

Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals

Immanuel Kant

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported between square brackets in normal-sized type.] In the title, 'Groundwork' refers not to the foundation that is laid but to the work of laying it.

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Preface

Ancient Greek philosophy was divided into three branches of knowledge: •natural science, •ethics, and •logic. This classification perfectly fits what it is meant to fit; the only improvement it needs is the supplying of the *principle* on which it is based; that will let us be sure that the classification does cover all the ground, and will enable us to define the necessary subdivisions of the three broad kinds of knowledge. [Kant, following the Greek, calls the trio *Physik*, *Ethik* and *Logik*. Our word 'physics' is much too narrow for *Physik*, which is why 'natural science' is preferred here. What is lost is the surface *neatness* of the Greek and German trio, and of the contrast between natural science and metaphysics, *Physik* and *Metaphysik*]

There are two kinds of rational knowledge:

- material knowledge, which concerns some object, and
- formal knowledge, which pays no attention to differences between objects, and is concerned only with the *form* of understanding and of reason, and with the universal rules of thinking.

Formal philosophy is called •'logic'. Material philosophy—having to do with definite objects and the laws that govern them—is divided into two parts, depending on whether the laws in question are laws of •nature or laws of •freedom. Knowledge of laws of the former kind is called •'natural science', knowledge of laws of the latter kind is called •'ethics'. The two are also called 'theory of nature' and 'theory of morals' respectively.

•Logic can't have anything empirical about it—it can't have a part in which universal and necessary laws of thinking are derived from *experience*. If it did, it wouldn't be *logic*—i.e. a set of rules for the understanding or for reason, rules that are valid for *all* thinking and that must be rigorously proved. The •natural and •moral branches of knowledge, on the other

hand, *can* each have an empirical part; indeed, they must do so because each must discover the laws for its domain. For •the former, these are the laws of nature considered as something known through experience; and for •the latter, they are the laws of the human will so far as it is affected by nature. The two sets of laws are nevertheless very different from one another. The laws of *nature* are laws according to which everything *does* happen; the laws of morality are laws according to which everything *ought to* happen; they allow for conditions under which what ought to happen doesn't happen.

•*Empirical* philosophy is philosophy that is based on experience. •*Pure* philosophy is philosophy that presents its doctrines solely on the basis of *a priori* principles. Pure philosophy can in turn be divided into two: when it is entirely *formal* it is •logic; when it is confined to definite objects of the understanding, it is •metaphysics.

In this way there arises the idea of a two-fold metaphysic—a *metaphysic of nature* and a *metaphysic of morals*. Physics, therefore, will have an empirical part and also a rational part, and ethics likewise, though here the empirical part may be called more specifically 'practical anthropology' and the rational part 'morals' in the strict sense.

All crafts, trades and arts have profited from the division of labour; for when •each worker sticks to one particular kind of work that needs to be handled differently from all the others, he can do it better and more easily than when •one person does everything. Where work is not thus differentiated and divided, where everyone is a jack-of-all-trades, the crafts remain at an utterly primitive level. Now, here is a question worth asking: Doesn't pure philosophy in each of its parts require a man who is particularly devoted to that part? Some people regularly mix up the empirical with the rational, suiting their mixture to the taste of the public

without actually knowing what its proportions are; they call themselves *independent thinkers* and write off those who apply themselves exclusively to the rational part of philosophy as mere *ponderers*. Wouldn't things be improved for the learned profession as a whole if those 'independent thinkers' were *warned* that they shouldn't carry on two employments at once—employments that need to be handled quite differently, perhaps requiring different special talents for each—because all you get when one person does several of them is bungling? But all I am asking is this: Doesn't the nature of the science of philosophy require that we carefully separate its empirical from its rational part? That would involve putting

- a metaphysic of nature before real (empirical) natural science, and

- a metaphysic of morals before practical anthropology.

Each of these two branches of metaphysics must be carefully cleansed of everything empirical, so that we can know how much pure reason can achieve in each branch, and from what sources it creates its *a priori* teaching. The metaphysic of morals must be cleansed in this way, no matter who the metaphysicians of morals are going to be—whether they will include all the moralists (there are plenty of them!) or only a few who feel a calling to this task.

Since my purpose here is directed to moral philosophy, I narrow the question I am asking down to this:

- Isn't it utterly necessary to construct a pure moral philosophy that is completely freed from everything that may be only empirical and thus belong to anthropology?

That there must be such a philosophy is self-evident from the common idea of *duty* and *moral laws*. Everyone must admit •that if a law is to hold *morally* (i.e. as a basis for someone's being *obliged* to do something), it must imply

absolute necessity; •that the command: *You are not to lie* doesn't apply only to human beings, as though it had no force for other rational beings (and similarly with all other moral laws properly so called); •that the basis for obligation here mustn't be looked for in people's natures or their circumstances, but •must be found *a priori* solely in the concepts of pure reason; and •that any precept resting on principles of mere experience may be called a practical rule but never a moral law. This last point holds even if there is something universal about the precept in question, and even if its empirical content is very small (perhaps bringing in only the motive involved).

