

Groundwork
for
the Metaphysics of Morals

[Ak 4:385]

Preface

[Ak 4:387]

Ancient Greek philosophy was divided into three sciences: **physics**, **ethics**, and **logic**.¹ This division is perfectly suitable to the nature of the thing and one cannot improve upon it, except only by adding its principle, in order in this way partly to secure its completeness and partly to be able to determine correctly the necessary subdivisions.

All rational cognition is either *material*, and considers some object, or *formal*, and concerns itself merely with the form of the understanding and of reason itself and the universal rules of thinking in general, without distinction among objects.² Formal philosophy is called **logic**, but material philosophy, which has to do with determinate objects and the laws to which they are subjected, is once again twofold. For these laws are either laws of **nature** or of **freedom**. The science of the first is called **physics**, and that of the other is **ethics**; the former is also named ‘doctrine of nature’, the latter ‘doctrine of morals’.

Logic can have no empirical part, i.e., a part such that the universal and necessary laws of thinking rest on grounds that are taken from experience; for otherwise it would not be logic, i.e., a canon for the understanding or reason which is valid for all thinking and must be demonstrated. By contrast, natural and moral philosophy can each have their empirical part, because the former must determine its laws of nature as an object of experience, the latter must determine the laws for the will of the human being insofar as he is affected by nature — the first as laws in accordance with which everything happens, the second as those in accordance with which everything ought to happen, but also reckoning with the conditions under which it often does not happen.

[Ak 4:388]

One can call all philosophy, insofar as it is based on grounds of experi-

1. According to Diogenes Laertius, *Lives and Opinions of the Eminent Philosophers* 7.39, this division was first devised by Zeno of Citium (335–265 B.C.) and was characteristic of the Stoics. See, e.g., Seneca, *Epistles* 89.9; Cicero, *On Ends* 4.4.

2. Cf. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A50–55/B74–79.

ence, *empirical*, but that which puts forth its doctrines solely from principles *a priori*, *pure* philosophy. The latter, when it is merely formal, is called *logic*; but if it is limited to determinate objects of the understanding, then³ it is called *metaphysics*.

In such a wise there arises the idea of a twofold metaphysics, the idea of a *metaphysics of nature* and of a *metaphysics of morals*. Physics will thus have its empirical but also a rational part; and ethics likewise; although here the empirical part in particular could be called *practical anthropology*, but the rational part could properly be called *morals*.⁴

All trades, handicrafts, and arts have gained through the division of labor, since, namely, one person does not do everything, but rather each limits himself to a certain labor which distinguishes itself markedly from others by its manner of treatment, in order to be able to perform it in the greatest perfection and with more facility. Where labors are not so distinguished and divided, where each is a jack-of-all-trades, there the trades still remain in the greatest barbarism. But it might be a not unworthy object of consideration to ask whether pure philosophy in all its parts does not require each its particular man, and whether it would not stand better with the learned trade as a whole if those who, catering to the taste of the public, are accustomed to sell the empirical along with the rational, mixed in all sorts of proportions⁵ unknown even to themselves—calling themselves ‘independent thinkers’,⁶ and those who prepare the merely rational part ‘quibblers’⁷—if they were warned not to carry on simultaneously two enterprises that are very different in their mode of treatment, each of which perhaps requires a particular talent, and the combination of which in a single person produces only bunglers: thus I here ask only whether the nature of the science does not require the empirical part always to be carefully separated from the rational, placing ahead of a genuine (empirical) physics a metaphysics of nature, and ahead of practical anthropology a metaphysics of morals, which must be carefully cleansed of everything

3. 1785: “understanding, is called”

4. Kant later includes “principles of application” drawn from “the particular nature of human beings” *within* “metaphysics of morals” itself, leaving “practical anthropology” to deal “only with the subjective conditions in human nature that hinder people or help them in fulfilling the laws of a metaphysics of morals” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 6:217).

5. *Verhältnisse*

6. *Selbstdenker*

7. *Grübler*

empirical, in order to know how much pure reason could achieve in both cases; and from these sources pure reason itself creates its teachings *a priori*, whether the latter enterprise be carried on by all teachers of morals (whose name is legion) or only by some who feel they have a calling for it. [Ak 4: 389]

Since my aim here is properly directed to moral philosophy, I limit the proposed question only to this: whether one is not of the opinion that it is of the utmost necessity to work out once a pure moral philosophy which is fully cleansed of everything that might be in any way empirical and belong to anthropology; for that there must be such is self-evident from the common idea of duty and of moral laws. Everyone must admit that a law, if it is to be valid morally, i.e., as the ground of an obligation, has to carry absolute necessity with it; that the command ‘You ought not to lie’ is valid not merely for human beings, as though other rational beings did not have to heed it; and likewise all the other genuinely moral laws; hence that the ground of obligation here is to be sought not in the nature of the human being or the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but *a priori* solely in concepts of pure reason, and that every other precept grounded on principles of mere experience, and even a precept that is universal in a certain aspect, insofar as it is supported in the smallest part on empirical grounds, perhaps only as to its motive, can be called a practical rule, but never a moral law.

