Religion within the Limits of Bare Reason

Immanuel Kant

[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 brackets in normal-sized type.—Some footnotes are presented in the main text instead of at the bottom of the page; this is because of formatting problems; the reasons are aesthetic, and have nothing to do with content.—Passages starting with † were added in the second edition (see page 6).

First launched: October 2013

Contents

Glossary

anschaulich: This is left untranslated on page 30 because no English word or short phrase quite does the job. To make something *anschaulich* is to make it—in this case metaphorically speaking—solid, something we can grab onto, push around, manipulate.

archetype: Translates Kant's *Urbild*, and means 'model' or 'prime example'—something to be followed or copied..

atonement: This English word comes from the notion of two people—e.g. a sinner and God—being *at one*; that goes with Kant's mention on page 63 of *Versöhnung* = 'reconciliation', suggesting that the core notion concerns God's attitude to the sinner, almost how he feels about him. But the word translated—wrongly but unavoidably—as 'atonement' is *Genugthuung*, which comes from *genug* = 'enough', 'sufficient'; the thought is that of reparation, paying a penalty. That is the emphasis all through the third Essay: Kant speaks of it as *legally* undoing what you have done; his phrase *Bezahlung für seine Schuld* means 'reparation for his guilt' and equally well means 'payment of his debt'.

change of heart: This nearly always translated *Sinnesänderung*, literally = 'change in thinking' or 'change of mentality'. On pages 24, 38 and 42 it translates *Herzensänderung*, literally = 'change of heart'. There's no evidence that Kant intended a distinction here, and much that he didn't.

chiliasm: 'The belief that Christ will reign in bodily presence on earth for a thousand years' (OED).

constitutive: A constitutive principle, for Kant, is a principle saying that such-and-such is the case, rather than serving merely as advice or recommendation or the like. (Cf. 'regulative', below.)

debt: This translates *Schuld*, which also means 'guilt'. In many passages Kant clearly means both at once, with 'debt' as a kind of metaphor for 'guilt'.

deduction: In Kant's terminology, the 'deduction' of an idea is an intellectual process in which the idea is introduced and in some way defended or justified.

determine: The basic meaning of 'determine' is *settle*, *fix*, *pin down*; thus, to determine what to do next is to decide what to do next, to settle the question. When on page 9 Kant says that in a morally bad action the will can't be 'determined' by anything outside it, the word conveys the notion of *fixed*, which would rule out freedom.

duty: This translates *Pflicht*, which Kant uses as his all-purpose name for what one morally ought to do. Most English-language moral philosophers also use 'I have a duty to do A' to mean 'I morally ought to do A'; but that isn't what it means in good standard English, where the term 'duty' is tightly tied to jobs, roles, social positions. The duties of a janitor; the duties of a landowner.

evil: This as a noun translates *Böse* and means merely 'something bad'. (The corresponding adjective (*böse*) is translated here by 'bad', so as to avoid loading it with all the force 'evil' has in English when used as an adjective.) For the noun, 'evil' is used because we don't have 'bad' as a noun as we have 'good' ('friendship is a good'). This has become a standard philosophical usage—e.g. 'the problem of evil' means 'the problem posed by the existence of bad states of affairs'.

idea: In Kant's terminology an 'idea' is a concept that comes from or belongs to *reason*, as distinct from the concepts

belonging to *the understanding*, which are what we use in thinking about the contingent empirical world.

ideal: As a noun this translates Kant's *Ideal*, a technical term which he explains in the first *Critique* at B 595–7, and is still using in the same sense here. An ideal is an idea [see above] which is the idea of an individual thing. The idea of *perfect moral purity* is not an ideal, the idea of *God* is an ideal. Kant does think of ideals as things we can steer by, try to live up to, etc., but the core meaning is that of 'idea of an individual'. When this word first occurs here (on page 31) Kant moves rapidly between 'idea' and 'ideal'; but that is harmless, because any ideal is an idea.

illuminism: 'A doctrine involving belief in or a claim to intellectual or spiritual enlightenment' (OED).

man: This translates Kant's *Mann* and (more often) his *Mensch*. The latter can be translated as 'human being', but in this version 'man' has been preferred as less fussy. On page 21 the biblical narrative of The Fall is of course really about a woman, Eve.

personality: In uses starting on page 12 the word refers to the condition of having respect for the moral law. In the uses starting on page 82 it involves the doctrine of the Trinity—one God, three persons. Kant's uses of *Persölichkeit* on page 71 clearly concern personal identity, and are translated accordingly.

