

IMMANUEL KANT

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*Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*

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## Preface

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Ancient Greek philosophy was divided into three sciences: **physics**, **ethics**, and **logic**. This division is perfectly suitable to the nature of the subject and there is no need to improve upon it except, perhaps, to add its principle, partly so as to insure its completeness and partly so as to be able to determine correctly the necessary subdivisions.

All rational cognition is either *material* and concerned with some object, or *formal* and occupied only with the form of the understanding and of reason itself and with the universal rules of thinking in general, without distinction of objects. Formal philosophy is called **logic**, whereas material philosophy, which has to do with determinate objects and the laws to which they are subject, is in turn divided into two. For these laws are either laws of **nature** or laws of **freedom**. The science of the first is called **physics**, that of the other is **ethics**; the former is also called the doctrine of nature, the latter the doctrine of morals.<sup>a</sup>

Logic can have no empirical part, that is, no part in which the universal and necessary laws of thinking would rest on grounds taken from experience; for in that case it would not be logic, that is, a canon for the understanding or for reason, which holds for all thinking and which must be demonstrated. On the other hand natural as well as moral philosophy<sup>b</sup> can each have its empirical part, since the former must determine laws of nature as an object of experience, the latter, laws of the human being's will insofar as it is affected by nature – the first as laws in accordance with which everything happens, the second as laws in accordance with which everything ought to happen, while still taking into account the conditions under which it very often does not happen.

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All philosophy insofar as it is based on grounds of experience can be called *empirical*; but insofar as it sets forth its teachings simply from a priori principles it can be called *pure* philosophy. When the latter is merely formal it is called *logic*; but if it is limited to determinate objects of the understanding it is called *metaphysics*.

In this way there arises the idea of a twofold metaphysics, a *metaphysics*

<sup>a</sup> *Naturlehre . . . Sittenlehre*. According to the *Critique of Judgment*, the doctrinal (*doktrinal*), as distinguished from the critical, part of philosophy is the metaphysics of nature and of morals (5:170).

<sup>b</sup> *Weltweisheit*, a common eighteenth-century word for *Philosophie*

*of nature* and a *metaphysics of morals*. Physics will therefore have its empirical part but it will also have a rational part; so too will ethics, though here the empirical part might be given the special name *practical anthropology*, while the rational part might properly be called *morals*.<sup>c</sup>

4:389 All trades, crafts, and arts have gained by the division of labor, namely when one person does not do everything but each limits himself to a certain task that differs markedly from others in the way it is to be handled, so as to be able to perform it most perfectly and with greater facility. Where work is not so differentiated and divided, where everyone is a jack-of-all-trades, there trades remain in the greatest barbarism. Whether pure philosophy in all its parts does not require its own special man might in itself be a subject not unworthy of consideration, and it might be worth asking whether the whole of this learned trade would not be better off if a warning were given to those who, in keeping with the taste of the public, are in the habit of vending the empirical mixed with the rational in all sorts of proportions unknown to themselves, who call themselves “independent thinkers,”<sup>d</sup> and others, who prepare the rational part only, “hair-splitters”:<sup>e</sup> the warning not to carry on at the same time two jobs which are very distinct in the way they are to be handled, for each of which a special talent is perhaps required, and the combination of which in one person produces only bunglers. Here, however, I ask only whether the nature of science does not require that the empirical part always be carefully separated from the rational part, and that a metaphysics of nature be put before physics proper (empirical physics) and a metaphysics of morals before practical anthropology, with metaphysics carefully cleansed of everything empirical so that we may know how much pure reason can accomplish in both cases and from what sources it draws this a priori teaching of its own<sup>f</sup> – whether the latter job be carried on by all teachers of morals (whose name is legion) or only by some who feel a calling to it.

Since my aim here is directed properly to moral philosophy, I limit the question proposed only to this: is it not thought to be of the utmost necessity to work out for once a pure moral philosophy, completely cleansed of everything that may be only empirical and that belongs to anthropology? For, that there must be such a philosophy is clear of itself from the common idea of duty and of moral laws. Everyone must grant that a law, if it is to hold morally, that is, as a ground of an obligation, must carry with it absolute necessity; that, for example, the command “thou

<sup>c</sup> *eigentlich Moral*, perhaps, “morals strictly speaking.” *Moral* and *Sitten* are translated as “morals,” *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* as “morality,” *sittliche Weltweisheit* and *Moralphilosophie* as “moral philosophy,” and *Sittenlehre* as “the doctrine of morals.” Kant occasionally uses *Moral* in the sense of “moral philosophy.”

<sup>d</sup> *Selbstdenker*

<sup>e</sup> *Grübler*

<sup>f</sup> *sie selbst diese ihre Belehrung a priori schöpfe*

shalt not lie” does not hold only for human beings, as if other rational beings did not have to heed it, and so with all other moral laws properly so called; that, therefore, the ground of obligation here must not be sought in the nature of the human being or in the circumstances of the world in which he is placed, but a priori simply in concepts of pure reason; and that any other precept, which is based on principles of mere experience – even if it is universal in a certain respect – insofar as it rests in the least part on empirical grounds, perhaps only in terms of a motive,<sup>g</sup> can indeed be called a practical rule but never a moral law.