Thus not only are moral laws together with their principles essentially distinguished among all practical cognition from everything else in which there is anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests entirely on its pure part, and when applied to the human being it borrows not the least bit from knowledge about him (anthropology), but it gives him as a rational being laws *a priori*, which to be sure require a power of judgment sharpened through experience, partly to distinguish in which cases they have their application, and partly to obtain access for them to the will of the human being and emphasis for their fulfillment, since he,⁸ as affected with so many inclinations, is susceptible to the idea of a pure practical reason, but is not so easily capable of making it effective *in concreto* in his course of life.

Thus a metaphysics of morals is indispensably necessary not merely from a motive of speculation, in order to investigate the source of the practical principles lying *a priori* in our reason, but also because morals themselves remain subject to all sorts of corruption as long as that guiding [Ak 4:390]

8. Kant’s text reads *diese*, which would be translated “the latter” and refer to “fulfillment”; editors suggest amending it to *dieser*, which would refer to ‘the human being’.

thread and supreme norm of their correct judgment is lacking. For as to what is to be morally good, it is not enough that it *conform* to the moral law, but it must also happen *for the sake of this law*; otherwise, that conformity is only contingent and precarious, because the unmoral ground will now and then produce lawful actions, but more often actions contrary to the law. But now the moral law in its purity and genuineness (which is precisely what most matters in the practical) is to be sought nowhere else than in a pure philosophy; hence this (metaphysics) must go first, and without it there can be no moral philosophy at all; that which mixes those pure principles among empirical ones does not even deserve the name of a ‘philosophy’ (for this distinguishes itself from common rational cognition precisely by the fact that what the latter conceives only as mixed in, it expounds in a separate science), still less of a ‘moral philosophy’, because precisely through this mixture it violates the purity of morals and proceeds contrary to its own end.

One should not think that what is here demanded we already have in the propaedeutic of the famous *Wolff* in his moral philosophy, namely in what he calls *universal practical philosophy*,⁹ and thus that here an entirely new field is not to be entered on. Precisely because it is supposed to be a “universal practical philosophy,” it has not drawn into consideration any will of a particular kind, such as one determined without any empirical motives fully from principles *a priori*, which one could call a ‘pure will’, but only volition in general, with all actions and conditions that pertain to it in this universal signification; and thereby it is distinguished from a metaphysics of morals just as general logic is from transcendental philosophy, of which the first expounds the actions and rules of thinking *in general*, but the latter merely the particular actions and rules of **pure** thinking, i.e., those through which objects can be cognized fully *a priori*. For the metaphysics of morals is to investigate the idea and principles of a possible *pure* will, and not the actions and conditions of human volition in general, which are for the most part drawn from psychology. It constitutes no objection to my assertion that moral laws and duty are also discussed in universal practical philosophy (though contrary to all warrant). For in this too the authors of that science remain faithful to their idea of it; they do not distinguish the

[Ak 4:391]

9. Christian Wolff (1679–1754), *Philosophia Practica Universalis* (1738–1739). Kant uses the same title himself, however, as a subtitle to the section of the introduction to the *Metaphysics of Morals* titled “Preliminary Concepts of the Metaphysics of Morals,” in which he discusses concepts such as freedom, duty, personhood, maxims, and laws (Ak 6:221–28).

motives that are represented as such fully *a priori* merely through reason, and are properly moral, from the empirical ones that understanding raises to universal concepts through the comparison of experiences; but rather they consider them, without respecting the distinction of their sources, only in accordance with their greater or smaller sum (since they are all regarded as homogeneous), and through that they make for themselves their concept of *obligation*, which is to be sure not less than moral, but is so constituted as can be demanded only in a philosophy that does not judge about the *origin* of all practical concepts, whether they occur *a priori* or merely *a posteriori*.

Now intending someday to provide a metaphysics of morals, I issue this groundwork in advance.¹⁰ There is, to be sure, really no other foundation for it than the critique of a *pure practical reason*,¹¹ just as for metaphysics there is the already provided critique of pure speculative reason. Yet in part the former is not of such utmost necessity as the latter, because in what is moral human reason, even in the most common understanding, can easily be brought to great correctness and completeness, whereas in its theoretical but pure use it is entirely dialectical; in part I require for a critique of a pure practical reason that if it is to be completed, its unity with the¹² speculative in a common principle must at the same time be exhibited, because it can in the end be only one and the same reason that is distinguished merely in its application. But I could not bring it to such a completeness here without bringing in considerations of an entirely different kind and confusing the reader. It is for the sake of this that instead of the term *Critique of pure practical reason* I have used instead *Groundwork for the metaphysics of morals*.