Thus not only are moral laws together with their principles essentially different from all practical knowledge involving anything empirical, but all moral philosophy rests solely on its pure or non-empirical part. Its application to human beings doesn't depend on knowledge of any facts about them (anthropology); it gives them, as rational beings, *a priori* laws—ones that are valid *whatever* the empirical circumstances may be. (Admittedly experience comes into the story in a certain way, because these laws require a power of judgment that has been sharpened by experience—•partly in order to pick out the cases where the laws apply and •partly to let the laws get into the person's will and to stress that they are to be acted on. For a human being has so many preferences working on him that, though he is quite capable of having the *idea* of a practical pure reason, he can't so easily bring it to bear on the details of how he lives his life.)

A metaphysic of morals is therefore indispensable, •for two reasons, one •theoretical and one •practical. One reason comes from •our wish, as theoreticians, to explore the source of the *a priori* practical principles that lie in our reason. The other reason is that •until we have the guide and supreme

norm for making correct moral judgments, morality itself will be subject to all kinds of corruption. Here is the reason for that. For something to be morally good, it isn't enough that it conforms to the moral law; it must be done *because* it conforms to the law. An action that isn't performed with that motive *may* happen to fit the moral law, but its conformity to the law will be chancy and unstable, and more often than not the action won't be lawful at all. So we need to find the moral law in its purity and genuineness, this being what matters most in questions about conduct; and the only place to find it is in a philosophy that is *pure* in the sense I have introduced—see page 1. So metaphysics must lead the way; without it there can't be any moral philosophy. Philosophy that isn't pure, i.e. that mixes pure principles with empirical ones, doesn't deserve the name of 'philosophy' (for what distinguishes philosophy from intelligent common sense is precisely that the former treats as separate kinds of knowledge what the latter jumbles up together). Much less can it count as 'moral philosophy', since by this mixing of pure with empirical it deprives morality of its purity and works against morality's own purposes.

I am pointing to the need for an entirely new field of investigation to be opened up. You might think that there is nothing new about it because it is already present in the famous Wolff's 'introduction' to his moral philosophy (i.e. in what he called 'universal practical philosophy'); but it isn't. Precisely because his work aimed to be *universal* practical philosophy, it didn't deal with any particular *kind* of will, and attended only to *will in general* and with such actions and conditions as that brings in; and so it had no room for the notion of a will that is determined by *a priori* principles with no empirical motives, which means that it had no place for anything that could be called a *pure* will. Thus Wolff's 'introduction' . . . concerns the actions and conditions of the

human will as such, which for the most part are drawn from empirical psychology, whereas the metaphysic of morals aims at a non-empirical investigation, namely investigating the idea and principles of a **possible pure will**. Without having the least right to do so, Wolff's 'universal practical philosophy' does have things to say about *laws* and *duty*; but this doesn't conflict with what I have been saying. For the authors of this intellectual project remain true to *their* idea of it in this part of its territory also: they don't distinguish

- motives that are presented completely *a priori* by reason alone and are thus *moral* in the proper sense of the word,

from

- motives that involve empirical concepts—ones that the understanding turns into universal concepts by comparing experiences.

In the absence of that distinction, they consider motives without regard to how their sources differ; they treat them as all being of the same kind, and merely *count* them; and on that basis they formulate their concept of *obligation*, so-called. This is as far from *moral* obligation as it could be; but in a philosophy that doesn't decide whether the origin of all possible practical concepts is *a priori* or *a posteriori*, what more could you expect?

Intending some day to publish a metaphysic of morals, I now present this groundwork, this exercise of foundation-laying, for it. There is, to be sure, no other basis for such a metaphysic than a critical examination of *pure practical reason*, just as there is no other basis for metaphysic than the critical examination of *pure speculative reason* that I have already published. [The unavoidable word 'speculative' (like its cognate 'speculation') is half of the dichotomy between practical and speculative. A speculative endeavour is one aimed at establishing truths about what *is* the case, implying nothing about what *ought* to be the

