeed as bearing directly on it. And in the Critique of Pure Reason, wherever the mysterious *thing in itself* comes into somewhat clearer view, it reveals itself as *the moral element* in us, as *will*.—But he brushed this aside.

In §. 4 I showed that Kant simply took the *imperative form* of ethics, and thus the concepts of ought, law, and duty, from theological morality. Yet he had to leave behind what alone gives these concepts force and meaning there. To give them a basis nonetheless, he goes so far as to demand that the *concept of duty* itself must also be the *reason for fulfilling* it, and thus the *binding force*. 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 to do it. A person's character begins to have worth only when they do good merely for the sake of tiresome duty, with no sympathy in their heart, cold and indifferent to others' suffering, and *not naturally inclined to human kindness*. This claim outrages genuine moral feeling. It glorifies the absence of love and directly opposes Christian moral teaching, which places love above everything and counts nothing without it (1. Corinthians, 13, 3). *Schiller* mocked this tactless moral pedantry in two apt epigrams headed "Scruples of Conscience and Decision." Their immediate occasion seems to have been some passages in the Critique of Practical Reason that fit this subject exactly. For example, S. 150;—R., S. 211: "The attitude required of a human being in following the moral law is to follow it from *duty*, not from *freely chosen affection*, or even from an effort *not commanded*, gladly undertaken of one's own accord."—It has to be *commanded*! What a morality for slaves! Then, in the same work, S.

213;—R., S. 257, we read “that feelings of compassion and tenderhearted sympathy would be troublesome even to right-minded people, because they would confuse their carefully considered maxims and so produce the wish to be rid of these feelings and subject to lawgiving reason alone.” I confidently maintain that what opens the hand of the loveless benefactor described above (S. 11;—R., S. 18), indifferent to other people’s suffering, can never be anything but slavish *superstitious fear*—unless he has ulterior motives. It makes no difference whether he calls his fetish “categorical imperative” or Fitzlipuzli.⁶ What else could move a hard heart but fear?

In keeping with these views, S. 13;—R., S. 19, says that an action’s moral worth is not to lie at all in the *intention* with which it was done, but in the maxim followed. Against this I ask the reader to consider that *intention alone* decides an action’s moral worth or lack of worth. The same action can therefore deserve blame or praise, depending on its intention. That is also why, whenever people discuss an action of any moral importance, everyone asks about the *intention* and judges the action by that alone. On the other side, people also appeal to their *intention* alone to justify themselves when they see their action misinterpreted, or to excuse themselves when it has had harmful results.

On S. 14;—R., S. 20, we finally receive the definition of *duty*, the basic concept of Kant’s whole ethics. It is “*the necessity of an action out of respect for the law.*”—But what is *necessary* happens and cannot fail to happen. Actions done from pure duty, by contrast, usually do not happen at all. Kant himself even admits, S. 25;—R., S. 28, that we have *no reliable examples at all* of an attitude of acting from pure duty. And on S. 26;—R., S. 29, he says, “It is utterly impossible to establish with certainty through experience *a single case* in which an action conforming to duty rested solely on the representation of duty.” The same is said on S. 28;—R., S. 30, and S. 49;—R., S. 50. In what sense, then, can such an action be called *necessary*? 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 this is much easier to say than to think through. Where is the *object* of this *objective* necessity, whose effect in objective reality usually—and perhaps always—fails to occur?

However fairly I interpret it, I cannot help saying that the definition's phrase "*necessity of an action*" is nothing but an artificially concealed and very strained way of saying *ought*. This intention becomes clearer when we notice that the same definition uses the word *respect* where *obedience* was meant. The note on S. 16;—R., S. 20, says: "*Respect* means only the subordination of my will to a law. The will's direct determination by the law, and the consciousness of this, is called *respect*." In what language? In German, what is described here is called *obedience*. The word *respect* cannot have been put so inappropriately in place of *obedience* for no reason. It must serve some purpose. Clearly, that purpose can only be to conceal the origin of the imperative form and the concept of duty in theological morality. We have already seen that the phrase *necessity of an action*, which takes the place of *ought* so awkwardly and unnaturally, was chosen only because *ought* is precisely the language of the *Ten Commandments*. The definition above, "Duty is the necessity of an action out of respect for the law," would therefore read as follows in natural, undisguised language—that is, without its mask: "*Duty* means an action that *ought* to be done out of *obedience* to a law."—That is "what lies at the poodle's core."

But now, the *law*, this final foundation stone of Kant's ethics! *What does it say? And where is it written?* This is the main question. First, I point out that these are *two* questions. One concerns the *principle* of ethics, the other its *foundation*. These are two quite different things, though they are usually confused, sometimes perhaps deliberately.

The *principle*, or highest *basic rule*, of a system of ethics is the shortest and clearest statement of the way of acting it prescribes. Or, if it has no imperative form, it states the way of acting to which it gives genuine moral worth. It is thus that system's instruction for virtue in general, expressed in *one* proposition: the what of virtue.—The *foundation* of a system of ethics, on the other hand, is the why of virtue. It is the *reason* for that obligation, recommendation, or praise, whether we seek it in human nature, in the external conditions of the world, or anywhere else. In ethics, as in all sciences, we should clearly distinguish the what from the why. Most writers on ethics deliberately blur this distinction instead. Probably this is because the what is so easy to state, while the

why is so terribly difficult. So they like to make up for poverty on *one* side with wealth on the *other*. By combining both in *one* proposition, they try to arrange a happy marriage between Penia (Poverty) and Poros (Resource). Usually they do this by not stating the what, which everyone knows, in its simple form. Instead, they force it into an artificial formula from which it must first be inferred as the conclusion from given premises. The reader then feels that they have learned not only the fact but also the reason for it. Most familiar moral principles readily show that this is so. In the next part, however, I do not intend to perform such tricks. I mean to proceed honestly, not to pass off the *principle* of ethics as its *foundation* at the same time, but to separate the two quite clearly. So I will state that what—the *principle*, the *basic rule*—right here in what I consider its simplest and purest form. All writers on ethics really agree on its content, however differently they dress it up: Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can. This is really the proposition that all moral teachers struggle to *justify*. It is the common result of their very different deductions. It is the what for which the why is still being sought, the consequence for which we demand the reason. It is therefore only what is given. What must be found in relation to it is the problem of every system of ethics, as well as of the present prize question. Solving this problem will provide the true *foundation* of ethics, which people have sought for thousands of years, like the philosophers' stone. The formula above really is the purest expression of what is given, the what, the principle. We can see this because it stands in relation to every other moral principle as a conclusion stands to its premises: it is what we are actually trying to reach. Every other moral principle must therefore be seen as a roundabout, indirect, or veiled expression of that simple proposition. This holds even, for example, for the commonplace basic rule considered so simple: What you do not want done to you, do not do to anyone else⁷. Its shortcoming is that it expresses only duties of justice, not duties of virtue. This is easily remedied by repeating it with both negatives removed. For then it, too, really means: Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can. But it gets there by a detour. This gives it the appearance of also having supplied the actual reason, the why,

for that instruction. It has not done so. The fact that I do not want something done to me in no way implies that I ought not to do it to others. The same holds for every *principle* or highest *basic rule* of morality put forward so far.

Let us now return to our question above. What does the *law* say, the law whose observance constitutes duty according to Kant? And what is it based on?—We will find that Kant, too, has very artfully tied the *principle* of morality closely to its *foundation*. Recall his demand, considered at the beginning, that the moral principle must be wholly independent of experience and purely formal—indeed, a synthetic proposition knowable independently of experience. It must therefore have no material content and may rest on nothing empirical. That means neither anything objective in the outside world nor anything subjective in consciousness, such as any feeling, inclination, or drive. Kant was clearly aware of the difficulty of this task. On S. 60;—R., S. 53, he says: “Here we see philosophy placed in a precarious position indeed. It is supposed to stand firm, although it hangs from nothing and rests on nothing in heaven or on earth.” We must therefore look forward all the more eagerly to his solution of the task he has set himself. We wait to see how something is to come from nothing; how laws for concrete human action are to take concrete form out of concepts wholly independent of experience, with no empirical or material content at all. We can take as a symbol of this process the chemical process in which three invisible gases—nitrogen, hydrogen, and chlorine—produce solid ammonium chloride before our eyes in an apparently empty space.—But I will set out the process by which Kant solves this difficult task more clearly than he himself wished or was able to do. This seems all the more necessary because the process rarely seems to have been properly understood. Almost all Kantians have fallen into the error of thinking that Kant presents the categorical imperative directly as a fact of consciousness. But then it would have an *anthropological* basis, resting on *experience*, even if inner experience, and thus on an *empirical* basis. This runs directly against Kant’s view, and he repeatedly rejects it. Thus he says on S. 48;—R., S. 44, “It cannot be established empirically whether there is any such categorical imperative at all.” And on S. 49;—R., S. 45: “The possibility of the categorical imperative must be investigated wholly independently of experi-

ence, since we do not have the advantage here of its actuality being given in experience.” Yet his very first student, *Reinhold*, was already caught in this error. In his “Contributions to a Survey of Philosophy at the Beginning of the 19th Century,” issue 2, S. 21, he says: “Kant accepts the moral law as an immediately certain fact, as an original fact of moral consciousness.” But if Kant had wanted to establish the categorical imperative as a fact of consciousness, and thus empirically, he would not have failed at least to show that it was such a fact. Nothing of the kind appears anywhere. To my knowledge, the categorical imperative first appears in the Critique of Pure Reason (S. 802 of the first and S. 830 of the fifth edition). It arrives there all at once, unannounced, connected with the preceding proposition only by a completely unjustified “therefore.” It is first formally introduced in the “Foundation for the Metaphysics of Morals,” the work we are examining in particular here. And it is introduced entirely by a route *independent of experience*, through a deduction from concepts. By contrast, the “Formula of Agreement for Critical Philosophy,” in the fifth issue of *Reinhold’s* journal just mentioned, so important for critical philosophy, even puts forward the following proposition on S. 122: “We distinguish moral self-awareness from the *experience* with which it is connected in human consciousness as an original *fact*, beyond which no knowledge can go. By this self-awareness we mean 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 guide for acts of will.”—There we would indeed have “a substantial statement—yes, one that really states something too.” (Schiller.)

But seriously: what an outrageous assumption of the very thing to be proved Kant’s moral law has grown into here! If this were true, ethics would indeed have a foundation of unmatched solidity. There would be no need for prize questions to encourage the search for it. But then the greatest marvel would be that such a fact of consciousness was discovered so late, while people had been eagerly and laboriously searching for a basis of morality for thousands of years. I will show further on how Kant himself gave rise to the error criticized here. Still, we might wonder how such a fundamental error could rule unchallenged among the Kantians. Yet while writing countless books on Kant’s philosophy,

they did not even notice the damage done to the Critique of Pure Reason in its second edition. That damage made it an incoherent book that contradicts itself. Only now has this come to light, and it has been explained, quite correctly in my view, in Rosenkranz's preface to the second volume of the collected edition of Kant's works. We must remember that many scholars are left little time for thorough learning by their constant teaching from the lectern and in print. "I learn by teaching" is not unconditionally true. Sometimes we might rather parody it: "By always teaching, I learn nothing." There is even some justification for what *Diderot* has Rameau's nephew say: "And these teachers—do you really think they will understand the sciences they teach? Nonsense, my dear sir, nonsense. If they had 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 several times: the professionals often do not know the best things." But to return to Kantian morality and the public: most people immediately assume that a conclusion has been correctly derived, as long as it agrees with their moral feelings. If the derivation looks difficult, they will not go deeply into it. They will leave that to the "specialists."

Kant's way of establishing his moral law is therefore not an empirical demonstration of it as a fact of consciousness, nor an appeal to moral feeling, nor an assumption of what must be proved under the grand modern name of an "absolute postulate." Instead, it is a very subtle thought process, which he presents twice, on S. 17 and 51;—R., S. 22 and 46. The following sets it out more clearly.

Kant rejected every empirical incentive of the will. In doing so, he ruled out in advance, as empirical, everything objective and everything subjective on which a law for the will might be based. So nothing is left to provide the *substance* of this law except its own *form*. This form is simply its *character as a law*. Its *character as a law* consists in applying to everyone, and thus in *universal validity*. This, then, becomes its *substance*. Consequently, the law's content is nothing but its *universal validity* itself. It will therefore say: "Act only on a maxim that you can at the same time will to become a universal law for all rational

beings.”—This, then, is the actual *grounding of Kant’s moral principle*, so widely misunderstood, and thus the *foundation* of his entire ethics.—Compare also the end of note 1 in the Critique of Practical Reason, S. 61;—R., S. 147.—I sincerely admire the great ingenuity with which Kant performed this feat. But I continue my serious examination by the standard of truth. I will add just one point here, to return to it later: *reason*, when and insofar as it carries out the specific line of reasoning just explained, receives the name *practical reason*. The categorical imperative of practical reason is the law that results from this thought process. Practical reason is therefore not, as most people—including Fichte early on—have thought, a special faculty that cannot be traced back any further, a hidden quality, a kind of moral instinct resembling Hutcheson’s moral sense. Rather, it is one and the same as *theoretical reason*, as Kant says in the preface, S. XII;—R., S. 8, and often enough elsewhere. It is theoretical reason itself insofar as it carries out the thought process explained above. Fichte calls Kant’s categorical imperative an *absolute postulate* (Foundation of the Entire Theory of Science, Tübingen 1802, S. 240, note). This is the modern, prettifying expression for assuming what must be proved. And that is how he himself consistently understood the categorical imperative, so he too falls under the error criticized above.

The first and most direct objection to Kant’s basis for morality is this. A moral law cannot originate in us in this way. That would require a person to come up, entirely on their own, with the idea of looking and asking around for a *law* that their will must obey and submit to. This cannot possibly occur to someone on its own. At most, it could occur after some other moral incentive had given the first push and prompted the inquiry. That incentive would have to be real and actively effective. It would have to make itself known, act on the person uninvited, and even force itself on them. But this would contradict Kant’s assumption. According to him, the thought process described above is *itself* supposed to be the origin of all moral concepts, the first heartbeat of morality. So long as such an incentive is *not* present—so long as, by hypothesis, there is no moral incentive besides the thought process described—egoism alone guides human conduct, following the law of motivation. In other words, in every individual

case, the motives operating at the time, which are entirely empirical and egoistic, determine the person's actions on their own and without interference. On this assumption, nothing prompts the person to ask about a law that would limit their willing and to which they would have to submit it. There is no reason why this should even occur to them. Still less is there a reason to investigate and puzzle over such a law. Yet only this could lead them into the peculiar train of thought in the reflection above. It makes no difference how clearly we suppose Kant's reflective process takes place. We might want to reduce it to a consideration that is only dimly felt. But no such change affects these basic truths: nothing comes from nothing, and an effect requires a cause. Like every motive that moves the will, the moral incentive absolutely must make itself known of its own accord. It must therefore act positively and consequently be *real*. For a human being, only what is empirical—or at least assumed to exist as something possibly empirical—has reality. So the moral incentive must in fact be *empirical*. As such, it must announce itself uninvited and come to us without waiting for us to ask about it. It must force itself on us, with enough power at least possibly to overcome the tremendously strong egoistic motives opposed to it. Morality concerns people's *actual* conduct, not houses of cards built prior to experience. No one would pay any attention to the results of such constructions amid life's serious demands and pressures. Against the storm of the passions, their effect would be that of an enema syringe against a raging fire. I have already mentioned that Kant considers it a great merit of his moral law that it rests solely on abstract, pure concepts prior to experience, and thus on *pure reason*. This supposedly makes it valid not just for human beings but for all rational beings as such. We must regret all the more that pure, abstract concepts prior to experience, without real content or any kind of empirical basis, can never move *human beings*, at least. I cannot speak for other rational beings. So the second defect in Kant's basis for morality is its lack of real content. This has gone unnoticed until now. Probably very few of those who celebrated and promoted Kant's morality ever clearly understood its actual *foundation*, as set out plainly above. The second defect, then, is a complete lack of reality, and therefore of any possible effectiveness. It hangs in the air like a spiderweb of the sub-

tlest and emptiest concepts. It rests on nothing, and so can support nothing and move nothing. Yet Kant has loaded it with an infinitely heavy burden: the assumption of freedom of the will.

Kant repeatedly states his conviction that freedom can have absolutely no place in human actions. He says that, in theory, we cannot even see how it could be possible (*Critique of Practical Reason*, S. 168;—R., S. 223). He also says that, given exact knowledge of a person's character and all the motives acting on them, we could calculate their conduct as certainly and precisely as a lunar eclipse (same work, S. 177;—R., S. 230). Despite this, freedom is assumed, though only in idea and as a postulate, solely on the credit of this moral foundation that hangs so completely in the air. This happens through the famous inference: "You can, because you ought to." But once we have clearly understood that something does not and cannot exist, what good does all this postulating do? Rather, we should reject what the postulate rests on, because it makes an impossible assumption. The rule is that the inference from impossibility to nonexistence is valid. A proof by contradiction would therefore overturn the categorical imperative here. Instead, one false doctrine is built on another.

Kant himself must privately have realized how inadequate a moral foundation made up of a few entirely abstract and empty concepts was. In the *Critique of Practical Reason*, the basis of ethics gradually changes its nature. As I said, Kant already proceeds less rigorously and methodically in that book, and his newly won fame has made him bolder. This basis almost forgets that it is merely a web of combined abstract concepts, and seems to want to become more substantial. For example, at S. 81;—R., S. 163, "the moral law" is "*as it were, a fact of pure reason.*" What are we supposed to make of this strange expression? Everywhere else, what is factual is contrasted with what can be known through pure reason.—Likewise, at S. 83;—R., S. 164 of the same work, he speaks of "a reason that determines the will *directly*," and so on.—We should remember here that in the *Groundwork* he expressly and repeatedly rejects every anthropological foundation and every attempt to establish the categorical imperative as a fact of consciousness. Such a foundation, he says,

would be *empirical*.—Yet casual remarks like these encouraged Kant’s followers to go much further down this road. *Fichte* (System of Ethics, S. 49) expressly warns “that we should not let ourselves be tempted to explain further our awareness that we have duties, or try to derive it from grounds outside itself, because this would detract from the dignity and absoluteness of the law.” What a fine excuse!—Then, at S. 66 of the same work, he says that “the principle of morality is a thought founded on the *intellectual intuitive perception* of the absolute activity of intelligence, and is pure intelligence’s direct concept of itself.” What phrases a windbag uses to hide his helplessness!—Anyone who wants to see how completely the Kantians gradually forgot and ignored Kant’s original foundation 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. At S. 105 and 106, it claims “that in Kantian philosophy autonomy—which is one and the same as the categorical imperative—is a fact of consciousness and cannot be traced back to anything further, since it announces itself through an immediate consciousness.”—Then it would have an anthropological, and therefore empirical, foundation. This contradicts Kant’s express and repeated declarations.—Nevertheless, at S. 108 of the same work we are told: “Both in the practical philosophy of criticism and in the whole of purified or higher transcendental philosophy, autonomy is what grounds itself and supplies a ground. It neither can nor needs to be grounded further. It is the absolutely original, what is true and certain through itself, the primal truth, what comes first in the highest sense, the absolute principle.—So if anyone suspects, demands, or seeks a ground for this autonomy outside itself, the Kantian school must believe either that they lack moral consciousness⁸, or that in their speculations they misunderstand it through false basic concepts. The Fichte-Schelling school declares that they suffer from the lack of intellect that makes a person incapable of philosophy. This is what characterizes the unholy rabble and the lazy cattle—or, as Schelling puts it more gently, the uninitiated crowd and the sluggish herd.” Everyone can sense what the truth of a doctrine must amount to when such trump cards are used to force its acceptance. Still, we must explain the truly childlike faith with which the Kantians

accepted the categorical imperative, and thereafter treated it as settled fact, by the respect these inspired. Disputing a theoretical claim here could easily be confused with moral wickedness. So even if someone noticed little of the categorical imperative in their own consciousness, they preferred to say nothing about it. They privately believed it must be more developed and appear more clearly in other people. No one likes turning the inside of their conscience outward.

In the Kantian school, practical reason and its categorical imperative thus appear increasingly as a fact beyond the physical world. They are a temple of Delphi in the human mind. From its dark inner sanctuary, oracular sayings announce without fail—not, unfortunately, what *will* happen, but what *ought* to happen. Once this *direct authority of practical reason* had been accepted—or rather slipped in and forced on people—it was unfortunately transferred to *theoretical* reason as well. Kant himself had often said that the two were, after all, one and the same reason (for example, Preface, S. XII;—R., S. 8). Once people had admitted that in *practical matters* there was a reason issuing pronouncements from an oracle's tripod, the next step was close at hand. They could grant the same privilege to its sister, or indeed to its partner in the very same substance, *theoretical reason*. They could declare it, like practical reason, answerable only to the emperor. The advantage was as enormous as it was obvious. Now all the would-be philosophers and fantasists, led by J. H. Jacobi, the denouncer of atheists, rushed to this little doorway that had unexpectedly opened for them. They came to bring their little wares to market, or at least to rescue their favorite items from the old inheritance that Kant's doctrine threatened to crush.—In an individual's life, one youthful misstep often ruins the whole course of life. Kant's single false assumption of a practical *reason* equipped with entirely transcendent credentials and handing down decisions “without grounds,” like the highest courts of appeal, had a similar result. From his rigorous, sober critical philosophy there sprang doctrines utterly foreign to it. These taught a *reason* that first only faintly “*had an inkling of*” the “*super-sensible*,” then clearly “*apprehended*” it, and finally even “*perceived it intellectually and intuitively*” in person. Any fantasist could now pass off his daydreams

as its “absolute” pronouncements and revelations—that is, as declarations issued from an oracle’s tripod. This new privilege was thoroughly exploited. Here, then, is the origin of the philosophical method that appeared immediately after Kant’s doctrine. It consists in mystifying, overawing, deceiving, throwing sand in people’s eyes, and blustering. The history of philosophy will one day list its era under the heading “Period of Dishonesty.” The *character of honesty*, of investigating together with the reader, which marks the writings of all earlier philosophers, has vanished here. The would-be philosopher of this period does not want to teach his reader, but to fool him. Every page bears witness to this. *Fichte* and *Schelling* shine as this period’s heroes. Finally there is also *Hegel*, a clumsy, witless charlatan, entirely unworthy even of them and far beneath these talented men. The chorus was supplied by all sorts of philosophy professors. With serious faces, they told their audiences about the infinite, the absolute, and many other things of which they could know absolutely nothing. Even this feeble play on words had to serve as a step toward that *prophetic role of reason*: since the German word “*Vernunft*,” *reason*, comes from “*Vernehmen*,” *apprehending*, it supposedly means that *reason* is a faculty for apprehending the so-called “*supersensible*” (Cloud-Cuckoo-Land, cloud-cuckoo-land). The idea met with boundless applause. For 30 years it was constantly repeated in Germany with unspeakable satisfaction, and even made the cornerstone of philosophical systems. Yet the truth is obvious. “*Vernunft*,” *reason*, does indeed come from “*Vernehmen*,” *apprehending*. But this is only because it gives human beings an advantage over animals: they can not only *bear* but also *apprehend*. What they apprehend is not what goes on in cloud-cuckoo-land, but what one rational person says to another. The other person *apprehends* this, and the ability to do so is called *reason*. This is how all peoples, all ages, and all languages have understood the concept of *reason*: as the capacity for general, abstract representations that are not intuitively perceived. These are called *concepts*, and words identify them and hold them in place. This capacity alone is the real advantage human beings have over animals. These *abstract* representations, or *concepts*, bring many individual things together. They make language possible, and through language, thinking in the proper sense. Through thinking they

make possible an awareness not just of the present, which animals also have, but of the past and the future as such. This in turn makes possible clear memory, reflection, foresight, intention, the planned cooperation of many people, the state, trades, arts, sciences, religions, and philosophies—in short, everything that makes human life so strikingly different from animal life. An animal has only representations given in *intuitive perception*, and therefore only motives given in *intuitive perception*. This makes the dependence of its acts of will on motives obvious. Human acts depend on motives no less. Given a person's individual character, motives move them with the strictest necessity too. But these motives are usually not representations given in *intuitive perception*. They are *abstract* representations: *concepts* and *thoughts*. These, however, result from earlier intuitive perceptions, and therefore from outside influences on the person. This gives a human being a *relative* freedom, namely in comparison with an animal. Unlike the animal, the person is not determined by their present surroundings as given in *intuitive perception*, but by their *thoughts*, drawn from past experiences or acquired through instruction. So the motive that moves them by necessity is not visible to an observer alongside the action. The person carries it around in their head. This gives not only their conduct as a whole, but even all their movements, a character visibly different from an animal's. It is as though finer, invisible threads were pulling them. All their movements therefore bear the stamp of deliberation and intention. This gives them an appearance of independence that visibly distinguishes them from animal movements. Yet all these great differences depend entirely on the capacity for *abstract representations*, or concepts. This capacity, then, is the essential feature of *reason*: the faculty that distinguishes *human beings*, called the rational faculty, the reasoning faculty, reason, reason, reasoning, reason, reason, discourse of reason.—But if someone asks me what, by contrast, *understanding*—mind, intellect, understanding, understanding—is, I answer as follows. It is the cognitive faculty that animals also possess, though in different degrees, and that we possess to the highest degree. It is the immediate awareness, preceding all experience, of the *law of causality*. This law constitutes the very form of understanding and its entire essence. Above all, *intuitive perception* of the external world depends on

it. By themselves, the senses are capable only of *sensation*. This is a long way from *intuitive perception*: it is merely the material for it. The mind sees and the mind hears; everything else is deaf and blind (the mind sees, the mind hears; everything else is deaf and blind). *Intuitive perception* arises when we immediately relate the *sensation* in our sense organs to its *cause*. Through this very act of intelligence, that cause presents itself as an *external object* in space, our form of intuitive perception. This itself proves that we are conscious of the law of causality prior to experience, and that it does not come from experience. Experience itself presupposes *intuitive perception*, and so becomes possible only through this law. Every superiority of understanding, all cleverness, insight, penetration, and discernment, consists in the *perfection* of this entirely immediate grasp of *causal relations*. That grasp underlies all knowledge of the *connections* between things, in the broadest sense of the word. Its sharpness and accuracy make *one* person *better at understanding*, cleverer, and more cunning than *another*. By contrast, people in all ages have called *someone rational* if they let *thoughts and concepts*, rather than impressions of intuitive perception, guide them, and therefore always proceed thoughtfully, consistently, and reflectively. Such conduct is everywhere called *rational conduct*. But this in no way implies honesty and human kindness. Someone can proceed with the greatest rationality—that is, thoughtfully, reflectively, consistently, systematically, and according to a plan—while following the most selfish, unjust, and even wicked maxims. So before *Kant*, it never occurred to anyone to identify just, virtuous, and noble conduct with *rational* conduct. People clearly distinguished the two and kept them separate. One rests on the *kind of motivation*, the other on *differences in basic maxims*. Only for *Kant*, because virtue was supposed to arise from pure reason, are virtuous and rational one and the same. This defies the usage of all peoples. Their usage is not accidental, but the product of shared human knowledge, and therefore agrees across peoples. Rationality and vice are perfectly compatible. Indeed, only their combination makes great, far-reaching crimes possible. Irrationality and generosity are equally compatible. For example, I might give someone in need something today that I myself will need still

more urgently tomorrow. Or I might let myself be carried away and give someone in distress the sum my creditor is waiting for. There are very many such cases.