Thus, among practical cognitions, not only do moral laws, along with their principles, differ essentially from all the rest,<sup>h</sup> in which there is something empirical, but all moral philosophy is based entirely on its pure part; and when it is applied to the human being it does not borrow the least thing from acquaintance with him (from anthropology) but gives to him, as a rational being, laws a priori, which no doubt still require a judgment sharpened by experience, partly to distinguish in what cases they are applicable and partly to provide them with access<sup>i</sup> to the will of the human being and efficacy for his fulfillment of them;<sup>j</sup> for the human being is affected by so many inclinations that, though capable of the idea of a practical pure reason, he is not so easily able to make it effective *in concreto* in the conduct of his life.

A metaphysics of morals is therefore indispensably necessary, not merely because of a motive to speculation – for investigating the source of the practical basic principles<sup>k</sup> that lie a priori in our reason – but also because morals themselves remain subject to all sorts of corruption as long as we are without that clue<sup>l</sup> and supreme norm by which to appraise them correctly. For, in the case of what is to be morally good it is not enough that it conform with the moral law but it must also be done *for the sake of the law*; without this, that conformity is only very contingent and precarious, since a ground that is not moral will indeed now and then produce actions in conformity with the law, but it will also often produce actions contrary to the

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<sup>g</sup> *Bewegungsgründe*. Kant subsequently (4:427) distinguishes this from an “incentive” (*Triebfeder*), and the force of some passages depends upon this distinction. However, he does not abide by the distinction, and no attempt has been made to bring his terminology into accord with it. He occasionally uses *Bewegursache*, in which case “motive,” which seems to be the most general word available, has been used.

<sup>h</sup> Here, as elsewhere, the difference between German and English punctuation creates difficulties. It is not altogether clear from the context whether the clause “in which there is something empirical” is restrictive or nonrestrictive.

<sup>i</sup> Or “entry,” “admission,” *Eingang*

<sup>j</sup> *Nachdruck zur Ausübung*

<sup>k</sup> *Grundsätze*. Kant does not draw a consistent distinction between *Grundsatz* and *Prinzip* and often uses one where the other would seem more appropriate. *Prinzip* is always, and *Grundsatz* often, translated as “principle.”

<sup>l</sup> *Leitfaden*

law. Now the moral law in its purity and genuineness (and in the practical this is what matters most) is to be sought nowhere else than in a pure philosophy; hence this (metaphysics) must come first, and without it there can be no moral philosophy at all. That which mixes these pure principles with empirical ones does not even deserve the name of philosophy (for what distinguishes philosophy from common rational cognition is just that it sets forth in separate sciences what the latter comprehends only mixed together); much less does it deserve the name of a moral philosophy, since by this very mixture it even infringes upon<sup>m</sup> the purity of morals themselves and proceeds contrary to its own end.

Let it not be thought, however, that what is here called for already exists in the celebrated Wolff's<sup>1</sup> propaedeutic to his moral philosophy, namely in what he called *universal<sup>n</sup> practical philosophy*, and that we do not therefore have to break into an entirely new field. Just because it was to be a universal practical philosophy it took into consideration, not a will of any special kind, such as one that would be completely determined from a priori principles without any empirical motives and that could be called a pure will, but rather volition generally,<sup>o</sup> with all the actions and conditions that belong to it in this general<sup>p</sup> sense; and by this it differs from a metaphysics of morals in the same way that general logic, which sets forth the actions and rules of thinking *in general*, differs from transcendental philosophy, which sets forth the special actions and rules of **pure** thinking, that is, of thinking by which objects are cognized completely a priori. For, the metaphysics of morals has to examine the idea and the principles of a possible *pure* will and not the actions and conditions of human volition generally, which for the most part are drawn from psychology. That this universal practical philosophy also discusses (though without any warrant)<sup>q</sup> moral laws and duties is no objection to my assertion. For the authors of that science remain true to their idea of it in this too; they do not distinguish motives that, as such, are represented completely a priori by reason alone and are properly moral from empirical motives, which the understanding raises to universal concepts merely by comparing experiences; instead they consider motives only in terms of the greater or smaller amount of them, without paying attention to the difference of their sources (since all of them are regarded as of the same kind); and this is how they form their concept<sup>r</sup> of *obligation*, which is anything but moral,

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<sup>m</sup> *Abbruch tut*. For Kant's explanation of this term, taken from the context of rights, see *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:429).

<sup>n</sup> *allgemeinen*

<sup>o</sup> *überhaupt*

<sup>p</sup> *allgemeinen*

<sup>q</sup> Or "authorization," *Befugnis*. For an explanation of this term in its moral use, see *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:222).