case; with no suggestion that it involves guesswork or anything like that. Two of Kant's most famous titles—*Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Practical Reason*—are really short-hand for *Critique of Pure Speculative Reason* and *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*, respectively. That involves the speculative/practical contrast; there is no pure/practical contrast. The second of those two works, incidentally, still lay in the future when Kant wrote the present work.] However, I have three reasons for not plunging straight into a critical examination of pure practical reason. **(1)** It is nowhere near as important to have a critical examination of pure practical reason as it is to have one of pure speculative reason. That is because even in the commonest mind, human reason can easily be brought to a high level of correctness and completeness in moral matters, whereas reason in its theoretical but pure use is wholly dialectical [= 'runs into unavoidable self-contradictions']. **(2)** When we are conducting a critical examination of pure practical reason, I insist that the job is not finished until practical reason and speculative reason are brought together and unified under a common concept of *reason*, because ultimately they have to be merely different applications of one and the same *reason*. But I couldn't achieve this kind of completeness here without confusing the reader by bringing in considerations of an altogether different kind from the matter in hand. That is why I have used the title *Groundwork for the Metaphysic of Morals* rather than *Critique of Pure Practical Reason*. **(3)** A metaphysic of morals, in spite of its forbidding title, can be done in a popular way so that people of ordinary intelligence can easily take it in; so I find it useful to separate this preliminary work on the foundation, dealing with certain subtleties here so that I can keep them out of the more comprehensible work that will come later. [Here and throughout, 'popular' means 'pertaining to or suitable for ordinary not very educated people'. The notion of being widely liked is not prominent in its meaning.]

In laying a foundation, however, all I am doing is seeking and establishing the *supreme principle of morality*—a self-contained and entirely completable task that should be kept separate from every other moral inquiry. Until now there hasn't been nearly enough attention to this important question of the nature of and basis for the supreme principle of morality. My conclusions about it could be clarified by bringing the supreme principle to bear on the whole system of morality, and confirmed by how well it would serve all through. But I must forgo this advantage: basically it would gratify me rather than helping anyone else, because a principle's being easy to use and its seeming to serve well don't prove for sure that it is right. They are more likely merely to create a *bias* in its favour, which will get in the way of its being ruthlessly probed and evaluated in its own right and without regard to consequences.

[Kant has, and uses in the present work, a well-known distinction between 'analytic' propositions (known to be true just by analysing their constituent concepts) and 'synthetic' propositions (can't be known without bringing in something that the concepts don't contain). In this next sentence he uses those terms in a different way—one that goes back to Descartes—in which they mark off not two kinds of proposition but two ways of proceeding. In the analytic procedure, you start with what's familiar and on that basis work out what the relevant general principles are; synthetic procedure goes the other way—you start with general principles and derive familiar facts from them.]

In the present work I have adopted the method that is, I think, the most suitable if one wants to proceed analytically from common knowledge to settling what its supreme principle is, and then synthetically from examining this principle and its sources back to common knowledge to which it applies. So the work is divided up thus:

Chapter 1 Moving from common-sense knowledge to philosophical knowledge about morality.

Chapter 2 Moving from popular moral philosophy to the

metaphysic of morals.

Chapter 3 Final step from the metaphysic of morals to the critical examination of pure practical reason.

Chapter 1:

Moving from common-sense knowledge to philosophical knowledge about morality

Nothing in the world—or *out of it!*—can possibly be conceived that could be called ‘good’ without qualification except a GOOD WILL. Mental *talents* such as intelligence, wit, and judgment, and *temperaments* such as courage, resoluteness, and perseverance are doubtless in many ways good and desirable; but they can become extremely bad and harmful if the person’s *character* isn’t good—i.e. if the *will* that is to make use of these •gifts of nature isn’t good. Similarly with •gifts of fortune. Power, riches, honour, even health, and the over-all well-being and contentment with one’s condition that we call ‘happiness’, create pride, often leading to arrogance, if there isn’t a good will to correct their influence on the mind. . . . Not to mention the fact that the sight of someone who shows no sign of a pure and good will and yet enjoys uninterrupted prosperity will never give pleasure to an impartial rational observer. So it seems that without a good will one can’t even be worthy of being happy.

Even qualities that are conducive to this good will and can make its work easier have no intrinsic unconditional worth. We rightly hold them in high esteem, but only because we assume them to be accompanied by a good will; so we can’t take them to be absolutely •or unconditionally• good.

•Moderation in emotions and passions, self-control, and calm deliberation not only are good in many ways but seem even to constitute part of the person’s *inner* worth, and they were indeed unconditionally valued by the ancients. Yet they are very far from being good without qualification—good in themselves, good in any circumstances—for without the principles of a good will they can become extremely bad: •for example•, a villain’s •coolness makes him far more dangerous and more straightforwardly abominable to us than he would otherwise have seemed.

What makes a good will *good*? It isn’t what it brings about, its usefulness in achieving some intended end. Rather, good will is good because of *how it wills*—i.e. it is *good in itself*. Taken just in itself it is to be valued incomparably more highly than anything that could be brought about by it in the satisfaction of some preference—or, if you like, the sum total of all preferences! Consider this case:

Through bad luck or a miserly endowment from step-motherly nature, this person’s will has no power at all to accomplish its purpose; not even the greatest effort on his part would enable it to achieve anything it aims at. But he does still have a good will—not as a

mere wish but as the summoning of all the means in his power.