As I said, reason was raised to the position of the source of all virtue. This rested on the claim that, as *practical reason*, it issues unconditional imperatives like an oracle, entirely prior to experience. Alongside this stood the false account of *theoretical reason* given in the Critique of Pure Reason. It described reason as a faculty essentially directed toward the *unconditioned*, which takes the form of three alleged ideas. At the same time, understanding was said to recognize, prior to experience, the impossibility of this unconditioned. As a model whose faults invited imitation, this combination led the babbling philosophers, headed by Jacobi, to their reason that directly *apprehends* the “*supersensible*.” It also led them to the absurd claim that reason is a faculty essentially designed for things beyond all experience, and thus for *metaphysics*. Supposedly, it knows directly and intuitively the ultimate grounds of all things and all existence, the supersensible, the absolute, the deity, and other such things.—Had people wanted to use *their reason* instead of worshiping it, a simple observation should long ago have countered these claims. Suppose human beings possessed a special organ for solving the riddle of the world, and this organ constituted *their reason*. Suppose they therefore carried within themselves an innate metaphysics that needed only to develop. Then people would have to agree as completely about the subjects of metaphysics as they do about the truths of arithmetic and geometry. It would be quite impossible for the earth to contain a large number of fundamentally different religions and an even larger number of fundamentally different philosophical systems. Instead, anyone whose religious or philosophical views differed from everyone else’s would immediately have to be regarded as someone not quite right in the head.—The following simple observation should have been equally unavoidable. If we discovered a species of ape that deliberately made tools for fighting, building, or some other use, we would immediately credit it with *reason*. Yet when we find savage peoples without any metaphysics or religion—and such peoples 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 supposed supersensible knowledge. But he would surely have considered Jacobi's *reason*, which directly *apprehends* the supersensible, beneath all criticism. Meanwhile, the universities still foist such a *reason*, answerable only to the emperor, on innocent young men.

Note.

If we want to get to the very bottom of the assumption of practical *reason*, we must trace its family tree a little further back. We find that it descends from a doctrine that *Kant* himself thoroughly refuted. Nevertheless, as a remnant of earlier ways of thinking, it secretly underlies his assumption of a practical reason with its imperatives and autonomy, without even his knowing it. This doctrine is rational psychology. According to it, a human being is composed of two completely different kinds of substance: a material body and an immaterial soul. *Plato* was the first to set out this dogma formally and try to prove it as an objective truth. But *Descartes* brought it to its full development and its extreme point by working it out with the greatest precision and scientific rigor. That very achievement, however, exposed its falsity, which was successively demonstrated by *Spinoza*, *Locke*, and *Kant*. *Spinoza*, whose philosophy chiefly consists in refuting his teacher's double dualism, made this his main proposition in direct and explicit opposition to *Descartes*' two substances: "Thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, understood now under one attribute, now under the other." *Locke* denied innate ideas, derived all knowledge from sensory knowledge, and taught that it was not impossible for matter to think. *Kant* refuted it through the critique of rational psychology as it appears in the first edition. On the other side, *Leibniz* and *Wolff* championed the bad cause. This earned Leibniz the undeserved honor of being compared with the great *Plato*, who was so unlike him. This is not the place to explain all this in detail. According to this rational psychology, the soul was originally and essentially a *knowing* being, and only as a consequence of this also a *willing* being. It had a higher and a lower faculty of knowledge, and likewise a higher and a lower faculty of will. This depended on whether, in these basic activities, it acted purely on its own, unmixed with the body, or in conjunction with it. In the higher faculty, the immaterial soul acted entirely on

its own, without the body's cooperation. There it was pure intellect. It dealt only with representations belonging to itself alone, and therefore not sensory at all but purely mental, and with acts of will of the same kind. None of these contained anything sensory, since that would come from the body.⁹ Here it knew nothing but pure abstractions, universals, innate concepts, eternal truths, and the like. Accordingly, its *willing* was influenced only by such purely mental representations. The *lower* faculty of knowledge and will, by contrast, was the work of the soul acting together with the body and its organs and closely joined to them. This impaired its purely mental activity. All knowing through *intuitive perception* was supposed to belong here and therefore to be obscure and confused. *Abstract* knowing, by contrast, consisting of abstracted concepts, was supposed to be clear! The will determined by such sensory knowledge was the lower and mostly bad will, since its *willing* was guided by sensory stimulation. The other *willing* was pure, guided by pure reason, and belonged to the immaterial soul alone. The Cartesian *De la Forge* worked this doctrine out most clearly in his *Treatise on the Human Mind*. At c. 23 he says: "It is only one and the same will that is called sensory appetite when it is aroused by judgments formed as a consequence of sensory perceptions, and is called rational appetite when the mind forms judgments about its own ideas independently of the confused sensory thoughts that cause its inclinations.——What led people to take these two different tendencies of the will for two different appetites is that one very often opposes the other. The intention that the mind builds upon its own perceptions does not always agree with the thoughts suggested to the mind by the body's condition. This condition often forces it to will one thing while its reason makes it desire another."—Ultimately, *Kant's* doctrine of the *autonomy* of the will comes from a dimly conscious memory of such views. As the voice of pure practical reason, this autonomy legislates for all rational beings as such and recognizes only *formal* determining grounds. These contrast with *material* grounds, which alone determine the lower faculty of desire, while the higher faculty opposes it.

In fact, this whole view, first presented in a properly systematic way by *Descartes*, can already be found in Aristotle. He states it clearly enough in *On the Soul*, I, 1. Even *Plato* had prepared the way for it and hinted at it in the *Phaedo* (S. 188 and 189, Bip.).—But because Descartes systematized and consolidated it, we find a hundred years later that the view has become quite bold. It has been pushed to its extreme, and precisely for that reason brought toward disillusionment. Muratori's *On the Power of Imagination*, cap. 1–4 and 13, offers a summary of the view then current. There imagination, whose function is the entire intuitive perception of the external world on the basis of sensory data, is a purely material, bodily, cerebral organ: the lower cognitive faculty. Only thinking, reflecting, and deciding are left to the immaterial soul.—But this plainly makes the matter questionable, and people must have felt it. If matter is capable of grasping the world through intuitive perception, a process so complex, then why should it not also be capable of abstracting from that perception, and therefore of everything else? Abstraction is clearly nothing more than dropping the features not needed for the purpose at hand: the differences between individuals and species. For example, I set aside what is peculiar to the sheep, the ox, the deer, the camel, and so on, and arrive at the concept of a ruminant. In this operation, representations lose their character as intuitive perceptions. As merely abstract representations that are not intuitively perceived—as concepts—they now need words so that they can be held in consciousness and used.—Despite all this, we still see *Kant* under the lingering influence of that old doctrine when he sets up 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 sensible left to say in reply, They quickly shove it into your conscience.
Schiller.

- ⁹ Pure thought is thought that is not concerned with any bodily images. Cart., Medit., p. 188.

Section 7



The highest principle of Kant's ethics.

In the last section I examined the actual foundation of Kant's ethics. I now turn to the *highest principle* of morality that rests on this foundation. It is closely connected with it, indeed fused with it. We remember 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."—It is a strange procedure to tell someone who is assumed to be looking for a law for his own actions that he must first look for one governing the actions of every possible rational being. But let us pass over that. Let us stick to this fact: the basic rule laid down by *Kant* is plainly not yet the moral principle itself. It is only a rule for finding it, an instruction about where to look. It is, so to speak, not yet cash, but a sound bill of exchange. Who is supposed to cash it? To state the truth at once, a very unexpected paymaster appears here—none other than *egoism*. I will make this clear immediately.

So the actual moral principle would be the maxim according to which I *can will* everyone to act. My *ability to will* is the hinge on which the instruction turns. But what exactly *can I* will, and what can I not will? To decide what I *can will* in this respect, I plainly need another standard. Only that standard would give me the key to an instruction delivered like a sealed order. Where should we look for this standard?—Nowhere but in my *egoism*. This is the nearest, always available, original, living standard for every act of will. It at least has the right of first possession over any moral principle.—The instruction in

Kant's highest rule for finding the actual moral principle rests on an unspoken assumption: I *can will* only what leaves me best off. Now, in setting a maxim that everyone is to follow, I must consider myself not only as always the *active* party but also as possibly, and at times, the *passive* party. From this standpoint, my *egoism* decides in favor of justice and human kindness. It does so not because it wants to *practice* them, but because it wants to *receive* them. It thinks like the miser who, after hearing a sermon on charity, cries out:

"How thoroughly explained, how fine!—

—I almost feel like going out to beg."

Kant cannot avoid supplying this essential key to the instruction that makes up his highest moral principle. But he does not supply it immediately when stating the principle, since that might cause offense. He puts it a respectable distance away, deeper in the text. This keeps it from being obvious that, despite the lofty preparations made independently of experience, egoism actually sits in judgment here and decides the matter. It decides from the standpoint of the possibly *passive* side, and its decision is then made binding on the *active* side. 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 pay me back in *the same coin*."—S. 55;—R., S. 49: "Making it a universal law that everyone could promise whatever occurred to him, intending not to keep the promise, would make promising itself, and any purpose one might have in promising, impossible, since *no one would believe* it."—On S. 56;—R., S. 50, he says of the maxim of unkindness: "A will that decided on this would contradict itself, since *cases can arise* in which it needs the love and sympathy of others. Through such a law of nature, arising from its own will, it would rob itself of all *hope of the help* it wishes for."—Likewise in the Critique of Practical Reason, Th. I, B. 1, Hauptst. 2, S. 123;—R., S. 192: "If everyone looked on the distress of others with complete indifference, and you belonged to such an *order of things*, would your will really agree to being in it?"—"How rashly we pass an unjust law against ourselves!" would be the answer. These passages explain well enough how to understand the phrase "*can will*" in *Kant's* moral principle. But the true state of this principle is stated most clearly in the Metaphysical

Foundations of the Doctrine of Virtue, §. 30: “For everyone wishes *to be helped*. But if he made known his maxim of being unwilling to help others, everyone would be entitled to refuse him help. So the self-interested maxim contradicts itself.” *Entitled*, he says, *entitled!* Here he states as clearly as possible that moral obligation rests entirely on an assumed *reciprocity*. It is therefore wholly egoistic, and egoism supplies its interpretation. Under the *condition* of *reciprocity*, egoism wisely agrees to a compromise. This would serve to establish the principle of political association, but not the moral principle. So when the Groundwork says, S. 81;—R., S. 67, “The principle: Always act on a maxim whose universality as a law you can at the same time will—is the only *condition* under which a will can never conflict with itself,” the real meaning of “conflict” is this: if a will had approved the maxim of injustice and unkindness, it would later revoke it when it happened to become the *party that suffers*. It would thus *contradict* itself.

This explanation makes it perfectly clear that Kant’s basic rule is not a *categorical* imperative, as he constantly claims. It is actually a *hypothetical* one. It rests on an unspoken *condition*: when I raise the law I am setting for my *actions* to the status of a *universal* law, it also becomes a law for what I *undergo*. Under this *condition*, as the potentially *passive* party, I certainly *cannot will* injustice and unkindness. But suppose I remove this *condition*. Perhaps I trust in my superior mental and physical powers, and, in choosing a universally valid maxim, think of myself only as the *active* party, never the *passive* one. Then, assuming morality has no foundation other than Kant’s, I can very well will injustice and unkindness as a universal maxim. I can therefore arrange the world upon the simple plan,

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

Wordsworth.

So the lack of a *real foundation* for Kant’s highest moral principle, shown in the last section, is joined by its hidden *hypothetical* character, contrary to *Kant’s* express assurance. Because of this character it even rests on mere *egoism*, which secretly interprets the instruction it gives. There is a further point. Considered

simply as a formula, it is only a roundabout, dressed-up, veiled statement of the familiar rule: “Do not do to another what you do not want done to yourself.” To be sure, this rule must be repeated without its two negatives. That removes its defect of containing only duties of justice, not duties of kindness. For this is plainly the only maxim according to which I can will everyone to act—with regard, of course, to my possibly *passive* role, and thus to my *egoism*. But this rule, “Do not do to another what you do not want done to yourself,” is itself only a roundabout statement, or, if one prefers, a premise, of the proposition I have put forward: “Harm no one; instead, help everyone as much as you can.” This is the simplest and purest expression of the conduct that all systems of morality unanimously demand. It is and remains the true, pure content of all morality. But what is its foundation? What gives this demand its force? That is the old, difficult problem now before us again. For on the other side *egoism* shouts loudly: “Help no one; instead, harm everyone if it happens to benefit you.” Malice offers this variation: “Instead, harm everyone as much as you can.” To put up a champion who can match and even defeat this *egoism*, and malice as well—that is the problem of all ethics. Here is Rhodes; jump here!—

On S. 57;—R., S. 60, *Kant* hopes to confirm the moral principle he has stated in another way. He tries to derive from it the long-recognized division of duties that really does rest on the nature of morality. These are duties of justice, also called perfect, indispensable, or strict duties, and duties of virtue, also called imperfect, broad, or meritorious duties, but best called duties of kindness. Yet his attempt is so forced and plainly unsuccessful that it counts heavily against his highest principle. Duties of justice are supposed to rest on a maxim whose opposite, taken as a universal law of nature, *cannot even be thought* without contradiction. Duties of virtue, by contrast, rest on a maxim whose opposite one can *think of* as a universal law of nature, but cannot possibly *will*.—Now I ask the reader to consider this. The maxim of injustice, the rule of force instead of right, is supposedly impossible even *to think of* as a law of nature. Yet it is actually the law that really and factually rules in nature, not only among animals but among human beings too. Civilized nations have tried to prevent its harmful effects by setting up the state. But whenever and however this institu-

tion is removed or evaded, that law of nature immediately returns. And it constantly rules between nations. As everyone knows, the language of justice used between them is merely the official jargon of diplomacy. Brute force decides. Genuine justice, on the other hand, meaning justice that is not forced, certainly does occur, but always only as an exception to that law of nature. Moreover, in the examples *Kant* gives before this division, his first illustration of duties of justice is the so-called duty to oneself not to end one's life voluntarily when its pains outweigh its pleasures (S. 53;—R., S. 48). So this maxim is supposedly impossible even *to think of* as a universal law of nature. I say that, since state power cannot intervene here, precisely this maxim shows itself without obstruction as an *actually existing law of nature*. For it is certainly a general rule that a person actually resorts to suicide as soon as the greatness of his suffering decisively overcomes the immensely strong, inborn drive to preserve life. Everyday experience shows this. But it is a bold assumption that any thought at all could hold him back once the powerful fear of death, so closely bound up with the nature of every living thing, has proved powerless to do so. Such a thought would have to be stronger even than that fear. The assumption is all the bolder when we see that this thought is so hard to discover that moralists still cannot tell us exactly what it is. At any rate, arguments of the kind *Kant* gives against suicide on this occasion, S. 53;—R., S. 48, and also S. 67;—R., S. 57, have certainly never held back anyone tired of life for even a moment. So a law of nature that indisputably exists in fact and operates every day is declared impossible *even to think of* without contradiction, all to support the division of duties derived from Kant's moral principle!—I admit that, from here, I look forward with some satisfaction to the foundation of morality I will present in the next part. The division into duties of justice and kindness—or, more accurately, into justice and human kindness—follows from it without any forcing. A principle of division arising from the nature of the matter draws a sharp boundary entirely on its own. My foundation of morality can thus actually supply the confirmation that *Kant* claims here for his own without any justification.

10 “By this simple plan,
Those who have the power should take,
Those who can should keep.”

Section 8



The *derived* forms of the highest principle of Kant's ethics.

As is well known, *Kant* also stated the highest principle of his ethics in a second, entirely different form. Unlike the first, this states the principle directly, instead of indirectly telling us how to look for it. Starting on S. 63;—R., S. 55, he prepares the way with extremely strange, strained, indeed distorted definitions of *ends and means*. These concepts can be defined much more simply and correctly: an *end* is the direct motive of an act of will; a *means* is its indirect motive (simplicity is the seal of truth). But through his odd definitions he slips toward this proposition: "A human being, and in general every rational being, exists as an *end in itself*."—I must say outright that "*existing as an end in itself*" is not a coherent thought. It is a contradiction in terms. To be an *end* means *to be willed*. Every *end* is an end only in relation to a will whose *end* it is—that is, as I said, whose direct motive it is. Only within this *relation* does the concept of an *end* have any meaning. It loses that meaning as soon as it is torn out of the relation. But this essential *relation* necessarily rules out anything "in itself." An "*end in itself*" is just like a "friend in itself," an enemy in itself, an uncle in itself, north or east in itself, up or down in itself, and so on. At bottom, though, the "*end in itself*" is in the same position as the "absolute ought." Both secretly, even unconsciously, rest on the same underlying thought as their condition: a theological one.—The "*absolute value*" supposedly belonging to this alleged but unthinkable *end in itself* is no better off. I must label this too, without mer-

cy, a contradiction in terms. Every value is a comparative quantity. Indeed, it 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 measured. Take it out of these two relations, and the concept of value loses all sense and meaning. This is too clear to need further explanation. —Those two definitions offend logic. In the same way, the statement on S. 65; —R., S. 56, offends genuine morality: beings without reason, meaning animals, are *things* and may therefore be treated merely as *means* that are not also *ends*. In line with this, the Metaphysical Foundations of the Doctrine of Virtue, §. 16, expressly says: “A human being can have a duty to no being except a human being.” Then §. 17 says: “Cruel treatment of animals conflicts with a person’s duty *to himself*, because it dulls his sympathy with their suffering. This weakens a natural tendency that is very useful to morality in relations *with other human beings*.”—So we are to feel compassion for animals merely for *practice*. They are, so to speak, the medical dummy on which we *practice* compassion for human beings. Along with all of Asia that has not been Islamized—that is, not Judaized—I find such statements outrageous and disgusting. This also shows once again how completely this philosophical morality depends on biblical morality. As shown above, it is only theological morality in disguise. Christian morality takes no account of animals, a point I will discuss later. So philosophical morality immediately leaves them without protection too. They are mere “*things*,” mere *means* to any ends one chooses: for instance, vivisection, hunts in which they are chased to exhaustion, bullfights, races, being whipped to death in front of a cart that is loaded with stone and will not move, and the like. —Shame on such a morality of pariahs, Chandals, and Mlecchas! It fails to recognize the eternal being present in everything that lives, shining with unfathomable significance from every eye that sees the sunlight. That morality recognizes and considers only its own precious species. It makes that species’ distinguishing feature, *reason*, the condition that a being must meet to receive moral consideration.

By this rough road, indeed by fair means and foul, *Kant* reaches the second statement of the basic principle of his ethics: “Act so that you always use humanity, both in your own person and in the person of everyone else, at the same time as an end, never merely as a *means*.” In a highly artificial way, and by a long detour, this says: “Consider not only yourself, but others too.” This in turn is a roundabout statement of the rule, “Do not do to another what you do not want done to yourself.” As I said, this itself contains only the premises for the conclusion that is the true final goal of all morality and all moral instruction: “Harm no one; instead, help everyone as much as you can.” Like everything beautiful, this proposition looks best naked.—But *Kant’s* second moral formula deliberately and rather clumsily drags in the supposed duties to oneself as well. I have already said what I think about them.

There is also this objection to the formula: a criminal who is to be executed is treated, quite rightly and justly, only as a *means*, not as an end. He is the indispensable *means* of preserving the law’s power to deter by carrying it out. That power is the law’s purpose.

Although this second formula of *Kant’s* does nothing to *establish a foundation* for morality, and cannot count as an adequate, direct statement of its rules—that is, as its highest principle—it does have another merit. It contains a subtle psychological and moral insight. It identifies *egoism* by a highly characteristic feature that is worth developing further here. We are all bursting with this *egoism*. To hide it as our shameful part, we invented *politeness*. Yet it usually peeps out from under all the veils thrown over it in this way: almost instinctively, in everyone we meet, we first look only for a possible *means* to one of our always numerous ends. When we make a new acquaintance, our first thought is usually whether the man might be useful to us for something. If he cannot be, then for most people he himself becomes nothing as soon as they are sure of this. Looking in everyone else for a possible *means* to our ends, and thus for a tool, is almost part of the natural way we look at people. Whether the tool might *suffer* more or less in being used is a thought that comes much later, and often never comes at all. Many things show that we assume this attitude in others. For example, when we ask someone for information or advice, we lose all trust in

what he says as soon as we discover that he might have some interest in the matter, however small or remote. We immediately assume that he will make us a *means* to his ends. His advice will then follow his intentions rather than his understanding, however great that understanding may be and however small his personal aim. For we know only too well that a cubic line of intention weighs more than a cubic rod of understanding. On the other hand, in such a case, when we ask, "What should I do?" the other person will often think of nothing except what we would have to do to serve *his* ends. Without even thinking of *our* ends, he will answer that way at once, almost mechanically. His will immediately dictates the answer before the question can even reach the court of his actual judgment. So he tries to steer us toward *his* ends without even becoming aware of it. He believes he is speaking from *understanding*, when only his *intention* is speaking through him. Indeed, he can go so far as actually to lie without noticing it himself. So much stronger is the influence of the will than that of knowledge. As a result, even someone's own consciousness is not a valid witness to whether he is speaking from *understanding* or from *intention*. His personal interest, however, usually is. Take another case. Someone pursued by enemies, terrified for his life, asks a peddler he meets about a side road. He may get the question in return, "Could you use any of my goods?" This is not to say it always happens this way. On the contrary, many people certainly do take a direct, genuine interest in another person's well-being and suffering. In *Kant's* language, they see that person as an end, not as a means. But how readily the thought occurs to each person to treat another, for once, as an end rather than, as usual, a means—this measures the great ethical differences between characters. What ultimately determines this will be the true foundation of ethics, which I will approach only in the next part. So, in his second formula, *Kant* has identified egoism and its opposite by a highly characteristic feature. I have been all the more glad to point out this bright spot and bring it into clear light by explaining it, since unfortunately I can otherwise accept very little of the foundation of his ethics.

The third and last form in which *Kant* stated his moral principle is the *autonomy* of the will: “The will of every rational being lays down universal laws for all rational beings.” This certainly follows from the first form. But the present form is now supposed to show, according to S. 71;—R., S. 60, that the distinctive mark of the categorical imperative is this: in willing from duty, the will *renounces every interest*. All earlier moral principles supposedly failed “because they always based actions on an *interest*, whether as a constraint or an attraction, *and whether the interest was one’s own or someone else’s*” (S. 73;—R., S. 62). Someone else’s too—please note that. “By contrast, a will that lays down universal laws prescribes actions from duty that are *not based on any interest at all*.” But now please consider what this actually means. It means nothing less than willing without a *motive*, and thus an effect without a cause. *Interest* and *motive* are interchangeable concepts. Does *interest* not mean “what concerns me,” what matters to me? And is that not, in general, everything that stimulates and moves my will? So what else is an *interest* but the effect of a motive on the will? Wherever a *motive* moves the will, it has an *interest*. But where no *motive* moves it, it can no more act than a stone can move from its place without a push or a pull. Surely I do not need to prove this to learned readers. It follows that every action necessarily presupposes an *interest*, since it must necessarily have a *motive*. Yet *Kant* proposes a second, entirely new kind of action that takes place without any *interest*, meaning without a *motive*. And these are supposed to be actions of justice and human kindness! To refute this monstrous assumption, we needed only to reduce it to its actual meaning, which the play on the word *interest* had concealed.—Meanwhile, *Kant* celebrates the triumph of his autonomy of the will (S. 74 ff.;—R., S. 62) by setting up a moral utopia called a *kingdom of ends*. Its population consists entirely of abstract *rational beings*. Every one of them constantly wills without *willing anything*—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 hard not to write satire. But *Kant’s autonomy* of the will leads him to something else, with more troublesome consequences than this little innocent kingdom of ends. Being entirely harmless, that kingdom can be left alone. The other thing is the concept of

human dignity. This rests solely on human *autonomy* and consists in this: the law a person is to follow is one he has given himself. So he stands in the same relation to it as subjects under a constitution stand to their own law.—We might let this pass as an ornament to Kant’s moral system. But once *Kant* had uttered the expression “*human dignity*,” it became the watchword of all helpless and thoughtless moralists. They hid their lack of a real foundation of morality, or at least one that said anything at all, behind that impressive expression, “*human dignity*.” They shrewdly counted on the reader’s also liking to see himself clothed in such *dignity*, and thus being satisfied with it.¹¹ Still, let us examine this concept a little more closely and test whether it has any reality.—*Kant* defines *dignity* (S. 79;—R., S. 66) as “an unconditional, incomparable *value*.” The lofty sound of this definition is so impressive that hardly anyone dares approach and inspect it closely. If he did, he would find that it too is only an empty exaggeration, with a contradiction in terms nesting inside it like a gnawing worm. Every *value* is an estimate of one thing compared with another. It is therefore a comparative concept, and thus relative. This relativity is precisely what makes up the nature of the concept of *value*. The Stoics already correctly taught, according to Diog. Laert., L. VII, c. 106: “Value is an appraiser’s exchange valuation, whatever an expert in the goods sets; for example, exchanging wheat for barley together with a mule” (“Valuation is the return for something appraised, whatever an expert in the goods has set; it is like saying: exchange wheat for barley with a mule added”). An *incomparable, unconditional, absolute value*, such as dignity is supposed to be, is therefore like so much else in philosophy: a task set in words, asking us to think a thought that *cannot* be thought, any more than the highest number or the largest space.

“But just where concepts are missing,
A *word* turns up at the right time.”

So here too, “human dignity” put a most welcome *word* into circulation. Every morality spun out through all the classes of duties and every case requiring a moral decision now found in it a broad foundation from which it could comfortably keep preaching.