***Pfaffentum*:** The nearest English is 'priesthood' but that doesn't capture the derogatory tone of it, which Kant explains on page 97. The corresponding down-putting word for priests is **Pfaffen**.

principle: Kant often uses *Princip* in a sense, once common but now obsolete, in which it means 'source', 'cause', 'driver', 'energizer', or the like. The same was true of the French *principe*, the Latin *principia*, and the English 'principle'. On page 45 the phrase 'a realm in which the power is held by principles' seems to be using the word in both senses at once. And on page 72 (the last of the **how** items) Kant is clearly talking about a 'principle' as a cause or driver and yet, oddly, the word he uses is not *Princip* but *Grundsatz* = 'basic proposition', which is hardly ever used in that way.

rational: This translates Kant's *rational*, an adjective that occurs only four times in the whole work, once on page 1 and three times on page 65.

regulative: A regulative principle, for Kant, is a principle that serves as advice or recommendation or even command, but not as giving any information. (Cf. 'constitutive', above.)

science: The use of this to translate *Wissenschaft* is practically unavoidable, but it has to be taken broadly as covering all the learned disciplines, so that (e.g.) history and theology are 'sciences'.

statutory: A statutory law is one that comes from someone's *choosing* to make it a law. The idea on page 56 of God's laws as being 'merely statutory' is the idea of their being laws only because God has decreed them.

subtle reasoning: This weakly 'translates' the various cognates of the verb *vernünfteln*, a splendid off-shoot of the noun *Vernunft* = 'reason', meaning: to employ a parade of super-subtle possibly invalid reasoning, weaving webs, splitting hairs, and so on. Neither this nor the corresponding noun *Vernünftelei* has a compact English equivalent.

thaumaturgy: 'The performance of miracles or wonders; magic' (OED).

theodicy: Attempt to reconcile the existence of bad states of affairs with the goodness of God.

vicarious: Acting in place of someone else. A vicarious atonement for my sins is an act of atonement performed by someone other than myself. Kant's reference on page 42 to 'the vicarious ideal of the son of God' means the idea of the son of God as a stand-in for God. In this version the word translates *stellvertretend* = 'place-taking'. The corresponding noun *Stellvertreter* is translated by 'proxy'.

Weltwesen: Literally 'world-being'; the ten occurrences of this word are left untranslated because the preparer of this version can't get a good sense of what Kant means by it.

Second Essay: The conflict of the good with the bad principle for command over man

[On the word 'principle' as used here and in the titles of the other three Essays, see the Glossary.]

We can't become morally good just by allowing the seed of goodness implanted in our species to develop unhindered; we also have to fight against an active and opposing cause of evil. The ancient Stoics especially called attention to this by their watchword *virtue*, which in Greek and in Latin signifies courage and daring and thus presupposes the presence of an enemy. In this regard 'virtue' is a noble name, and isn't harmed by the fact that it has often been boastfully misused and (like the word 'enlightenment' recently) ridiculed. Simply to demand courage is to go half-way towards giving it; whereas the lazy and timid way of thinking (in morality and religion) that entirely mistrusts itself and waits for outside aid slackens a man's powers and makes him unworthy even of being helped.

Yet those valiant Stoics mistook their enemy. It is not

> the merely undisciplined natural inclinations that present themselves so openly to everyone's consciousness,

but rather

> an invisible foe that hides behind reason and is therefore all the more dangerous.

They invoked wisdom against •folly, which carelessly lets itself be deceived by the inclinations, instead of against the human heart's •wickedness, which secretly undermines a man's disposition with soul-destroying principles.[1]

There's nothing wrong with natural inclinations, considered in themselves, and trying to wipe them out would be futile, and indeed harmful and wrong. Let us instead tame them, so that instead of tearing one another to pieces they can be brought into harmony in a whole that is called *happiness*. The reason that brings this about is **prudence**. But the only thing that should be completely eradicated as bad in itself and absolutely reprehensible is what is opposed to the moral law; and the reason that teaches this truth, especially when it puts it into actual practice, is the only thing that deserves the name of **wisdom**. . . .

[1] These philosophers based their universal ethical principle on the dignity of human nature, i.e. on its freedom from the power of the inclinations; and they couldn't have taken their stand on anything better or nobler. They then derived the moral laws directly from reason, which alone legislates morally and whose command through these laws is absolute. So they had everything exactly right—objectively with regard to the rule, and subjectively with reference to the incentive—provided the man was credited with having an uncorrupted will to incorporate these laws unhesitatingly into his maxims. But that latter presupposition is just where they went wrong. However early we direct our attention to our moral state, it's never too early for us to start dislodging from its stronghold the evil that has already entered in (and couldn't have done so if we hadn't brought it into our maxims); that is, the first really good act that a man can perform has as its starting-point the evil that resides not in his •inclinations but in his •perverted maxim, and so in freedom itself. The inclinations merely make it hard to **act on** the good maxim that opposes them; but the genuine evil consists in the man's not **willing** to resist the inclinations when they tempt him to transgress. This disposition of his is the true enemy. The inclinations are opponents of basic principles in general, whether good or bad; and the high-minded Stoic moral principle is of value as a general discipline of the inclinations, aiming to get the subject to be guided by basic principles. But when it comes to specific principles of moral goodness that ought to be present as maxims, but aren't, there must be in the subject some other opponent that virtue must tackle. . . .