<sup>r</sup> *und machen sich dadurch ihren Begriff*

although the way it is constituted is all that can be desired in a philosophy that does not judge at all about the *origin* of all possible practical concepts, whether they occur only a posteriori or a priori as well.

Intending to publish some day a metaphysics of morals,<sup>2</sup> I issue this groundwork in advance. Indeed there is really no other foundation for a metaphysics of morals than the critique of a *pure practical reason*, just as that of metaphysics is the critique of pure speculative reason, already published. But in the first place the former is not of such utmost necessity as the latter, because in moral matters human reason can easily be brought to a high degree of correctness and accomplishment, even in the most common understanding, whereas in its theoretical but pure use it is wholly dialectical; and in the second place I require that the critique of a pure practical reason, if it is to be carried through completely, be able at the same time to present the unity of practical with speculative reason in a common principle, since there can, in the end, be only one and the same reason, which must be distinguished merely in its application. But I could not yet bring it to such completeness here without bringing into it considerations of a wholly different kind and confusing the reader. Because of this I have made use of the title *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* instead of *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*.

But in the third place, since a metaphysics of morals, despite its intimidating title, is yet capable of a great degree of popularity and suitability for the common understanding, I find it useful to separate from it this preliminary work of laying its foundation, so that in the future I need not add subtleties, which are unavoidable in it, to teachings more easily grasped.

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The present groundwork is, however, nothing more than the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*, which constitutes by itself a business that in its purpose is complete and to be kept apart from every other moral investigation. No doubt my assertions on this important and central question, discussion of which has till now been far from satisfactory, would receive a great deal of light from the application of the same principle to the whole system, and of confirmation through the adequacy that it would everywhere show; but I had to forgo this advantage, which would be after all more gratifying to me than commonly useful since the facility with which a principle can be used and its apparent adequacy furnish no quite certain proof of its correctness but, instead, awaken a certain bias against rigorously investigating and weighing it in itself and without any regard for what follows from it.

I have adopted in this work the method that is, I believe, most suitable if one wants to proceed analytically from common cognition to the determination of its supreme principle, and in turn synthetically from the examination of this principle and its sources back to the common cognition in which we find it used. Accordingly, the division turns out as follows:

## GROUNDWORK OF THE METAPHYSICS OF MORALS

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



# Section I

## *Transition from common rational to philosophic moral cognition*

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It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will**. Understanding, wit, judgment<sup>3</sup> and the like, whatever such *talents* of mind<sup>4</sup> may be called, or courage, resolution, and perseverance in one's plans, as qualities of *temperament*, are undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes,<sup>5</sup> but they can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose distinctive constitution<sup>6</sup> is therefore called *character*, is not good. It is the same with *gifts of fortune*. Power, riches, honor, even health and that complete well-being and satisfaction<sup>7</sup> with one's condition called *happiness*, produce boldness and thereby often arrogance<sup>8</sup> as well unless a good will is present which corrects the influence of these on the mind and, in so doing, also corrects the whole principle of action and brings it into conformity with universal ends<sup>9</sup> – not to mention that an impartial rational spectator can take no delight in seeing the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced with no feature of a pure and good will, so that a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy.

Some qualities are even conducive<sup>9</sup> to this good will itself and can

<sup>3</sup> *Geistes*. Compare Kant's use of *Geist* in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (7:225) and of *Geisteskräfte* in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:445).

<sup>4</sup> *in mancher Absicht*, perhaps "in many respects"

<sup>5</sup> *Beschaffenheit*, occasionally translated as "character." "Constitution" is also used to translate *Einrichtung* and sometimes *Anlage*, which is used rather loosely in the *Groundwork*.

<sup>6</sup> Kant uses a great variety of words for what could be called "pleasure" (*Lust*) in the most general sense. Although he later draws broad distinctions among pleasures in terms of their origins (e.g., between the pleasure of taste and that of sensation, and between both of these and moral pleasure), these distinctions still leave a number of words problematic. Within the *Groundwork* (4:396) he suggests a distinction between *Zufriedenheit* or "satisfaction" in general and reason's own kind of *Zufriedenheit*, which in that context I have translated as "contentment." However, his vocabulary is not consistent, and I have not attempted to make it so.

<sup>7</sup> *Mut . . . Übermut*

<sup>8</sup> *allgemein-zweckmäßig mache*

<sup>9</sup> *beförderlich*. Compare *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:407–9). *Befördern* is usually translated as "to further" or "to promote."

4:394 make its work much easier; despite this, however, they have no inner unconditional worth but always presuppose a good will, which limits the esteem one otherwise rightly has for them and does not permit their being taken as absolutely good. Moderation in affects and passions, self-control, and calm reflection are not only good for all sorts of purposes but even seem to constitute a part of the *inner* worth of a person; but they lack much that would be required to declare them good without limitation (however unconditionally they were praised by the ancients); for, without the basic principles of a good will they can become extremely evil, and the coolness of a scoundrel makes him not only far more dangerous but also immediately more abominable in our eyes than we would have taken him to be without it.