But, thirdly, because a metaphysics of morals, despite its intimidating title, is yet susceptible to a high degree of popularity and suitability to the common understanding, I find it useful to separate from it this preliminary work of laying the ground, in order that in the future I need not attach subtleties, which are unavoidable in it, to more easily grasped doctrines.

[Ak 4:392]

The present groundwork is, however, nothing more than the search for

10. Kant's *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 6:205–493, was published in 1797–1798.

11. Kant published the *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak 5:1–163, in 1788. But he appears not to have intended to write a separate work with that title in 1785–1786. He apparently planned to include a “practical” section in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1787), but published the *Critique of Practical Reason* separately when it grew too long for that.

12. In 1785 the definite article *der* is repeated; that version would be translated: “its unity with the critique of speculative reason in a common principle.”

and establishment *of the supreme principle of morality*, which already constitutes an enterprise whole in its aim and to be separated from every other moral investigation. To be sure, my assertions about this important and principal question, whose discussion has hitherto been far from satisfactory, would receive much light through the application of the same principle to the entire system, and of confirmation through the adequacy it manifests everywhere; yet I had to dispense with this advantage, which would also be basically more a matter of my self-love than of the common utility, because the facility of use and the apparent adequacy of a principle provide no wholly secure proof of its correctness, but rather awaken a certain partiality not to investigate and consider it for itself without any regard for the consequences.

The method I have taken in this work, I believe, is the one best suited if one wants to take the way analytically from common cognition to the determination of its supreme principle and then, in turn, synthetically from the testing of this principle and its sources back to common cognition, in which its use is encountered. Hence the division turns out thus:

First Section: Transition from common rational moral cognition to philosophical moral cognition.

Second Section: Transition from popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals.

Third Section: Final step from the metaphysics of morals to the critique of pure practical reason.

First Section

[Ak 4:393]

TRANSITION

FROM COMMON RATIONAL MORAL COGNITION

TO PHILOSOPHICAL MORAL COGNITION

There is nothing it is possible to think of anywhere in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a **good will**. Understanding, wit, the power of judgment,¹ and like *talents* of the mind,² whatever they might be called, or courage, resoluteness, persistence in an intention, as qualities of *temperament*, are without doubt in some respects good and to be wished for; but they can also become extremely evil and harmful, if the will that is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose peculiar constitution is therefore called *character*,³ is not good. It is the same with *gifts of fortune*. Power, wealth, honor,⁴ even health and that entire well-being and contentment with one's condition, under the name of *happiness*, make for courage and thereby often also for arrogance,⁵ where there is not a good will to correct their influence on the mind,⁶ and thereby on the entire principle of action, and make them universally purposive; not to mention that a rational impartial spectator can never take satisfaction even in the sight of the uninterrupted welfare of a being, if it is adorned with no trait of a pure and good will; and so the good will appears to constitute the indispensable condition even of the worthiness to be happy.

Some qualities are even conducive to this good will itself and can make its work much easier, but still have despite this no inner unconditioned worth, yet always presuppose a good will, which limits the esteem⁷ that one

[Ak 4:394]

1. See *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Respect*, Ak 7:196–201.

2. *Geist*

3. For Kant's distinction between "temperament" and "character," see *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Respect*, Ak 7:286–95; see also Ak 4:398–99 below.

4. Power, wealth, and honor are for Kant the three objects of the principal social passions. See *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Respect*, Ak 7:271–274.

5. *Mut und hierdurch öfters auch Übermut*

6. *Gemüt*

7. 1786: *Hochschätzung*; 1785: *Schätzung* ("estimation")

otherwise rightly has for them, and does not permit them to be held absolutely good. Moderation in affects and passions,⁸ self-control, and sober reflection not only are good for many aims, but seem even to constitute a part of the *inner* worth of a person; yet they lack much in order to be declared good without limitation (however unconditionally they were praised by the ancients).⁹ For without the principles of a good will they can become extremely evil, and the cold-bloodedness of a villain makes him not only far more dangerous but also immediately more abominable in our eyes than he would have been held without it.