So when the Stoics saw a man's moral struggle merely as a conflict with his inclinations—innocent in themselves, but hindrances to his doing his duty—the only wrong-doing they could pin-point was his *not* fighting these inclinations; he hadn't accepted any positive principle that was bad in itself. Yet this failure-to-fight is itself contrary to duty (a transgression) and not a mere lapse of nature, and the Stoics couldn't look for its cause in the inclinations (because that would send them off in a circle). . . . So we can easily understand how philosophers for whom the basis of an explanation remained ever hidden in darkness. . . .could think they were holding their own in a conflict with the opponent of goodness while not recognising what the real opponent is.[1]

So it's not surprising that an Apostle represents this invisible enemy—this destroyer of basic principles that is known only through its operations on us—as being •outside us and indeed as being •a bad spirit: 'Our fight is not against flesh and blood (the natural inclinations) but against rulers and powers—against bad spirits.' [This derives from *Ephesians* 6:12: 'For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against spiritual wickedness in high places.'] This way of putting things seems to be intended not

- •to extend our knowledge beyond the world of sense,

but only

- •to take conception of something that is unfathomable by us and make it *anschaulich* [see Glossary] for *practical* use.

Its practical value to us isn't affected by whether we locate the seducer within ourselves or outside, for we are equally guilty either way; we wouldn't be led astray by an outside seducer if we weren't already secretly in league with him.[2] I shall deal with this whole subject in two sections, ·one starting overleaf and the other on page 43·.

[1] It is a common assumption in moral philosophy that the existence of moral evil in man can easily be explained by •the power of the incentives of his sensuous nature on the one hand, and •the impotence of the incentive of reason (his respect for the law) on the other, i.e. by weakness. But if it's easy to explain that conflict, it must be even easier to explain one side of it, namely the moral goodness in him (his moral predisposition). Now reason's ability to dominate all opposing incentives through the mere idea of a law is utterly inexplicable; so it is also inconceivable how the motivating forces of the sensuous nature could overpower a reason that commands with such authority. For if all the world proceeded in conformity with the precepts of the law, we would say that everything happened 'according to the natural order', and it wouldn't occur to anyone to ask about the cause.

[2] It's a special feature of Christian ethics that it represents

- •moral goodness as differing from moral evil

not as

- •Heaven differing from Earth

but as

- •Heaven differing from Hell.

This merely presents a picture, a shocking picture; but what it means is philosophically correct. It gets us to regard good and evil, the realms of light and of darkness, as separated by an immeasurable gulf, rather than as being adjacent and as •merging into one another by gradual differences in degree of brightness. This ·Heaven-Hell· manner of representation has something horrible about it, despite which it is very exalting. What *justifies* it is •the complete dissimilarity of the basic principles by which one can become a subject of one or other of these realms, and •the danger of thinking that there's a kinship between the characteristics that fit someone for one of them and those that fit him for the other.

1. The good principle's legal claim to dominion over man

A. The personified idea of the good principle

[This paragraph presents what Kant takes to be a centrally Christian 'idea' of how God relates to human morality. The quoted phrases are mostly from *John* 1–3. That this is offered as reportage and not as Kant's own doctrine is indicated by his final 'and so on'.] The only thing that can make a world •the object of a divine decree and the •purpose of creation is *humanity in its complete moral perfection*. (I'm using 'humanity' here to include any *Weltwesen* [see Glossary] equipped with reason.) According to the will of the supreme being, the direct consequence of such moral perfection is. . . .happiness. This uniquely God-pleasing *man* 'is in God through eternity'; the idea of him emanates from God's very being; so he is not •a created thing but •God's only begotten son, 'the Word. . . .through which all other things exist'. . . . 'Man is the reflection of God's glory.' 'In him God loved the world', and it's only in him and by adopting his attitudes that we can hope 'to become the sons of God'; and so on.

Now it is our universal human duty to elevate ourselves to this ideal [see Glossary] of moral perfection, i.e. to this archetype [see Glossary] of the moral disposition in all its purity; and the idea itself. . . .can give us power to do this. But just because we didn't **make** this idea, and because it has settled itself in man without our grasping how human nature could have been able even to **receive** it, it is better to say that *this archetype has come down to us from Heaven, and has taken on humanity* [i.e. has made itself human]. Why is that better? Because it is even more impossible to conceive how

> •man, bad by nature, might unaided throw off badness and **raise** himself to the ideal of holiness

than it is to conceive how

> •the ideal of holiness might **lower itself** to man and take on a humanity that isn't bad in itself.

We can see this union with us as a lowering, an abasement, of the son of God if we think of this divinely-minded person. . . .as furthering the world's good by taking upon himself himself a full measure of sufferings, though he himself is holy and therefore not bound to endure any sufferings. Man, on the other hand, is never free from guilt even when he takes on the very same disposition [as the 'son of God'?]; he can see himself as *deserving* whatever sufferings come his way, from whatever direction; so he must regard himself as unworthy of the union of •his way of thinking with •such an idea, although the idea serves him as an archetype.