At the end of his account (S. 124;—R., S. 97), *Kant* says: “But how can *pure reason*, without any other incentives drawn from anywhere else, be *practical* all by itself? That is, how can the mere principle of the *universal validity of all its maxims* as laws, without any object of the will in which one might take an interest beforehand, by itself provide an incentive and produce an interest that could be called purely moral? Or, in other words, how can *pure reason* be *practical*?—All human reason is unable to explain this, and all effort and work are wasted.”—Now one would think that if something is claimed to exist, yet *cannot* even be understood as possible, it must at least have been demonstrated to be a fact. But the categorical imperative of practical reason is expressly *not* presented as a fact of consciousness, nor is it otherwise established through experience. On the contrary, we are warned often enough *not* to look for it by this anthropological, experience-based route: for example, S. VI of the preface;—R., S. 5, and S. 59, 60;—R., S. 52. We are also repeatedly assured, for example on S. 48;—R., S. 44, “that no example, and thus no empirical means, can establish whether any such imperative exists at all.” And on S. 49;—R., S. 45, “that the reality of the categorical imperative is *not* given in experience.”—Put all this together, and one might really suspect that *Kant* is making fools of his readers. This might well be permissible and proper with today’s German philosophical public. But in *Kant’s* day that public had not yet distinguished itself as it has since. Besides, ethics was the least suitable subject for joking. So we must hold to this conviction: something that can neither be understood as *possible* nor demonstrated as *actual* has no evidence for its existence.—But suppose we merely try to grasp it through imagination. We picture a person whose mind is possessed, as if by a demon, by an *absolute ought* speaking in nothing but categorical imperatives. This ought constantly demands to direct his actions against his inclinations and wishes. Here we see no accurate picture of human nature or of what happens within us. What we do recognize is an artificial substitute for theological morality, standing in the same relation to it as a wooden leg to a living one.

Our result, then, is that Kant's ethics, like all earlier systems, lacks any secure foundation. As I showed by examining its *imperative form* at the very beginning, it is basically only theological morality turned around and disguised in very abstract formulas apparently discovered independently of experience. This disguise had to be all the more elaborate and unrecognizable because *Kant* certainly deceived even himself in the process. He *really* thought he could establish the concepts of a *command of duty* and a *law* independently of all theology and base them on pure knowledge independent of experience, although these concepts plainly have meaning only in theological morality. Against this, I have shown well enough that in his system these concepts have no real foundation and float freely in the air. Toward the end, the disguised *theological morality* even unveils itself under his own hands: in the doctrine of the *highest good*, in the postulates of *practical reason*, and finally in moral theology. Yet none of this freed either him or the public from their illusion about the true connection of things. Instead, both were pleased to see all these articles of faith now established through ethics, even if only in thought and for practical purposes. They innocently mistook the consequence for the ground and the ground for the consequence. They failed to see that all these supposed conclusions from that ethics were already its underlying assumptions—unspoken and hidden, but absolutely necessary.

Now, at the end of this sharp examination, which has been tiring even for the reader, perhaps I may be allowed a playful, even frivolous comparison to lighten things up. I would compare Kant, in this self-deception, to a man at a masked ball who spends the whole evening courting a masked beauty, imagining that he is making a conquest, until at the end she takes off her mask and reveals herself—as his wife.

- ¹¹ The first person 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 the Philosophy of Morals*, 1802.

Section 9



Kant's account of conscience.

The supposed practical reason, with its categorical imperative, is clearly most closely related to *conscience*. Yet it differs from conscience in two essential ways. First, the categorical imperative gives commands, so it necessarily speaks *before the act*. *Conscience*, strictly speaking, speaks only afterward. *Before the act*, it can speak only *indirectly*, at most. It does this through reflection, which brings back memories of earlier cases when similar acts later met with the disapproval of conscience. I think even the origin of the word “*Gewissen*” (“*conscience*”) rests on this, since only what has already happened is “*gewiß*” (“*certain*”). In everyone, even the best person, impure, base, malicious thoughts and wishes arise. An outside event, a stirred-up emotion, or an inner bad mood may cause them. But a person is not morally responsible for these, and they must not burden his *conscience*. They show only what *human beings in general* might be capable of doing, not what the person thinking them could do. Other motives oppose them in him, though these do not enter his awareness at that moment along with those thoughts. So the thoughts can never become acts. They resemble the outvoted minority in an assembly making a decision. Each person comes to know himself, like other people, through experience of his *acts* alone. Only these burden *conscience*. Unlike thoughts, acts are not merely possible. They are *certain* and stand there unchangeably. They are not merely thought but *known*. The same is true of the Latin “*conscientia*” (“*conscience*”). It is Horace’s “con-

scire sibi, pallescere culpa”—“to be aware of one’s guilt and grow pale at it.” The same applies to “συνείδησις” (“conscience”). It is a person’s knowledge of what he has done. Second, *conscience* always takes its material from experience. The supposed categorical imperative cannot do this, since it is purely independent of experience.—In the meantime, we may assume that *Kant’s* account of *conscience* will also shed light on this concept he newly introduced. His main presentation of conscience is in the “Metaphysical Foundations of the Doctrine of Virtue,” §. 13. In the criticism that follows, *I assume the reader has those few pages at hand*.

Kant’s presentation of conscience makes a most imposing impression. People stood before it in respectful awe. They were all the less willing to object because they had to fear that a theoretical objection would be mistaken for a practical one. If they denied the correctness of Kant’s account, they might be thought to have no conscience. This cannot deter me. Our concern here is theory, not practice. The aim is not to preach morality but to examine rigorously the ultimate grounds of ethics.

To begin with, *Kant* uses *Latin legal expressions* throughout. These hardly seem suited to describing the most secret movements of the human heart. Yet he keeps this language and this legal way of presenting things from beginning to end. So it seems essential and specific to the subject. He shows us a complete court of law inside the mind, with a trial, judge, prosecutor, defense lawyer, and verdict. If the inner process really worked as *Kant* describes it, we would have to wonder how anyone could be—I will not say so *bad*, but so *stupid*—as to act against *conscience*. Such a unique supernatural institution within our self-awareness, such a masked Vehmic secret tribunal in the mysterious darkness of our inner life, would fill everyone with horror and superstitious fear. It would surely stop people from grasping at brief, passing advantages against the prohibition and under the threats of terrifying supernatural powers that announce their presence so clearly and so close at hand.—In reality, we see the opposite. The influence of conscience is generally thought so weak that all peoples have

tried to help it through positive religion, or even to replace it entirely with such religion. And if conscience were like this, the Royal Society could never have thought of the present prize question.

But when we look more closely at Kant's account, we find that its imposing effect is mainly achieved in this way. *Kant* gives moral self-judgment a form he treats as specific and essential to it. It is nothing of the kind. This form can be fitted to moral self-judgment just as it can to any other brooding over what we have done and could have done differently, even when that brooding has nothing to do with morality proper. An obviously false, artificial conscience, based on mere superstition, will also sometimes take this form of accusation, defense, and judgment. A Hindu may blame himself for having given occasion to the murder of a cow. A Jew may remember smoking a pipe in his house on the Sabbath. But even self-examination that starts from no ethical point of view at all, and is more immoral than moral, will often take the same form. For example, suppose that, out of kindness but without thinking, I have become guarantor for a friend. That evening I realize what a heavy responsibility I have taken on. I see how easily this could bring me serious losses, as the old voice of wisdom predicts: "Stand surety, and ruin is close!" Here too a prosecutor appears within me. Facing him is a defense lawyer who tries to make my hasty guarantee look better. He appeals to the pressure of circumstances, my obligations, the seeming harmlessness of the matter, and even praises my kindness. Finally the judge appears and delivers the merciless verdict, "A stupid move!" I collapse under it.

What is true of the courtroom form *Kant* favors is also true of most of the rest of his description. For example, what he says at the very beginning of the paragraph, as though it were specific to conscience, applies to every scruple of an entirely different kind. It can be understood quite literally of the secret awareness of someone living on investment income who knows that his expenses far exceed the interest, that he is using up 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 with pleasures and distractions, or put himself to sleep, but he cannot avoid coming to himself or waking up now and then, when he

immediately hears its terrifying voice,” and so on.—Having described that courtroom form as essential to the subject, and therefore kept it from beginning to end, Kant uses it for the following carefully planned piece of false reasoning. 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 adds a very strained and unclear note to explain this. From it he concludes that, to avoid a contradiction, we must think of the inner judge in that courtroom drama of conscience as distinct from ourselves, as *someone else*. We must think of this judge as one who knows our hearts, knows everything, obligates everyone, and, as the power that enforces the verdict, is all-powerful. The path is now entirely smooth. He leads his reader from conscience to superstitious fear as a wholly necessary consequence of it. He secretly relies on the reader being all the more willing to follow him because early education has made such concepts familiar, indeed second nature. So *Kant* has an easy task here. But he should have rejected it and taken care not only to *preach* honesty here but also to *practice* it.—I completely deny the statement quoted above, on which all these conclusions rest. Indeed, I call it an evasive trick. It is not true that the prosecutor must always lose if the accused and the judge are one person—at least not in the inner court. Did the prosecutor lose in my example of the guarantee?—Or, to avoid a contradiction, did we have to personify something here too? Did we have to think of *someone else*, existing objectively, as the one whose verdict was that thunderous “A stupid move!”? Perhaps a Mercury in the flesh? Or a personification of the practical cleverness (*Metis*) recommended by Homer (Il., 23, 313 seq.)? Would we then have to take the path of superstitious fear here too, though a pagan one? *Kant* guards against giving objective validity to his moral theology, which is already outlined here briefly but in its essentials. He presents it only as a subjectively necessary form. But that does not clear him of the arbitrary way he constructs it, even if only as subjectively necessary. He does so by means of wholly groundless assumptions.

This much, then, is certain. The whole legal and dramatic form in which *Kant* presents conscience is entirely inessential to it and in no way specific to it. He maintains this form throughout, right to the end, as though it were one with the thing itself, and finally draws conclusions from it. In fact, it is a much more general form that reflection on any practical matter can easily take. It arises mainly from the conflict of opposing motives that usually occurs in such reflection. Reflecting reason weighs these motives one after another. It makes no difference whether they are moral or egoistic motives, or whether we are deciding what to do or brooding over what we have already done. Now remove this arbitrarily imposed dramatic and legal form from *Kant's* account. The halo around it and its imposing effect disappear too. Only this remains: when we think about our actions, we sometimes feel a special kind of dissatisfaction with ourselves. Its distinctive feature is that it concerns not the outcome but the act itself. Unlike every other dissatisfaction in which we regret the foolishness of what we did, it does not rest on *egoistic grounds*. For here we are dissatisfied precisely because we acted too egoistically. We cared too much about our own well-being and too little about the well-being of others. Or we even made others' suffering an end in itself, without gaining anything for ourselves. We can be dissatisfied with ourselves over this and grieve over sufferings we have not *endured* but *caused*. That is the bare fact, and no one will deny it. Later we will examine how it connects with the only basis of ethics that stands up to scrutiny. But *Kant*, like a clever advocate, tried to get as much as possible out of the original fact by dressing it up and enlarging it. He wanted to secure in advance as broad a basis as possible for his morality and moral theology.

Section 10



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

In the service of truth, I have attacked *Kant's* ethics. Unlike earlier attacks, mine do not merely touch its surface but undermine its deepest foundation. Now justice seems to require that I not leave it without recalling *Kant's* greatest and most brilliant contribution to ethics. This is his account of how freedom and necessity exist together. He first presents it in the Critique of Pure Reason (S. 533–554 of the first edition and S. 561–582 of the fifth). He gives an even clearer account 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* proved the complete and strict necessity of acts of will when motives occur. They established it so clearly and beyond doubt that it must be counted among fully demonstrated truths. Only ignorance and crudeness could therefore keep talking of freedom in a person's individual actions, of a free choice indifferent between alternatives. The irrefutable arguments of these predecessors also led *Kant* to accept the complete necessity of acts of will as settled beyond any further doubt. This is shown by every passage in which he discusses freedom from the *theoretical* point of view alone. Yet it remains true that our actions are accompanied by an awareness that we act on our own authority and are the original source of our actions. Through this awareness we recognize them as our work. Each of us

feels with unfailing certainty that he is the actual doer of his deeds and morally *responsible* for them. But *responsibility* presupposes that we could have acted differently, and thus presupposes freedom in some way. So awareness of *responsibility* also contains an indirect awareness of freedom. The key to resolving this contradiction, which arises from the subject itself, was finally found in Kant's profound distinction between appearance and the thing in itself. This distinction is the innermost core of his whole philosophy and its chief achievement.

The individual has an unchangeable, inborn character. All its expressions are strictly determined by the law of causality. Here, because causality works through the intellect, it is called motivation. This individual is only the appearance. The thing in itself underlying that appearance lies outside space and time. It is therefore free of any sequence or multiplicity of acts. It is one and unchangeable. Its nature in itself is the *intelligible character*. This is equally present in all the individual's deeds and imprinted on them all, like a stamp in a thousand seals. It determines the *empirical character* of this appearance, which shows itself in time and in a sequence of acts. Thus the appearance must show the constancy of a natural law in all its expressions brought about by motives. All its acts therefore occur with strict necessity. This also gave a rational basis to the unchangeable, unbending rigidity of each person's empirical character. Thoughtful minds had always noticed this, while others thought a person's character could be reshaped by reasonable arguments and moral warnings. It was now established for philosophy too, bringing philosophy into agreement with experience. Philosophy no longer had to be put to shame by popular wisdom, which had long expressed this truth in the Spanish proverb: "What comes in with the baby's cap goes out with the burial shroud" (What comes in with the child's cap goes out again with the burial shroud), or: "What is sucked in with milk is spilled out into the burial shroud" (What is taken in with milk is poured out again into the burial shroud).

I consider this account by *Kant* of how freedom and necessity exist together the greatest achievement of deep human thought. It and the transcendental aesthetic are the two great diamonds in the crown of Kant's fame, which will never fade away.—As is well known, *Schelling*, in his essay on freedom, gave a

paraphrase of this account by *Kant*. Its vivid coloring and concrete presentation make it easier for many people to grasp. I would praise it if *Schelling* had had the honesty to say that he was presenting *Kant's* wisdom here, not his own. Some of the philosophical public still take it for his own today.

We can make both this Kantian account and the nature of freedom in general easier to understand by connecting them with a general truth. I think its most concise expression is a statement often made by the Scholastics: "Acting follows being" (*operari sequitur esse*). That is, everything in the world acts according to what it is, according to its nature. All its expressions are therefore already potentially contained in that nature. They become actual when outside causes bring them about, and in this way that nature itself becomes known. This is the *empirical character*. Its inner, ultimate ground, which is inaccessible to experience, is the *intelligible character*: the thing's nature in itself. Human beings are no exception to the rest of nature here. Each person too has an unchangeable character, but it is entirely individual and different in everyone. For our way of knowing, this character is *empirical*, and for that very reason it is only appearance. What it may be in its own nature, however, is called the *intelligible character*. All a person's actions are determined in their outward form by motives. They can never turn out otherwise than in agreement with this unchangeable individual character. A person must act according to what he is. So for any given individual in any given case, only one action is possible: "Acting follows being" (*operari sequitur esse*). Freedom belongs not to the empirical character but only to the intelligible character. A given person's acting (*operari*) is necessarily determined from outside by motives and from within by his character. So everything he *does* happens necessarily. But freedom lies in his being (*esse*). He could have been a different person. His guilt and merit lie in what he is. For everything he *does* follows from this of itself, as a mere consequence.—*Kant's* theory actually brings us back from the basic error that placed necessity in being (*esse*) and freedom in acting (*operari*). It leads us to see that the reverse is true. So a person's moral responsibility does, at first and on the surface, concern what he *does*. At bottom, however, it concerns what he *is*. Once this is given, his actions, when the motives occurred, could never have turned out differently.

Yet however strict the necessity with which motives bring about deeds, given a particular character, no one will ever think of using this to excuse himself and shift the guilt onto the motives. Not even someone convinced of this necessity will do so. He clearly recognizes that, as far as the matter and the circumstances were concerned—that is, objectively—a very different, even opposite action was quite possible. Indeed, it would have occurred if only *he had been a different person*. But he feels responsible for being *this sort of person and not another*, as his action reveals.—Here, in being (*esse*), lies the spot struck by the sting of conscience. For conscience is simply the increasingly intimate acquaintance with one's own self that develops from one's own way of acting. So although acting (*operari*) gives conscience its occasion, what it actually accuses is being (*esse*). We are aware of *freedom* only through *responsibility*. So where responsibility lies, freedom must lie too: in being (*esse*). Acting (*operari*) falls under necessity. But we come to know ourselves, like other people, only *through experience*. We have no knowledge of our character in advance of experience. In fact, we start out with a very high opinion of it. For the principle “Everyone is presumed good until the opposite is proved” also applies before the inner court.

Note.

Anyone who can recognize the essential point of a thought even when it is expressed in very different forms will see, as I do, that Kant's account of intelligible and empirical character brings an insight already held by Plato to the clarity of abstract thought. But Plato had not recognized the ideal nature of time, so he could present this insight only in a temporal form. He could therefore express it only through myth and in connection with the migration of souls. That the two accounts are identical becomes much clearer through Porphyry's explanation and development of Plato's myth. He presents it so clearly and precisely that its agreement with Kant's abstract account becomes unmistakable. Stobaeus has preserved this discussion in full from a work of Porphyry's that no longer survives. In it, Porphyry gives a detailed and exact commentary on the myth at issue here, which Plato presents in the second half of the tenth book of the Republic. It is in the second book of Stobaeus's Eclogues, Kap. 8, §§. 37–40. This section is very much worth reading. As a sample, I give the short §. 39

here, to encourage the interested reader to take up Stobaeus himself. He will then recognize that this Platonic myth can be seen as an allegory of the great and profound insight that Kant presented in its abstract purity as his account of intelligible and empirical character. So Plato had already reached the essentials of this insight thousands of years ago. It reaches even further back, since Porphyry thinks Plato received it from the Egyptians. But it is already present in the teaching of the migration of souls in Brahmanism, from which the wisdom of the Egyptian priests most probably comes.—The §. 39 just mentioned reads:

“For Plato’s overall meaning seems to be this. Before souls enter bodies and different lives, they have the power to choose this course of life or another, which they are to live out with a particular kind 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.) But that power of self-direction is restricted as soon as they enter one of these lives. For when they descend into bodies and become the souls of living creatures instead of unbound souls, they have a power of self-direction suited to the creature’s constitution. In some, as in human beings, it is highly intelligent and active. In others, as in almost all other animals, it has little scope for movement and follows a single course. This power of self-direction depends on the constitution. It moves of its own accord, but follows the impulses arising from that constitution.” (“For Plato’s view as a whole seems to be this. Before souls enter bodies and definite kinds of life, they have the power to choose one life or another, which they are to spend in a body suited to that life [for they are allowed to choose the life of either a lion or a human being]. But as soon as a particular life has been taken on, that freedom is removed. When they descend into bodies and change from free souls into the souls of animals, they acquire a freedom suited to the animal’s organism. In some cases, as in human beings, it is very intelligent and mobile. In others, as in almost all other animals, it is simple and has little mobility. This freedom depends on the animal’s organism in such a way that it moves on its own, but is carried along according to the organism’s appetites.”)

Section 11



Fichte's ethics as a magnifying mirror for the faults in Kant's ethics.

In anatomy and zoology, students sometimes see things less clearly in prepared specimens and natural objects than in engravings that exaggerate them a little. In the same way, I can recommend Fichte's "System of Ethics" to anyone who, after the criticism in the sections above, still does not fully see that Kant's foundation for ethics is worthless. It can help make this clear.

In old German puppet plays, the emperor or some other hero always had the clown Hanswurst alongside him. Afterward, the clown repeated everything the hero had said or done, in his own style and with exaggerations. In just this way, behind the great *Kant* stands the creator of the "Wissenschaftslehre" (Theory of Science), more accurately the "Wissenschaftsleere" (Emptiness of Science). This man's plan was to attract attention through a philosophical deception, and then use that attention to secure his own and his family's well-being. Given the German philosophical public he faced, the plan was entirely suitable and deserves approval. He carried it out mainly by *outdoing* Kant in every respect, presenting himself as Kant's living superlative. By enlarging Kant's most prominent features, he produced what was quite literally a caricature of Kant's philosophy. He did the same in ethics. In his "System of Ethics," we find that the categorical imperative has grown into a despotic imperative. The absolute ought, reason as lawgiver, and the command of duty have developed into a *moral fate*: an unfathomable necessity requiring the human race to act in strict

accordance with certain maxims (S. 308–309). Judging by the moral arrangements made, a great deal must depend on this, though we never actually learn what. We see only this much: just as bees have an instinct to build cells and a hive together, human beings supposedly have an instinct to perform together a great, strictly moral comedy on the world stage, in which we would be nothing but puppets on strings. There is, however, an important difference: the beehive actually gets built, whereas the comedy actually performed on the world stage is highly immoral instead of moral. Here, then, we see the imperative form of Kant's ethics, its moral law and absolute ought, taken further, until it has become a system of *moral fatalism*. Its development sometimes turns comic.¹² If *Kant's* ethics shows a certain moral pedantry, *Fichte's* most ridiculous moral nitpicking offers plenty of material for satire. Read, for example, S. 407–409, where he settles the familiar example from casuistry, in which one of two human lives must be lost. We also find all *Kant's* faults pushed to their extreme. For example, S. 199: "To act on the impulses of sympathy, compassion, and human kindness is simply not moral, but to that extent opposed to morality."! —S. 402: "The incentive for being helpful must never be thoughtless good-heartedness, but the clearly conceived aim of promoting reason's causal activity as much as possible."—Among these pieces of nitpicking, however, *Fichte's* real philosophical crudeness plainly shows through—as we might expect from a man whose teaching never left him time to learn. He seriously asserts a will free to choose either way, and supports it with the most commonplace arguments (S. 160, 173, 205, 208, 237, 259, 261).—Anyone who is not yet fully convinced that a motive, though it works through knowledge, is a cause like any other, and therefore brings about its result with the same necessity as any other cause, so that all human actions follow with strict necessity—anyone who has not understood this is still philosophically crude and has not learned the basics of philosophical knowledge. Understanding the strict necessity of human actions is the dividing line between philosophical minds and all the rest. When *Fichte* reached this line, he clearly showed that he belonged to the rest. Later, again following *Kant's* lead (S. 303), he says things that directly contradict the passages above. Like so many other contradictions in his writings, this only proves

that, because he was never serious about discovering the truth, he had no firm basic conviction at all. Nor did he need one for his purposes. Nothing is more ridiculous than that people have praised this man for the strictest consistency. They simply mistook his pedantic tone, with its long-winded demonstrations of trivial things, for consistency.

The fullest development of *Fichte's* system of *moral fatalism* appears in his last work, "The Theory of Science Presented in Its General Outline," Berlin 1810. It has the advantage of being only 46 S. long, in 12° format, while containing his entire philosophy in a nutshell. I therefore recommend it to anyone who thinks their time too valuable to waste on this man's larger productions. Those are written with Christian Wolff's long-windedness and dullness, and are really designed to deceive the reader, not to teach him. In this little work, then, we read on S. 32: "The intuition of a world of the senses existed only so that, in this world, the I might become visible to itself as *absolutely bound by an ought*."—On S. 33 we even get "the ought of the visibility of the ought," and on S. 36 "an ought of seeing that I ought."—This, then, is where the *imperative form of Kant's* ethics led immediately after *Kant*, as a model whose faults could be imitated. Its unproved ought was something it requested as a very convenient place to stand.

Still, nothing said here takes away *Fichte's* achievement. It consists in having obscured, and indeed displaced, *Kant's* philosophy—that late masterpiece of human intellectual depth—among the nation in which it appeared. He did this with blustering superlatives, extravagances, and the nonsense masquerading as depth in his "Foundation of the Entire Theory of Science." In doing so, he showed the world beyond dispute how competent the German philosophical public was: he made it play the part of a child coaxed into handing over a precious jewel by being offered a Nuremberg toy in exchange. The fame he gained this way still lives on credit today. Even today, *Fichte* is always mentioned alongside *Kant* as another man of the same kind (Heracles and an ape!—i. e. Hercules and an ape!), and is often ranked above him.¹³ Because of this, his example also brought forth those successors in the art of philosophically deceiving the German public whom everyone knows. They were driven by the same

spirit and crowned with the same success. This is not the place to discuss them at length, although philosophy professors still explain their respective opinions at great length and discuss them seriously, as if they were really dealing with philosophers. So we owe it to Fichte that clear documentary evidence exists, ready to be reviewed one day before the court of posterity. This court overturns the judgments of the present, and in nearly every age it has had to be for genuine merit what the Last Judgment is for the saints.

- 12 To support 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 aim beyond itself."—S. 232: "Now, according to the moral law, the empirical being in time ought to become an exact copy 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 making reason real: this is the final, ultimate aim of his existence. This alone is what he exists for, and if it is not to happen, he need not exist at all."—S. 347: "I am a tool of the moral law in the world of the senses!"—S. 360: "The moral law commands us to nourish the body and promote its health. Of course, this may not be done in any sense or for any purpose other than to be an effective tool for advancing reason's aim."—(Vergl. S. 371) S. 376: "Every human body is a tool for advancing reason's aim. I must therefore aim to make every tool as fit as possible for this task; consequently, I must take care of everyone."—This is how he derives human kindness!—S. 377: "I can and may take care of myself only because, and only insofar as, I am a tool of the moral law."—S. 388: "To defend someone being persecuted, at the risk of one's own life, is an absolute duty:—as soon as a human life is in danger, you no longer have the right to think about the safety of your own."—S. 420: "Within the sphere of the moral law, there is no way of viewing my fellow human being except as a tool of reason."
- 13 I will support 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:

“But still more sublime than *Kant’s* are *Fichte’s* ideas, which he expressed in his ethics and here and there in his other writings. Christianity has nothing whose sublimity could be set beside *Fichte’s* ideas.”

Section 12



III.

Establishing a Foundation for Ethics.

Requirements.

So even *Kant's* foundation for ethics, regarded for sixty years as solid ground, sinks before our eyes into the deep, perhaps unfillable abyss of philosophical errors. It turns out to be an unjustified assumption and nothing more than theological morality in disguise.—As I have said, I can take it as known that earlier attempts to establish a foundation for ethics are even less satisfactory. They mostly consist of unproved assertions plucked out of thin air. Like *Kant's* own foundation, they are also contrived subtleties that demand the finest distinctions and rest on the most abstract concepts: difficult combinations of ideas, rules for finding answers, propositions balanced on a needlepoint, and maxims on stilts, so high up that real life and its bustle are no longer visible below. That is why they are certainly well suited to echoing around lecture halls and providing an exercise in sharp thinking. But things like these cannot produce the call to act justly and help others that, after all, really does exist in every human being. Nor can they counterbalance the strong impulses toward injustice and harshness, or form the basis for the reproaches of conscience. Trying to trace these reproaches back to the violation of such hair-splitting maxims can only make them ridiculous. So if we take the matter seriously, artificial combinations of concepts like these can never contain the true *impulse* toward justice and

human kindness. Instead, this impulse must be something that needs little reflection and still less abstraction or combination of ideas. It must speak to everyone, even the least cultivated person, regardless of intellectual training. It must rest solely on directly grasping what is before us, and impress itself on us straight from the reality of things. Until ethics can show a foundation of this kind, it may argue and parade around in lecture halls: real life will mock it. I must therefore give moral philosophers this paradoxical advice: first take a little look around at human life.

Section 13



The skeptical view.