A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favor of some inclination and indeed, if you will, of the sum of all inclinations. Even if, by a special disfavor of fortune or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose – if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing and only the good will were left (not, of course, as a mere wish but as the summoning of all means insofar as they are in our control) – then, like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself. Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add anything to this worth nor take anything away from it. Its usefulness would be, as it were, only the setting to enable us to handle it more conveniently in ordinary commerce or to attract to it the attention of those who are not yet expert enough, but not to recommend it to experts or to determine its worth.

4:395 There is, however, something so strange in this idea of the absolute worth of a mere will, in the estimation of which no allowance is made for any usefulness, that, despite all the agreement even of common understanding with this idea, a suspicion must yet arise that its covert basis is perhaps mere high-flown fantasy and that we may have misunderstood the purpose of nature in assigning reason to our will as its governor. Hence we shall put this idea to the test from this point of view.

In the natural constitution of an organized being, that is, one constituted purposively for life,<sup>2</sup> we assume as a principle that there will be found in it no instrument for some end other than what is also most appropriate to that end and best adapted to it. Now in a being that has reason and a will, if the proper end of nature were its *preservation*, its *welfare*, in a word its *happiness*, then nature would have hit upon a very bad

<sup>2</sup> *zweckmäßig zum Leben eingerichteten*. *Zweck* is translated as “end” except when it occurs as part of *zweckmäßig*, *Zweckmäßigkeit*, and *zwecklos*.

arrangement in selecting the reason of the creature to carry out this purpose. For all the actions that the creature has to perform for this purpose, and the whole rule of its conduct, would be marked out for it far more accurately by instinct, and that end would have thereby been attained much more surely than it ever can be by reason; and if reason should have been given, over and above, to this favored creature, it must have served it only to contemplate the fortunate constitution of its nature, to admire this, to delight in it, and to be grateful for it to the beneficent cause, but not to submit its faculty of desire<sup>a</sup> to that weak and deceptive guidance and meddle with nature's purpose. In a word, nature would have taken care that reason should not break forth into *practical use* and have the presumption, with its weak insight, to think out for itself a plan for happiness and for the means of attaining it. Nature would have taken upon itself the choice not only of ends but also of means and, with wise foresight, would have entrusted them both simply to instinct.

And, in fact, we find that the more a cultivated reason purposely occupies itself with the enjoyment of life and with happiness, so much the further does one get away from true satisfaction; and from this there arises in many, and indeed in those who have experimented most with this use of reason, if only they are candid enough to admit it, a certain degree of *misology*, that is, hatred of reason; for, after calculating all the advantages they draw – I do not say from the invention of all the arts of common luxury, but even from the sciences (which seem to them to be, at bottom, only a luxury of the understanding) – they find that they have in fact only brought more trouble upon themselves instead of gaining in happiness; and because of this they finally envy rather than despise the more common run of people, who are closer to the guidance of mere natural instinct and do not allow their reason much influence on their behavior. And to this extent we must admit that the judgment of those who greatly moderate, and even reduce below zero, eulogies extolling the advantages that reason is supposed to procure for us with regard to the happiness and satisfaction of life is by no means surly or ungrateful to the goodness of the government of the world; we must admit, instead, that these judgments have as their covert basis the idea of another and far worthier purpose of one's existence, to which therefore, and not to happiness, reason is properly destined,<sup>b</sup> and to which, as supreme condition, the private purpose of the human being must for the most part defer.

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Since reason is not sufficiently competent to guide the will surely with

<sup>a</sup> *Begehrungsvermögen*. For Kant's definition of this term see *Critique of Practical Reason* (5:8 n) and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:211). *Vermögen* by itself is sometimes translated as "capacity" or "ability."

<sup>b</sup> *bestimmt*. Except when it has this sense of "vocation," *Bestimmung* and its cognates are translated in terms of "determination."

regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs (which it to some extent even multiplies) – an end to which an implanted natural instinct would have led much more certainly; and since reason is nevertheless given to us as a practical faculty, that is, as one that is to influence the *will*; then, where nature has everywhere else gone to work purposively in distributing its capacities,<sup>c</sup> the true vocation of reason must be to produce a will that is good, not perhaps *as a means* to other purposes, but *good in itself*, for which reason was absolutely necessary. This will need not, because of this, be the sole and complete good, but it must still be the highest good and the condition of every other, even of all demands for happiness. In this case it is entirely consistent with the wisdom of nature if we perceive that the cultivation of reason, which is requisite to the first and unconditional purpose, limits in many ways – at least in this life – the attainment of the second, namely happiness, which is always conditional; indeed it may reduce it below zero without nature proceeding unpurposively in the matter, because reason, which cognizes its highest practical vocation in the establishment of a good will, in attaining this purpose is capable only of its own kind of satisfaction, namely from fulfilling an end which in turn only reason determines, even if this should be combined with many infringements upon the ends of inclination.