The ideal of a humanity pleasing to God (hence of such moral perfection as can be had by a *Weltwesen* who is prey to needs and inclinations)—how are we to get this into our thought? Only as the idea of a man [see Glossary] who would be willing not merely •to perform all the human duties and •to spread good as widely as possible by precept and example, but even—though mightily tempted not to—•to take upon himself every affliction, right up to the most ignominious death; doing all this for the good of the world and even for his enemies. The only way we can get any concept of the strength of a moral disposition is by picturing it as wrestling with obstacles and winning every time.

So man can hope to become acceptable to God (and so be saved) through a practical faith in this son of God (thought of as having taken upon himself human nature). A man who is conscious of a moral disposition such that

> he can have a well-grounded confidence in himself, and believe that with such temptations and sufferings

(if these are made the touchstone of that idea) he would be unswervingly loyal to humanity's archetype and by faithful imitation remain true to his exemplar

—that man, and he alone, is entitled to look on himself as an object not unworthy of divine approval

B. The objective reality of this idea

From the practical point of view this idea is completely real in its own right, because it resides in our reason that provides us with moral laws. We •ought to conform to it, from which it follows that we •can do so. If we had to *show in advance* that man could conform to this archetype—as is absolutely essential with concepts of nature, if we're not to run the risk of being deluded by empty notions—we would have to hesitate about allowing the moral law to have the authority of an unconditioned yet conclusive determining basis of our will. How could •the bare idea of lawfulness as such work more strongly on the will than •every conceivable incentive whose source is personal gain? Reason can't help us to understand this, because the law commands unconditionally ·so that there are no 'if's or 'whethers' or the like for reason to grip onto·; and empirical examples aren't relevant because even if no-one had ever given unqualified obedience to this law, the objective necessity of doing so would still be undiminished and self-evident. So we don't need any empirical example to make the idea of *a man who is morally well-pleasing to God* our archetype; this idea as an archetype is already lodged in our reason. Consider the case of someone X who

- •wants to accept a certain particular man Y as an example of someone who fits that idea, because X wants to imitate him; but
- •demands more ·from Y· than what he sees, i.e. more than a course of life that is entirely blameless and as meritorious as one could wish; and therefore
- •goes on to require, as credentials required for **belief**, that Y should have performed miracles or had them performed for him

—this person X is thereby confesses to his own moral **unbelief**, i.e. to his lack of faith in virtue. This lack can't be repaired by any belief that rests on miracles (and is merely historical). The only belief that has moral worth is a belief in the practical validity of that idea nested in our reason. (This idea might count in favour of the truth of miracles as possible effects of the good principle [see Glossary], but it can't make *them* count in favour of *it*.)

For just this reason it must be possible to *experience* the example of such a ·morally perfect· man (to the extent that we can expect or demand any merely external experience to document an inner moral disposition). According to the law, each man ought to provide an example of this idea in his own person; and that's why the archetype is always lodged in reason—no example in outer experience is adequate to it, for •outer experience doesn't reveal the inner nature of the disposition but merely allows it to be somewhat shakily inferred. (Indeed even self-observation—a man's •inner experience of himself—doesn't enable him to see deeply enough into his own heart to get certain knowledge of the basis of the maxims he accepts or of their purity and stability.)

Now suppose that such a truly divinely-minded man showed up at some particular time—as though he had fallen from Heaven to Earth—and had

- •given in his own person, through his teachings and his way of life and his sufferings, an example of a man who is pleasing to God—as good an example as can be looked for in external experience,

(because, remember, the archetype of such a person is to be sought only in our own reason), and if through all this he had

> •produced immeasurably great moral good on earth by bringing about a revolution in the human race,

that still wouldn't give us no cause to suppose that he was anything but a naturally begotten man. (Indeed, any naturally begotten man feels himself obliged to provide such an example in himself.) I'm not absolutely denying that he *could* be a man supernaturally generated ·in some way that ruled out natural birth·; ·but it doesn't matter either way·, because to suppose that he *is* can't **help us** in our moral lives. The *archetype* that we associate with this appearance—[i.e. with this empirically given man]—is located in natural men, in *us*; and the presence of this archetype in the human soul is in itself incomprehensible enough without being supposed to be realised in a particular individual, let alone having a supernatural origin. Indeed, the elevation of such a holy one above all the frailties of human nature would. . . .actually **hinder us** in adopting the idea of him as a model for us to follow. If we regard this God-pleasing individual as

> •having a nature that is 'human' in the sense of being burdened with the same needs as ourselves—and hence the same sorrows and the same inclinations—and thus with the same temptations to transgress;

while also

> •being so *super*human that his unchanging purity of will—innate in him, not something he had to work for—makes it absolutely impossible for him to transgress;

that would put this divine man so infinitely far from the natural man that he could no longer be held up as an *example*. The natural man would say:

> 'If I too had a perfectly holy will, then all temptations to evil would of themselves be thwarted in me; if I too had the most complete inner assurance that after a short earthly life I would (by virtue of this holiness) immediately enter into all the eternal glory of the kingdom of Heaven, then I too would accept willingly and indeed joyfully all sufferings, however bitter they might be, even to the most ignominious death, because I would see before my eyes the glorious and imminent outcome.'