The good will of this person would sparkle like a jewel all by itself, as something that had its full worth in itself. Its value wouldn't go up or down depending on how useful or fruitless it was. If it was useful, that would only be the *setting* of the jewel, so to speak, enabling us to handle it more conveniently in commerce (a diamond ring is easier to manage than a diamond) or to get those who don't know much about jewels to look at it. But the setting doesn't affect the value of the jewel and doesn't recommend it the experts.

But there is something extremely strange in this idea of the absolute worth of the will—the mere *will*—with no account taken of any use to which it is put. It is indeed so strange that, despite the agreement even of common sense (an agreement I have exhibited in the preceding three paragraphs), you're bound to suspect that there may be nothing to it but high-flown fancy, and that I have misunderstood what nature was up to in appointing reason as the ruler of our will. So let us critically examine the idea from the point of view of this suspicion.

We take it as an axiom that in the natural constitution of an organized being (i.e. one suitably adapted to life) no organ will be found that isn't perfectly adapted to its purpose, whatever that is. Now suppose that nature's real purpose for you, a being with reason and will, were that you should survive, thrive, and be happy—in that case nature would have hit upon a *very* poor arrangement in appointing your *reason* to carry out this purpose! For all the actions that you need to perform in order to carry out *this* intention of nature - and indeed the entire regulation of your conduct—would be marked out for you much more exactly and reliably by *instinct* than it ever could be by *reason*. And if nature had

favoured you by giving you reason as well as instinct, the role of reason would have been to let you contemplate the happy constitution of your nature, to admire it, to rejoice in it, and to be grateful for it to its beneficent cause; *not* to let you subject your faculty of desire to that weak and delusive guidance and to interfere with nature's purpose. In short, nature would have taken care that reason didn't intrude into *practical morality* and have the presumption, with its weak insight, to think out for itself the plan of happiness and how to get it. Nature would have taken over the choice not only of ends but also of the means to them, and with wise foresight she would have entrusted both to instinct alone. [Kant presents this paragraph in terms not of 'you' but of 'a being'.]

What we find in fact is that the more a cultivated reason devotes itself to the enjoyment of life and happiness, the more the person falls short of true contentment; which is why many people—especially those who have made the greatest use of reason—have a certain hostility towards reason, though they may not be candid enough to admit it. They have drawn many advantages from reason; never mind about its role in the inventions that lead to ordinary luxuries; my interest is in the advantages of intellectual pursuits, which eventually seem to these people to be also a luxury of the understanding. But after looking over all this they find that they have actually brought more trouble on themselves than they have gained in happiness; and eventually they come not to *despise* but to *envy* the common run of people who stay closer to merely natural instinct and don't give reason much influence on their doings. So much for the drawbacks of well-being and happiness as one's dominant aim in life. As for those who play down or outright deny the boastful eulogies that are given of the happiness and contentment that reason can supposedly bring us: the judgment they are making doesn't involve gloom, or

ingratitude for how well the world is governed. Rather, it's based on the idea of another and far nobler purpose for their existence. It is for achieving *this* purpose, not happiness, that reason is properly intended; and this purpose is the supreme condition, so that the private purposes of men must for the most part take second place to it. Its being the supreme or highest condition means that it isn't itself conditional on anything else; it is to be aimed at *no matter what* else is the case; which is why our private plans must stand out of its way.

So reason isn't competent to act as a guide that will lead the will reliably to its objectives and will satisfy all our needs (indeed it *adds* to our needs!); an implanted instinct would do this job much more reliably. Nevertheless, reason is given to us as a *practical* faculty, that is, one that is meant to have an influence on the *will*. Its proper function must be to produce a will that is good *in itself* and not good *as a means*. Why? Because

- nature has everywhere distributed capacities suitable to the functions they are to perform,
- the *means* to good are, as I have pointed out, better provided for by instinct, and
- reason and it alone can produce a will that is good *in itself*.

This *good* will needn't be the sole and complete good, but it must be the condition of all others, even of the desire for happiness. So we have to consider two purposes: **(1)** the unconditional purpose of producing a good will, and **(2)** the conditional purpose of being happy. Of these, **(1)** requires the cultivation of reason, which - at least in this life—in many ways *limits* and can indeed almost *eliminate* **(2)** the goal of happiness. This state of affairs is entirely compatible with the wisdom of nature; it doesn't have nature pursuing its goal clumsily; because reason, recognizing that its highest

practical calling is to establish a good will, can by achieving that goal get a contentment of its own kind (the kind that comes from attaining a goal set by reason), even though this gets in the way of things that the person merely *prefers*.