Or does a look back over the attempts that have been made in vain for more than two thousand years to find a secure foundation for morality perhaps show that there is no natural morality at all, none independent of human rules? Is morality, on this view, through and through an artifact, a device invented to keep the selfish and spiteful human race under better control? And would it therefore fall away without the support of the positive religions, because it would have no inner proof and no natural basis? Justice and police cannot be enough everywhere. Some offenses are too hard to discover, and for some, punishment is awkward. In such cases public protection leaves us. Besides, civil law can at most enforce justice. It cannot enforce love of humanity and kindness, if only because in such cases everyone would want to be the one who receives and no one the one who gives. This has led to the hypothesis that morality rests on religion alone, and that the purpose of both is to make up for the unavoidable shortcomings of the state's institutions and legislation. So, the claim goes, there can be no natural morality, that is, one based only on the nature of things or of human beings. That would explain why philosophers search in vain for its foundation. This opinion is not without plausibility. The Pyrrhonists already put it forward: Nothing is good by nature, and nothing is bad,

but people have judged these things by what they think,

according to Timon (nothing is good by nature, and nothing is bad, “but these things are judged at the choice of human beings,”—according to Timon). Sext. Emp. adv. Math., XI, 140. Outstanding thinkers in more recent times have also declared themselves for it. So it deserves careful examination, even though it would be more convenient to dismiss it with an inquisitor’s sidelong glance at the conscience of those in whom such a thought could arise.

We would be making a great and very youthful mistake if we believed that all the just and lawful actions of human beings have a moral origin. Most of the time, the relation between the justice people practice and genuine *honesty* of heart is much like the relation between expressions of politeness and genuine love of one’s neighbor. Genuine love, unlike politeness, does not merely seem to overcome egoism. It really does. People show off the integrity of their attitude everywhere and want it to be beyond all doubt. They show great indignation at the faintest hint of suspicion on this point, and that indignation is ready to turn into the fiercest anger. Only the inexperienced and simple-minded will take all this at once for hard cash, and for the effect of a delicate moral feeling or conscience. In truth, the integrity that is generally practiced in human dealings, and held up as a rock-solid maxim, rests mainly on two outside necessities. The first is the legal order, through which public authority protects everyone’s rights. The second is the recognized need for a good name, or civil honor, in order to get ahead in the world. Through this need, everyone’s steps stand under the watch of public opinion. Public opinion is relentlessly strict. It never forgives even a single misstep in this matter. It holds it against the guilty person until death, as an indelible stain. In this, public opinion is truly wise. It starts from the principle “acting follows being” (*operari sequitur esse*), and so from the conviction that character does not change. Therefore, whatever someone has done once, that person will inevitably do again under exactly the same circumstances. These two guards, then, are what watch over public integrity. Without them, to speak frankly, we would be in a bad way, especially with regard to property. Property is the chief point in human life, the one around which its activity mainly turns. For purely ethical motives for honesty, assuming they exist, can mostly find their application to civil property only after a

long detour. First and directly, they can relate only to *natural* right. They can relate to *positive* law only indirectly, insofar as natural right underlies it. But *natural* right attaches to no property except what has been acquired by one's own effort. If someone attacks such property, the powers the owner spent on it are attacked too, and so are stolen from the owner. I reject the theory of first occupation outright, but I cannot go into refuting it here.¹⁴ Now, of course, every possession founded on positive law is supposed to rest in the end, at its first source, on the natural right of property, however many intermediate links there may be. But in most cases, how far our civil property lies from that original source of the natural right of property! Usually the connection between the two is very hard to demonstrate, or cannot be demonstrated at all. Our property is inherited, married into, or won in a lottery. Or if it is none of these, it was still not gained by real labor in the sweat of our brow, but by clever thoughts and ideas, for example in speculative trading. Sometimes it was even gained by stupid ideas, which the god of outcomes, Deus Eventus, has crowned and glorified by way of chance. In very few cases is property really the fruit of genuine effort and labor. Even then, the labor is often only mental, like that of lawyers, doctors, officials and teachers. To a crude person's eye, such work seems to cost little effort. It takes considerable education to recognize the ethical right in all such property, and so to respect it from a purely moral impulse. As a result, many people privately regard other people's property as held by positive law alone. So if they find a way to take it from them by using the laws, or even just getting around them, they have no scruples. It seems to them that the owners are losing it by the same route by which they obtained it earlier. So they consider their own claims just as well founded as those of the former owner. From their point of view, in civil society the right of the cleverer has taken the place of the right of the stronger. Meanwhile, a rich person is often truly of unbreakable integrity. They are devoted with their whole heart to a rule, and they uphold a maxim on whose observance their entire property rests, along with the many advantages they thereby have over others. So they profess the principle "to each person what belongs to them" (*sum cuique*) in full earnest and do not depart from it. There really is such an *objective* attachment to good

faith, with a resolve to hold it sacred. It rests only on the fact that good faith is the basis of all free dealings among people, of good order and of secure property. So it often benefits us ourselves, and in this respect it even has to be upheld at some cost, just as we also spend something on a good field. Yet honesty with this basis will, as a rule, be found only among well-off people, or at least people engaged in profitable work. It is found most of all among merchants, who have the clearest conviction that trade and commerce have their indispensable support in mutual trust and credit. That is also why the merchant's honor is a quite special kind. The poor person is different. They have come off badly in the matter. Because of the inequality of property, they see themselves condemned to want and hard work, while others, before their eyes, live in abundance and idleness. This person 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 to get the purely ethical drive toward honesty that keeps them from reaching out a hand for other people's abundance? Mostly it is the legal order that holds them back. But suppose the rare opportunity comes once, in which they are safe from the effect of the law. By a single deed they could roll off the crushing burden of want, which the sight of other people's abundance makes even more painful. They could also put themselves in possession of the pleasures they have so often envied. What will hold their hand back then? Religious doctrines? Faith is seldom that firm. A purely moral motive for justice? Perhaps in individual cases. But in the great majority it will be only the concern for their good name, their civil honor, which matters a great deal even to a person of modest standing. It will be the obvious danger of being cast out forever, by such a deed, from the great Masonic lodge of honest people. These people follow the law of integrity, and by it they have divided up property among themselves all over the earth and manage it. It will be the danger of being, because of a single dishonest act, a pariah of civil society for life, someone whom no one trusts any more, whose company everyone shuns, and for whom all advancement is therefore cut off. In a word, that is: "A fellow who has stolen"—and the proverb applies to such a person: "Whoever steals once is a thief for life."

These, then, are the guardians of public integrity. Anyone who has lived and kept their eyes open will admit that by far the greatest part of the honesty in human dealings is owed to them alone. There is also no shortage of people who hope to escape even their watchfulness. They regard justice and honesty only as a signboard, a flag, under whose protection one carries out one's privateering raids with all the better success. So we should not flare up at once in holy zeal and get angry when a moralist raises the question whether all honesty and justice might be, at bottom, merely conventional. We should not do so when this moralist then follows the principle further and tries to trace all the rest of morality back to more remote, indirect, but in the end still egoistic reasons, as Holbach, Helvetius, d'Alembert and others of their time have shrewdly tried to do. For the greater part of just actions this is in fact true and correct, as I have shown above. There is no doubt that it is also true of a considerable part of acts of love of humanity. They often come from showing off. Very often they come from belief in a future retribution, which would even be repaid squared, or indeed cubed. They also allow other egoistic reasons. But it is just as certain that there are acts of selfless love of humanity and of wholly voluntary justice. Proofs of the latter, if I am to appeal not to facts of consciousness but only to facts of 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 entirely ruled out, and yet even a poor person gave a rich person what was theirs. For example: a lost-and-found item brought back to its owner; something deposited by a third party who had already died, brought to the owner; a deposit made in secret with a poor man by a fugitive from the country, faithfully kept and returned. Cases like these do exist, without doubt. But the surprise, the emotion and the respect with which we receive them clearly show that they belong among unexpected things, among rare exceptions. There really are truly honest people, just as there really is four-leaf clover. But Hamlet speaks without exaggeration 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 religious doctrines lay at the bottom of the actions mentioned above, and so a

regard for punishment and reward in another world, one could also point to cases in which those who performed them held no religious belief at all. That is not nearly as rare as publicly admitting it.

Against the skeptical view, people first appeal to *conscience*. But doubts are raised against its natural origin too. At least there is also a counterfeit conscience (*conscientia spuria*), which is often mistaken for it. The remorse and anxiety that many a person feels about what they have done is often, at bottom, nothing other than fear of what may happen to them for it. Breaking external, arbitrary, even absurd rules torments many a person with inner reproaches, just in the manner of conscience. For example, it weighs heavily on the heart of many an overly pious Jew that, although it says in the second book of Moses, Kap. 35, 3, "You shall kindle no fire on the Sabbath day in any of your dwellings," he has smoked a pipe at home on Saturday. Many a nobleman or officer is gnawed by a secret self-reproach that on some occasion they did not properly follow the laws of the fools' code that people call chivalrous honor. This goes so far that many a member of this class, when put in the impossible position of keeping a given word of honor, or even of satisfying the said code in quarrels, will shoot themselves dead. (I have witnessed both.) On the other hand, the same person will break their word any day with a light heart, as long as the shibboleth "honor" was not attached to it. In general, every inconsistency, every thoughtless act, every action against our resolutions, principles or convictions, of whatever kind, and even every indiscretion, every mistake, every blunder, afterward nags at us quietly and leaves a sting in the heart. Many a person would be astonished to see what their conscience, which seems quite impressive to them, is really made of: perhaps 1/5 fear of other people, 1/5 superstitious fear of the gods, 1/5 prejudice, 1/5 vanity and 1/5 habit. So at bottom they are no better than the Englishman who said outright: I cannot afford to keep a conscience (keeping a conscience is too expensive for me). Religious people of every faith very often mean by *conscience* nothing other than the doctrines and rules of their religion, and the self-examination carried out in relation to them. The expressions *coercion of conscience* and *freedom of conscience* are indeed taken in this sense too. The theologians, scholastics and

casuists of the middle and later periods took it the same way: everything a person knew of the church's rules and regulations, together with the intention to believe and follow them, made up their conscience. Accordingly there was a doubting conscience, an opining conscience, an erring conscience, and the like, and to set these right people kept a counselor for matters of conscience. How little the concept of conscience, like other concepts, is fixed by its object itself, how differently different people have grasped it, and how shaky and uncertain it appears in the writers, one can see in brief from Stäudlin's "History of the Doctrine of Conscience." None of this is suited to vouch for the reality of the concept, and so it has prompted the question whether there really is a proper, innate conscience at all. In §. 10, in the discussion of freedom, I was already led to state my concept of conscience briefly, and I will come back to it further below.

None of these skeptical doubts, taken together, is enough to deny that any genuine morality exists. But they do lower our expectations of the moral disposition in human beings, and so of the natural foundation of ethics. So much that is credited to it demonstrably comes from other incentives. And looking at the moral corruption of the world proves well enough that the incentive toward the good cannot be very powerful, especially because it often does not work even where the motives opposing it are not strong. Even so, the individual difference between characters remains fully valid here. Meanwhile, our recognition of that moral corruption is made harder, because its expressions are held back and hidden by the legal order, by the necessity of honor, and even by politeness. Finally, there is this as well. In education, people think they promote the morality of their pupils by presenting integrity and virtue to them as the maxims generally followed in the world. Then experience later teaches them otherwise, often to their great harm. The discovery that their teachers in youth were the first to deceive them can then affect their own morality more harmfully than if those teachers had set them the first example of frankness and honesty themselves, and had said openly: "The world lies in wickedness. People are not as they should be. But don't let that mislead you; be better yourself." All this, as I said, makes it harder for us to recognize the real immorality of the

human race. The state is the masterpiece of everyone's egoism, an egoism that understands itself, is rational and has been added up. It has put the protection of everyone's rights into the hands of a power that is infinitely superior to the strength of any individual, and that forces each person to respect the rights of all others. Then the boundless egoism of almost everyone, the malice of many, the cruelty of some cannot show itself. Compulsion has tamed everyone. The illusion that results is so great that, in individual cases where state power cannot protect or is evaded, we see people's insatiable greed, base lust for money, deeply hidden falseness and treacherous malice come into view. Then we often shrink back and raise a hue and cry, thinking we have run into a monster never seen before. But without the compulsion of the laws and the necessity of civil honor, such events would be entirely everyday matters. One must read crime stories and descriptions of anarchic conditions to recognize what a human being really is in moral terms. These thousands who crowd past one another before our eyes in peaceful dealings should be regarded as so many tigers and wolves whose bite is secured by a strong muzzle. So when we imagine state power once abolished, that is, that muzzle thrown off, every thoughtful person recoils from the spectacle that would then be expected. In doing so, they show how little effect they really credit to religion, to conscience, or to the natural foundation of morality, whatever it may be. But precisely then, facing those immoral powers set free, the true moral incentive in human beings would also show its effectiveness uncovered. So it could be recognized most easily. At the same time the unbelievably great moral difference between characters would come out unveiled, and would be found just as great as the intellectual difference between minds. That certainly says a lot.

Someone may perhaps want to object to me that ethics is not concerned with how people actually act. They may say it is the science that states how they *ought* to act. But this is exactly the principle I deny. In the critical part of this essay I showed well enough that the concept of ought, the *imperative form* of ethics, is valid only in theological morality and loses all sense and meaning outside it. I, by contrast, set ethics the aim of interpreting and explaining the human way of acting, which differs enormously in moral terms, and of tracing

it back to its final ground. So, to find the foundation of ethics, no other way remains but the empirical one: to investigate whether there are any actions at all to which we must grant *genuine moral worth*. These will be the actions of voluntary justice, pure love of humanity and true nobility of character. These are then to be regarded as a given phenomenon. We have to explain it correctly, that is, trace it back to its true grounds, and so show the incentive, in any case a special one, that moves human beings to actions of this kind, which is specifically different from every other kind. This incentive, together with receptiveness to it, will be the final ground of morality, and knowledge of it will be the foundation of morals. That is the modest path along which I point ethics. Whoever finds it not grand, professorial and academic enough, because it is no construction a priori and contains no absolute legislation for all rational beings in the abstract, may go back to the categorical imperatives, to the shibboleth of “human dignity,” to the hollow phrases, fancies and soap bubbles of the schools, to principles that experience mocks at every step and about which, outside the lecture halls, no one knows anything or has ever felt anything. By contrast, experience stands beside the foundation of morals that emerges on my path, and gives its quiet testimony for it every day and every hour.

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

¹⁵ By the course of this world, being honest means being one person picked out of ten thousand.

Section 14



Antimoral¹⁶ incentives.

The main and basic incentive in human beings, as in animals, is *egoism*, that is, the urge toward existence and well-being. The German word *Selbstsucht* (literally “self-sickness”) carries a false side-meaning of illness. The word *Eigennutz* (self-interest), on the other hand, names *egoism* insofar as it is guided by reason. Reason enables it, through reflection, to pursue its aims according to a plan. So animals can be called egoistic, but not self-interested. For the more general concept, then, I will keep the word *egoism*. This *egoism*, in the animal as in the human being, is tied most closely to the innermost core and essence of the being. In fact it is identical with it. Therefore, as a rule, all of a being’s actions arise from *egoism*, and the explanation of any given action must always be sought there first. The calculation of all the means by which people try to steer a human being toward some goal is likewise built throughout on egoism. By its nature, *egoism* is boundless. The human being wants unconditionally to preserve their existence. They want it unconditionally free of pain, which includes every lack and deprivation. They want the greatest possible sum of well-being and every enjoyment they are capable of. They even try, if possible, to develop new capacities for enjoyment in themselves. Everything that stands in the way of the striving of their *egoism* arouses displeasure, anger and hatred. They will try to destroy it as an enemy. If possible, they want to enjoy everything and have everything. Since that is impossible, they want 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 every individual were given the choice between their own destruction and the destruction of the rest of the world, I do not need to say which way the choice would fall for the great majority. Accordingly, everyone makes themselves the center of the world and relates everything to themselves. Whatever happens, for example the greatest changes in the fate of nations, they will first relate to their own interest in it. However small and indirect that interest may be, they will think of it before everything else. There is no greater contrast than the one between the intense and exclusive interest that each person takes in their own self and the indifference with which, as a rule, everyone else regards that very self, just as that person regards theirs. It even has its comic side to see the countless individuals, each of whom, at least in practical terms, holds only themselves to be *real* and regards the others as, in a way, mere phantoms. This rests in the end on the fact that each person is given to themselves *directly*, while others are given to them only *indirectly*, through the representation of them in their head. And directness asserts its right. That is, because subjectivity is essential to every consciousness, each person is the whole world to themselves. For everything objective exists only *indirectly*, as a mere representation of the subject, so that everything always depends on self-consciousness. The only world that each person really knows and is aware of, they carry within themselves as their representation, and so each is the center of it. That is exactly why each person is everything to themselves. They find themselves to be the holder of all reality, and nothing can be more important to them than they themselves. Now, while in their subjective view their 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. At the same time they know with complete certainty that this very self, more important than everything, this microcosm, of which the macrocosm, that is, their whole world, appears as a mere modification or accident, must perish in death. For them, death is therefore the same as the end of the world. These, then, are the elements from which egoism grows, on the basis of the will to live. Egoism always lies like a wide ditch between one human being and

another. If someone does once jump across it to help another, it is like a miracle, which arouses amazement and earns applause. Above, in §. 8, in explaining Kant's moral principle, I had occasion to describe how egoism shows itself in everyday life. There, despite the politeness that is pinned on in front of it as a fig leaf, it still always peeks out from some corner. Politeness is the conventional and systematic denial of egoism in the small things of daily dealings. It is, of course, acknowledged hypocrisy. Even so, it is demanded and praised, because what it hides, egoism, is so ugly that people do not want to see it, although they know it is there. In the same way, people want repulsive objects at least covered by a curtain. Egoism pursues its aims without condition wherever it is not opposed either by outside force (which includes every fear, whether of earthly or of otherworldly powers) or by the genuine moral incentive. So, given the countless multitude of egoistic individuals, the war of everyone against everyone would be the order of the day, to the ruin of all. That is why reflecting reason very soon invents the institution of the state. The state arises from mutual fear of mutual violence, and it prevents the harmful consequences of general egoism as far as can be done by the *negative* route. Where, by contrast, those two powers opposing it do not take effect, egoism will at once show itself in its whole terrible size, and the phenomenon will not be a pretty one. I wanted to express the strength of this antimoral power without long discussion. So I was intent on marking the size of egoism in a single stroke, and looked for some really emphatic hyperbole. In the end I arrived at this one: many a person would be capable of killing another just to grease their boots with the victim's fat. But I was still left with the scruple whether it really is a hyperbole. *Egoism*, then, is the first and chief, though not the only, power that the *moral incentive* has to fight. Already here one sees that, to take the field against such an opponent, the moral incentive must be something more real than a hair-splitting piece of cleverness or an a priori soap bubble. Meanwhile, in war the first thing is to reconnoiter the enemy. In the coming fight, egoism, as the main force on its side, will oppose above all the virtue of *justice*, which in my view is the first and truly proper cardinal virtue.

The virtue of *love of humanity*, on the other hand, will more often face *ill will* or *hatefulness*. So let us first consider the origin and the degrees of these. Ill will in its lower degrees is very common, even nearly usual, and it easily reaches the higher ones. Goethe is probably right to say that in this world indifference and dislike are truly at home. (Elective Affinities, Th. 1, C. 3.) It is very fortunate for us that prudence and politeness throw their cloak over it and do not let us see how widespread mutual ill will is, and how the war of everyone against everyone is carried on at least in thought. But now and then it does come into view, for example in the so frequent and so merciless gossip. It becomes fully visible in outbursts of anger. These mostly exceed their cause many times over. They could not turn out so strong if they had not been compressed, like gunpowder in a gun, as long-nursed hatred brooding inside. For the most part, ill will arises from the unavoidable collisions of egoism, which occur at every step. Then it is also aroused objectively, by the sight of vices, faults, weaknesses, follies, defects and imperfections of every kind, which each person, more or less, at least occasionally, presents to the others. This can go so far that to some people, especially in moments of hypochondriac low mood, the world looks, from the aesthetic side, like a cabinet of caricatures; from the intellectual side, like a madhouse; and from the moral side, like a lodging house for crooks. If such low mood becomes lasting, misanthropy arises. Finally, a main source of ill will is envy. Or rather, envy itself is already ill will, aroused by another's good fortune, possessions or advantages. No human being is entirely free of it, and Herodotus (III, 80) already said so: Envy is born in human beings from the start (envy is planted in human beings from the origin). Its degrees, however, differ greatly. It is most implacable and most poisonous when directed at personal qualities, because here no hope is left for the envious person. It is also the most despicable then, because it hates what it should love and honor. But that is how it is:

It seems envy is felt more toward these than toward others,
who have lifted themselves into flight on their own,
leaving the common cage.¹⁷

Petrarch already laments. More extended reflections on envy can 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 enjoy *Schadenfreude* is devilish. There is no more infallible sign of a thoroughly bad heart and deep moral worthlessness than a streak of pure, heartfelt *Schadenfreude*. One should avoid forever anyone in whom one has noticed it: This one is wicked; Roman, keep away from him. Envy and *Schadenfreude* are in themselves merely theoretical. In practice they become malice and cruelty. Egoism can lead to crimes and misdeeds of every kind. But the harm and pain it causes to others is for it merely a means, not an end, and so occurs only incidentally. For malice and cruelty, on the other hand, the sufferings and pains of others are an end in themselves, and reaching that end is enjoyment. For this reason, malice and cruelty make up a higher degree of moral badness. The maxim of the most extreme egoism is: Help no one, but on the contrary, if it happens to be useful (so even this is still conditional), harm everyone. The maxim of malice is: Harm everyone as much as you can. As *Schadenfreude* is only theoretical cruelty, so cruelty is only practical *Schadenfreude*, and *Schadenfreude* will appear as cruelty as soon as the occasion comes.

Tracing the special vices that spring from the two basic powers just named would be in place only in a fully worked-out ethics. Such an ethics would derive from *egoism*, roughly, greed, gluttony, lust, self-interest, stinginess, avarice, injustice, hard-heartedness, pride, arrogance, and so on. From *hatefulness* it would derive grudging, envy, ill will, malice, *Schadenfreude*, prying curiosity, slander, insolence, petulance, hatred, anger, betrayal, sly spite, vengeance, cruelty, and so on. The first root is more animal, the second more devilish. Which one predominates gives the main line in the ethical classification of characters. It may be the one, the other, or else the moral incentive, which has yet to be shown further on. No human being is entirely without something of all three.

With this I have finished the review of the antimoral powers. It is certainly a terrifying review, and it recalls the review of the princes of darkness in Milton's *Pandemonium*. My plan, however, made it necessary for me to consider this

gloomy side of human nature first. Because of this my path certainly departs from that of all other moralists and becomes like Dante's, which leads first into hell.

The overview of the antimoral powers given here makes clear how hard the problem is: to find an incentive that could move human beings to a way of acting opposed to all those inclinations rooted deep in their nature. Or, if this opposite way of acting should happen to be found in experience, to find an incentive that gave a sufficient and unforced account of it. The problem is so hard that, to solve it for humanity at large, people everywhere have had to call in machinery from another world. People pointed to gods whose will and command was the way of acting demanded here, and who gave force to this command by punishments and rewards, either in this world or in another world to which death would transfer us. Suppose that belief in a doctrine of this kind took root generally, as is indeed possible through very early instilling. And suppose 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 really mean by morality of disposition. For clearly all actions called forth by motives of this kind would always be rooted only in mere egoism. How could one speak of selflessness where a reward lures me or a threatened punishment scares me off? A reward in another world, firmly believed in, is to be regarded as a perfectly safe bill of exchange, but one that falls due only after a very long time. Satisfied beggars everywhere so often promise that the giver will be repaid the gift a thousandfold in that other world. This promise may move many a miser to give generous alms. The miser hands them out cheerfully as a good investment, firmly convinced that in that other world, too, he will at once rise again as an extremely rich man. For the great mass of the people it may perhaps have to remain with incentives of this kind. Accordingly, the various religions, which are precisely the metaphysics of the people, hold them up to the people. Here, however, it should be noted that we are sometimes just as mistaken about the true motives of our own doing as about those of other people's. So many a per-

son, though they can account for their noblest actions only by motives of the kind above, surely acts from much nobler and purer incentives, ones much harder to make clear. They truly do from direct love of their neighbor what they can explain only by their God's command. Philosophy, by contrast, looks here, as everywhere, for the true, final explanations of the problem at hand. These must be founded on human nature and independent of all mythical interpretations, religious doctrines and transcendent entities posited as real, and philosophy demands to see them demonstrated in outer or inner experience. Our task here, however, is a philosophical one. So we must set aside entirely all solutions of it that depend on religions. I have mentioned them here only to bring out the great difficulty of the problem.

¹⁶ I allow myself the irregular compounding of the word, since “anti-ethical” would not be apt here. The “sittlich” and “unsittlich” that have now come into fashion (the German-rooted words for “ethical” and “unethical”) are a poor substitute for “moral” and “immoral.” First, “moral” is a scientific concept, and as such it deserves a Greek or Latin name, for reasons found in my main work, Bd. 2, Kap. 12, S. 134 ff. Second, “sittlich” is a weak and tame expression, hard to tell apart from “sittsam” (demure), which people popularly call “zimperllich” (prissy). One must make no concessions to German chauvinism.

¹⁷ People seem, more than others, to envy those
who, raised up by the force of their own wings,
depart from the cage that everyone shares.

Section 15



How to recognize actions with moral worth.

The first question to settle now is a question of experience: do people actually act justly of their own free will and show unselfish love for others, even to the point of nobility and generosity of spirit? Unfortunately, the question cannot be settled by experience alone. We can observe only the deed, not the motives behind it. So the possibility always remains that a selfish motive influenced a just or good action. I will not use the illegitimate trick of turning this theoretical inquiry into an appeal to the reader's conscience. But I believe very few people will doubt the matter. Their own experience will have convinced them that people often act justly for one reason alone: to prevent someone else from being wronged. Indeed, some people seem to have an *inborn* principle of giving others their due. They never deliberately wrong anyone. They do not pursue their own advantage without limits, but also take other people's rights into account. When they and someone else have taken on obligations to each other, they make sure not only that the other person does what is required, but also that the other person receives what is due. They sincerely do not want anyone dealing with them to lose out. These are the *truly honest people*, the few who are fair among the countless unfair people. But such people do exist. I also think it will be granted that some people help and give, work for others and give things up, with no further aim in their hearts than to help someone whose need they see. As for Arnold von Winkelried, he cried out, "Loyal, dear fellow

Confederates, will you remember my wife and child?” Then he gathered as many of the enemy’s spears into his arms as he could hold. Anyone who can imagine that he had some selfish aim in doing this is welcome to do so. I cannot.—In §. 13 above, I already pointed to cases of freely chosen justice that cannot be denied without quibbling and stubbornness.—But if someone still insists on denying that any such actions occur, then, on that person’s view, morality would be a science with no real subject matter, like astrology and alchemy. It would be a waste of time to keep arguing about its basis. I would therefore have nothing more to say to that person. I am speaking to those who accept that these actions really occur.