The good will is good not through what it effects or accomplishes, not through its efficacy for attaining any intended end, but only through its willing, i.e., good in itself, and considered for itself, without comparison, it is to be estimated far higher than anything that could be brought about by it in favor of any inclination, or indeed, if you prefer, of the sum of all inclinations. Even if through the peculiar disfavor of fate, or through the meager endowment of a stepmotherly nature, this will were entirely lacking in the resources to carry out its aim, if with its greatest effort nothing of it were accomplished, and only the good will were left over (to be sure, not a mere wish, but as the summoning up of all the means insofar as they are in our control): then it would shine like a jewel for itself, as something that has its full worth in itself. Utility or fruitlessness can neither add to nor subtract anything from this worth. It would be only the setting, as it were, to make it easier to handle in common traffic, or to draw the attention of those who are still not sufficiently connoisseurs, but not to recommend it to connoisseurs and determine its worth.

There is, however, something so strange in this idea of the absolute worth of the mere will, without making any allowance for utility in its estimation, that despite all the agreement with it even of common reason, there must nevertheless arise a suspicion that perhaps it is covertly grounded merely on a high-flown fantasy, and that nature might have been falsely understood in the aim it had in assigning reason to govern our will. Hence we will put this idea to the test from this point of view.

[Ak 4:395]

In the natural predispositions of an organized being, i.e., a being arranged purposively for life, we assume as a principle that no instrument is to

8. In Kant's empirical theory of the faculty of desire, affects and passions are the two principal obstacles to rational self-control. See *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 6:407–9; *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Respect*, Ak 7:251–67.

9. Courage and self-control were, for the ancients, two of the primary moral virtues, along with wisdom, justice, and sometimes piety. See Plato, *Meno* 78d–e, *Republic* 427e; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 3.6–12; Cicero, *On Duties* 1.15.

be encountered in it for any end except that which is the most suitable to and appropriate for it.¹⁰ Now if, in a being that has reason and a will, its *preservation*, its *welfare* — in a word, its *happiness* — were the real end of nature, then nature would have hit on a very bad arrangement in appointing reason in this creature to accomplish the aim. For all the actions it has to execute toward this aim, and the entire rule of its conduct, would be prescribed to it much more precisely through instinct, and that end could be obtained far more safely through it than could ever happen through reason; and if, over and above this, reason were imparted to the favored creature, it would have served it only to make it consider the happy predisposition of its nature, to admire it, to rejoice in it, and to make it grateful to the beneficent cause of it, but not to subject its faculty of desire to that weak and deceptive guidance, and meddle in the aim of nature; in a word, nature would have prevented reason from breaking out into *practical use* and from having the presumption, with its weak insight, to think out for itself the project of happiness and the means of attaining it; nature would have taken over the choice not only of the ends but also of the means, and with wise provision would have entrusted both solely to instinct.¹¹

In fact we also find that the more a cultivated reason gives itself over to the aim of enjoying life and happiness, the further the human being falls short of true contentment; from this arises in many, and indeed in those most practiced in the cultivated use of reason, if only they are sincere enough to admit it, a certain degree of *misology*, i.e., hatred of reason;¹² for after reckoning all the advantages they draw, I do not say from the invention of all the arts of common luxury,¹³ but even from the sciences (which also

10. Kant's reasons for accepting this proposition as an *a priori* maxim of reflective judgment are presented in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (1790), § 66, Ak 5:376–77.

11. Kant rejects the proposition that human happiness is an end of nature in his writings on history and in his review of the chief work of his former student J. G. Herder (1762–1802). See *Idea toward a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim* (1784), Ak 8:19–20; Reviews of Herder's *Ideas for the Philosophy of History of Humanity* (1785–1786), Ak 8:64–65; *Conjectural Beginning of Human History* (1786), Ak 8:114–18. See also *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, Ak 5:429–31. Though not an end of nature, human happiness is an end of reason, and of morality; see *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak 5:61–62, 110–13; *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 6:387–88.

12. See Plato, *Phaedo* 89d–91b.

13. “Luxury (*luxus*) is excessive convenience in the social life of a community (so that its convenience works against its welfare)”; *Anthropology in a Pragmatic Respect*, Ak 7:249.

[Ak 4:396]

seem to them in the end to be¹⁴ a luxury of the understanding), they nevertheless find that they have in fact only brought more¹⁵ hardship down on their shoulders than they have gained in happiness, and on this account in the end they sooner envy than despise human beings of the more common stamp, who are closer to the guidance of mere natural instinct and do not permit their reason much influence over their deeds and omissions. And we must admit this much, that the judgment of those who very much moderate the boastful high praise of the advantages that reason is supposed to supply us in regard to happiness and contentment with life, or who even reduce it below zero, is by no means morose or ungrateful toward the kindness of the world's government; but rather these judgments are covertly grounded on the idea of another aim for their existence, possessing much greater dignity, for which, and not for their happiness, reason has been given its wholly authentic vocation, and to which, therefore, as a supreme condition, the private aims of the human being must for the most part defer.