To be sure, the thought •that this divine man actually had this eminence and this bliss from all eternity (and hadn't needed to earn them through such sufferings), and •that he willingly renounced them for the sake of utterly unworthy people and even for the sake of his enemies, to save them from everlasting perdition—this thought must attune our hearts to admiration, love, and gratitude towards him. And **the idea of conduct** fitting such a perfect a standard of morality would no doubt be valid as a model for us to copy; but **he himself** couldn't be represented to us as an example for us to model ourselves on, or therefore as a proof that we could attain such a pure and exalted moral goodness.

·START OF A FOOTNOTE ABOUT 'ANALOGIES'·

It is indeed an incurable limitation of human reason that we can't conceive of any considerable moral worth in the actions of a personal being without representing that person, or an appearance of him. This is a constraint not on moral worth but on our thinking about it—it's the fact that to make suprasensible qualities intelligible to ourselves we need help from some analogy to natural existences. The philosophical poet ·Haller· puts •man higher on the moral scale than •the inhabitants of Heaven: *The world with all its faults / Is better than a realm of will-less angels.'* His point is that •man has to fight a propensity to evil within himself. . . .whereas the inhabitants of Heaven are placed above the *possibility* of

going astray by the holiness of their nature. —The Scriptures too go along with this when, in order to make the degree of God's love for the human race **graspable** by us, they ascribe to him the very highest sacrifice that a loving being can make, a sacrifice performed so that even those who are unworthy may be made happy ('For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life' [*John* 3:16; Kant quotes only the first six words]; though we can't indeed **conceive through reason** how an all-sufficient being could sacrifice a part of his state of bliss or rob himself of a possession. [Kant goes on to say that this way of making something graspable involves what he calls 'the schematism of analogy'—a valid way of elucidating things, but not a basis for any extension of our knowledge. He warns, at length, against treating such analogies as pointers to the facts. For example, we can't make organisms comprehensible to us except by attributing intelligence to them, on the analogy of a watch-maker to his work, but it is just plain wrong to attribute intelligence to organisms. The term 'schematism' occurs in this work only in this footnote.]

·END OF FOOTNOTE·

This same divinely-minded but genuinely human teacher could still truthfully speak of himself as if the ideal of goodness were physically on display in his teachings and conduct. What he would be talking about is only the moral disposition that controls his actions; he can't show this disposition itself to others, so he puts it on view through his teachings and actions: 'Which of you can accuse me of sin?' [*John* 8:46] ·There is of course no knock-down proof that his moral disposition is doing this work·, but in the absence of evidence to the contrary it is only fair to conclude that this teacher's flawless example of his teaching comes from his having a supremely pure moral disposition. [The rest of this paragraph is exceptionally difficult, even by Kant's standards. In it, he •endorses our adopting this ideal 'teacher' as an archetype, something for us to try to model ourselves on, •speaks of our 'appropriating' the teacher's disposition 'for the sake of ours', and •says that to do this we have to 'unify' our own moral characters with the moral disposition of the archetype. He doesn't say crisply what this 'appropriation' consists in; but his treatment of three great 'difficulties' in the way of making it comprehensible shows us well enough what his topic is here.]

C. Difficulties that oppose the reality of this idea, and their solution

(a) The first difficulty casting doubt on whether the idea of *humanity well-pleasing to God* is achievable in us comes from the contrast between •the holiness of the ·divine· lawgiver and •our own lack of righteousness. The law says: 'Be ye holy (in the conduct of your lives) even as your father in Heaven is holy', this being the ideal of the son of God that is set up before us as our model. But it is *infinitely* far from the evil of our starting-point to the good that we ought to bring about in ourselves; so the process of conforming our way of life to the holiness of the law can't be completed in any ·finite period of· time. Yet a man's moral constitution *ought to* accord with this holiness. So this ·holiness-conforming· constitution must be supposed to be lurking in his disposition—

> in the all-embracing and sincere maxim of conformity of conduct to the law, a disposition arising from a holy principle that the man has made his own highest maxim

—as the seed from which all goodness is to be developed. A change of heart [see Glossary] such as this must be possible because duty requires it.