Only actions of the kind just described, then, are credited with *moral worth* in the proper sense. What distinguishes them is the exclusion of the sort of motives that otherwise produce all human actions: *self-interested* motives, in the widest sense of the word. That is precisely why discovering a selfish motive completely removes an action’s moral worth if it was the only motive, and reduces its moral worth if it was a contributing motive. The absence of all selfish motivation is therefore the *test of whether an action has moral worth*. Someone might object that actions done out of pure malice and cruelty are not selfish either. But clearly these cannot be what is meant here, since they are the opposite of the actions we are discussing. Anyone who insists on a strict definition can explicitly rule them out by their essential feature: they aim at someone else’s suffering.—Another sign of actions with moral worth is entirely internal and therefore less obvious. They leave us with a certain satisfaction with ourselves, called the approval of conscience. In the same way, the opposite actions—those of injustice and lack of love, and still more those of malice and cruelty—bring an opposite inner judgment of ourselves. There is also a secondary, incidental outward sign: actions of the first kind win the approval and respect of uninvolved witnesses, while actions of the second kind have the opposite effect.

We have now identified actions with moral worth and accepted that they actually occur. We must treat them as the phenomenon before us that needs explaining. We must therefore ask what can move people to act in this way. If

this inquiry succeeds, it must reveal the genuine moral motive. Since all ethics must rest on that motive, our problem would then be solved.

Section 16



Stating and proving the only genuine moral motive.

After these essential preparations, I come to showing what the true motive is behind every action with genuine moral worth. We will find that its seriousness and unquestionable reality set it far apart from all the hair-splitting, overly clever reasoning, fallacies, baseless claims, and soap bubbles of reasoning independent of experience that earlier systems have tried to make the source of moral action and the basis of ethics. I do not want merely to *propose* this moral motive for people to accept if they choose. I want actually to *prove* that it is the only possible one. The proof requires us to bring together many ideas. So I will first state some premises on which the argument depends. These can readily be accepted 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) Likewise, an action cannot fail to occur when there is a motive sufficient for the acting person's character, unless a stronger opposing motive makes it necessary not to act.
- 3) The only things that move the will are well-being and suffering, understood generally and in the widest sense of the words. Conversely, well-being and suffering mean "in agreement with a will, or against it." So every motive must have some connection with well-being and suffering.

- 4) It follows that every action has as its ultimate aim some being capable of well-being and suffering.
- 5) This being is either the person acting or someone else. In the latter case, that other person is involved as the recipient of the action, which is done either to harm that person or to benefit and help them.
- 6) Every action whose ultimate aim concerns the acting person's own well-being and suffering is *self-interested*.
- 7) Everything said here about actions applies equally to refraining from actions for which both a motive and an opposing motive are present.
- 8) As the explanation in the previous section shows, *self-interest* and an action's *moral worth* absolutely exclude each other. If an action is motivated by a selfish aim, it cannot have moral worth. If an action is to have moral worth, no selfish aim may motivate it, directly or indirectly, whether close at hand or far removed.
- 9) Since §. 5 ruled out supposed duties toward ourselves, an action's moral significance can lie only in its relation to others. Only in relation to others can it have moral worth or deserve moral condemnation, and so be an act of justice or love for others, or the opposite of either.

The following is clear from these premises. The well-being and suffering that, according to premise 3, must be the ultimate aim behind every action or decision not to act belong either to the acting person or to someone else who is affected by the action. In the first case the action is necessarily selfish, because it rests on a self-interested motive. This applies not only to actions we openly undertake for our own benefit and advantage, as we do in the great majority of cases. It applies equally whenever we expect an action to have some distant result for ourselves, whether in this world or another. It also applies when we have in mind our honor, our reputation among people, someone's high regard, the sympathy of spectators, or anything similar. The same is true if, by our action, we mean to uphold a rule from whose general observance we expect some eventual advantage for ourselves: for example, a rule of justice or of everyone helping one another, and so on.—It is also true if we think it advisable to obey some absolute command coming from a power that, though unknown, is

clearly superior. Here, only fear of the harmful consequences of disobedience can motivate us, even if we think of those consequences only generally and vaguely.—The same applies when, by acting or refraining from action, we try to maintain our own high opinion of ourselves, our worth or dignity, whether our idea of these is clear or vague. Otherwise we would have to give up that opinion and see our pride hurt.—Finally, it also applies if, following *Wolff's* principles, we want to work toward our own perfection through the action. In short, whatever we make an action's ultimate motive, it will always turn out that, by some roundabout route, the real driving force is ultimately *the acting person's own well-being and suffering*. The action is therefore selfish and consequently has no moral worth. There is only one case where this does not hold: when the ultimate motive for acting or not acting lies directly and exclusively in the *well-being and suffering* of someone else who is affected. In that case, the person who acts or refrains from acting has only *someone else's* well-being and suffering in view. That person aims at nothing except that the other should remain unharmed, or even receive help, support, and relief. *This aim alone* gives an action or a decision not to act the stamp of *moral worth*. That worth therefore rests exclusively on acting or refraining from action solely for someone else's benefit. Whenever this is not the case, the well-being and suffering that drive someone to act or hold them back can only be their own. But then acting or not acting is always *selfish* and thus *without moral worth*.

But if I am to act solely *for the other person's sake*, then *their well-being and suffering must be my immediate motive*, just as my own are in every other action. This brings our problem into sharper focus. How is it possible for someone else's well-being and suffering to move my will immediately, that is, in just the way that normally only my own do? How can they become my direct motive, sometimes even so strongly that I give them more or less priority over my own well-being and suffering, which are otherwise the only source of my motives?—Clearly, this is possible only if the other person becomes the ultimate aim of my will, just as I myself normally am. I must want their well-being and not want their suffering just as directly as I normally want only my own well-being and not my own suffering. But this necessarily means that I directly share in their

suffering simply as their suffering. I feel it as I otherwise feel only my own, and therefore want their well-being as directly as I otherwise want only my own. This requires me to be *identified* with them in some way. In other words, the complete difference between me and everyone else, on which my self-interest rests, must be removed at least to a certain extent. But I am not inside the other person's skin. So only through the *knowledge* I have of them, that is, the representation of them in my head, can I identify with them so far that my deed shows that difference to have been removed. The process analyzed here is not something dreamed up or invented out of nothing. It is entirely real and by no means rare. It is the everyday phenomenon of *compassion*: an entirely direct sharing, independent of all other considerations, first in someone else's suffering, and through this in preventing or ending that suffering. Ultimately, all satisfaction, well-being, and happiness consist in that prevention or ending of suffering. This compassion alone is the real basis of all freely chosen justice and all genuine love for others. An action has moral worth only to the extent that it comes from compassion. Every action arising from any other motives has none. As soon as this compassion is stirred, the other person's well-being and suffering matter directly to me, in just the same way, though not always to the same degree, as normally only my own do. So the difference between that person and me is no longer absolute.

This process is certainly astonishing, even mysterious. It is, in fact, the great mystery of ethics, its fundamental phenomenon, and the boundary beyond which only metaphysical speculation can venture a step. In this process we see the dividing wall removed that, by the light of nature—as the old theologians call reason—completely separates one being from another. What is not myself has, in a certain sense, become myself. For now, though, let us leave the metaphysical interpretation of this phenomenon alone. Let us first see whether all actions of freely chosen justice and genuine love for others really arise from this process. Our problem will then be solved. We will have shown that morality's ultimate foundation lies in human nature itself. This foundation cannot in turn be a problem for *ethics*, though, like everything that exists simply as such, it can be a problem for *metaphysics*. But the metaphysical interpretation of this

fundamental ethical phenomenon already goes beyond the Royal Society's question, which asks about the basis of ethics. At most, it can be attached as a supplement that one is free to offer and free to accept.—Before I move on to deriving the cardinal virtues from the basic motive we have identified, I still need to add two essential remarks.

1) To make the argument easier to understand, I simplified the account above, which derives compassion as the only source of actions with moral worth. I deliberately left out the motive of *malice*. Like compassion, it is not self-interested, but it makes another person's pain its ultimate aim. By including it now, we can restate the proof above more completely and rigorously as follows:

There are only *three basic motives* for human actions. Every possible motivating consideration works only by stirring one of them. They are:

- a) Self-interest, which wants one's own well-being (it has no limits).
- b) Malice, which wants someone else's suffering (it goes as far as the most extreme cruelty).
- c) Compassion, which wants someone else's well-being (it goes as far as nobility and generosity of spirit).

Every human action must be traceable to one of these motives, although two of them can also work together. We have accepted that actions with moral worth actually occur. So they too must arise from one of these basic motives. But according to premise 8, they cannot come from the *first* motive. Still less can they come from the *second*: every action arising from it deserves moral condemnation, whereas some actions produced by the first are morally neutral. So they must come from the *third* motive. What follows will confirm this through experience.

2) Our direct sharing in another person's condition is limited to their *suffering*. Their *well-being* does not stir it, at least not directly. In itself, their well-being leaves us indifferent. J. J. Rousseau says this too in *Émile* (liv. IV): "First maxim: The human heart is not inclined to put itself in the place of people who are happier than we are, but only in the place of those who are more to be pitied." etc.

The reason is that pain and suffering—which include every lack, deprivation, need, and indeed every wish—are what is *positive*, what we feel directly. By contrast, satisfaction, enjoyment, and happiness consist only in the removal of a deprivation or the relief of a pain. Their effect is therefore *negative*. That is precisely why need and desire are the condition of every enjoyment. Plato already recognized this, making exceptions only for pleasant smells and the pleasures of the mind. (De Rep., IX, p. 264 sq. Bip.) Voltaire also says, “There are no real pleasures without real needs.” So pain is what is positive, what makes itself known through itself. Satisfaction and enjoyments are what is *negative*: merely the removal of that pain. This is the immediate reason why only another person’s suffering, lack, danger, and helplessness stir our concern directly and in themselves. A happy, contented person, simply as such, leaves us indifferent. This is really because their condition is negative: an absence of pain, lack, and distress. We can, of course, be glad about other people’s happiness, well-being, and enjoyment. But this is a secondary response, brought about because their earlier suffering and deprivation had saddened us. Or we may take an interest in a happy person enjoying life, not *as such*, but because that person is our child, father, friend, relative, servant, subject, or the like. But someone happy and enjoying life *simply as such* does not stir our direct concern in the way that someone suffering, deprived, or unhappy does *simply as such*. Even in our own case, it is really only our suffering that moves us to act. This includes every lack, need, wish, and even boredom. A state of contentment and happiness, by contrast, leaves us inactive and resting idly. Why should it not be the same with respect to others, since our sharing in their condition rests on identifying with them? In fact, the sight of a happy person enjoying life, simply as such, can very easily arouse our envy. Everyone has a tendency toward envy, which was listed above among the forces working against morality.

Following the account above of compassion as being motivated directly by someone else’s suffering, I must also criticize an error made by Cassina (Analytical Essay on Compassion, 1788; translated into German by Pockels, 1790) and often repeated since. He thinks compassion arises from a momentary illusion of the imagination: we put ourselves in the suffering person’s place and then

imagine we are suffering their pain in *our own* person. This is not at all what happens. At every moment we remain clearly aware that the other person is suffering, not us. We feel the suffering directly in *their* person, not in *our own*, and it saddens us. We suffer with them, and therefore in them. We feel their pain as *theirs* and do not imagine it is our own. Indeed, the happier our own condition is, and so the greater the contrast between our awareness of it and the other person's situation, the more open we are to compassion. But explaining how this extremely important phenomenon is possible is not so easy, nor can it be done by a purely psychological approach, as Cassina tried to do. The explanation can only be metaphysical. I will try to give one in the final part.

Now I will turn to deriving actions with genuine moral worth from the source we have shown them to have. In the previous part I already set out the following rule as the general maxim of these actions, and therefore as the highest principle of ethics: "Harm no one; rather, help everyone as much as you can." Since this maxim contains *two* statements, the actions that correspond to it naturally fall into two classes.

Section 17



The Virtue of Justice.

A closer look at compassion, the process identified above as the basic phenomenon of ethics, immediately shows two clearly separate degrees. Another person's suffering can directly become my motive—that is, determine what I do or refrain from doing—in either of these ways. First, it can work against selfish or malicious motives and stop me from making someone else suffer: from bringing about suffering that does not yet exist and becoming the cause of another person's pain. Then, at the higher degree, compassion can work positively and drive me to give active help. The distinction between so-called duties of right and duties of virtue, or more accurately between justice and loving kindness, emerges here entirely on its own. *Kant* could arrive at it only by forcing things. Its natural emergence confirms the soundness of the principle. It is the natural, unmistakable, clear boundary between the negative and the positive, between not hurting and helping. The existing names, duties of right and duties of virtue—the latter also called duties of love or imperfect duties—have a basic flaw: they put a general class alongside one of its subdivisions. Justice is a virtue too. These names also rest on far too broad a use of the concept of *duty*. I will return that concept to its proper limits below. In place of these two duties, then, I put two virtues: justice and loving kindness. I call them cardinal virtues because all the others arise from them in practice and can be derived from them

in theory. Both have their roots in natural compassion. Compassion itself is an undeniable fact of human consciousness, an essential part of it. It does not depend on assumptions, concepts, religions, dogmas, myths, upbringing, or education. It is original and direct, grounded in human nature itself. That is precisely why it holds good under all conditions and appears in every country and age. People everywhere confidently appeal to it as something that must be present in every human being. Nowhere does it count as one of the “foreign gods.” By contrast, we call someone who seems to lack it inhuman; and “humanity” is often used as another word for compassion.

The first degree at which this genuine, natural moral incentive works is therefore only *negative*. To begin with, we are all inclined toward injustice and violence. Our needs, desires, anger, and hatred enter consciousness directly and so have the right of first occupancy. The suffering that our injustice and violence cause others, on the other hand, enters consciousness only by the secondary route of *mental representation*, and only through experience: in other words, *indirectly*. That is why *Seneca* says, “No one acquires a good disposition before having a bad one” (Ep. 50). The first degree of compassion’s effect, then, is to oppose and check the suffering I would cause others through the anti-moral forces within me. It calls out “Stop!” and stands as a defensive barrier in front of the other person, protecting him from the harm my selfishness or malice would otherwise drive me to inflict. From this first degree of compassion comes the rule “hurt no one”: the principle of *justice*. Here alone this virtue has its pure, unmixed, genuinely moral origin. It cannot have such an origin anywhere else, because otherwise it would have to rest on selfishness. If I am receptive to compassion to this degree, it will hold me back whenever and wherever I might want to use another person’s suffering as a means to my own ends. It makes no difference whether that suffering comes at once or later, directly or indirectly through intermediate steps. I will therefore attack neither another person’s property nor his person, and cause him neither mental nor physical suffering. I will not only refrain from physical harm but also avoid causing mental pain through insults, intimidation, vexation, or slander. The same compassion will keep me from seeking to satisfy my lust at the expense of women’s happiness in

life, from seducing another man's wife, or from corrupting young men morally and physically by leading them into pederasty. Still, compassion need not actually be stirred in every single case; it would often come too late. Noble minds have learned once and for all that every unjust act necessarily brings suffering on others, sharpened by the feeling of being wronged—that is, of being at the mercy of someone else's greater power. This knowledge gives rise to the rule “hurt no one.” Rational reflection raises it into a firm, settled resolve: to respect everyone's rights, never to permit oneself to infringe them, and to remain free of the self-reproach of having caused another person's suffering. It also means not using force or cunning to shift onto others the burdens and suffering that life's circumstances bring each of us, and instead carrying one's own allotted share, so as not to double someone else's. For although *principles*, and abstract knowledge in general, are certainly not the original source or first foundation of morality, they are indispensable for a moral life. They are the container, the reservoir, in which we store the disposition that comes from the source of all morality. That source does not flow at every moment; when an occasion for action comes, its stored contents can flow there through channels. Morality in this respect resembles physiology. The gallbladder, for example, is needed as a reservoir for what the liver produces; and there are many similar cases. Without firmly established *principles*, we would be helplessly exposed to anti-moral incentives whenever outside impressions stirred them into strong emotions. Holding to our principles and following them despite opposing motives is *self-control*. Here, too, lies the reason why women generally fall below men in the virtue of justice, and therefore in honesty and conscientiousness. Because of the weakness of their reason, they are much less able than men to understand general *principles*, hold on to them, and use them as guides. Injustice and deceit are therefore their most common vices, and lying is their true element. But they surpass men in the virtue of *loving kindness*. The occasion for this virtue is usually something *directly perceived*, so it speaks immediately to compassion, to which women are decidedly more receptive. Yet only what can be directly perceived, what is present and immediately real, truly exists for them. They have difficulty grasping the distant, absent, past, or future, which can be known only

through concepts. So there is compensation here too: justice is more the male virtue, loving kindness more the female. The thought of seeing women serve as judges provokes laughter; but the Sisters of Mercy surpass even the Brothers of Mercy. The *animal* goes further still: it entirely lacks abstract or rational knowledge. It is incapable of resolutions, let alone principles, and therefore of *self-control*. It is defenseless against impressions and emotions. Precisely for this reason it has no conscious *morality*, although species differ greatly in malice and goodness of character, as do individuals in the highest groups. Thus in the just person's individual actions, compassion now works only indirectly, through principles: not so much actually as potentially. It is rather like the greater *speed* made possible in statics by a longer balance arm, which lets the smaller mass balance the larger. At rest this speed works only potentially, yet just as effectively as if it were actual. Compassion nevertheless remains ready to become active itself. So if the chosen principle of justice ever falters in a particular case, no motive—leaving selfish ones aside—is more effective in supporting it and reviving just intentions than one drawn from the original source, compassion. This applies not only to harm against someone's person but also to harm against his property. Suppose, for example, that someone feels tempted to keep a valuable object he has found. Apart from all prudential and religious motives against doing so, nothing will bring him back to the path of justice more readily than imagining the loser's anxiety, heartbreak, and lamenting. A sense of this truth often leads people who publicly appeal for the return of lost money to add that the loser is poor, a servant, or someone of that kind.

I hope these considerations make it clear that justice too, as a genuine, freely practiced virtue, has its origin in compassion, however unlikely that may seem at first. If this still seems too meager a soil for such a great and truly cardinal virtue to have its only root in, recall what was said above. Genuine, voluntary, unselfish, undisguised justice is found among human beings only in very small measure. It always appears as a surprising exception. In both quality and quantity it stands to its imitation—the justice based on mere prudence and loudly advertised everywhere—as gold stands to copper. I would call the latter common justice and the former heavenly justice. For it is the former that, according

to Hesiod, leaves the earth in the Iron Age to live with the heavenly gods. The root I have identified is strong enough for this rare plant, which is always an exotic on earth.

Injustice, or *wrong*, therefore always consists in *hurting* someone else. The concept of *wrong* is thus *positive* and comes before the concept of *right*. The latter is *negative* and merely identifies the actions we can perform without hurting others—that is, without doing *wrong*. It is easy to see that this also includes every action whose sole purpose is to ward off an attempted wrong. No concern for another person, no compassion for him, can require me to let him hurt me: to suffer a wrong. That the concept of *right* is *negative*, as opposed to *wrong*, which is *positive*, is also clear from the first explanation of this concept 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: right is what is not unjust” (On the Law of War and Peace, L. I, c. 1, §. 3). The negative nature of justice shows itself, despite appearances, even in the commonplace definition “Give everyone what is his.” If it is his, there is no need to give it to him. What this means, then, is “Take from no one what is his.” Because justice makes only a negative demand, it can be enforced: everyone can practice “hurt no one” at the same time. The institution that enforces it is the *state*. Its sole purpose is to protect individuals from one another and the whole community from external enemies. Some German would-be philosophers of this venal age want to twist it into an institution for moral education and spiritual improvement. Behind this lurks the Jesuit aim of abolishing personal freedom and individual development, turning each person into 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 statement, “In my country everyone should be able to see to his own salvation in his own way,” meant that he never intended to take that road. Yet even now we see the state everywhere assuming responsibility for its members’ metaphysical needs, with North America more an apparent than a real exception. Governments seem to have chosen as their principle the saying of Quintus Curtius: “Nothing controls the masses more effectively

than superstition. Otherwise unruly, savage, and changeable, once they are captured by an empty religion they obey prophets more readily than their own leaders.”

The concepts of *wrong* and *right* mean hurting and not hurting, with the latter including the warding off of harm. Clearly, these concepts are independent of all enacted law and come before it. There is therefore a purely ethical right, or natural right, and a pure theory of right independent of all enacted rules. Its principles do have an empirical origin insofar as they arise on the occasion of the concept of *harm*. In themselves, however, they rest on pure understanding, which supplies the following principle a priori: the cause of a cause is the cause of its effect. Here that means that whatever I must do to prevent someone else from hurting me has him, not me, as its cause. I can therefore resist all his encroachments without doing him wrong. It is, so to speak, a moral law of recoil. Thus the empirical concept of harm combines with this rule supplied by pure understanding to produce the basic concepts of wrong and right. Everyone grasps these a priori and immediately applies them when experience presents the occasion. An empiricist who denies this, and accepts experience alone, need only be referred to the savages. They all distinguish wrong and right correctly, often with subtlety and precision. This is especially striking in their barter and other agreements with the crews of European ships, and in their visits aboard them. They are bold and confident when right is on their side, but anxious when it is not. In disputes they accept a just settlement, whereas unjust treatment drives them to war. The *theory of right* is a part of morality that identifies the actions we must not perform if we do not want to hurt others—that is, commit a wrong. Morality here considers the *active* side. Legislation takes this chapter of morality and uses it in reverse, with regard to the *passive* side. It considers these same actions as things no one has to endure, since no one should suffer a wrong. Against these actions the state erects the barrier of laws, as enacted law. Its aim is that no one should *suffer* a wrong. The aim 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*: hurting someone else, whether in his person, freedom, property, or honor. But it can differ greatly in *quantity*. Moralists do not seem to have properly investigated this difference in the *size of a wrong*. Yet it is recognized everywhere in actual life: the amount of blame people express corresponds to it. The same applies to the *justice* of actions. To illustrate: someone on the verge of starvation who steals a loaf of bread commits a wrong. But how small his injustice is compared with that of a rich man who somehow deprives a poor man of his last possessions. A rich man who pays his day laborer acts justly. But how small this justice is compared with that of a poor man who voluntarily returns a purse of gold he has found to its rich owner. The measure of this very significant difference in the *quantity* of justice and injustice, while their quality remains the same, is not direct and absolute like the measure on a ruler. It is indirect and relative, like that of sines and tangents. I propose the following formula: the size of the injustice of my action equals the size of the harm I cause someone else by it, divided by the size of the benefit I gain from it. And the size of the justice of my action equals the size of the benefit I would gain by hurting someone else, divided by the size of the harm he would suffer from it. Besides this, however, there is a *double injustice*, different in kind from any single injustice, however great. This shows itself in the indignation of an uninvolved witness, which is always proportional to the size of the injustice. Only with double injustice does it reach its highest degree, and the witness then abhors it as something outrageous, crying out to heaven: an atrocity, a sacrilege, at which the gods themselves seem to cover their faces. This *double injustice* occurs when someone has expressly undertaken an obligation to protect another person in a particular respect. Merely failing to fulfill this obligation would already hurt the other person and so be a wrong. But the person now goes further and himself attacks and hurts the other person in the very respect in which he was supposed to protect him. This happens, for example, when an appointed guard or escort becomes a murderer; when a trusted custodian becomes a thief; when a guardian deprives his wards of their property; when an attorney betrays his client's case; when a judge takes a bribe; or when someone asked for advice deliberately gives advice that will ruin the

questioner. All these come under the concept of *betrayal*, which the world abhors. Accordingly, *Dante* places traitors at the very bottom of hell, where Satan himself lives (Inf., XI, 61–66).

Now that the concept of *obligation* has come up, this is the place to define the concept of *duty*, which is used so often in ethics and in life, but given too broad a scope. We have found that wrong always consists in hurting someone else, whether in his person, freedom, property, or honor. It seems to follow that every wrong must be a positive attack, an act. But there are actions whose mere *omission* is a wrong. Such actions are called *duties*. This is the true philosophical definition of *duty*. The concept loses its distinctive character, and is therefore lost altogether, if we follow previous moral teaching and call every praiseworthy way of acting a *duty*. That forgets that a *duty* must also be *something owed*. *Duty—what ought to be done, what is owed, duty—is therefore an action whose mere omission hurts someone else, that is, commits a wrong*. Clearly this can happen only if the person omitting the action has undertaken to perform it: has placed himself under an *obligation*. All duties therefore rest on an obligation undertaken. As a rule this is an explicit mutual agreement: between ruler and people, government and officials, master and servant, attorney and client, doctor and patient, or, more generally, anyone who has undertaken to provide any kind of service and the person who commissioned it, in the broadest sense of that word. That is why every duty confers a right: no one can undertake an obligation without a motive, which here means some benefit to himself. I know of only *one* obligation that is undertaken *not* through an agreement but directly through an act alone. The person to whom it is owed did not yet exist when it was undertaken. This is the obligation of parents to their children. Whoever brings a child into the world has the *duty* to support it until it can support itself. If that time should *never* come—as with a blind person, a cripple, a cretin, or the like—the duty never ends either. For merely failing to give help, an omission, would hurt the child and indeed bring about its destruction. The moral duty of children to their parents is not so direct 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. Later,

however, that duty ends along with the right from which it arose. Gratitude then takes its place, for whatever the parents did beyond their strict duty. Ingratitude is an ugly vice, often even an outrageous one, but gratitude should not be called a duty. Its absence does not hurt the other person and is therefore no *wrong*. Otherwise the benefactor would have to have thought he was silently making a bargain. Compensation for damage caused might perhaps be put forward as an obligation arising directly from an act. But this only reverses the consequences of an unjust act and is a mere attempt to erase it. It is something purely negative, based on the fact that the act itself should not have occurred. It should also be noted here that equity is the enemy of justice and often does it serious damage. We should therefore not give it too much room. The German favors equity; the Englishman sides with justice.