For since reason is not sufficiently effective in guiding the will safely in regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs (which it in part itself multiplies), and an implanted natural instinct would have guided us much more certainly to this end, yet since reason nevertheless has been imparted to us as a practical faculty, i.e., as one that ought to have influence on the *will*, its true vocation must therefore be not to produce volition *as a means* to some other aim, but rather to produce a *will good in itself*, for which reason was absolutely necessary, since everywhere else nature goes to work purposively in distributing its predispositions. This will may therefore not be the single and entire good, but it must be the highest good, and the condition for all the rest, even for every demand for happiness, in which case it can be united with the wisdom of nature, when one perceives that the culture of reason, which is required for the former, limits in many ways the attainment of the second aim, which is always conditioned, namely of happiness, at least in this life, and can even diminish it to less than nothing without nature's proceeding unpurposively in this; for reason, which recognizes its highest practical vocation in the grounding of a good will, is capable in attaining this aim only of a contentment after its own kind, namely from the fulfillment of an¹⁶ end that again only reason determines,

14. 1785 reads *scheint* instead of *zu sein scheinen*, which would have the effect in translation of eliminating the words "to be" from this sentence.

15. 1785: "more of"

16. 1785: "of the end"

even if this should also be bound up with some infringement of the ends of inclination.

[Ak 4:397]

But now in order to develop the concept of a good will, to be esteemed in itself and without any further aim, just as it dwells already¹⁷ in the naturally healthy understanding, which does not need to be taught but rather only to be enlightened, this concept always standing over the estimation of the entire worth of our actions and constituting the condition for everything else: we will put before ourselves the concept of **duty**, which contains that of a good will, though under certain subjective limitations and hindrances, which, however, far from concealing it and making it unrecognizable, rather elevate it by contrast and let it shine forth all the more brightly.

I pass over all actions that are already recognized as contrary to duty, even though they might be useful for this or that aim; for with them the question cannot arise at all whether they might be done *from duty*, since they even conflict with it. I also set aside the actions which are actually in conformity with duty, for which, however, human beings have immediately *no inclination*, but nevertheless perform them because they are driven to it through another inclination. For there it is easy to distinguish whether the action in conformity with duty is done *from duty* or from a self-seeking aim. It is much harder to notice this difference where the action is in conformity with duty and the subject yet has besides this an *immediate* inclination to it. E.g., it is indeed in conformity with duty that the merchant should not overcharge his inexperienced customers, and where there is much commercial traffic, the prudent merchant also does not do this, but rather holds a firm general price for everyone, so that a child buys just as cheaply from him as anyone else. Thus one is *honestly* served; yet that is by no means sufficient for us to believe that the merchant has proceeded thus from duty and from principles of honesty; his advantage required it; but here it is not to be assumed that besides this, he was also supposed to have an immediate inclination toward the customers, so that out of love, as it were, he gave no one an advantage over another in his prices. Thus the action was done neither from duty nor from immediate inclination, but merely from a self-serving aim.

By contrast, to preserve one's life is a duty, and besides this everyone has an immediate inclination to it. But the often anxious care that the greatest part of humankind takes for its sake still has no inner worth, and its maxim has no moral content. They protect their life, to be sure, *in conformity with duty*, but not *from duty*. If, by contrast, adversities and hopeless grief have

[Ak 4:398]

17. This word added in 1786

entirely taken away the taste for life, if the unhappy one, strong of soul, more indignant than pusillanimous or dejected over his fate, wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear, but from duty: then his maxim has a moral content.

To be beneficent where one can is a duty, and besides this there are some souls so sympathetically attuned¹⁸ that, even without any other motive of vanity or utility to self, take an inner gratification in spreading joy around them, and can take delight in the contentment of others insofar as it is their own work. But I assert that in such a case the action, however it may conform to duty and however amiable it is, nevertheless has no true moral worth, but is on the same footing as other inclinations, e.g., the inclination to honor, which, when it fortunately encounters something that in fact serves the common good and is in conformity with duty, and is thus worthy of honor, deserves praise and encouragement, but not esteem; for the maxim lacks moral content, namely of doing such actions not from inclination but *from duty*. Thus suppose the mind of that same friend of humanity were clouded over with his own grief, extinguishing all his sympathetic participation¹⁹ in the fate of others; he still has the resources to be beneficent to those suffering distress, but the distress of others does not touch him because he is²⁰ sufficiently busy with his own; and now, where no inclination any longer stimulates him to it, he tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination, solely from duty; only then does it for the first time have its authentic moral worth. Even more: if nature had put little sympathy at all in the heart of this or that person, if he (an honest man, to be sure) were by temperament cold and indifferent toward the sufferings of others, perhaps because he himself is provided with particular gifts of patience and strength to endure his own, and also presupposes or even demands the same of others; if nature has not really formed²¹ such a man into a friend of humanity (although he would not in truth be its worst product), nevertheless would he not find a source within himself to give himself a far higher worth than that which a good-natured temperament might have? By all means! Just here begins the worth of character, which is moral and the highest without any comparison, namely that he is beneficent not from inclination but from duty.