The difficulty is this: How can the disposition—·the flawless one of which I have just spoken·—stand in for the action itself, when each individual action is defective? The solution rests on these considerations. The only way we can conceive of the relation of cause and effect is in terms of time-conditions, so that we have to see the continual and endless advance from a deficient good to a better one as always still defective. We must, then, regard the good as it appears in us, i.e. in our actions, as being always inadequate to a holy law. But this endless progress of our goodness towards conformity to the law, even if conceived in terms of actual actions, can be thought of as judged by

> someone who knows the heart through a purely intellectual intuition, as a completed whole,

—·and judged favourably· because of the disposition, suprasensible in its nature, from which this progress itself is derived. Thus the always-defective man can hope to be overall God-pleasing at whatever instant he goes out of existence.[1]

(b) The second difficulty. . . .concerns **moral** happiness. I don't mean the assurance of everlasting **physical** happiness, i.e. contentment with one's physical state (freedom from illnesses etc. and ever-increasing pleasures); I mean rather the reality and constancy of a disposition that always progresses in goodness and never falls away from it. ·The difficulty is that· a man with a disposition of this sort has only to be absolutely sure of its unchangeableness to think that he isn't merely 'seeking for the kingdom of God' but is already in possession of it, so that 'all the rest (everything that concerns physical happiness) will come to him' [Kant is here echoing 'Seek ye first the kingdom of righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you' *Matthew* 6:33].

how the next paragraph begins: *Nun könnte man zwar den hierüber besorgten Menschen mit seinem Wunsche dahin verweisen: 'Sein (Gottes) Geist giebt Zeugniß unserm Geist' u.s.w., d.i. wer eine so lautere Gesinnung, als gefordert wird, besitzt, wird von selbst schon fühlen, daß er nie so tief fallen könne, das Böse wiederum lieb zu gewinnen; allein. . . .*

flatly translated: A man who is concerned about this could have his attention drawn, with his wish, to this: 'His (God's) Spirit bears witness to our spirit' etc.; meaning that anyone who has as pure a disposition as is required will feel, even on his own, that he could never fall so low as to return to loving evil. But. . . .

more freely, what Kant seems to be getting at: If someone is asking himself 'Might it really be true that I am already in the kingdom of God, and am thus guaranteed physical happiness from now on? That would be wonderful!', he could be told to subject himself and his hopes to *Romans* 8:16: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God', meaning that if his moral disposition puts him in the kingdom of God then he must already feel, with no input from outside, that he will never fall so low as to return to loving evil; but. . . .

[1] Regarding this disposition that stands in the place of the totality of this endless series of approximations I am emphatically *not* saying that it makes up for •the short-fall in conformity to duty. . . .·in each individual action·. All it makes up for is •the failure that is inseparable from the existence of a temporal being as such, namely the failure ever wholly to be what we have in mind to become. The question of making up for actual transgressions in this series of actions will be taken up when I solve the third difficulty.

. . . .it's dangerous to put any trust in feelings of that kind, ones supposedly of supernatural origin. A man is never more easily deceived than in what promotes his good opinion of himself. And it doesn't seem advisable to encourage such a state of confidence; rather it is morally better to 'work out your own salvation with fear and trembling' [*Philippians* 2:12]. (That is a harsh saying, and if it is misunderstood it can drive people to the blackest fanaticism.) And yet ·some level of confidence is needed for morality·: if a man had no confidence in his moral disposition once he had acquired it, he would scarcely be able to persevere steadfastly in it. However, he can get such confidence ·in a reasonable way· by comparing •the course of his life up to now with •the resolution that he has adopted. Admittedly, a man who through a long enough course of life has observed the effects that these principles of goodness. . . .have had in steadily improving his way of life can infer only *conjecturally* [*vermuthungsweise*] that his inner disposition has been fundamentally improving, but he can hope *reasonably* [*vernünftigerweise*] ·that this is so·:

> 'If the improvements I have made are based on a good underlying principle, I can hope they will continually strengthen me to make further advances, and that in this life on earth I'll never leave this path but will push on with ever-growing courage. Indeed, if after this life I'm to enter into another one, although the circumstances there may (for all I know) be utterly unlike those of this life, I can still hope that the underlying principle will keep me on this path and bring me ever nearer to the unreachable goal of perfection.'

His reasonable basis for this is his belief that his conduct up to now shows that his moral disposition has been improving right from the outset. Compare him with someone who finds that despite frequent good resolutions he •has never stood his ground, •has always fallen back into evil, and •has to admit that as his life has advanced he has kept falling from bad to worse, as though the route of moral progress were always uphill and slippery. This man can't reasonably hope that he will conduct himself better if he goes on living here on earth, let alone that he'll do better in a future life if there is one. On the strength of his past record he has to think that corruption is rooted in his very disposition.

The first of these men gives us a glimpse of a happy and desirable future that stretches further than we can think about; the second a glimpse of an equally long future of misery; in short, a blessed or cursed *eternity*. These are powerful enough representations to bring peace to one man and strengthen him in goodness, and to awaken in the other the voice of conscience commanding him still to break with evil as far as possible. So they are powerful enough to serve as incentives, leaving no need to lay down dogmatically, as a theological doctrine, that man is destined for an eternity of good or evil—a claim in which reason simply passes beyond the limits of its own insight.