The law of motivation is just as strict as the law of physical causation, and therefore brings with it an equally irresistible compulsion. Accordingly, there are two ways of committing a wrong: *force* and *cunning*. Just as I can use force to kill or rob another person, or compel him to obey me, I can also do all this through cunning. I put false motives before his intellect, and as a result he must do what he otherwise would not do. This is done by means of a *lie*. Its wrongfulness rests on this alone, and attaches to it only insofar as it is a tool of cunning—that is, of compulsion through motivation. As a rule, however, that is what it is. To begin with, even my lying cannot happen without a motive. With the rarest exceptions, that motive will be unjust: the intention to direct others over whom I have no power according to my own will, to compel them through motivation. This intention underlies even merely boastful lying. The person who uses it tries to gain more standing in other people's eyes than he deserves. The binding force of a *promise* or *contract* rests on the fact that, if unfulfilled, it is the most solemn kind of lie. The intention to exercise mental compulsion over another person is all the more obvious here, since the motive for lying—the performance demanded of the other party—is expressly stated. Fraud is contemptible because it disarms its victim through a show of sincerity before attacking him. *Betrayal* is its highest point and is deeply abhorred because it belongs to the category of *double injustice*. But just as I can repel

force with force without doing wrong, and therefore rightfully, I can also repel it through cunning if I lack force or find cunning more convenient. Thus, in cases where I have a right to use force, I also have a right *to lie*. This applies, for example, against robbers and aggressors of every kind who have no right to use violence, and whom I therefore lure into a trap by cunning. That is why a promise extorted by force is not binding. But *the right to lie* actually goes further. It applies to every wholly unauthorized question about my personal or business affairs—a prying question—if not only answering it but even refusing it with “I won’t say” would arouse suspicion and put me in danger. Here lying is self-defense against unauthorized curiosity, which is usually not well-intentioned. I have the right to prepare physical resistance against other people’s presumed ill will and the physical violence I accordingly anticipate, at the risk of the aggressor. As a preventive measure I can therefore put sharp spikes on my garden wall, let vicious dogs loose in my yard at night, and even, depending on the circumstances, set foot traps and spring guns. The intruder has only himself to blame for their harmful consequences. In the same way, I have the right to use every means to keep secret anything whose disclosure would expose me to attack by others. I also have reason to do so, because here too I must assume that others’ ill will is quite possible and take precautions against it in advance. That is why Ariosto says:

Although pretense is most often
 Blamed and taken as a sign of bad intent,
 Still, in many, many matters
 It has plainly done good,
 Preventing harm, disgrace, and death:
 For we do not always deal with friends
 In this mortal life, much darker than bright,
 And filled with envy.¹⁹

(Orl. fur., IV, 1.)

Thus, without doing wrong, I may use cunning in advance to counter even a merely presumed attempt to hurt me through cunning. I need not answer someone who pries without permission into my private affairs. Nor need I say

“I want to keep that secret,” pointing out the place where a secret lies that is dangerous to me, perhaps useful to him, and in any case gives him power over me:

They want to know the household’s secrets, and so be feared.

Instead, I am entitled to put him off with a lie, at his own risk if it leads him into a harmful mistake. Here lying is the only way to meet prying, suspicious curiosity; I am therefore in a position of self-defense. “Ask me no questions, and I’ll tell you no lies”²⁰ is the right rule here. Among the English, accusing someone of lying is regarded as the gravest insult. For that very reason they really do lie less than other nations. Correspondingly, all unauthorized questions about another person’s affairs are considered bad manners, described by the expression “to ask questions.” Every sensible person acts on the principle stated above, even if he is scrupulously upright. Suppose, for example, that he is returning from a remote place where he has collected money. An unknown traveler joins him and, as usual, first asks *where he is going*, then *where he has come from*, and gradually what took him to that place. He will answer with a lie to guard against the danger of robbery. Someone who is found in the house where the father of a daughter he is courting lives, and is asked why he is unexpectedly there, will give a false reason without hesitation, unless he is a fool. There are very many such cases in which every reasonable person lies without any qualms of conscience. Only this view removes the glaring contradiction between the morality people teach and the morality practiced daily, even by the most honest and best people. Yet the restriction stated above, to cases of self-defense, must be strictly maintained. Otherwise this teaching would be open to horrible abuse, since lying is in itself a very dangerous tool. Although the law protects the public peace, it still allows everyone to carry and use weapons, that is, in self-defense. In the same way, morality allows lying in that case, but also *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 the claim that lying is utterly and unconditionally reprehensible, without exception and by its very nature, is already contradicted by the existence of cases in which lying is even a *duty*, particularly for doctors. There are also *noble* lies:

that of the Marquis of Posa in *Don Carlos*, the one in *Jerusalem Delivered*, II, 22, and all cases in general where one person wants to take another's guilt upon himself. Finally, 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 usual doctrine of the lie of necessity is a miserable patch on the clothing of a poverty-stricken morality. The arguments given in some textbooks at *Kant's* prompting, which derive the wrongfulness of lying from the human *power of 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*, "Human beings were given speech so they could hide their thoughts." *Kant's* unconditional, boundless horror of lying, displayed on every occasion, rests either on affectation or on prejudice. In the chapter on lying in his "Doctrine of Virtue," he denounces it with every insulting description but supplies no actual reason for its reprehensibility. A real reason would have been more effective. Declaiming is easier than proving, and moralizing easier than being sincere. *Kant* would have done better to direct this special zeal against *pleasure in others' suffering*. That, not lying, is the truly devilish vice. It is the exact opposite of compassion: nothing but powerless cruelty. Unable to bring about the suffering it so enjoys seeing in others, it thanks chance for doing the job in its place. Under the code of chivalric honor, an accusation of lying is taken so very seriously that it must actually be washed away with the accuser's blood. This is not because lying is *wrong*. If it were, an accusation of a wrong committed by force would have to cause just as grave an offense, which, as everyone knows, it does not. The reason is that, under the code of chivalric honor, force is really what establishes right. A person who resorts to a lie to commit a wrong shows that he lacks force, or the courage needed to use it. Every lie shows fear. That is what condemns him.

¹⁸ A full account of the theory of right can be found in "The World as Will and Representation," Bd. 1, §. 62.

- ¹⁹ However much pretense is usually blamed and taken as evidence of bad intent, it has nevertheless plainly done good in very many matters by preventing harm, disgrace, and death. For we do not always speak with friends in this mortal life, which is much darker than bright and overflows with envy.
- ²⁰ Don't question me, and I won't 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 most fundamental cardinal virtue. The ancient philosophers recognized it as such, though they placed three other, poorly chosen virtues alongside it. But they did not yet identify loving kindness—charity, love—as a virtue. Even *Plato*, who reaches the greatest heights in morality, gets no further than voluntary, unselfish justice. Loving kindness has, of course, always existed in practice and in fact. But Christianity was the first to discuss it in theory and formally establish it as a virtue, indeed the greatest of all, and even extend it to enemies. This is Christianity's greatest achievement, though only in relation to Europe. In Asia, a thousand years earlier, unlimited love of one's neighbor had already been both taught and prescribed, as well as practiced. The Veda and Dharma-Shastra, the Itihasa and Purana, and the teaching of the Buddha Shakyamuni never tire of preaching it. Strictly speaking, traces of recommendations 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.

Through *compassion*—the process whose reality was established above, though its origin remains mysterious—another person's suffering in itself and as such directly becomes my motive. The second degree at which this happens is clearly

distinct from the first because of the *positive character* of the actions it produces. Compassion then does not merely stop me from hurting the other person; it actually drives me to help him. The livelier and more deeply felt this direct concern is, and the greater and more urgent the other person's distress, the greater the sacrifice this purely moral motive will lead me to make to meet his need or relieve his distress. This can mean using my physical or mental powers on his behalf, or sacrificing my property, health, freedom, or even life. Here, then, in direct concern that neither rests on an argument nor needs one, lies the only pure origin of loving kindness—charity, love. This is the virtue whose rule is “help everyone as much as you can.” From it comes everything that ethics prescribes under the names duties of virtue, duties of love, or imperfect duties. This entirely direct, indeed instinctive concern for another person's suffering—in other words, compassion—is the only source of such actions if they are to *have moral worth*. That means they must be free of all selfish motives. Precisely for that reason, they must awaken in us the inner satisfaction called a good, satisfied, approving conscience. They must also produce in an observer that distinctive approval, respect, admiration, and even humbling reflection on himself, whose existence is an undeniable fact. If a charitable act has any other motive, however, it can only be selfish, unless it is actually malicious. The basic incentives of all actions identified above are selfishness, malice, and compassion. Correspondingly, the *motives* that can move human beings at all fall under three completely general and highest classes: 1) one's own well-being, 2) another's suffering, 3) another's well-being. If the motive of a charitable act does *not belong to the third class*, it must necessarily belong to the *first* or the *second*. The *second* really does occur sometimes. I might, for example, help someone in order to hurt someone else whom I do not help, or make that person's suffering more keenly felt. Or I might want to shame a third person who did not help the recipient, or, finally, humiliate the recipient himself by helping him. But the *first* occurs much more often. This happens whenever, in doing a good deed, I have *my own well-being* in view, however remotely and indirectly. I may be thinking of a reward in this world or another, or of the respect I will gain and the reputation for having a noble heart. I may calculate that the person I help

today could one day help me in return, or benefit and serve me in some other way. I may even be driven by the thought that the rule of generosity or charity must be upheld because it could someday benefit me too. In short, it happens whenever my purpose is anything other than the purely *objective* one: wanting to know that I have helped the other person, rescued him from his distress and difficulties, and freed him from suffering. Nothing beyond that, and nothing alongside it! Only then, and then alone, have I really shown the loving kindness—charity, love—whose preaching is Christianity’s great and distinctive achievement. The very instructions the Gospel adds to its command to love, such as “Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (“Your left hand should not know what the right does”), and similar sayings, rest on a sense of what I have derived here: only another person’s distress, and no other consideration, must be my motive if my action is to have moral worth. The same passage rightly says (Matth. 6, 2) that people who give to show off have already received their reward. But here too the Vedas give us, so to speak, a higher initiation. They repeatedly assure us that anyone who desires any reward for his deeds is still on the path of darkness and not yet ready for liberation. If someone giving alms asked me what he got out of it, my honest answer would be: “This: that the poor person’s lot is made that much easier. Beyond that, absolutely nothing. If that does not satisfy you, and you really do not care about it, then you did not really want to give alms. You wanted to make a purchase, and you have been cheated out of your money. But if you do care that the person burdened by poverty suffers less, then you have achieved your aim. What you get out of it is that he suffers less, and you see exactly how far your gift is rewarded.”

But how is it possible for suffering that is not *mine*, that does not affect *me*, to become my motive just as directly as only my own suffering usually does, and move me to act? As I have said, this can happen only if, although it is given to me merely as something outside me, through external perception or information, I nevertheless *share the feeling* of it, feel it *as mine*, yet not *in me* but *in someone else*. Then what *Calderón* expressed has happened:

that between seeing
Suffering and suffering
There was no distance.

“The Worst Isn’t Always Certain,” *Jorn.* II, p. 229.

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

This presupposes that I have to some extent identified myself with the other person, and that the barrier between self and not-self has therefore been removed for the moment. Only then do the other person’s concerns, needs, distress, and suffering directly become my own. I no longer see him as empirical perception presents him: someone alien to me, of no concern to me, entirely different from me. Instead, I suffer with him *in him*, even though his skin does not enclose my nerves. Only in this way can *his* pain and *his* distress become a motive for *me*. Otherwise only my own can do so. This *process*, I repeat, is *mysterious*. Reason cannot give a direct account of it, and its grounds cannot be discovered through experience. Yet it happens every day. Everyone has often experienced it in himself. Even the most hard-hearted and selfish person has not remained a stranger to it. It happens before our eyes every day, in individual, small-scale cases, wherever one person, on a direct impulse and without much reflection, helps and supports another. Sometimes someone even puts his own life in the most obvious danger for a person he is seeing for the first time, with no thought beyond the great distress and danger he sees the other person in. It happens on a large scale when, after long reflection and difficult debate, the generous British nation gives 20 million pounds sterling to buy freedom for the Black slaves in its colonies, to the cheers of a whole world. Anyone who would deny compassion as the motive of this fine, large-scale act and attribute it to Christianity should consider that not a word in the entire New Testament is said against slavery, however common it was at that time. Indeed, as late as 1860, in North America, someone in a debate about slavery appealed to the fact that Abraham and Jacob had also kept slaves.

Ethics may explain what practical results this mysterious inner process will have in each individual case, in chapters and sections about duties of virtue, duties of love, imperfect duties, or whatever else they are called. The root and founda-

tion of it all is what I have presented here. From it comes the principle “help everyone as much as you can.” Everything else here follows very easily from this, just as all the duties of justice follow from the first half of my principle, “hurt no one.” Ethics is really the easiest of all the sciences. We should expect no less, since everyone has the responsibility to construct it for himself: to derive the rule for each case that arises from the highest principle rooted in his heart. Few people have the leisure and patience to learn a fully constructed system of ethics. All virtues flow from justice and loving kindness. These are therefore the cardinal virtues, and deriving them lays the foundation of ethics. Justice makes up the entire ethical content of the Old Testament, and loving kindness that of the New. The latter is the “new commandment” (Joh. 13, 34), which, according to Paul (Röm. 13, 8–10), contains all the Christian virtues.

Section 19



Evidence supporting the basis of morality presented here.

The truth just stated—that compassion, as the only motive not based on self-interest, is also the only genuinely moral motive—strikes people as a paradox. This is strange, indeed almost impossible to understand. So I will try to make it less foreign to the reader's convictions by showing that experience and the expressions of common human feeling confirm it.

1) For this purpose, I will first take an invented case that can serve as a decisive test in this investigation. But to avoid making things easy for myself, I will not choose a case of love for humanity. Instead I will take a violation of someone's rights, and the most serious kind at that.—Suppose there are two young men, Caius and Titus, both passionately in love, but each with a different girl. Each has a rival who has an advantage because of outside circumstances and stands completely in his way. Both decide to get rid of their respective rivals. Both are completely safe from discovery, and even from any suspicion. But when each begins making the actual arrangements for the murder, both struggle with themselves and give it up. They must give us an honest, clear account of why they abandoned their plans.—I will leave the account Caius gives entirely up to the reader. Perhaps religious reasons held him back: God's will, eventual reward or punishment, the Last Judgment, or something similar. Or he might say: "I considered that the principle behind my action in this case would not have been fit to serve as a universally valid rule for all possible rational beings. After

all, I would have treated my rival only as a means and not also as an end.”—Or, with Fichte, he might say: “Every human life is a means of putting the moral law into practice. So I cannot destroy someone who is meant to contribute to putting it into practice without being indifferent to whether the moral law is put into practice.” (The Science of Ethics, S. 373.)—(In passing, he could get past this scruple by hoping that, once he had his beloved, he would soon produce a new instrument of the moral law.)—Or, following *Wollaston*, he might say: “I considered that this action would express an untrue statement.”—Or, following *Hutcheson*: “The moral sense, whose feelings cannot be explained any further than those of any other sense, led me to leave it undone.”—Or, following *Adam Smith*: “I foresaw that my action would not arouse any sympathy with me in those who witnessed it.”—Or, following *Christian Wolff*: “I realized that this would work against my own perfection and would not promote anyone else’s either.”—Or, following *Spinoza*: “Nothing is more useful to a human being than another human being; therefore I did not want to kill a human being.”—In short, let him say whatever you like.—But I reserve the right to give *Titus*’s account. He should say: “When it came to making the arrangements, I had to think for the moment not about my passion but about that rival. Only then did I fully understand what was actually about to happen to him. But then compassion and pity took hold of me. I felt sorry for him. I couldn’t bring myself to do it: I wasn’t able to do it.”—Now I ask every honest and unbiased reader: Which of the two is the better person?—Which of the two would the reader rather trust with his own fate?—Which of them was held back by the purer motive?—Where, then, does the basis of morality lie?

2) Nothing outrages our moral feelings so deeply as cruelty. We can forgive every other crime, but not cruelty. The reason is that cruelty is the exact opposite of compassion. Suppose we hear of a very cruel act. For example, the newspapers are reporting just now that a mother murdered her five-year-old boy by pouring boiling oil down his throat, and her younger child by burying it alive. Or take the report just received from Algiers: after a chance quarrel and fight between a Spaniard and an Algerian, the Algerian, being stronger, tore the Spaniard’s entire lower jaw clean off and carried it away as a trophy, leaving him

alive. We are horrified and cry out: “How is it possible to do something like that?”—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 principle so completely unfit to become a universal law for all rational beings?—Certainly not.—Or: How is it possible to neglect one’s own perfection and other people’s so badly?—No more than the others.—The meaning of that question is certainly just this: How is it possible to have no compassion at all?—So it is the greatest lack of compassion that marks an act as morally depraved and disgusting in the deepest sense. It follows that compassion is the true moral motive.

3) In general, the basis of morality and motive for moral conduct that I have put forward is the only one that can claim real, indeed widespread, effectiveness. Surely no one would want to claim this for the other moral principles offered by philosophers. These consist of abstract statements, some of them positively hair-splitting, with no foundation beyond an artificial combination of concepts. Applying them to actual behavior would often even have a ridiculous side. A good deed done solely out of regard for Kant’s moral principle would really be a product of philosophical pedantry. Otherwise it would amount to self-deception: the person acting would use his reason to interpret a deed arising from other, perhaps nobler motives as a product of the categorical imperative and the unsupported concept of duty. But it is seldom possible to show a definite effect not only from *philosophical* moral principles, which are designed for theory alone, but even from *religious* moral principles, which are set up entirely for practical use. The first evidence of this is that, despite the great differences between religions around the world, the level of morality—or rather immorality—shows no corresponding difference at all. In essence, it is much the same everywhere. We must simply avoid confusing roughness and refinement with morality and immorality. The Greeks’ religion had very little moral tendency, almost entirely limited to oaths. No dogma was taught and no morality publicly preached. Yet we do not see that the Greeks, taken as a whole, were morally worse than the people of the Christian centuries. Christianity’s moral teaching is of a much higher kind than that of the other religions that

have ever appeared in Europe. But suppose someone therefore believed that European morality had improved to the same extent and now at least stood above that of its contemporaries. It would soon be possible to show him that Muslims, Zoroastrians, Hindus, and Buddhists display at least as much honesty, faithfulness, tolerance, gentleness, charity, generosity, and self-denial as Christian peoples do. More than that, the long list of inhuman cruelties that have accompanied Christianity would make us fear that the balance might tip against it. These include the many religious wars; the indefensible Crusades; the extermination of a large part of America's native inhabitants and the peopling of that continent with Black slaves dragged over from Africa, torn from their families, their homeland, their continent, without any right or any semblance of right, and condemned to endless prison labor²²; the tireless persecution of heretics and the outrageous tribunals of the Inquisition; the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre; Alba's execution of 18000 people in the Netherlands; etc., etc.— But more generally, compare the excellent morality preached by Christianity, and more or less by every religion, with the actual behavior of their followers. Imagine what that behavior would become if the secular authorities did not prevent crimes. Indeed, imagine what we would have to fear if all laws were suspended for even a single day. We will then have to admit that all religions actually have very little effect on morality. Admittedly, weakness of faith is to blame for this. In theory, and as long as it remains a matter of pious reflection, everyone's faith seems firm to him. But action is the hard test of all our convictions. When the moment for it comes, and faith has to prove itself through great acts of renunciation and difficult sacrifices, its weakness becomes clear. When someone seriously plans a crime, he has already broken through the barrier of genuine, pure morality. After that, the first thing that stops him is always the thought of the courts and the police. If he puts this aside because he hopes to escape them, the second barrier in his way is concern for his honor. But if he gets past this defense too, the odds are heavily against any religious dogma still having enough power over him to keep him from acting, once he has overcome those two powerful obstacles. Anyone not frightened off by immediate and certain dangers will hardly be kept in check by distant dangers based only on faith.

Besides, against every good action that comes entirely from religious convictions, one can still object that it was not unselfish. It was done with an eye to reward and punishment, and therefore has no purely moral worth. We find this insight forcefully expressed in a letter by the famous Grand Duke Karl August of Weimar: “Baron *Weyhers* himself thought that a man must be a bad fellow if religion made him good, rather than his being naturally inclined that way. Wine brings out the truth.” (Letters to J. H. Merck, Br. 229.)—Now consider, by contrast, the moral motive I have put forward. Who would dare deny for a moment that it has a definite and truly wonderful effect at all times, among all peoples, in every situation in life, even in a lawless state, even amid the horrors of revolutions and wars, in great matters and small, every day and every hour? Who would deny that it prevents much wrongdoing every day and brings about many good deeds, without any hope of reward and often quite unexpectedly? And when it alone has been at work, who would deny that we all, moved and respectful, recognize the deed’s genuine moral worth without reservation?

4) Boundless compassion for all living beings is the firmest and most reliable guarantee of morally good behavior. It needs no detailed rules for particular cases. Anyone filled with it will certainly not injure anyone, infringe on anyone’s rights, or cause anyone pain. Instead he will be patient with everyone, forgive everyone, and help everyone as much as he can. All his actions will show justice and love for humanity. By contrast, try saying: “This person is virtuous, but he has no compassion.” Or: “He is an unjust and malicious person; yet he is very compassionate.” The contradiction becomes obvious.—Tastes differ, but I know no more beautiful prayer than the one that closes the ancient Indian plays, just as English plays in earlier times closed with a prayer for the king. It says: “May all living beings remain free from pain.”

5) Particular details also show that compassion is the true basic moral motive. For example, it is equally wrong to use risk-free legal tricks to cheat a rich person or a poor person out of a hundred thalers. But the reproaches of conscience and the blame expressed by uninvolved witnesses will be much louder and stronger in the second case. That is why even Aristotle says: “It is worse to wrong someone unfortunate than someone fortunate” (“It is more unjust to

have wronged an unfortunate person than a fortunate one”), Probl., XXIX, 2. By contrast, the reproaches will be even quieter than in the first case if it is a state treasury that has been cheated, because it cannot be an object of compassion. We can see that what directly gives rise to our own and other people’s blame is not the violation of someone’s rights, but first of all the suffering it causes that person. Certainly, conscience and other people will also condemn a violation of rights simply as such, like the one against a state treasury mentioned above. But they do so only because it breaks the principle of respecting *every* right, which is what makes someone truly honest. So their condemnation is indirect and less severe. But if the state treasury had been *entrusted* to the person, the case would be entirely different. The concept of *double injustice* established above, with its special characteristics, would then apply. What I have explained here accounts for the gravest accusation everywhere made against greedy extortionists and scoundrels who keep within the law: that they have seized the property of widows and orphans. Being completely helpless, these people should have aroused their compassion even more than others. So it is the complete absence of compassion that proves someone’s wickedness.

6) Compassion is even more obviously the basis of love for humanity than it is of justice. No one will receive proof of genuine love for humanity from others as long as he is doing well in every respect. A fortunate person can certainly experience the goodwill of his relatives and friends in many ways. But the expressions of pure, unselfish concern focused on another person’s situation and fate, which result from love for humanity, are reserved for someone who is suffering in some respect. We do not take an interest in a fortunate person *simply because he is fortunate*. He remains a stranger to our hearts *in that respect*: let him keep what he has. Indeed, if he has a great advantage over others, he will easily arouse envy. This threatens to turn into pleasure at his misfortune if he ever falls from his high position of good fortune. But this threat usually goes unfulfilled. It does not come to Sophocles’ “the enemies laugh” (“the enemies laugh”). For as soon as the fortunate person falls, a great change takes place in other people’s hearts, and it has something to teach us here. First, it now becomes clear what kind of interest the friends of his fortunate days took in

him: "Friends scatter when the wine jars have been drained to the dregs." But on the other side, what he feared more than misfortune itself, and found unbearable to think about, usually does not happen: the rejoicing of those who envied his good fortune, the mocking laughter of people enjoying his suffering. Envy has been appeased. It has vanished with its cause, and the compassion that now takes its place produces love for humanity. When a fortunate person has fallen, those who envied him and his enemies have often turned into considerate friends who comfort and help him. Who has not experienced something like this personally, at least to a lesser degree? After suffering some misfortune, who has not been surprised to see people who had previously shown the greatest coldness, even ill will, now approach with genuine concern? Misfortune is the condition for compassion, and compassion is the source of love for humanity.—A related observation is that nothing calms our anger so quickly, even when it is justified, as hearing someone say of its target: "He is an unfortunate person." Compassion does to anger what rain does to fire. So I advise anyone who does not want to have something to regret: if you are burning with anger against someone else and intend to make him suffer greatly, vividly imagine that you have already done it. Imagine seeing him struggle with his mental or physical pain, or with hardship and misery, and having to tell yourself: I did this. If anything can calm your anger, this can. For compassion is the true antidote to anger. By using this trick on ourselves, we bring on in advance, while there is still time,

compassion, whose voice,
once we have had revenge, makes its laws heard.

Volt., "Semiramis", A. 5, Sc. 6.

In general, nothing removes our hostile feelings toward others so easily as finding a point of view from which they call on our compassion.—Even the fact that parents usually love a sickly child the most rests on its constantly arousing compassion.

7) The moral motive I have put forward also proves itself genuine by extending its protection to *animals*, for which other European moral systems make such inexcusably poor provision. The supposed absence of rights for animals, the

delusion that our actions toward them have no moral significance—or, in the language of those moral systems, that we have no duties toward animals—is simply an outrageous crudity and barbarism of the West, whose source lies in Judaism. In philosophy it rests on the assumption, against all the evidence, that humans and animals are entirely different. As everyone knows, *Descartes* expressed this most firmly and starkly, as a necessary consequence of his errors. When 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 in the way of this exclusive privilege and patent of immortality for the human species. Nature, as on all such occasions, lodged its silent protest. Troubled by their intellectual consciences, the philosophers now had to try to support rational psychology with empirical psychology. They therefore worked to open an enormous gulf, an immeasurable distance, between humans and animals, so as to present them as fundamentally different despite all the evidence. *Boileau* already mocks such efforts:

Do animals have universities?

Do we see all four faculties flourishing among them?