So we have to develop •the concept of a will that is to be esteemed as good in itself without regard to anything else, •the concept that always takes first place in judging the total worth of our actions, with everything else depending on it, •a concept that is already lodged in any natural and sound understanding, and doesn't need to be *taught* so much as to be *brought to light*. In order to develop and unfold it, I'll dig into the concept of duty, which *contains* it. The concept of a good will is present in the concept of duty, •not shining out in all its objective and unconditional glory, but rather •in a manner that brings it under certain subjective •restrictions and •hindrances; but •these are far from concealing it or disguising it, for they rather bring it out by contrast and make it shine forth all the more brightly. I shall now look at that contrast.

•My topic is the difference between doing something from duty and doing it for other reasons. In tackling this, I shall set aside without discussion two kinds of case—one for which my question doesn't arise, and a second for which the question arises but is too easy to answer for the case to be interesting or instructive. Following those two, I shall introduce two further kinds of case. **(1)** I shan't discuss actions which—even if they are useful in some way or other—are clearly *opposed to* duty, because with them the question of doing them *from duty* doesn't even arise. **(2)** I shall also ignore cases where someone does *A*, which really is in accord with duty, but where what he directly *wants* isn't to perform *A* but to perform *B* which somehow leads to or involves *A*. For example: he (*B*) unbolts the door so as to escape from the fire, and in so doing he (*A*) enables

others to escape also. There is no need to spend time on such cases, because *in them* it is easy to tell whether an action that is in accord with duty is done •from duty or rather •for some selfish purpose. **(3)** It is far harder to detect that difference when the action the person performs—one that is in accord with duty—is what he directly wanted to do, rather than being something he did only because it was involved in something *else* that he directly wanted to do. Take the example of a shop-keeper who charges the same prices for selling his goods to inexperienced customers as for selling them to anyone else. This is in accord with duty. But there is also a prudential and not-duty-based motive that the shop-keeper might have for this course of conduct: when there is a buyers' market, he may sell as cheaply to children as to others so as not to lose customers. Thus the customer is honestly served, but we can't infer from this that the shop-keeper has behaved in this way from duty and principles of honesty. His own advantage requires this behaviour, and we can't assume that in addition he directly wants something for his customers and out of love for them he charges them all the same price. His conduct of his policy on pricing comes neither from *duty* nor from *directly wanting* it, but from a selfish purpose. [Kant's German really does say first that the shop-keeper *isn't* led by a direct want and then that he *is*. His point seems to be this: The shop-keeper *does* want to treat all his customers equitably; his intention is aimed at precisely that fact about his conduct (unlike the case in **(2)** where the agent enables other people to escape but isn't aiming at that *at all*). But the shop-keeper's intention doesn't *stop there*, so to speak; he wants to treat his customers equitably not because of what he wants for *them*, but because of how he wants them to behave later in *his* interests. This involves a kind of indirectness, which doesn't assimilate this case to **(2)** but does distinguish it from a fourth kind of conduct that still isn't morally worthy but not because it

involves the 'indirectness' of **(2)** or that of **(3)**.]

(4) It is a duty to preserve one's life, and moreover everyone directly wants to do so. But because of the power of that want, the often anxious care that most men have for their survival has no intrinsic worth, and the maxim *Preserve yourself* has no moral content. Men preserve their lives *according to* duty, but not *from* duty. But now consider this case:

Adversities and hopeless sorrow have completely taken away this unfortunate man's relish for life. But his fate has not made him passively despondent or dejected. He is strong in soul, and is exasperated at how things have gone for him, and would like actively to do something about it. Specifically, he *wishes for death*. But he preserves his life without loving it, not led by any want or fear, but acting from duty.

For this person the maxim *Preserve yourself* has moral content.

We have a duty to be charitably helpful where we can, and many people are so sympathetically constituted that without any motive of vanity or selfishness they find an inner satisfaction in spreading joy and take delight in the contentment of others if they have made it possible. But I maintain that such behaviour, done in that spirit, has no true moral worth, however amiable it may be and however much it accords with duty. It should be classed with actions done from other wants, such as the desire for honour. With luck, someone's desire for honour may lead to conduct that in fact accords with duty and does good to many people; in that case it deserves praise and encouragement; but it doesn't deserve high esteem, because the maxim on which the person is acting doesn't have the moral content of an action done not because the person *likes* acting in that way but from duty. [In this context, 'want' and 'liking' and 'desire' are used

to translate *Neigung*, elsewhere in this version translated as 'preference'; other translations mostly use 'inclination'.]

Now consider a special case:

This person has been a friend to mankind, but his mind has become clouded by a sorrow of his own that has extinguished all feeling for how others are faring. He still has the power to benefit others in distress, but their need leaves him untouched because he is too preoccupied with his own. But now he tears himself out of his dead insensibility and acts charitably purely from duty, without feeling any want or liking so to behave.

Now, for the first time, his conduct has genuine moral worth. Having been deprived by nature of a warm-hearted temperament, this man could find in himself a source from which to give himself a far higher worth than he could have got through such a temperament. It is just here that the worth of character is brought out, which is morally the incomparably highest of all: he is beneficent not from preference but from duty.