[Ak 4:399]

To secure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly), for the lack

18. *teilnehmend gestimmte Seelen*

19. *Teilnehmung*

20. 1785: *wäre*

21. *gebildet*

of contentment with one's condition, in a crowd of many sorrows and amid unsatisfied needs, can easily become a great *temptation to the violation of duties*. But even without looking at duty, all human beings always have of themselves the most powerful and inward inclination to happiness, because precisely in this idea all inclinations are united in a sum. Yet the precept of happiness is for the most part so constituted that it greatly infringes on some inclinations and yet the human being cannot make any determinate and secure concept of the sum of satisfaction of them all, under the name of 'happiness'; hence it is not to be wondered at that a single inclination, which is determinate in regard to what it promises and the time in which its satisfaction can be obtained, can outweigh a wavering idea; and the human being, e.g., a person with gout, could choose to enjoy what tastes good and to suffer what he must, because in accordance with his reckoning, here at least he has not sacrificed the enjoyment of the present moment through expectations, perhaps groundless, of a happiness that is supposed to lie in health. But also in this case, if the general inclination to happiness does not determine his will, if for him, at least, health does not count as so necessary in his reckoning, then here, as in all other cases, there still remains a law, namely to promote his happiness not from inclination but from duty, and then his conduct has for the first time its authentic moral worth.

It is in this way, without doubt, that those passages in scripture are to be understood in which it is commanded to love our neighbor and even our enemy. For love as inclination cannot be commanded; but beneficence solely from duty, even when no inclination at all drives us to it, or even when natural and invincible disinclination resists, is *practical* and not *pathological* love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of feeling, in the principles of action and not in melting sympathy;²² but the former alone can be commanded.

The second proposition²³ is: an action from duty has its moral worth *not in the aim* that is supposed to be attained by it, but rather in the maxim in accordance with which it is resolved upon; thus²⁴ that worth depends not on the actuality of the object of the action, but merely on the *principle of the volition*, in accordance with which the action is done, without regard to any object of the faculty of desire. It is clear from the preceding that the aims we may have in actions, and their effects, as ends and incentives of the will, can

[Ak 4:400]

22. *schmelzender Teilnahme*

23. Kant does not say explicitly what the "first proposition" was, but presumably it is that an action has moral worth only if it is done from duty.

24. This word added in 1786

impart to the actions no unconditioned and moral worth. In what, then, can this worth lie, if it is not supposed to exist in the will, in the relation of the actions to the effect hoped for? It can lie nowhere else *than in the principle of the will*, without regard to the ends that can be effected through such action; for the will is at a crossroads, as it were, between its principle *a priori*, which is formal, and its incentive *a posteriori*, which is material, and since it must somehow be determined by something, it must be determined through the formal principle in general of the volition if it does an action from duty, since every material principle has been withdrawn from it.

The third proposition, as a consequence of the first two, I would express thus: *Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for the law*. For the object, as an effect of my proposed action, I can of course have an *inclination*, but *never respect*, just because it²⁵ is merely an effect and not the activity of a will.²⁶ Just as little can I have respect for inclination in general, whether my own or another's; I can at most approve it in the first case, in the second I can sometimes even love it, i.e., regard it as favorable to my own advantage. Only that which is connected with my will merely as a ground, never as an effect, only what does not serve my inclination but outweighs it, or at least wholly excludes it from the reckoning in a choice, hence only the mere law for itself, can be an object of respect and hence a command. Now an action from duty is supposed entirely to abstract from²⁷ the influence of inclination, and with it every object of the will, so nothing is left over for the will that can determine it except the *law* as what is objective and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law, hence the maxim* of complying with such a law, even when it infringes all my inclinations.

[Ak 4:401]

The moral worth of the action thus lies not in the effect to be expected from it; thus also not in any principle of action which needs to get its motive from this expected effect. For all these effects (agreeableness of one's condition, indeed even the furthering of the happiness of others) could be brought about through other causes, and for them the will of a rational being

*A *maxim* is the subjective principle of the volition; the objective principle (i.e., that which would serve all rational beings also subjectively as a practical principle if reason had full control over the faculty of desire) is the practical *law*.

25. Kant's pronoun here is in the feminine, which could refer to "effect" but not to "object," which seems to be the intended referent. Editors therefore often emend the pronoun to the neuter.