In the end, animals supposedly could not even distinguish themselves from the outside world and had no awareness of themselves, no self! Against such absurd claims, we need only point to the boundless selfishness present in every animal, even the smallest and lowest. This is sufficient evidence of how clearly animals are aware of their own self as opposed to the world, or the not-self. If a Cartesian of this kind found himself in a tiger's claws, he would understand very clearly how sharply such an animal distinguishes its self from its not-self. Alongside these philosophical sophistries, we find something similar in ordinary speech. Some languages, especially German, have entirely separate words for animals' eating, drinking, being pregnant, giving birth, dying, and dead bodies. The aim is to avoid using the words that describe those acts in humans and to hide the complete identity of the thing under different words. Ancient languages do not have this double set of expressions. Without any qualms, they name the same thing with the same word. So that wretched trick is undoubtedly the work of the European priesthood. In its irreverence, it thinks it cannot

go far enough in denying and insulting the eternal being that lives in all animals. In this way it laid the foundation for the harshness and cruelty toward animals customary in Europe, which someone from High Asia can view only with justified disgust. We do not find this contemptible trick in English, undoubtedly because the Saxons were not yet Christians when they conquered England. But something similar appears in the peculiar fact that in English all animals are neuter in gender. They are therefore represented by the pronoun “it,” just like lifeless things. This is quite outrageous, especially with primates, such as dogs, apes, etc., and is unmistakably a priestly trick for reducing animals to things. The ancient Egyptians, whose whole lives were devoted to religious purposes, placed the mummies of humans and those of ibises, crocodiles, etc., 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. Sometimes the dog has waited there for its own death, out of a faithfulness and attachment not found among the human race.—Nothing leads more decisively to recognizing that the same essential nature appears in animals and humans than studying zoology and anatomy. What, then, should we say when today (1839) a sanctimonious animal anatomist dares to insist on an absolute and fundamental difference between humans and animals? What should we say when he goes so far as to attack and slander honest zoologists who, free from all priestcraft, currying of favor, and religious hypocrisy, follow the guidance of nature and truth? You would have to be truly blind in every sense, or completely chloroformed by the Jewish stench, not to see that what is essential and chief in an animal and in a human being is the same. What separates the two does not lie in what is primary: the principle, the vital force, the inner being, the core of both appearances. In the one as in the other, that core is the *will* of the individual. The difference lies only in what is secondary: the intellect, the degree of the power of knowing. In humans this degree is incomparably higher, because of the added ability of *abstract* knowledge, which is called *reason*. Yet it can be shown to be higher only because of a greater development of the brain. That is a bodily difference in one single part, the brain, and specifically in how much of it there is. What animals and humans have in common, however, both in mind and in

body, is beyond all comparison greater. A Western, Judaized despiser of animals and idolater of reason has to be reminded that, as he was nursed by *his* mother, so the dog was nursed by *its* mother. I have criticized above the fact that even *Kant* fell into this mistake of his contemporaries and countrymen. Christian morality takes no account of animals. This is a defect in it, and it is better to admit it than to keep it going. It is all the more surprising because in other respects this morality agrees very closely with that of Brahmanism and Buddhism. It is only expressed less strongly and is not carried through to the extremes. So one can hardly doubt that it comes from India, as the idea of a god who became a human being (Avatar) does too, and that it may have reached Judea by way of Egypt. Christianity would then be a reflection of the original Indian light from the ruins of Egypt, which unfortunately fell on Jewish ground. One could take the following fact as a neat *symbol* of the defect I have just criticized in Christian morality, which otherwise agrees so closely with the Indian. John the Baptist appears quite in the manner of an Indian sannyasi. But he is—dressed in animal skins! As everyone knows, this would be an abomination to any Hindu. The Royal Society at Calcutta even received its copy of the Vedas only on the promise that it would not have it bound in leather, in the European way. That is why it is found in their library bound in silk. The Gospel story of Peter's catch of fish offers a similar, characteristic contrast. The Savior blesses that catch by a miracle, in such a way that the boats are overfilled with fish to the point of sinking (Luke 5). Set against it is the story of Pythagoras, who was initiated into Egyptian wisdom. He buys the fishermen's catch from them while the net is still under the water, and then gives all the caught fish their freedom (Apul., *On Magic*, p. 36. Bip.).—Compassion for animals is so closely connected with goodness of character that one may say with confidence: whoever is cruel to animals cannot be a good person. This compassion also shows itself to spring from the same source as the virtue we are to practice toward people. For example, sensitive people may remember that they once mistreated their dog, their horse or their monkey, in a bad mood, in anger, or heated by wine. They did it undeservedly or needlessly, or beyond what was right. They then feel the same remorse and the same dissatisfaction

with themselves that they feel when they remember wrong done to people. In that case it is called the voice of the punishing conscience. I remember reading that an Englishman in India shot a monkey while hunting. He could not forget the look the monkey gave him as it died, and from then on he never shot at a monkey again. It was the same with William Harris, a true Nimrod, who traveled deep into the interior of Africa in 1836 and 1837 only to enjoy the pleasure of hunting. In his travel account, published at Bombay in 1838, he tells the following story. He had killed the first elephant, a female. The next morning he went to look for the fallen animal. All the other elephants of the area had fled. Only the fallen one's young had spent the night with its dead mother. Now, forgetting all fear, it came toward the hunters. It showed its inconsolable grief in the liveliest and clearest ways, and it wound its small trunk around them to call for their help. At that moment, Harris says, true remorse for his deed seized him, and he felt as if he had committed a murder. We see this sensitive English nation stand out, above all others, for a striking compassion for animals. It shows itself on every occasion. It has had the power to move the nation, in spite of the "cold superstition" that otherwise degrades it, to fill the gap that religion left in morality by means of legislation. For this very gap is the reason that in Europe and America animal-protection societies are needed. Even these can work only with the help of the courts and the police. In Asia the religions give animals enough protection, so no one there thinks of such societies. Meanwhile, in Europe too, the sense of animals' rights is waking more and more. It grows to the degree that the strange notions slowly fade and vanish. These notions say that the animal world came into existence merely for the use and amusement of humans. Because of them, animals are treated entirely as things. For these notions are the source of the crude and completely thoughtless treatment of animals in Europe, and I have shown their Old Testament origin in the second volume of the *Parerga*, section 177. So let it be said to the credit of the English that among them the law was the first to take animals under its protection, quite seriously, against cruel treatment. The wrongdoer really has to pay for having committed an outrage against animals, even when they belong to him. Indeed, they are not satisfied even with that. In London

there is a society, formed of its members' own free will for the protection of animals: the Society for the prevention of cruelty to animals. By private means, and at considerable expense, it does a great deal to work against the torturing of animals. Its emissaries watch in secret, so that afterward they can come forward as informers against the tormentors of speechless, feeling beings. People have to fear their presence everywhere.²³ At steep bridges in London the society keeps a team of horses. It is hitched, free of charge, in front of every heavily loaded wagon. Is that not fine? Does it not win our applause just as much as a kind deed toward people? The Philanthropic Society in London, for its part, also offered a prize of 30 pounds in 1837. It was for the best statement of moral reasons against cruelty to animals. The reasons, however, were to be taken mainly from Christianity, which of course made the task harder. In 1839 the prize was awarded to Mr. Macnamara. In Philadelphia there is an Animals friends Society for similar purposes. T. Forster (an Englishman) dedicated his book *Philozoa*, 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 tries to support his appeals for humane treatment of animals with the Bible too, but he slides

off everywhere. So in the end he reaches for the argument that Jesus Christ was, after all, born in a stable among the little ox and the little donkey. This, he says, would hint symbolically that we should regard animals as our brothers and treat them accordingly.—All that has been cited here shows that the moral side we are discussing is by now beginning to find an echo in the Western world too. Besides, compassion for animals does not have to go so far that we should give up animal food, as the Brahmans do. The reason is that in nature the capacity for suffering keeps pace with intelligence. So a human being would suffer more by doing without animal food, especially in the north, than the animal suffers from a quick death that always comes unforeseen. Still, this death should be made even easier with chloroform. Without animal food, in fact, the human race could not even survive in the north. By the same standard, humans also let animals work for them. Only excess in the effort laid on them turns into cruelty.

8) Let us for once set aside any metaphysical investigation of the final ground of that compassion, though such an investigation may be possible. Only from this compassion can non-egoistic actions come. Let us look at it from the empirical standpoint, simply as a device of nature. Then it will be clear to everyone that nature could do nothing more effective for two purposes. One is to ease as much as possible the countless and many-sided sufferings to which our life is exposed and which no one entirely escapes. The other is to balance the burning egoism that fills all beings and often turns into malice. What nature did was to plant in the human heart that wonderful disposition by which one person feels the suffering of another along with them. From it comes the voice that, depending on the occasion, calls out strongly and clearly to one person "Spare!" and to another "Help!" Surely the mutual help that springs from this offered more hope for the welfare of all than a general, abstract, strict command of duty could. Such a command would come out of certain reflections of reason and combinations of concepts. Even less success could be expected from it, because general propositions and abstract truths are quite incomprehensible to the unrefined person. For him only the concrete counts for anything. And all of humanity, except an extremely small part, has always been unrefined and must remain so. The reason is that the great amount of physical labor, which the whole of society absolutely needs, does not allow the mind to be trained. To awaken compassion, by contrast, no abstract knowledge is needed. Compassion has been shown to be the *only source of unselfish actions and therefore the true basis of morality*. It needs only intuitive knowledge, the mere grasp of the concrete case. Compassion responds to that at once, without any further mediation by thought.

9) We will find the following fact in complete agreement with this last consideration. The foundation I have given to ethics leaves me, it is true, without a predecessor among the academic philosophers. In fact, in relation to their doctrines it is paradoxical, since some of them flatly reject and condemn compassion. Examples are the Stoics (Sen., *De clem.*, II, 5), Spinoza (*Eth.*, IV, prop. 50), and Kant (*Critique of Practical Reason*, p. 213;—*R.*, p. 257). On the other hand, my foundation has on its side the authority of the greatest moralist of all

modern times. That is, without doubt, J. J. Rousseau. He knew the human heart deeply. He drew his wisdom not from books but from life, and he meant his teaching not for the lecture desk but for humanity. He was an enemy of prejudices and a pupil of nature. Nature had given him alone the gift of being able to moralize without being boring, because he hit the truth and touched the heart. So I will allow myself to set down a few passages from him in confirmation of my view. Up to now I have been as sparing with quotations as I could.

In the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, p. 91 (edit. Bip.), he says: There is another principle, which Hobbes did not perceive at all. It was given to human beings to soften, in certain circumstances, the ferocity of their self-love, and it tempers the ardor they have for their own well-being by an *innate repugnance at seeing their fellow creature suffer*. I do not believe I have any contradiction to fear in granting to human beings *the only natural virtue* that the most extreme detractor of human virtues was forced to recognize. I am speaking of *compassion*, etc.—p. 92: Mandeville sensed very well that, with all their morality, men would never have been anything but monsters, if nature had not given them *compassion* in support of reason. But he did not see that *from this single quality flow all the social virtues*, which he wants to deny to human beings. In fact, what are generosity, clemency, humanity, if not *compassion* applied to the weak, to the guilty, or to the human race in general? Goodwill and even friendship are, rightly understood, products of a constant compassion fixed on one particular object. For to wish that someone not suffer at all, what is that other than to wish that he be happy?—Sympathy will be all the more energetic as *the animal looking on will identify itself more intimately with the suffering animal*.—p. 94: It is therefore quite certain that compassion is a natural feeling. In each individual it moderates self-love, and it contributes to the mutual preservation of the whole species. It is compassion that, in the state of nature, takes the place of laws, customs and virtues, with this advantage: nobody will be tempted to disobey its gentle voice. It is compassion that will keep any robust savage from taking from a weak child, or from an infirm old man, the livelihood he has gained with difficulty, if he himself hopes to find his own elsewhere. It is com-

passion that, in place of that sublime maxim of reasoned justice, “Do to others as you would have them do to you,” inspires in all human beings this other maxim of natural goodness, much less perfect but perhaps more useful than the former: “Do your own good with the least possible harm to others.” In a word, it is *in this natural feeling, rather than in subtle arguments, that one must seek the cause of the repugnance that every person would feel at doing wrong*, even independently of the maxims of education.—Compare with this what he says in Emile, Book IV, pp. 115–120 (ed. Bip.), where it says, among other things: In fact, how do we let ourselves be moved to compassion, if not by transporting ourselves outside ourselves and *identifying ourselves with the suffering animal; by leaving our own being, so to speak, to take on its being?* We suffer only so far as we judge that it suffers. *It is not in ourselves, it is in it, that we suffer.* ———to offer the young man objects on which the expansive force of his heart can act, which widen it, which extend it over other beings, which make him everywhere *find himself again outside himself*; to keep away with care those that constrict it, concentrate it, and tighten the spring *of the human self*, etc.—

Since I have, as I said, no authorities on the side of the schools, I add further that the *Chinese* recognize five cardinal virtues (Tschang), and that compassion (Sin) stands at the top of them. The other four are: justice, politeness, wisdom and sincerity.²⁴ In agreement with this, we see among the Hindus too, on the memorial tablets set up in memory of dead princes, that compassion for humans and animals takes first place among the virtues praised in them. In Athens, compassion had an altar in the forum: “The Athenians have an altar of Compassion in their marketplace. They alone among the Greeks honor this god, who is more helpful than any other god to human life and to the reversals of fortune.” Paus., I, 17. (“The Athenians have an altar of compassion in the forum. Because this god helps human life and the changes in affairs more than any other god, the Athenians alone among the Greeks give it honors.”) Lucian also mentions this altar in the Timon, section 99.—A saying of Phocion, preserved for us by Stobaeus, presents compassion as the holiest thing in human beings: “One should remove neither the altar from a sanctuary nor compassion from human nature” (“One should remove neither the altar from the temple

nor compassion from human life”). In the *Wisdom of the Indians*, which is the Greek translation of the *Panchatantra*, it says (Sect. 3, p. 220): “For it is said that compassion comes first among the virtues” (“Compassion is counted as the chief of the virtues”). One sees that all times and all countries have recognized the source of morality very well. Only Europe has not. The only one to blame is the Jewish stench, which runs through everything here. So morality absolutely has to be a command of duty, a moral law, an imperative—in short, an order and a command that is obeyed. They do not give this up. They refuse to see that anything of this kind always has only egoism as its basis. Among individuals, to be sure, and superior ones, the truth as something felt has made itself known. So it did with Rousseau, as cited above. And Lessing too says, in a letter of 1756: “The most compassionate person is the best person, the one most disposed to all social virtues and to every kind of generosity.”

- 22 Even now, according to Buxton, *The African slavetrade*, 1839, their number is increased every year by about 150000 newly captured Africans. In capturing them and on their journey, over 200000 others die miserably.
- 23 How seriously the matter is taken is shown by the following quite recent example, which I translate from the *Birmingham Journal* of December 1839: “Arrest of a company of 84 dogfighters.—Word had come that a dogfight was to take place yesterday on the open ground in Fox Street in Birmingham. So the Society of Friends of Animals took precautions to make sure of the help of the police. A strong detachment of police marched to the place of combat, and as soon as it was let in, it arrested the entire company present. These participants were then tied together in pairs with loops around their hands, and the whole group was joined by a long rope in the middle. In this way they were led to the police office, where the mayor sat in session with the magistrate. The two main persons were each sentenced to a fine of 1 pound sterling plus 8½ shillings costs and, if they failed to pay, to 14 days of hard labor in the house of correction. The rest were released.”—The dandies, who are never missing from such noble pleasures, will have looked very embarrassed in the procession.—But we find a still sterner example from more recent times in the *Times* of April 6, 1855, p. 6,

and in fact it was set by that newspaper itself. It reports a case that came before a court. The daughter of a very wealthy Scottish baronet had tortured her horse in a most cruel way, with a club and a knife. For this she had been sentenced to a fine of 5 pounds sterling. But a girl like that cares nothing about this, and so she would really have skipped off unpunished if the Times had not followed with the right and painful punishment. The paper printed the girl's first and last names twice, in large letters, and went on: "We cannot help saying that a couple of months in prison, together with some whippings, given in private but by the sturdiest woman in Hampshire, would have been a much more fitting punishment for Miss N. N. A wretch of this kind has forfeited all the consideration and privileges due to her sex. We can no longer regard her as a woman."—I dedicate these newspaper reports especially to the societies against cruelty to animals that have now been founded in Germany, so that they see how one has to go about it if anything is to come of it. Still, 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 stimulus for it all over Germany.

²⁴ Journ. Asiatique, Vol. 9, p. 62, to be compared with Mencius, ed. Stan. Julien, 1824, Book I, section 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, whose answer is needed to complete the foundation of ethics I have set out, is this: What is the reason for the great difference in the moral conduct of people? If compassion is the basic motive of all genuine, that is, unselfish, justice and love of humanity, why is one person moved by it and another not?—Perhaps ethics, by uncovering the moral motive, can also set it in action? Can it remake a hard-hearted person into a compassionate one, and so into a just and kind one?—Certainly not. The difference between characters is inborn and cannot be wiped out. A malicious person's malice is as inborn in him as the snake's fangs and venom sac are in the snake. And he can no more change it than the snake can. "Willing cannot be learned," said Nero's teacher. *Plato* examines at length in the *Meno* whether virtue can be taught or not. He cites a passage from *Theognis*:

Yet by teaching

You will never turn a bad man into a good one.

(By teaching you will never produce a good man from a bad one.)

and he arrives at the result: "Virtue would be neither natural nor teachable, but would come by divine fate, without understanding, to those it comes to" ("Virtue will be present in us neither through teaching nor through nature, but by a divine lot, without the mind, it will flow into whoever has received that lot"). In this, the difference between "by nature" and "by divine fate" seems to

me to mark roughly the difference between the physical and the metaphysical. Already the father of ethics, *Socrates*, according to *Aristotle*, asserted: "It does not depend on us to be good or bad" ("It is not in our power to be good or bad"). (Eth. magna, I, 9.) Aristotle himself speaks in the same sense: "For everyone thinks that each kind of character belongs to us somehow by nature. We have justice, self-control and the rest right from birth" ("For each single character trait seems to be present in all people somehow by nature: as soon as we are born, we are suited and ready for justice, self-control, courage and the other virtues"). (Eth. Nicom., VI, 13.) We also find this conviction stated very decidedly in the fragments of the Pythagorean Archytas, which are in any case very old, even if perhaps not genuine. Stobaeus has preserved them for us in the Anthology, Tit. I, section 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, it says: "The virtues that make use of reasons and proofs ought to be called forms of knowledge. Virtue, however, is the moral and best state of the unreasoning part of the soul, by which we are said to be of a certain character, for example generous, just and self-controlled." ("The virtues that use reason and proof may rightly be called forms of knowledge; but by the word virtue we mean the moral and best *condition of the part of the soul without reason*, by which we are said to have some moral quality and are called, for instance, generous, just and temperate.") Suppose one surveys all the virtues and vices that *Aristotle* put together for a short overview in the book On Virtues and Vices. One will find that all of them can be thought of only as inborn qualities. Indeed, they can be genuine only as such. If, on the other hand, they were taken up arbitrarily as a result of rational reflection, they would really come down to pretense and would not be genuine. Then there would be no reckoning at all on their lasting or proving true under the pressure of circumstances. It is no different with the virtue of love of humanity, which is missing in Aristotle, as in all the ancients. In the same sense, then, though keeping his skeptical tone, *Montaigne* says: "Would it be true that, to be entirely good, we must be so by a hidden, natural and universal property, without law, without reason, without example?" (Book II, chapter 11.) *Lichtenberg* says outright: "All

virtue out of intention is not worth much. Feeling or habit is the thing.” (Miscellaneous Writings, “Moral Remarks”.) But even the original teaching of Christianity agrees with this view. In the Sermon on the Mount itself, in Luke, chapter 6, verse 45, it says: “The good man brings out what is good from the good treasure of his heart, and the wicked man brings out what is wicked from the wicked treasure of his heart” (“A good man brings forth good from the good treasure of his mind, and a bad man brings forth evil from the bad treasure of his mind”). In the two verses before it, the figurative illustration of the matter had been given first, through the fruit, which always turns out according to the tree.

It is *Kant*, however, who first made this important point completely clear. He did it through his great teaching that the *empirical character* has the *intelligible character* as its ground. The empirical character is an appearance. It presents itself in time and in a multitude of actions. The intelligible character is the nature of the thing in itself behind that appearance. So it is independent of space and time, of multiplicity and of change. Only from this can we explain the rigid unchangeableness of characters. It is known to everyone with experience, and it is astonishing. Reality and experience have always held it up victoriously against the promises of an ethics that wants to make people morally better and talks about progress in virtue. In this way they have proved that virtue is inborn and is not preached into people. Suppose character were not something original, unchangeable, and so closed to all improvement through the correction of knowledge. Suppose instead, as that shallow ethics claims, that improving character by means of morality were possible, and so “a steady progress toward the good.” Then, unless all the many religious institutions and moralizing efforts have failed in their purpose, the older half of humankind would have to be considerably better than the younger half, at least on average. But there is so little trace of this that, on the contrary, we hope for something good more readily from young people than from old ones, who have become worse through experience. It can happen, to be sure, that one person seems somewhat better in old age and another worse than he was in youth. But this is only because in old age, thanks to more mature knowledge that has been corrected

many times, the character shows itself more purely and clearly. In youth, ignorance, errors and fantasies sometimes put forward false motives and sometimes covered up real ones.—This follows from what was said in the preceding essay, p. 50 and following pages, under 3. Among punished criminals there are many more young people than old. The reason is that where a disposition to such deeds lies in the character, it soon finds the occasion to come out as an act, and it reaches its goal, the galleys or the gallows. And the other way around: someone whom the occasions of a long life have not been able to move to crimes will not easily run into motives for them later either. So the true ground of the respect paid to old age seems to me to lie in this: an old person has passed the test of a long life and has kept a spotless name. For that is the condition of this respect.—In keeping with this view, people in real life have never let those promises of the moralists confuse them. They have never again trusted someone who once proved himself bad. And they have always looked with confidence to the nobility of someone who once gave proof of it, whatever else may have changed. “Acting follows being” is a fruitful principle of Scholasticism. Every thing in the world acts according to its unchangeable nature, which makes up its being, its essence. So does the human being. As someone is, so he will act, so he must act. The free choice of indifference is an invention from the childhood of philosophy, long since exploded. Some old women in doctors’ hats may by all means still drag it around with them.

The three basic ethical motives of the human being are egoism, malice and compassion. They are present in everyone in a different and incredibly varied proportion. Depending on that proportion, motives will work on the person and actions will turn out. Over an egoistic character only egoistic motives will have power. Those that speak to compassion, and those that speak to malice, will not prevail against them. Such a person will give up his interest as little to take revenge on his enemy as to help his friend. Another person is strongly receptive to malicious motives. He will often not shrink from great harm to himself in order to harm others. For there are characters who find so much enjoyment in causing another’s suffering that it outweighs their own suffering, even when that is just as great: “heedless of himself, so long as he harms anoth-

er” (Sen., *De ira*, I, 1). These people go into a fight with passionate delight. In that fight they expect to receive as great injuries as they hand out. Indeed, they will deliberately murder someone who has done them harm, and right afterward kill themselves to escape punishment. Experience has shown this very often. *Goodness of heart*, by contrast, consists in a deeply felt, universal compassion with everything that lives, but first of all with human beings. This is because sensitivity to suffering keeps pace with the growth of intelligence. So the countless mental and bodily sufferings of humans make a much stronger claim on compassion than the animal’s pain, which is only bodily and even then duller. Goodness of character will therefore first hold a person back from injuring another in any respect whatever. Then it will also call him to help wherever someone else’s suffering presents itself. And here too it can go just as far as malice does in the opposite direction. Characters of rare goodness take another’s suffering more to heart than their own. So they make sacrifices for others by which they themselves suffer more than the person they helped had suffered before. Where several, or even many, can be helped at the same time by it, they will if necessary sacrifice themselves completely. Arnold von Winkelried did so. Johannes von Müller (*Universal History*, Book 10, chapter 10) tells this about *Paulinus*, bishop of Nola, in the 5th century, during the invasion of Italy by the Vandals from Africa: “After he had given up, as ransom money for prisoners, all the treasures of the church and his own and his friends’ property, he saw the misery of a widow whose only son was being carried off. For this son he offered himself into servitude. For whoever was of a fit age and did not fall by the sword was taken prisoner to Carthage.”

Because of this incredibly great, inborn and original difference, in each person the motives that mainly stir him will be only those for which he has predominant receptivity. In the same way *one* body reacts only to acids and another only to alkalis. As with the one, so with the other: neither can be changed. Motives of kindness to people are such powerful drives for a good character. As such, they can do nothing over someone who is receptive only to egoistic motives. Suppose one still wants to bring such a person to kind actions. That can be done only by holding up the illusion that easing other people’s suffering

will, indirectly and in some way, work out to *his own advantage*. (Most moral teachings are in fact various kinds of attempts in just this direction.) But this only misleads his will. It does not improve it. Real improvement would require changing the whole manner of his receptivity to motives. For example, one would have to bring it about that another's suffering, as such, was no longer a matter of indifference to the first person; that causing it was no longer a pleasure to the second; or that, for a third, every increase of his own well-being, even the smallest, no longer far outweighed all motives of any other kind and made them ineffective. But this is far more certainly impossible than turning lead into gold. For it would require turning a person's heart around inside his body, so to speak, and recreating his deepest inner being. All one is able to do, in contrast, is to brighten the *head*, correct the *insight*, and bring the person to a more correct grasp of what objectively exists, of the true conditions of life. But this achieves nothing more than that the nature of his will shows itself more consistently, more clearly and more decisively, and expresses itself without falsification. For some good actions are at bottom based on false motives, on well-meant illusions of an advantage of one's own to be gained thereby in this world or in another. In the same way, some misdeeds are based merely on false knowledge of the conditions of human life. The American penitentiary system is built on this. It does not aim to improve the criminal's *heart*. It aims only to set his *head* straight, so that he comes to see that work and honesty are a surer, indeed easier, road to his own welfare than roguery.

Motives can force *legality*, not *morality*. One can reshape *acting*, but not the actual *willing*, which alone has moral worth. One cannot change the goal the will strives toward, only the path it takes to get there. Instruction can change the choice of means, but not the choice of the final, general ends. Every will sets those for itself, in keeping with its original nature. One can show the egoist that by giving up small advantages he will gain larger ones. One can show the malicious person that causing others' suffering will bring greater suffering on himself. But nobody can talk anyone out of egoism itself or malice itself, any more than a cat out of its inclination to catch mice. Even goodness of character can be brought to a more consistent and more complete expression of its nature by

increasing insight, by instruction about the conditions of life, that is, by brightening the head. One example is pointing out the more remote consequences that our actions have for others. These include, for instance, the sufferings that grow out of this or that action for them, indirectly and only in the course of time, when we had not thought it so bad. Another example is instruction about the harmful consequences of many a kind-hearted action, such as sparing a criminal. Especially there is instruction about the priority that “Harm no one” always has over “Help everyone,” and so on. In this respect there is indeed a moral education and an improving ethics. But it goes no further than this, and the limit is easy to see. The head is brightened. The heart stays unimproved. What is basic and decisive, in the moral as in the intellectual and the physical, is *what is inborn*. Human skill can only help things along. Everyone is what he is, so to speak “by the grace of God,” by divine right, by divine fate.

“In the end you are—*what you are*.

Put on wigs of millions of curls,

Put your foot on platform shoes a yard high:

You still remain always what you are.”

But for a long time now I have heard the reader raise the question: what becomes of guilt and merit?—In answer I refer to section 10. There, what would otherwise have to be presented here has already found its place, because it stands in close connection with *Kant’s* doctrine of how freedom and necessity exist together. So I ask the reader to read again here what was said there. According to it, acting is entirely necessary once motives arise. So *freedom*, which announces itself only through *responsibility*, can lie only in being. The reproaches of conscience concern, first and apparently, *what we have done*. Really and at bottom, though, they concern what we *are*. Our deeds are the only fully valid evidence about that, since they stand to our character as symptoms stand to a disease. So in this being, in what we *are*, guilt and merit must lie as well. What we either esteem and love or despise and hate in others is not something fickle and changeable. It is something lasting, something that exists once and for all: what they *are*. If we ever go back on our opinion of them, we do not say that they have changed. We say that we were mistaken about them.