To secure one's own happiness is a duty (at least indirectly), because discontent with one's condition—bundled along by many cares and unmet needs—could easily become a great *temptation to transgress against duties*. But quite apart from duty, all men have the strongest and deepest desire [*Neigung*] for happiness, because in the idea of happiness all our desires are brought together in a single sum-total. But the injunction 'Be happy!' often takes a form in which it *thwarts* some desires, so that a person can't get a clear and secure concept of •the sum-total of satisfactions that goes under the name 'happiness'. So it isn't surprising that the prospect of •a single satisfaction, definite as to what it is and when it can be had, can outweigh a fluctuating idea •such as that of happiness•. For example, a man with the gout

[a painful ailment made worse by alcohol and rich food] can choose to enjoy what he likes and put up with the consequences, because according to his calculations (this time, anyway) he hasn't sacrificed present pleasure to a possibly groundless expectation of the 'happiness' that health is supposed to bring. But even for this man, whose will is not settled by the general desire for happiness and for whom health plays no part in his calculations, there still remains—as there does for everyone—the law that *he ought to promote his happiness, not from wanting or liking but from duty*. Only by following this could his conduct have true moral worth.

No doubt this is how we should understand the scriptural passages that command us to love our neighbour and even our enemy. We can't be commanded to *feel* love for someone, or to simply *prefer* that he thrive. There are two sorts of love: •practical love that lies in the will and in principles of action, and •pathological love that lies in the direction the person's feelings and tender sympathies take. [Kant uses 'pathological' simply to mean that this is a *state* that the person is in; from Greek *pathos* = 'that which happens to a person'; no suggestion of abnormality. His point is that being a *loving* person is no more morally significant than being a *stupid* person or a *right-handed* person.] The latter of these cannot be commanded, but the former can be—and that is a command to do good to others from duty, even when you don't want to do it or like doing it, and indeed even when you naturally and unconquerably *hate* doing it.

•So much for the **first proposition** of morality:

•For an action to have genuine moral worth it must be done from duty. •

The **second proposition** is:

•An action that is done from duty doesn't get its moral value from the purpose that's to be achieved through it but from the maxim that it involves, •giving the *reason* why the person acts thus. •

So the action's moral value doesn't depend on whether what is aimed at in it is actually achieved, but solely on the principle *of the will* from which the action is done, irrespective of anything the faculty of *desire* may be aiming at. From what I have said it is clear that the purposes we may have in acting, and their effects as drivers of the will towards desired ends, can't give our actions any unconditional value, any *moral* value. Well, then, if the action's moral value isn't to be found in

- the will in its relation to its hoped-for effect,

where *can* it be found? The only possible source for it is

- the principle on which the will acts—and never mind the ends that may be achieved by the action.

For the will stands at the crossroads, so to speak, at the intersection between •its *a priori* principle, which is formal, and •its *a posteriori* driver—the contingent desire that acts on it—which is material. In that position it must be determined by something; and if it is done from duty it must be determined by the formal principle of the will, since every material principle—every contingent driver of the will—has been withdrawn from it.

The **third proposition**—a consequence of the first two—I would express as follows:

- To have a duty is to be required to act in a certain way out of respect for law.

(1) As for what will result from my action, I can certainly *prefer* or *be drawn to* it, but I can't have *respect* for it; to earn my respect it would have to be something the will *does*, not merely something that its doings *lead to*. (2) Similarly, I can't •respect any want or preference: if the preference is mine, the most I can do is to •endorse it; if it is someone else's I can even •love it—i.e. see it as favourable to my interests. What can get respect and can thus serve as a command is •something that isn't (1) a consequence of my

volition but only a source for it, and isn't (2) in the service of my preferences but rather overpowers them or at least prevents them from being considered in the choice I make; •this something is, in a word, *law* itself. Suppose now that someone acts from duty: the influence of his *preferences* can't have anything to do with this, and so facts about what he might achieve by his action don't come into it either; so what is there left that can lead him to act as he does? If the question means 'What is there objectively, i.e. distinct from himself, that determines his will in this case?' the only possible answer is *law*. And if the question concerns what there is *in the person* that influences his will—i.e. what subjectively influences it—the answer has to be *his respect for this practical law*, and thus his acceptance of the maxim *I am to follow this law even if it thwarts all my desires*. (A maxim is a subjective principle of volition. The objective principle is the practical law itself; it would also be the subjective principle for all rational beings if reason fully controlled the formation of preferences.)

So an action's moral value doesn't lie in •the effect that is expected from it, or in •any principle of action that motivates it because of this expected effect. All the expected effects—something agreeable for me, or even happiness for others—could be brought about through other causes and don't *need* •the will of a rational being, whereas the highest good—what is unconditionally good—can be found only in •such a will. So this wonderful good, which we call *moral* goodness, can't consist in anything but *the thought of law* in itself *that only a rational being can have*—with the will being moved to act by this thought and not by the hoped-for effect of the action. When the person acts according to this conception, this moral goodness is already present •in him; we don't have to look for it •in the upshot of

his action.¹ [In passages like this, ‘thought’ translates *Vorstellung* = ‘mental representation’.]