4:397 We have, then, to explicate<sup>d</sup> the concept of a will that is to be esteemed in itself and that is good apart from any further purpose, as it already dwells in natural sound understanding and needs not so much to be taught as only to be clarified – this concept that always takes first place in estimating the total worth of our actions and constitutes the condition of all the rest. In order to do so, we shall set 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 bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth all the more brightly.

I here pass over all actions that are already recognized as contrary to duty, even though they may be useful for this or that purpose; for in their case the question whether they might have been done *from duty* never arises, since they even conflict with it. I also set aside actions that are really in conformity with duty but to which human beings have *no inclination* immediately<sup>e</sup> and

<sup>c</sup> *Anlagen*

<sup>d</sup> *entwickeln*. In the context of organisms generally, and more specifically with reference to man's talents and capacities, this is translated as "to develop." However, in the context of analytic and synthetic propositions, see the Jäsche *Logik* (9:111, *Anmerkung 1*), where it is said that in an implicitly identical proposition (as distinguished from a tautology), a predicate that lies *unentwickelt (implicite)* in the concept of the subject is made clear by means of *Entwicklung (explicatio)*.

<sup>e</sup> *unmittelbar*. Kant occasionally uses *direkt* as a synonym; no temporal reference is intended.

which they still perform because they are impelled<sup>f</sup> to do so through another inclination. For in this case it is easy to distinguish whether an action in conformity with duty is done *from duty* or from a self-seeking purpose. It is much more difficult to note this distinction when an action conforms with duty and the subject has, besides, an *immediate* inclination to it. For example, it certainly conforms with duty that a shopkeeper not overcharge an inexperienced customer, and where there is a good deal of trade a prudent merchant does not overcharge but keeps a fixed general price for everyone, so that a child can buy from him as well as everyone else. People are thus served *honestly*; but this is not nearly enough for us to believe that the merchant acted in this way from duty and basic principles of honesty; his advantage required it; it cannot be assumed here that he had, besides, an immediate inclination toward his customers, so as from love, as it were, to give no one preference over another in the matter of price. Thus the action was done neither from duty nor from immediate inclination but merely for purposes of self-interest.

On the other hand, to preserve one's life is a duty, and besides everyone has an immediate inclination to do so. But on this account the often anxious care that most people take of it still has no inner worth and their maxim has no moral content. They look after their lives *in conformity with duty* but not *from duty*. On the other hand, if adversity and hopeless grief have quite taken away the taste for life; if an unfortunate man, strong of soul and more indignant about his fate than despondent or dejected, wishes for death and yet preserves his life without loving it, not from inclination or fear but from duty, then his maxim has moral content.

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To be beneficent<sup>g</sup> where one can is a duty, and besides there are many souls so sympathetically attuned that, without any other motive of vanity or self-interest they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy around them and can take delight in the satisfaction of others so far as it is their own work. But I assert that in such a case an action of this kind, however it may conform with duty and however amiable it may be, has nevertheless no true moral worth but is on the same footing with other inclinations, for example, the inclination to honor, which, if it fortunately lights upon what is in fact in the common interest and in conformity with duty and hence honorable, deserves praise and encouragement but not esteem; for the maxim lacks moral content, namely that of doing such actions not from inclination but *from duty*. Suppose, then, that the mind of this philanthropist were overclouded by his own grief, which extinguished all sympathy with the fate of others, and that while he still had the means to benefit

<sup>f</sup> *getrieben*. *Antrieb* is translated as "impulse."

<sup>g</sup> *Wohltätig sein*. In view of Kant's distinction between *Wohltun* and *Wohlwollen* (6:393, 450 ff.), *Wohltun* and its cognates are translated in terms of "beneficence" and *Wohlwollen* in terms of "benevolence."

others in distress their troubles did not move him because he had enough to do with his own; and suppose that now, when no longer incited to it by any inclination, he nevertheless tears himself out of this deadly insensibility and does the action without any inclination, simply from duty; then the action first has its genuine moral worth. Still further: if nature had put little sympathy in the heart of this or that man; if (in other respects an honest<sup>h</sup> man) he is by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others, perhaps because he himself is provided with the special gift of patience and endurance toward his own sufferings and presupposes the same in every other or even requires it; if nature had not properly fashioned such a man (who would in truth not be its worst product) for a philanthropist, would he not still find within himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than what a mere good-natured temperament might have? By all means! It is just then that the worth of character comes out, which is moral and incomparably the highest, namely that he is beneficent not from inclination but from duty.