In the same way, the object of our satisfaction and dissatisfaction with ourselves is *what we are*, what we irrevocably are and remain. This extends even to our intellectual qualities, and even to the traits of our faces. How could guilt and merit not lie, then, in *what we are*?—The ever more complete acquaintance with ourselves, the ever fuller *record of our deeds*, is *conscience*. The subject matter of conscience is first of all our actions. It is those actions in which we either gave no hearing to compassion, which called on us at least not to hurt others, or even to give them help and support, because egoism or even malice led us; or else, rejecting both of these, we followed that call. Both cases show how great the *difference* is that we make *between ourselves and others*. In the end the degrees of morality or immorality rest on *this difference*. That is, the degrees of justice and love of humanity, as well as of their opposite. The ever richer memory of the actions that matter in this respect completes more and more the picture of our character, the true acquaintance with ourselves. From this acquaintance grows satisfaction or dissatisfaction with ourselves, with *what we are*. Which one it is depends on whether egoism, malice or compassion has prevailed. That is, it depends on whether the difference we have made between our own person and the rest has been greater or smaller. By the same standard we also judge others. We get to know their character empirically, just like our own, only less perfectly. Here what appears as praise, approval and esteem, or as blame, indignation and contempt, is what showed itself in self-judgment as satisfaction or dissatisfaction, which can go as far as the anguish of conscience. Many very common sayings show that the reproaches we make to others, too, are aimed only *first* at the deeds, but *really* at their unchangeable character, and that virtue or vice is seen as an inherent, lasting quality. Examples: “Now I see what you are like!”—“I was wrong about you.”—Now I see what You are!—“So that is how you are!”—“That is not how I am!”—“I am not the man who would be capable of deceiving you,” and the like. Also: “well-born souls”; in Spanish too, “well-born”; the Greek words for “well-born” and “good birth” used to mean virtuous and virtue; “a friend of a more noble mind,” and so on.

Conscience depends on reason only because a clear and connected recollection is possible only by means of reason. It lies in the nature of the matter that conscience speaks only *afterward*. That is why it is also called the *judging* conscience. It can speak *beforehand* only in an improper sense, namely indirectly: reflection concludes, from the memory of similar cases, that a deed that is only planned will be disapproved of in the future.—So far goes the ethical fact of consciousness. It itself remains as a metaphysical problem. That problem does not belong directly to our task, but it will be touched on in the last section.—The insight that conscience is only the acquaintance, arising through deeds, with one's own unchangeable character fits perfectly with the following fact. In different people the *receptivity* to the motives of self-interest, of malice and of compassion is extremely different. On it the whole moral worth of a person rests. This receptivity is not something explainable from something else. Nor is it something to be gained by instruction, and so arising in time and changeable, or dependent on chance. It is inborn, unchangeable and not explainable any further. Accordingly the course of life itself, with all its many-sided activity, is nothing more than the outer dial of that inner, original clockwork, or the mirror in which alone the nature of one's own will, which is one's core, can become evident to each person's intellect.

Whoever takes the trouble to think through properly what was said here and in the mentioned section 10 will discover in my foundation of ethics a consistency and rounded wholeness that all the others lack. On the other side, he will discover an agreement with the facts of experience, which those others have even less. For only truth can agree throughout with itself and with nature. All false basic views, by contrast, are in conflict inwardly with themselves and outwardly with experience, which files its silent protest at every step.

I am well aware, though without regret or remorse, that the truths set out here at the end in particular clash head-on with many deeply rooted prejudices and errors. They especially offend a certain current infant-school morality. For first, I am not speaking here to children, nor to the common people, but to an enlightened academy. Its purely theoretical question is directed to the ultimate basic truths of ethics, and to a most serious question it also expects a serious

answer. Second, I hold that there can be no privileged errors, no useful ones, and not even harmless ones. Every error does infinitely more harm than good. —If, on the other hand, one wanted to make existing prejudices the measure of truth, or a boundary stone that its presentation must not cross, it would be more honest to let philosophical faculties and academies die out altogether. For what is not should not seem to be either.

Section 21



IV.

Toward a metaphysical explanation of the basic ethical phenomenon.

An understanding about this addition.

So far, I have established the moral motive as a fact. I have shown that it alone can produce unselfish justice and genuine love for other people, the two cardinal virtues on which all the others rest. This is enough to establish ethics, since ethics must necessarily rest on something that actually and demonstrably exists, whether in the outside world or in consciousness. The alternative would be to follow some of my predecessors and simply choose an abstract proposition at will, then derive moral rules from it—or to follow *Kant* and do the same with a mere concept, that of *law*. It seems to me that this meets the Royal Society's question, since the question asks for the foundation of ethics, not for a metaphysics to establish that foundation in turn. Still, I see very well that the human mind does not yet find its final satisfaction and peace here. As at the end of every inquiry and every science of actual things, it stands before a basic phenomenon. This explains everything that falls under it and follows from it, but remains unexplained itself, confronting us as a riddle. So here too the demand for a *metaphysics* arises: that is, for an ultimate explanation of the basic phenomena as such and, taken together, of the world. Here too this demand raises the question of why what exists and has been understood is this way rather than another, and how the character of appearance that we have described

emerges from the inner nature of things as they are in themselves. Indeed, ethics has an especially urgent need for a metaphysical foundation. Philosophical and religious systems agree that the ethical significance of actions must also be metaphysical. It must extend beyond the mere appearance of things, and therefore beyond every possibility of experience, and so be closely connected with the whole existence of the world and with human destiny. For the ultimate point at which the meaning of existence as a whole culminates must surely be ethical. This last point is also confirmed by an undeniable fact. As death approaches, everyone's thoughts, whether or not they have accepted religious dogmas, take a *moral* direction. They try to settle the account of their completed life entirely from a *moral* standpoint. The testimony of the ancients carries particular weight here, because it is not under Christian influence. I therefore point out that this fact is already stated in a passage attributed to the very ancient lawgiver Zaleucus, though Bentley and Heyne consider it the work of a Pythagorean. Stobaeus has preserved it for us (Floril., Tit. 44, §. 20): "We must keep before our eyes the moment when each of us reaches the end and leaves life. For everyone about to die is seized by regret, remembering the wrongs they have done, and by the urge to wish that everything they had done had been just." (We must set before our eyes that moment when each of us must depart from life: for remorse seizes all who are dying, as they remember what they have done unjustly, and they long deeply to have done everything justly.) Likewise, to recall a historical example, we see Pericles on his deathbed refusing to hear about all his great deeds, and wanting to hear only that he had never put a citizen into mourning (Plut. in Pericl.). To set a very different case beside this, I remember reading a report of testimony before an English jury about a rough, fifteen-year-old Black boy aboard a ship. About to die from an injury he had just received in a fight, he hurriedly had all his shipmates brought to him to ask whether he had ever hurt or insulted any of them. Their answer that he had not gave him great peace. Experience consistently teaches that dying people wish to make peace with everyone before they leave. Another kind of evidence for our claim comes from a familiar experience. People very willingly accept payment for intellectual achievements, even the world's greatest

masterpieces, if they can get it. But almost everyone who has done something morally outstanding refuses any reward for it. This is especially true of great moral deeds, as when someone has saved another person's life, or even many lives, at the risk of their own. In such cases they generally refuse any reward at all, even if they are poor, because they feel that accepting it would harm the metaphysical value of their action. *Bürger* gives us a poetic account 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 come across it several times in English newspapers.—These facts are universal and occur regardless of religion. Because life has this undeniable ethical and metaphysical tendency, no religion could gain a foothold in the world without interpreting life in this sense. Every religion gains its hold on people's hearts through its ethical side. Each makes its dogma the foundation of the moral motive that everyone feels but does not therefore understand, and joins the two so closely that they appear inseparable. Indeed, priests try to present unbelief and immorality as one and the same thing. This is why believers regard an unbeliever as identical with a morally bad person. We can already see this in the use of words such as godless, atheistic, unchristian, heretic, and the like as synonyms for morally bad. Religions have an easy task here. Starting from *faith*, they may demand it unconditionally for their dogma, even with threats. Philosophical systems do not have things so easy. Thus, if we examine all the systems, we will find that both their foundation of ethics and the point where ethics connects with their stated metaphysics are in an extremely bad state everywhere. Yet the demand that ethics rest on metaphysics cannot be dismissed, as I have already confirmed in the introduction by citing the authority of *Wolff* and *Kant*.

But the problem of metaphysics is so much harder than any other problem that occupies the human mind that many thinkers consider it completely insoluble. In this particular case I face a further, quite special disadvantage caused by the form of a detached study: I cannot begin from a definite metaphysical system that I might accept. I would either have to explain it, which would take far too much space, or assume it as given and certain, which would be highly questionable. This in turn means that here, just as in what came before, I cannot use the

synthetic method, but only the analytical one. I must go not from the ground to its consequences, but from the consequences to their ground. This hard necessity of proceeding without assumptions, and starting from no standpoint except the one common to everyone, has already made explaining the foundation of ethics so difficult for me that I now look back on it as a difficult feat I have accomplished. It is like doing something freehand that is normally done only with a firm support underneath. Now, with the question of a metaphysical explanation of the ethical foundation before us, the difficulty of proceeding without assumptions becomes so overwhelming that I see only one way out. I must limit myself to very general outlines, give suggestions rather than full explanations, show the path that leads to the goal here without following it to the end, and, in general, say only a very small part of what I would have to present under other circumstances. To justify this approach, besides the reasons just given, I appeal to the fact that the actual question has been answered in the preceding sections. Whatever else I offer here is therefore work beyond what is required, an *addition* that I am free to give and the reader free to take.

Section 22



Metaphysical foundation.

We must now leave the firm ground of experience, which has supported every step we have taken so far. We are to find our final theoretical satisfaction in a region that no experience could possibly reach. We will be fortunate if we gain even a hint, a passing glimpse, that gives us some peace. But what must not leave us is the honesty of our approach so far. We will not follow the so-called post-Kantian philosophy by indulging in fantasies, serving up fairy tales, trying to impress through words, and throwing dust in the reader's eyes. Our promise is a little, honestly offered.

What has explained things up to this point now becomes our problem itself: that natural compassion which is inborn in every human being and cannot be erased, and which we have found to be the only source of *unselfish actions*. Only such actions have moral value. Many modern philosophers treat the concepts of *good* and *evil* as *simple* concepts, meaning ones that neither need nor allow explanation. They then usually speak very mysteriously and reverently about an "*idea of the good*," which they make the support of their ethics, or at least a cover for its poverty.²⁵ Their approach forces me to explain here that these concepts are anything but simple, much less given a priori. They express a relationship and are drawn from the most everyday experience. Anything that agrees with the efforts of some individual will is called *good* in relation to it: good food, good roads, a good omen. The opposite is called *bad*, or, in living

beings, *evil*. A person whose character makes them unwilling to obstruct other people's efforts, and instead favorable and helpful to them as far as reasonably possible—someone who therefore does not hurt others, but helps and supports them wherever possible—is called a *good person* by those others for exactly the same reason. So the concept of good is applied to this person from the same relative, experience-based standpoint, located in the person on the receiving end. But if we examine such a person's character not just in relation to others, but in itself, we know from the preceding discussion that their virtues of justice and love for other people arise from a wholly direct concern for others' well-being and suffering, whose source we have identified as compassion. If we go back to what is essential in such a character, we undeniably find it in this: this person *makes less of a distinction between themselves and others than other people do*. In the eyes of a malicious character, this distinction is so great that another person's suffering is a direct pleasure. They therefore seek it without any further advantage to themselves, and even against their own advantage. In the eyes of an egoist, the same *distinction* is still great enough for them to use great harm to others as a means of gaining a small advantage for themselves. For both, then, there is a wide gulf, a powerful *distinction*, between the I, confined to their own person, and the not-I, which includes the rest of the world. "Let the world perish, as long as I am safe" is their rule. For a good person, by contrast, this *distinction* is by no means so great. Indeed, in acts of generosity it seems to disappear: another person's well-being is advanced at the cost of one's own, so that the other person's I is put on the same level as one's own. And where *many* others must be saved, one's own I is sacrificed to them completely, as one person gives their life for many.

The question now is whether this last way of understanding the relationship between one's own I and another's, which underlies the actions of a good character, is mistaken and based on a deception. Or is that true instead of the opposite understanding, on which egoism and malice rest?—

The understanding that underlies egoism is strictly justified *by experience*. In experience, the *distinction* between oneself and another person appears absolute. The difference in spatial location that separates me from the other person

also separates me from their well-being and suffering.—Against this, however, the first thing to note is that our knowledge of our own selves is by no means exhaustive or clear down to its final ground. Through the perception that the brain produces from the data of the senses, and thus indirectly, we know our own body as an object in space. Through the inner sense, we know the ongoing series of our efforts and acts of will that arise in response to external motives. Finally, we also know the many weaker or stronger movements of our own will to which all our inner feelings can be traced. That is all: for knowing itself is not in turn known. What actually underlies this whole appearance, our inner *nature in itself*, the very thing that wills and knows, is not accessible to us. We look only outward; inside it is dark. So our knowledge of ourselves is by no means complete and exhaustive. Instead, it is very superficial. For the greater part—indeed, the main part—we are unknown to ourselves and a riddle. Or, as *Kant* says, the I knows itself only as appearance, not as what it may be in itself. In the other part, the one that enters our knowledge, each of us is certainly completely different from everyone else. But it does not yet follow that the same holds for the large and essential part that remains hidden and unknown to each of us. At least the possibility therefore remains that this part is one and the same in everyone.

What is the basis of all multiplicity and numerical difference among beings?—Space and time. Only these make it possible, since we can think of and represent many things only as either side by side or one after another. Now, many things of the same kind are *individuals*. So I call space and time, insofar as they make *multiplicity* possible, the principle of individuation, without worrying whether this is exactly the sense in which the Scholastics used that expression.

If *anything* in the insights that *Kant's* astonishing depth of thought gave the world is unquestionably true, it is the *transcendental aesthetic*: the doctrine that space and time are ideal. Its basis is so clear that no objection with any appearance of validity has been found against it. It is *Kant's* triumph and one of 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 perception. They belong to this facul-

ty, not to the things known through it, and therefore can never be characteristics of things as they are in themselves. They belong only to the *appearance* of those things, as this alone is possible in our consciousness of the outside world, which is tied to physiological conditions. But if *time and space* do not belong to the thing in itself, that is, to the true nature of the world, then *multiplicity* necessarily does not belong to it either. Consequently, even in the countless appearances of this world of the senses, it can only be one. Only the one and identical being can manifest itself in them all. Conversely, what presents itself as *many*, and therefore in time and space, cannot be the thing in itself, but only *appearance*. As such, appearance exists only for our consciousness, which is restricted by many conditions and indeed rests on an organic function. It does not exist outside that consciousness.

This doctrine—that all multiplicity is only apparent, that in all the individuals of this world, however infinitely many appear one after another and side by side, only one and the same truly existing being manifests itself, present and identical in them all—certainly existed long before *Kant*. Indeed, one might say it has always existed. First of all, it is the chief and fundamental teaching of the oldest book in the world, the sacred *Vedas*, whose doctrinal part, or rather esoteric teaching, we have in the *Upanishads*.²⁶ There we find this great teaching on almost every page. It is tirelessly repeated in countless turns of phrase and explained through many images and comparisons. Even from the scant reports of his philosophy that have reached us, there can be no doubt at all that it also lay at the foundation of the wisdom of *Pythagoras*. Everyone knows that almost the entire philosophy of the *Eleatic* school was contained in this doctrine alone. Later the *Neoplatonists* were steeped in it, teaching “that because all things are one, all souls are one” (that because of the unity of all things, all souls are one). In the 9th century we see it unexpectedly appear in Europe through *Scotus Eriugena*, who, inspired by it, tries to dress it in the forms and expressions of the Christian religion. Among the Muslims we find it again as the inspired mysticism of the *Sufis*. But in the West, *Giordano Bruno* had to pay with a disgraceful and agonizing death for being unable to resist the urge to state 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 in alarm before its smoking ruins, this insight was revived by the eclectic philosophy of *Schelling*. He combined the teachings of Plotinus, Spinoza, Kant, and Jakob Böhme with the results of modern natural science. He hurriedly assembled a whole to satisfy his contemporaries' urgent need for the time being, then played it through with variations. As a result, this insight has gained general acceptance among German scholars and has become almost universally known even among the merely educated.²⁷ The only exceptions are today's university philosophers. They have the difficult task of working against so-called *pantheism*. This puts them in great distress and embarrassment, and in their anxiety they reach now for the most pitiful sophistries, now for the most bombastic phrases, to patch together some respectable costume in which to dress an approved and officially imposed spinning-wheel philosophy. In short, "the One and All" has always been the fools' joke and the wise person's endless subject of meditation. Yet a strict proof of it can be given only from *Kant's* doctrine, as was done above. *Kant* himself did not do this, but, like a clever speaker, gave only the premises, leaving his listeners the pleasure of drawing the conclusion.

If multiplicity and separateness therefore belong only to mere *appearance*, and it is one and the same being that presents itself in everything alive, then the understanding that removes the distinction between I and not-I is not the mistaken one. Rather, the opposite understanding must be mistaken. We also find the Hindus calling this latter understanding *Maya*, meaning appearance, deception, illusion. We have found the former view to underlie the phenomenon of compassion, and indeed found compassion to be its actual expression. It would therefore be the metaphysical basis of ethics, and would consist in *one* individual directly recognizing in *another* themselves, their own true being. In that case, practical wisdom—acting justly and doing good—would agree exactly in its result with the deepest teaching of theoretical wisdom at its furthest reach. The practical philosopher, meaning the just, charitable, generous person, would express through action only the same insight that is the result of the the-

oretical philosopher's deepest thought and most laborious research. Yet moral excellence stands higher than all theoretical wisdom. The latter always remains fragmentary and reaches by a slow chain of inferences the goal that moral excellence reaches at once. Through their actions, a morally noble person, however much they may lack intellectual excellence, displays the deepest insight and highest wisdom. They put the greatest genius and most learned scholar to shame if that person's actions reveal that this great truth has remained foreign to their heart.

"Individuation is real. The principle of individuation and the difference between individuals that rests on it are the order of things as they are in themselves. Each individual is a being fundamentally different from all others. Only in my own self do I have my true existence; everything else, by contrast, is not-I and foreign to me."—This is the understanding whose truth flesh and bone bear witness to, which underlies all egoism, and whose actual expression is every unloving, unjust, or malicious action.—

"Individuation is mere appearance, produced through space and time, which are nothing more than the forms of all the objects of my brain's faculty of knowledge, forms conditioned by that faculty. Therefore the multiplicity and difference of individuals are also mere appearance: they exist only in my *representation*. My true inner being exists in every living thing just as directly as it reveals itself to me alone in my self-consciousness."—This understanding, for which the formula *tat-twam asi*, that is, "this is you," is the standard expression in Sanskrit, is what breaks through as *compassion*. All genuine, that is, unselfish virtue therefore rests on it, and every good deed is its actual expression. Ultimately it is to this understanding that every appeal for kindness, for love of others, for mercy instead of strict justice is directed. Such an appeal reminds us of the respect in which we are all one and the same being. Egoism, envy, hatred, persecution, harshness, revenge, pleasure in others' suffering, and cruelty, by contrast, appeal to the first understanding and find reassurance in it. We feel moved and delighted when we hear about a noble action, still more when we see one, and most of all when we do one ourselves. At the deepest level, this feeling rests on the action's giving us certainty that beyond all the multiplicity

and difference of individuals that the principle of individuation sets before us, there is a unity among them. This unity truly exists and is even accessible to us, since it has just appeared in actual fact.

Depending on which of these two ways of understanding we hold to, either the love or the strife of Empedocles appears between one being and another. But if someone filled with strife were to attack their most hated enemy and penetrate to that enemy's deepest inner core, they would be surprised to discover themselves there. For just as we ourselves are present in all the people who appear to us in dreams, the same is true when we are awake, though it is not so easy to see. But *tat-twam asi*.

The predominance of one or the other of these two ways of understanding shows itself not only in individual actions, but in the whole character of a person's consciousness and mood. These are therefore essentially different in a *good* character from what they are in a *bad* one. The latter everywhere feels a strong dividing wall between themselves and everything outside them. To them the world is an *absolute not-I*, and their relation to it is hostile from the start. As a result, the basic tone of their mood is spite, suspicion, envy, and pleasure in others' suffering.—A good character, by contrast, lives in an outside world of the same nature as their own being. Other people are not a not-I to them, but "I once again." So their original relation to everyone is friendly. They feel inwardly related to all beings, take a direct interest in their well-being and suffering, and confidently assume the same interest on their part. This produces the deep peace within them and that confident, calm, contented mood which makes everyone feel comfortable in their company.—A bad character does not trust in help from others when in need. If they ask for it, they do so without confidence. If they receive it, they do so without real gratitude, because they can hardly understand it as anything but the effect of others' foolishness. They are still unable to recognize their own being in another, even after it has made itself known from that other person through unmistakable signs. This is really what makes all ingratitude so outrageous. This moral isolation, in which they essentially and inescapably find themselves, also makes them easily fall into despair.—A good character will ask for help from others with as much confi-

dence as they are aware of their own readiness to help them. For, as I said, to one person the human world is not-I; to the other, "I once again."—The generous person who forgives an enemy and returns good for evil is sublime and receives the highest praise, because they recognized their very own being even where it decisively denied itself.

Every wholly pure act of kindness, every completely and truly unselfish act of help, which as such has the other person's need as its only motive, is really, if we investigate down to its ultimate ground, a mysterious action, a practical mysticism. Ultimately it comes from the same understanding 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 aiming, in the remotest way, at anything other than relieving the hardship that weighs on the other person is possible only insofar as they recognize that it is they themselves who now appear before them in that sad form. They recognize their own being in itself in the other person's appearance. This is why, in the preceding part, I called compassion the great mystery of ethics.

Someone who dies for their country has freed themselves from the illusion that confines existence to their own person. They extend their own being to their fellow citizens, in whom they live on, and even to future generations of those citizens, for whom they act. They regard death as the blinking of the eyes, which does not interrupt sight.

Consider the person to whom all others have always been not-I, who at bottom considered only their own person truly real. They saw others, strictly speaking, only as phantoms, granting them merely a relative existence insofar as they could serve or oppose their purposes. Thus an immeasurable difference, a deep gulf, remained between their person and all that not-I. Since they existed exclusively in their own person, they see all reality and the whole world perish with their self in death. By contrast, consider someone who saw their own being, themselves, in all others, indeed in everything alive, so that their existence merged with that of all living things. Through death this person loses only a small part of their existence. They continue in all the others, in whom they have always recognized and loved their being and their self. The illusion that sepa-

rated their consciousness from everyone else's disappears. This may explain, if not entirely, at least a large part of the difference between the way especially good people and predominantly evil people face the hour of death.—

In every century, poor truth has had to blush because it was paradoxical, though this is not its fault. It cannot take on the shape of the prevailing error enthroned above all. So it sighs and looks up to its protecting god, Time, who beckons it toward victory and fame, but whose wingbeats are so vast and slow that the individual dies in the meantime. I too am therefore very well aware of how paradoxical this metaphysical explanation of the basic ethical phenomenon must seem to educated Westerners accustomed to entirely different foundations of ethics. But I cannot do violence to the truth. The most I can bring myself to do in this regard is to give a quotation showing how, thousands of years ago, this metaphysics of ethics was already the fundamental view of Indian wisdom. I point back to that wisdom as Copernicus pointed back to the Pythagoreans' system of the universe, which Aristotle and Ptolemy had displaced. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, Lectio 13; 27, 28, according to A. W. von Schlegel's translation, it says: "Whoever sees the same supreme lord present in all living things, not perishing when they perish, truly sees.—And seeing the same lord present everywhere, one does not harm oneself through one's own fault: from there one proceeds to the highest path."

I must stop with these suggestions toward a metaphysics of ethics, although a further important step remains to be taken in it. But that step presupposes that we had gone a step further in ethics itself, which I was not allowed to do. In Europe, ethics is assigned its highest goal in the teaching of justice and virtue, and what goes beyond these is either unknown or at least not accepted. It is therefore because of this necessary omission that the outlines of a metaphysics of ethics given here do not yet let us glimpse, even from a distance, the keystone of the whole structure of metaphysics, or the actual coherence of the *Divine Comedy*. But this was neither part of the question nor of my plan. For one cannot say everything in a single day, and one should not answer more than one is asked.

Whenever we try to advance human knowledge and understanding, we will always feel the resistance of the age. It is like a load we have to pull, pressing heavily on the ground and defying every effort. Then we must take comfort in the certainty that, though prejudice is against us, truth is on our side. As soon as its ally, time, has joined it, truth is completely certain of victory—if not today, then tomorrow.

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

Bouterweck, Practical Aphorisms, p. 54.

As we can see, he would like nothing better than to turn the simple, indeed trivial concept *good* into something fallen from Zeus, so that he could set it up as an idol in the temple.

- ²⁶ The authenticity of the *Oupnekhat* had been challenged on the basis of a few marginal comments added by Muslim copyists that had found their way 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 also by *Boehinger*, *On the Contemplative Life among the Hindus*, 1831, p. 12.—Even a reader who knows no Sanskrit can clearly establish the following by comparing the more recent translations of individual Upanishads by *Rammohun Roy*, *Poley*, and even *Colebrooke*, as well as the latest ones by *Röer*: the Persian translation by Sultan *Dara Shikoh*, the martyr of this doctrine, which *Anquetil* translated into Latin with strict literalness, was based on an exact and complete understanding of the words. The others, by contrast, largely made do with groping and guessing, and are therefore certainly much less accurate.—Further details can be found in the second volume of *Supplementary Writings*, ch. 16, §. 184.

- ²⁷ Among our species, we can for quite a long time

Keep the door closed to reason.

But once it skillfully comes inside,

It stays in the house,

And soon it is the one in charge.

Volt.

Judgment



of the Royal Danish Society of Sciences.

Only one author attempted to explain the question proposed in 1837: “Should the source and foundation of moral philosophy be sought in an explanation 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; giving morality a foundation is²⁸ hard,” worthy of the prize. For, leaving out what was chiefly required, he thought the request was to establish some principle of ethics. He therefore treated the part of his essay in which he explains the connection between his proposed principle of ethics and his metaphysics as an appendix, in which he offered more than had been asked. Yet the question itself demanded a discussion in which the connection between metaphysics and ethics would receive particular attention. As for the author’s attempt to establish the foundation of ethics in compassion, neither did the manner of his argument satisfy us, nor did he actually prove that this foundation was sufficient. Indeed, he himself was forced to admit the opposite. Nor should we pass over in silence that he refers to several of the greatest philosophers of modern times in so indecent a manner as to cause justified and serious offense.

- ²⁸ The Academy added this second “is” out of its own resources, to provide evidence for Longinus’s teaching (de sublim., c. 39) that adding or removing *one* syllable can destroy the whole force of a sentence.