26. 1785: "an effect of my will"

27. *absondern*

is therefore not needed; but in it alone the highest and unconditioned good can nevertheless be encountered. Nothing other than the *representation of the law* in itself, *which obviously occurs only in the rational being* insofar as it, and not the hoped-for effect, is the determining ground of the will, therefore²⁸ constitutes that so pre-eminent good which we call ‘moral’, which is already present in the person himself who acts in accordance with it, but must not first of all be expected from the effect.**

[Ak 4:402]

But what kind of law can it be, whose representation, without even

**One could accuse me of merely taking refuge behind the word *respect* in an obscure feeling instead of giving a distinct reply to the question through a concept of reason. Yet even if respect is a feeling, it is not one *received* through influence but a feeling *self-effected* through a concept of reason and hence specifically distinguished from all feelings of the first kind, which may be reduced to inclination or fear. What I immediately recognize as a law for me, I recognize with respect, which signifies merely the consciousness of the *subjection* of my will to a law without any mediation of other influences on my sense. The immediate determination of the will through the law and the consciousness of it is called *respect*, so that the latter is to be regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject and not as its *cause*. Authentically, respect is the representation of a worth that infringes on my self-love. Thus it is something that is considered as an object neither of inclination nor of fear, even though it has something analogical to both at the same time. The *object* of respect is thus solely the law, and specifically that law that we *lay upon ourselves* and yet also as in itself necessary. As a law we are subject to it without asking permission of self-love; as laid upon us by ourselves, it is a consequence of our will, and has from the first point of view an analogy with fear, and from the second with inclination. All respect for a person is properly only respect for the law (of uprightness, etc.) of which the person gives us the example. Because we regard the expansion of our talents also as a duty, we represent to ourselves a person with talents also as an *example of a law*, as it were (to become similar to the person in this) and that constitutes our respect. All so-called moral *interest* consists solely in *respect* for the law. [The parenthetical material in the penultimate sentence was added in 1786. Cf. *Critique of Practical Reason*, Ak 5:71–89. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant lists *four* feelings that are produced directly by reason and can serve as moral motivation. These are “moral feeling,” “conscience,” “love of human beings,” and “respect” (*Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 6:399–403).]

[Ak4:401]

28. 1785: “thus”

taking account of the effect expected from it, must determine the will, so that it can be called good absolutely and without limitation? Since I have robbed the will of every impulse that could have arisen from the obedience to any law, there is nothing left over except the universal lawfulness of the action in general which alone is to serve the will as its principle, i.e., I ought never to conduct myself except so *that I could also will that my maxim become a universal law*. Here it is mere lawfulness in general (without grounding it on any law determining certain actions) that serves the will as its principle, and also must so serve it, if duty is not to be everywhere an empty delusion and a chimerical concept; common human reason,²⁹ indeed, agrees perfectly with this in its practical judgment, and has the principle just cited always before its eyes.

Let the question be, e.g.: When I am in a tight spot, may I not make a promise with the intention of not keeping it? Here I easily make a distinction in the signification the question can have, whether it is prudent, or whether it is in conformity with duty, to make a false promise. The first can without doubt often occur. I do see very well that it is not sufficient to get myself out of a present embarrassment by means of this subterfuge, but rather it must be reflected upon whether from this lie there could later arise much greater inconvenience than that from which I am now freeing myself, and, since the consequences of my supposed *cunning* are not so easy to foresee, and a trust once lost to me might become much more disadvantageous than any ill I think I am avoiding, whether it might not be more *prudent* to conduct myself in accordance with a universal maxim and make it into a habit not to promise anything except with the intention of keeping it. Yet it soon occurs to me here that such a maxim has as its ground only the worrisome consequences. Now to be truthful from duty is something entirely different from being truthful out of worry over disadvantageous consequences; in the first case, the concept of the action in itself already contains a law for me, whereas in the second I must look around elsewhere to see which effects might be bound up with it for me. For if I deviate from the principle of duty, then this is quite certainly evil; but if I desert my maxim of prudence, then that can sometimes be very advantageous to me, even though it is safer to remain with it. Meanwhile, to inform myself in the shortest and least deceptive way in regard to my answer to this problem, whether a lying promise is in conformity with duty, I ask myself: Would I be content with it if my maxim (of getting myself out of embarrassment through an untruthful promise) should be valid as a universal law (for

[Ak 4:403]

29. 1785: "but common human reason"

myself as well as for others), and would I be able to say to myself that anyone may make an untruthful promise when he finds himself in embarrassment which he cannot get out of in any other way? Then I soon become aware that I can will the lie but not at all a universal law to lie; for in accordance with such a law there would properly be no promises, because it would be pointless to avow my will in regard to my future actions to those who would not believe this avowal, or, if they rashly did so, who would pay me back in the same coin; hence my maxim, as soon as it were made into a universal law, would destroy itself.