To assure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly); for, want of satisfaction with one's condition, under pressure from many anxieties and amid unsatisfied needs, could easily become a great *temptation to transgression of duty*. But in addition, without looking to duty here, all people have already, of themselves, the strongest and deepest inclination to happiness because it is just in this idea that all inclinations unite in one sum. However, the precept of happiness is often so constituted that it greatly infringes upon some inclinations, and yet one can form no determinate and sure concept of the sum of satisfaction of all inclinations under the name of happiness. Hence it is not to be wondered at that a single inclination, determinate both as to what it promises and as to the time within which it can be satisfied, can often outweigh a fluctuating idea, and that a man – for example, one suffering from gout – can choose to enjoy what he likes and put up with what he can since, according to his calculations, on this occasion at least he has not sacrificed the enjoyment of the present moment to the perhaps groundless expectation of a happiness that is supposed to lie in health. But even in this case, when the general<sup>i</sup> inclination to happiness did not determine his will; when health, at least for him, did not enter as so necessary into this calculation, there is still left over here, as in all other cases, a law, namely to promote his happiness not from inclination but from duty; and it is then that his conduct first has properly moral worth.

It is undoubtedly in this way, again, that we are to understand the

<sup>h</sup> *ehrlicher*. I have translated this as “honest” because Kant gives the Latin *honestas* as a parenthetical equivalent of such derivatives of *Ehre* as *Ehrbarkeit*. However, the context often makes it clear that he is not thinking of “honesty” in the narrow sense.

<sup>i</sup> *allgemeine*

passages from scripture in which we are commanded to love our neighbor, even our enemy. For, love as an inclination cannot be commanded, but beneficence from duty – even though no inclination impels us to it and, indeed, natural and unconquerable aversion opposes it – is *practical* and not *pathological*<sup>j</sup> love, which lies in the will and not in the propensity of feeling,<sup>k</sup> in principles of action and not in melting sympathy; and it alone can be commanded.

The second proposition is this: an action from duty has its moral worth *not in the purpose* to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon, and therefore does not depend upon the realization of the object of the action but merely upon the *principle of volition* in accordance with which the action is done without regard for any object of the faculty of desire. That the purposes we may have for our actions, and their effects as ends and incentives of the will, can give actions no unconditional and moral worth is clear from what has gone before. In what, then, can this worth lie, if it is not to be in the will in relation to the hoped for effect of the action? It can lie nowhere else *than in the principle of the will* without regard for the ends that can be brought about by such an action. For, the will stands between its a priori principle, which is formal, and its a posteriori incentive, which is material, as at a crossroads; and since it must still be determined by something, it must be determined by the formal principle of volition as such when an action is done from duty, where every material principle has been withdrawn from it.

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The third proposition, which is a consequence of the two preceding, I would express as follows: *duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law*. For an object as the effect of my proposed action I can indeed have *inclination* but *never respect*, just because it is merely an effect and not an activity of a will. In the same way I cannot have respect for inclination as such, whether it is mine or that of another; I can at most in the first case approve it and in the second sometimes even love it, that is, regard it as favorable to my own advantage. Only what is connected with my will merely as ground and never as effect, what does not serve my inclination but outweighs it or at least excludes it altogether from calculations in making a choice<sup>l</sup> – hence the mere law for itself – can be an object of respect and so a command. Now, an action from duty is to put aside entirely the influence of inclination and with it every object of the will; hence there is left for the will nothing that could determine it except

<sup>j</sup> *pathologische*, i.e., dependent upon sensibility

<sup>k</sup> *Empfindung*. In the *Critique of Judgment* (5:206) Kant distinguishes an “objective sensation” (e.g., green) from a “subjective sensation” (e.g., pleasure) and suggests that misunderstanding could be avoided if “feeling” (*Gefühl*) were used for the latter. I have followed his suggestion, while indicating the German word in a note.

<sup>l</sup> *bei der Wahl*

4:401 objectively the *law* and subjectively *pure respect* for this practical law, and so the maxim\* of complying with such a law even if it infringes upon all my inclinations.

Thus the moral worth of an action does not lie in the effect expected from it and so too does not lie in any principle of action that needs to borrow its motive from this expected effect. For, all these effects (agreeableness of one's condition, indeed even promotion of others' happiness) could have been also brought about by other causes, so that there would have been no need, for this, of the will of a rational being, in which, however, the highest and unconditional good alone can be found. Hence nothing other than the *representation of the law* in itself, *which can of course occur only in a rational being*, insofar as it and not the hoped-for effect is the determining ground of the will, can constitute the preeminent good we call moral, which is already present in the person himself who acts in accordance with this representation and need not wait upon the effect of his action.†

4:402 But what kind of law can that be, the representation of which must determine the will, even without regard for the effect expected from it, in order for the will to be called good absolutely and without limitation? Since I have deprived the will of every impulse that could arise for it from obeying some law, nothing is left but the conformity of actions as such with universal law,<sup>m</sup> which alone is to serve the will as its principle, that is,