So we have a law the thought of which can settle the will without reference to any expected result, and *must* do so if the will is to be called absolutely good without qualification; what kind of law can this be? Since I have robbed the will of any *impulses* that could come to it from obeying any law, nothing remains to serve as a ‘guiding’ principle of the will except *conduct’s universally conforming to law as such*. That is, **I ought never to act in such a way that I couldn’t also will that the maxim on which I act should be a universal law**. In this context the ‘guiding’ principle of the will is conformity to law as such, not bringing in any particular law governing some class of actions; and it *must* serve as the will’s principle if *duty* is not to be a vain delusion and chimerical concept. Common sense in its practical judgments is in perfect agreement with this, and constantly has this principle in view.

Consider the question: May I when in difficulties make a promise that I intend not to keep? The question obviously has two meanings: is it •prudent to make a false promise?

does it conform to •duty to make a false promise? No doubt it often *is* •prudent, but not as often as you might think. Obviously the false promise isn’t made prudent by its merely extricating me from my present difficulties; I have to think about whether it will in the long run cause more trouble than it saves in the present. Even with all my supposed cunning, the consequences can’t be so easily foreseen. People’s loss of trust in me might be far more disadvantageous than the trouble I am now trying to avoid, and it is hard to tell whether it mightn’t be more *prudent* to act according to a universal maxim *not ever to make a promise that I don’t intend to keep*. But I quickly come to see that such a maxim is based only on fear of consequences. Being truthful from •duty is an entirely different thing from being truthful out of •fear of bad consequences; for in •the former case a law is included in the concept of the action itself (so that the right answer to ‘What are you doing?’ will include a mention of that law); whereas in •the latter I must first look outward to see what results my action may have. [In the preceding sentence, Kant speaks of a ‘law for me’ and of results ‘for me’.] To deviate from the principle of duty is certainly bad; whereas to be unfaithful to my maxim

¹ It might be objected that I tried to take refuge in an obscure feeling behind the word ‘respect’, instead of clearing things up through a concept of reason. Although respect is indeed a feeling, it doesn’t come from outer influence; rather, it is a •feeling that a rational concept creates unaided; so it is different in kind from all the •feelings caused from outside, the ones that can come from desire or fear. When I directly recognize something as a law for myself I recognize it *with respect*, which merely means that I am conscious of submitting my will to a law without interference from any other influences on my mind. The will’s being directly settled by law, and the consciousness of this happening, is called ‘respect’; so *respect* should be seen as an *effect* of the law’s operation on the person’s will, not as a *cause* of it. Really, respect is the thought of a value that breaks down my self-love. Thus it is not something to be either desired or feared, though it has something analogous to both •desire and fear. The only thing that can be respected is law, and it has to be the law that we •impose on ourselves yet •recognize as necessary in itself.

•As a law it makes us subject to it, without consulting our self-love; which gives it some analogy to fear.

•As imposed on us by ourselves, it is a consequence of our will; which gives it some analogy to preference.

•This is really the only *basic* sense of the term ‘respect’. Any •respect for a *person* is only •respect for the law (of righteousness, etc.) of which the person provides an example. Our respect for a person’s talents, for instance, is our recognition that we ought to practice until we are as talented as he is; we see him as a kind of example of a •law, because we regard it as our •duty to improve our talents. •So respect for persons is a disguised form of respect for law. All moral *concern* (as it is called) consists solely in respect for the law.

of prudence may be very advantageous to me, though it is certainly safer to abide by it. How can I know whether a deceitful promise is consistent with duty? The shortest way to go about finding out is also the surest. It is to ask myself:

- Would I be content for my maxim (of getting out of a difficulty through a false promise) to hold as a *universal law*, for myself as well as for others?

•That is tantamount to asking:

- Could I say to myself that anyone may make a false promise when he is in a difficulty that he can't get out of in any other way?

Immediately I realize that I could will •the lie but not •a universal law to lie; for such a law would result in there being no promises at all, because it would be futile to offer stories about my future conduct to people who wouldn't believe me; or if they carelessly did believe me and were taken in •by my promise•, would pay me back in my own coin. Thus my maxim would necessarily destroy itself as soon as it was made a universal law.

So I don't need to be a very penetrating thinker to bring it about that my will is morally good. Inexperienced in how the world goes, unable to prepare for all its contingencies, I need only to ask myself: *Can you will that your maxim become a universal law?* If not, it must be rejected, not because of any harm it might bring to anyone, but because there couldn't be a system of •universal legislation that included it as one of its principles, and •that is the kind of legislation that reason forces me to respect. I don't yet see what it is based on (a question that a philosopher may investigate), but I at least understand these two:

- It is something whose value far outweighs all the value of everything aimed at by *desire*,
- My duty consists in my having to act from pure respect for the practical law.