·Footnote on aspects of morality and the after-life·

Will the punishments of Hell come to an end or will they last for ever? That is one of the *children's questions*, ones the answers to which—if they have answers—won't do us any good. If we were taught that the former alternative is correct, there would be cause for concern that many people (and indeed all who believe in purgatory. . . .) would say 'Then I hope I can endure it!'. [Why might there be a 'concern' about this reaction? Presumably because it shows a resolve to 'tough it out' rather than being adequately deterred.] But if the other alternative—·eternal punishment·—were asserted as an article of faith, then despite the aim for terrific deterrence there might arise the hope of complete immunity from punishment after a most abandoned life. A cleric who is asked for advice and

comfort by a now-repentant man nearing the end of a wicked life must find it cruel and inhuman to announce to the sinner his eternal condemnation. And since he doesn't allow for any middle ground between •eternal punishment and •no punishment, he has to give the sinner a hope of the latter alternative; he'll have to promise to transform him right now into a God-pleasing man. There's no time now for him to enter on a good course of life, so this transformation will have to be brought about by •avowals of penitence, •confessions of faith, and •solemn promises to live better if death is postponed. That is what's bound to happen if the eternity of man's future destiny—good or bad depending on how he has lived here—is set forth as a *dogma*. It is better for a man to be taught to frame *for himself* a concept of his future state as the natural and foreseeable result of his moral condition up to now. The immensity of this series of consequences under the sway of evil will impel him to undo what he has done as far as possible before his life ends, by appropriate reparation or compensation; which means that it will have the same beneficial moral effect on him as can be expected from announcing the eternity of his doom, but without bringing the disadvantages of that dogma (which, incidentally, isn't justified by insight through reason or by biblical scholarship). The upshot of the dogma is that the wicked man either

- •during the course of his life counts in advance on easily getting pardon, or
- •near the end of his life believes that what he is up against are only the claims of divine justice, which can be satisfied with mere words.

Either way, the rights of humanity are disregarded, and no-one gets back what belongs to him. . . . You might fear that the man's reason, through his conscience, will judge him too leniently; but I believe that that's seriously wrong. Precisely because reason is free, and must pass judgment on the man himself, it can't be bribed; and if we tell a man in this situation that it's at least possible that he will soon have to stand before a judge, we need then only to leave him to his own reflections, which will probably pass judgment on him with the greatest severity.

I will add here three observations about the common proverb 'All's well that ends well'. **(1)** It can be applied to moral situations, but only if 'ending well' means the man's becoming a genuinely good man. But how is he to recognise himself as such, given that he can only infer this from subsequent steadily good conduct for which, at the end of life, no time remains? **(2)** The proverb can be more easily applied to happiness, but only from the viewpoint of someone who at the end of his life *looks back* on it. Sufferings that have been endured leave behind them no tormenting memories once we realise that we are free of them, but rather a feeling of gladness that adds a tang to our enjoyment of our new good fortune. Pleasures and pains belong to the world of the senses; they belong to the temporal sequence of events, and disappear when it does. . . . **(3)** If someone uses this proverb to assign a high moral value ['all well'] to the life he has led up to now, on the grounds that his latest conduct has been perfectly good ['ends well'], he'll be seriously misled. His life must be judged on the basis of the subjective principle of his moral disposition; this lies outside the reach of the senses, so its existence •can't be divided up into periods of time—·i.e. it's not the sort of thing that can have a *history*·—and •can only be thought of as an absolute unity. A conclusion about the disposition must be based on the actions that are its appearances; ·they are strung out in time, but· for purposes of judging a life they have to be viewed as a temporal unity, a whole; in which case •the reproaches over the earlier, pre-improvement, part of his life might well speak as loudly

as •the approval of the latter portion, greatly dampening the triumphant note of 'All's well that ends well!'

The doctrine regarding the ·infinite· duration of punishments in another world is closely related to (though not identical with) the doctrine that 'All forgiving of sins must happen here', meaning that at the end of life our account must be completely closed, and that no-one should hope to retrieve **there** what has been neglected **here**. This has no more right to be proclaimed as a dogma than has the previous one ·about eternal punishment·. It's only a principle through which practical reason controls its use of its own concepts of the suprasensible realm while admitting that it knows nothing of that realm's objective character. All it is saying is this:

> Your answer to the question 'Am I a God-pleasing person?' has to be based on how you have conducted your life; but that basis ends when your life ends, so that is the last time at which the moral judgment on your life can be made.

In general, human wisdom would benefit in many ways if, instead of trying to establish

> constitutive [see Glossary] principles that would give us something we can't possibly have, namely knowledge of suprasensible objects,

we limited our judgment to

> regulative [see Glossary] principles—ones that content themselves with ·guiding· the possible application of those objects to the moral life.