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

†It could be objected that I only seek refuge, behind the word *respect*, in an obscure feeling, instead of distinctly resolving the question by means of a concept of reason. But though respect is a feeling, it is not one *received* by means of influence; it is, instead, a feeling *self-wrought* by means of a rational concept and therefore specifically different from all feelings of the first kind, which can be reduced to inclination or fear. What I cognize immediately as a law for me I cognize with respect, which signifies merely consciousness of the *subordination* of my will to a law without the mediation of other influences on my sense. Immediate determination of the will by means of the law and consciousness of this is called *respect*, so that this is regarded as the *effect* of the law on the subject, and not as the *cause* of the law. Respect is properly the representation of a worth that infringes upon my self-love. Hence there is something that is regarded as an object neither of inclination nor of fear, though it has something analogous to both. The *object* of respect is therefore simply the *law*, and indeed the law that we impose upon *ourselves* and yet as necessary in itself. As a law we are subject to it without consulting self-love; as imposed upon us by ourselves it is nevertheless a result of our will; and in the first respect it has an analogy with fear, in the second with inclination. Any respect for a person is properly only respect for the law (of integrity and so forth) of which he gives us an example. Because we also regard enlarging our talents as a duty, we represent a person of talents also as, so to speak, an *example of the law* (to become like him in this by practice), and this is what constitutes our respect. All so-called moral *interest* consists simply in *respect* for the law.

<sup>m</sup> *die allgemeine Gesetzmäßigkeit der Handlungen überhaupt*



*I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.* Here mere conformity to law as such, without having as its basis some law determined for certain actions, is what serves the will as its principle, and must so serve it, if duty is not to be everywhere an empty delusion and a chimerical concept. Common human reason also agrees completely with this in its practical appraisals and always has this principle before its eyes. Let the question be, for example: may I, when hard pressed, make a promise with the intention not to keep it? Here I easily distinguish two significations the question can have: whether it is prudent or whether it is in conformity with duty to make a false promise. The first can undoubtedly often be the case. I see very well that it is not enough to get out of a present difficulty by means of this subterfuge but that I must reflect carefully whether this lie may later give rise to much greater inconvenience for me than that from which I now extricate myself; and since, with all my supposed *cunning*, the results cannot be so easily foreseen but that once confidence in me is lost this could be far more prejudicial to me than all the troubles" I now think to avoid, I must reflect whether the matter might be handled *more prudently* by proceeding on a general maxim and making it a habit to promise nothing except with the intention of keeping it. But it is soon clear to me that such a maxim will still be based only on results feared. To be truthful from duty, however, is something entirely different from being truthful from anxiety about detrimental results, since in the first case the concept of the action in itself already contains a law for me while in the second I must first look about elsewhere to see what effects on me might be combined with it. For, if I deviate from the principle of duty this is quite certainly evil; but if I am unfaithful to my maxim of prudence this can sometimes be very advantageous to me, although it is certainly safer to abide by it. However, to inform myself in the shortest and yet infallible way about the answer to this problem, whether a lying promise is in conformity with duty, I ask myself: would I indeed be content that my maxim (to get myself out of difficulties by a false promise) should hold as a universal law (for myself as well as for others)? and could I indeed say to myself that every one may make a false promise when he finds himself in a difficulty he can get out of in no other way? Then I soon become aware that I could indeed will the lie, but by no means a universal law to lie; for in accordance with such a law there would properly be no promises at all, since it would be futile to avow my will with regard to my future actions to others who would not believe this avowal or, if they rashly did so, would pay me back in like coin; and thus my maxim, as soon as it were made a universal law, would have to destroy itself.

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I do not, therefore, need any penetrating acuteness to see what I have

"alles Übel. Übeln is translated as "troubles" or "ills." "Evil" is reserved for Böse.

to do in order that my volition be morally good. Inexperienced in the course of the world, incapable of being prepared for whatever might come to pass in it, I ask myself only: can you also will that your maxim become a universal law? If not, then it is to be repudiated, and that not because of a disadvantage to you or even to others forthcoming from it but because it cannot fit as a principle into a possible giving of universal law,<sup>o</sup> for which lawgiving reason, however, forces<sup>p</sup> from me immediate respect. Although I do not yet see<sup>q</sup> what this respect is based upon (this the philosopher may investigate), I at least understand this much: that it is an estimation of a worth that far outweighs any worth of what is recommended by inclination, and that the necessity of my action from *pure* respect for the practical law is what constitutes duty, to which every other motive must give way because it is the condition of a will good *in itself*, the worth of which surpasses all else.

4:404 Thus, then, we have arrived, within the moral cognition of common human reason, at its principle, which it admittedly does not think so abstractly in a universal form<sup>r</sup> but which it actually has always before its eyes and uses as the norm for its appraisals. Here it would be easy to show how common human reason, with this compass in hand, knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty, if, without in the least teaching it anything new, we only, as did Socrates, make it attentive to its own principle; and that there is, accordingly, no need of science and philosophy to know what one has to do in order to be honest and good, and even wise and virtuous. We might even have assumed in advance that cognizance of what it is incumbent upon everyone to do, and so also to know, would be the affair of every human being, even the most common.