Thus I need no well-informed shrewdness to know what I have to do in order to make my volition morally good. Inexperienced in regard to the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for all the occurrences that might eventuate in it, I ask myself only: Can you will also that your maxim should become a universal law? If not, then it is reprehensible, and this not for the sake of any disadvantage impending for you or someone else, but because it cannot fit as a principle into a possible universal legislation; but for this legislation reason extorts immediate respect from me, from which, to be sure, I still do not have *insight* into that on which it is grounded (which the philosopher may investigate), but I at least understand this much, that it is an estimation of a worth which far outweighs everything whose worth is commended by inclination, and that the necessity of my actions from *pure* respect for the practical law is what constitutes duty, before which every other motive must give way because it is the condition of a will that is good *in itself*, whose worth surpasses everything.

Thus in the moral cognition of common human reason we have attained to its principle, which it obviously does not think abstractly in such a universal form, but actually has always before its eyes and uses as its standard of judgment. It would be easy here to show how, with this compass in its hand, it knows its way around very well in all the cases that come before it, how to distinguish what is good, what is evil, what conforms to duty or is contrary to duty, if, without teaching it the least new thing, one only makes it aware of its own principle, as Socrates did;³⁰ and thus that it needs no science and philosophy to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, or indeed, even wise and virtuous. It might even have been conjectured in advance that the acquaintance with what every human being is obliged to do, hence to know, would also be the affair of everyone,

[Ak 4:404]

30. This would appear to be Kant's interpretation of Socrates' "human wisdom" (Plato, *Apology* 20c–24b). Compare *Metaphysics of Morals*, Ak 6:411.

even of the most common human being. Here³¹ one cannot regard without admiration the way the practical faculty of judgment is so far ahead of the theoretical in the common human understanding. In the latter, if common reason ventures to depart from the laws of experience and perceptions of sense, then it falls into sheer inconceivabilities and self-contradictions, or at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and inconstancy. But in the practical, the power of judgment first begins to show itself to advantage when the common understanding excludes from practical laws all sensuous incentives. It then even becomes subtle, caviling with its conscience, or with other claims in reference to what is to be called right, or even in wanting sincerely to determine the worth of actions for its own instruction,³² and, what is most striking, it can in the latter case do so with just as good a hope of getting things right as any philosopher might promise to do; indeed, it is almost more secure in this even than the latter, because the philosopher has³³ no other principle than the common understanding, but the philosopher's judgment is easily confused by a multiplicity of considerations that are alien and do not belong to the matter and can make it deviate from the straight direction. Would it not accordingly be more advisable in moral things to stay with the judgment of common reason, and bring in philosophy at most only in order to exhibit the system of morals all the more completely and comprehensibly, and its rules in a way that is more convenient for their use (still more for disputation), but not in order to remove the common human understanding in a practical respect out of its happy simplicity, and through philosophy to set it on a new route of investigation and instruction?

[Ak 4:405]

There is something splendid about innocence, but it is in turn very bad that it cannot be protected very well and is easily seduced. On this account even wisdom — which consists more in deeds and omissions than in knowledge — also needs science, not in order to learn from it but in order to provide entry and durability for its precepts. The human being feels in himself a powerful counterweight against all commands of duty, which reason represents to him as so worthy of esteem, in his needs and inclinations, whose satisfaction he summarizes under the name of 'happiness'. Now reason commands its precepts unremittingly, without promising anything to inclinations, thus snubbing and disrespecting, as it were, those impetuous claims, which at the same time seem so reasonable (and will not

31. 1785: "Nevertheless"

32. 1785: *Belohnung* ("reward"); 1786: *Belehrung* ("instruction")

33. 1785: "can have"

be done away with by any command). From this, however, arises a *natural dialectic*, that is, a propensity to ratiocinate against those strict laws of duty and to bring into doubt their validity, or at least their purity and strictness, and,³⁴ where possible, to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations, i.e., at ground to corrupt them and deprive them of their entire dignity, which not even common practical reason can in the end call good.

Thus *common human reason* is impelled, not through any need of speculation (which never assaults it as long as it is satisfied with being mere healthy reason), but rather from practical grounds themselves, to go outside its sphere and to take a step into the field of *practical philosophy*, in order to receive information and distinct directions about the source of its principle and its correct determination in opposition to the maxims based on need and inclination, so that it may escape from its embarrassment concerning the claims of both sides and not run the risk of being deprived, through the ambiguity into which it easily falls, of all genuine ethical principles. Thus even in common practical reason, when it is cultivated, there ensues unnoticed a *dialectic*, which necessitates it to seek help in philosophy, just as befalls it in its theoretical use; and therefore the first will find no more tranquillity than the other anywhere except in a complete critique of our reason.

34. 1785: “at least”