Every other motive must yield to duty, because it is the condition of a •will that is good in itself, and the value of •that surpasses everything.

And so in the common-sense understanding of morality we have worked our way through to its *principle*. Admittedly, common sense doesn't have the abstract thought of this principle as something universal, but it always has the principle in view and uses it as the standard for its judgments.

It would be easy to show how common sense, with this compass in its hand, knows very well how to distinguish •good from •bad, •consistent with duty from •inconsistent with duty. To do this it doesn't have to be taught anything new; it merely needs (Socrates-fashion) to have its attention drawn to the principle that it already has; and thus •we can see• that neither science nor philosophy is needed in order to know what one must do to be honest and good, and even to be wise and virtuous. That's something we might well have assumed in advance: that the knowledge of what every person is obliged to do (and thus also what everyone is obliged to know) is *everyone's* business, even the most common person's. We can't help admiring the way common sense's ability to make •practical judgment outstrips its ability to make •theoretical ones. In •theoretical judgments, if common sense ventures to go beyond the laws of experience and perceptions of the senses, it falls into sheer inconceivabilities and self-contradictions, or at least into a chaos of uncertainty, obscurity, and instability. On the other hand, it is just when common sense *excludes* •everything empirical—that is•, all action-drivers that bring in the senses—that its ability to make •practical judgments first shows itself to advantage. It may then start splitting hairs, quibbling with its own conscience or with other claims concerning what should be called right, or wanting to satisfy itself about the exact worth of certain actions; and the great

thing about these activities of common sense is that in them it has as good a chance of getting it right as any philosopher has—perhaps even a better chance, because the philosopher doesn't have any *principle* that common sense lacks and his judgment is easily confused by a mass of irrelevant considerations so that it easily goes astray. Here are two ways in which we could inter-relate common-sense morality and philosophy: **(1)** We could go along with common-sense moral judgments, and bring in philosophy—if at all—only so as to make the system of morals more complete and comprehensible and its rules more convenient for use, especially in disputation. **(2)** We could steer common sense away from its fortunate simplicity in practical matters, and lead it *through* philosophy into a new path of inquiry and instruction. From what I have said, isn't it clear that **(1)** is the wiser option to take?

Innocence is indeed a glorious thing, but it is very sad that it doesn't take care of itself, and is easily led astray. For this reason, even wisdom—which consists in •doing and allowing more than in •knowing—needs science [*Wissenschaft*], not as something to learn from but as something that will ensure that wisdom's precepts get into the mind and stay there. [‘Knowing’ translates *Wissen*, which is half the word translated as ‘science’, an overlap that Kant surely intended. The ‘science’ in question here is presumably metaphysics.] Without that help, they are not likely to ‘stay there’, and here is why. Against all commands of duty that a man's reason presents to him as deserving of so much respect, he feels in himself a powerful •counter-weight—namely, his needs and preferences, the complete satisfaction of which he lumps together as ‘happiness’. Reason issues inexorable commands without promising the preferences anything •by way of recompense. It ignores and has no respect for the claims •that desire makes—claims that are so impetuous and yet so

plausible, and which refuse to give way to any command. This gives rise to a natural dialectic—an intellectual conflict or contradiction—in the form of a propensity to argue against the stern laws of duty and their validity, or at least to cast doubt on their purity and strictness, and, where possible, to make them more accordant with our wishes and desires. This undermines the very foundations of duty's laws and destroys their dignity—which is something that even *ordinary* practical reason can't, when it gets right down to it, call good.

In this way common sense is driven to go outside its own territory and to take a step into the field of practical *philosophy*. It doesn't do this because of any speculative (= ‘theory-building’) need, which is something that never occurs to it so long as it is satisfied to remain merely healthy reason. [Kant's phrase translated here as ‘common sense’ is *gemeine Menschvernunft*, which contains *Vernunft* = ‘reason’. Putting its bits together it could be taken to mean ‘general human reason’, but ‘common sense’ is about right.] Rather, it is driven to philosophy in order to become •informed and clearly •directed regarding the source of its principle and how exactly it differs from the maxims based on needs and preferences. It does this so as to escape from the embarrassment of opposing claims, and to avoid risking the loss of all genuine moral principles through the ambiguity in which common sense is easily involved—the ambiguity between the moral and prudential readings of questions about what one ought to do. Thus when common-sense moral thought develops itself, a dialectic surreptitiously occurs that forces it to look to philosophy for help, and the very same thing happens in common-sense theoretical thinking. It is true of each kind of ordinary or common-sense thought: each can come to rest only in a complete critical examination of our reason.