<sup>o</sup> *allgemeine Gesetzgebung*. This phrase, which recurs frequently throughout Kant's works in practical philosophy, presents a number of difficulties. First, it is not always clear whether, within the compound word *Gesetzgebung*, "universal" is intended to modify "law" or "giving." If the context suggests the latter, I have used "universal lawgiving" and indicated the phrase in a footnote. Second, Kant distinguishes between positive law, which is *willkürlich* ("chosen" by the *Gesetzgeber*) and *zufällig* ("contingent"), and natural law, which can be known *a priori*. See *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:224 and 227). Since "legislation" and "legislator" suggest "making" laws or enacting positive laws, I have reserved these words for the context of "public right," which is distinguished from "private right" by the existence of legislative, executive, and judicial authorities.

<sup>p</sup> *abzwingt*. In *The Metaphysics of Morals*, where the concept of *Zwang* comes to the foreground in the context of moral constraint, Kant sometimes gives *Nötigung* as a parenthetical equivalent of *Zwang*. There *Nötigung* is translated as "necessitation," *Zwang* as "constraint," and (*äußere*) *Zwang* as "external constraint" or "coercion." In more general contexts, however, *nötigen* and *zwingen* are sometimes translated as "forced" or "constrained" or "compelled."

<sup>q</sup> Or "have insight into," *einsehe*. On the whole Kant seems to use *einsehen* informally. But see below, 4:446, note q.

<sup>r</sup> *so in einer allgemeinen Form abgedernert*. *Absondern* is sometimes translated as "to separate" or "to set aside."

Yet we cannot consider without admiration how great an advantage the practical faculty of appraising<sup>s</sup> has over the theoretical in common human understanding. In the latter, if common reason ventures to depart from laws of experience and perceptions of the senses it falls into sheer incomprehensibilities<sup>t</sup> and self-contradictions, at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and instability. But in practical matters, it is just when common understanding excludes all sensible incentives from practical laws that its faculty of appraising first begins to show itself to advantage. It then becomes even subtle, whether in quibbling tricks with its own conscience or with other claims regarding what is to be called right, or in sincerely wanting to determine the worth of actions for its own instruction; and, what is most admirable, in the latter case it can even have as good a hope of hitting the mark as any philosopher can promise himself; indeed, it is almost more sure in this matter, because a philosopher, though he cannot have any other principle than that of common understanding, can easily confuse his judgment by a mass of considerations foreign and irrelevant to the matter and deflect it from the straight course. Would it not therefore be more advisable in moral matters to leave the judgment of common reason as it is and, at most, call in philosophy only to present the system of morals all the more completely and apprehensibly<sup>u</sup> and to present its rules in a form more convenient for use (still more for disputation), but not to lead common human understanding, even in practical matters,<sup>v</sup> away from its fortunate simplicity and to put it, by means of philosophy, on a new path of investigation and instruction?

There is something splendid about innocence; but what is bad about it, in turn, is that it cannot protect itself very well and is easily seduced. Because of this, even wisdom – which otherwise consists more in conduct than in knowledge – still needs science, not in order to learn from it but in order to provide access and durability for its precepts. The human being feels within himself a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty, which reason represents to him as so deserving of the highest respect – the counterweight of his needs and inclinations, the entire satisfaction of which he sums up under the name happiness. Now reason issues its precepts unremittingly,<sup>w</sup> without thereby promising anything to the inclinations, and so, as it were, with disregard and contempt for those claims, which are so impetuous and besides so apparently equitable (and refuse to be neutralized by any command). But from this there arises a *natural dialectic*, that is, a propensity to rationalize against those strict laws

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<sup>s</sup> *Beurteilungsvermögen*<sup>t</sup> *Unbegreiflichkeiten*<sup>u</sup> *faßlicher*<sup>v</sup> *in praktischer Absicht*<sup>w</sup> *gebietet die Vernunft . . . unnachlässig . . . ihre Vorschriften*

of duty and to cast doubt upon their validity, or at least upon their purity and strictness, and, where possible, to make them better suited to our wishes and inclinations, that is, to corrupt them at their basis and to destroy all their dignity – something that even common practical reason cannot, in the end, call good.

In this way *common human reason* is impelled, not by some need of speculation (which never touches it as long as it is content to be mere sound reason), but on practical grounds themselves, to go out of its sphere and to take a step into the field of *practical philosophy*, in order to obtain there information and distinct instruction regarding the source of its principle and the correct determination of this principle in comparison with maxims based on need and inclination, so that it may escape from its predicament about claims from both sides and not run the risk of being deprived of all genuine moral principles through the ambiguity<sup>x</sup> into which it easily falls. So there develops unnoticed in common practical reason as well, when it cultivates itself, a *dialectic* that constrains it to seek help in philosophy, just as happens in its theoretical use; and the first will, accordingly, find no more rest than the other except in a complete critique of our reason.

<sup>x</sup> *Zweideutigkeit*