That would stop us from generating pseudo-knowledge of things about which we basically know nothing at all, a groundless subtle reasoning [see Glossary] that glitters for a while but eventually turns out to do harm to morality.

·END OF FOOTNOTE ON MORALITY AND THE AFTER-LIFE·

So the good and pure disposition that we are conscious of (we could call it a *good spirit* presiding over us) **indirectly** gives us confidence in its own permanence and stability; it is our Comforter when our moral lapses start us worrying about its constancy. [The idea of a Comforter sent by God—the Holy Ghost—appears repeatedly in *John* 14–16.] Certainty about it isn't possible for us, nor—so far as we can see—would it do us any good morally. We can't base such confidence on an **immediate** consciousness of the unchangeableness of our •dispositions because we can't look at •them; we can only draw conclusions about them from their consequences in our way of life. But those consequences are merely objects of perception, *appearances of* the disposition, so the latter's strength can't be judged from them with any certainty. And when we think we are near to death and think we have improved our disposition only recently, we can't even have such ·uncertain· empirical evidence that the new disposition is genuine. . . .

[This next paragraph uses 'debt' to translate *Schuld* = 'debt' and 'guilt', and 'indebtedness' to translate *Verschuldigung*= 'indebtedness' and 'guiltiness'. Kant clearly means to be exploiting that ambiguity.]

(c) The apparently the greatest difficulty confronting any man when his life-conduct as a whole is judged before a divine moral tribunal is this: Whatever he may have done in the way of adopting a good disposition, and however steadfastly he is staying faithful to this change, the fact remains that *he started from evil*, and this is an indebtedness that he can't possibly wipe out. Since his change of heart [*Herzensänderung*] he hasn't acquired any new debts, but he can't take this to mean that he has paid his old ones.

> Mightn't he by future good conduct produce a surplus over what he is morally obliged to perform at every instant, ·a surplus that could count towards paying off the old debts·?

No, ·there are no such surpluses·: at every moment it is his *duty* to do all the good he can. This debt is built in, i.e. prior to all the good a man may do; it is exactly the thing I referred to in the First Essay as 'the radical evil in man'; and our common sense of what is right and reasonable tells us that this debt can't be paid by anyone else. It's not. . . .like a financial indebtedness, where the creditor doesn't care whether he paid by the debtor or by someone else paying it for him; rather is it the most *personal* of all debts, namely a debt of sins, which. . . .can't be taken on by an innocent person even if he is magnanimous enough to be willing to take it upon himself for the sake of the sinner. Now, moral evil (called 'sin', meaning 'transgression of the moral law regarded as a divine command') brings with it *infinite* guilt; And because it is infinite, it seems that every man must expect to be punished for ever and thrown out of the kingdom of God. (Why *infinite* guilt? *Not* because of the infinitude of the supreme lawgiver whose authority is violated: we understand nothing of such transcendent relationships of man to the supreme being. The guilt is infinite because this moral evil lies in the disposition and the maxims in general, so it brings with it with it an infinity of violations of the law. This emphasis on general principles rather than particular transgressions stands in contrast to a human law-court, which attends to a single offence, the act itself and facts relating to it, and not to the ·offender's· general disposition.)

The solution of this difficulty rests on the following considerations. We have to think of the judicial verdict of someone who knows the heart as being based on •the accused person's general disposition and not on •his disposition's appearances, i.e. his individual lawless or law-abiding actions. But we are considering a man whose present good disposition has the upper hand over the bad principle that was formerly dominant in him. So our question is this:

> Can the moral consequence of his previous disposition—his punishment, i.e. the effect on him of God's displeasure—be extended to his God-pleasing present state, with its improved disposition?

the next sentence: *Da hier die Frage nicht ist: ob auch vor der Sinnesänderung die über ihn verhängte Strafe mit der göttlichen Gerechtigkeit zusammenstimmen würde (als woran niemand zweifelt), so soll sie (in dieser Untersuchung) nicht als vor der Besserung an ihm vollzogen gedacht werden.*

plainly translated: Since the question here is not whether the punishment inflicted on him would agree with divine justice before his change of heart (which no-one doubts), the punishment should not (in this investigation) be thought of as imposed on him before his improvement.

perhaps meaning this: This is not a question about whether punishment ordained for him before his change of heart would have squared with divine justice (no-one doubts that it would); so for present purposes we aren't thinking about punishment inflicted on the man **before** his improvement.

But **after** his improvement the penalty can't be considered appropriate to him—to this newly God-pleasing man who is now leading a new life and is morally a different man. Yet supreme justice must be satisfied: punishment must come to everyone who deserves it. So we'll have to think of the punishment as inflicted **during** his change of heart. [Kant's reason for this last move seems to be mistaken. He says he has concluded that the punishment can't justly be inflicted either before or after the improvement; but in fact all he has said about pre-improvement punishment—according to the above 'perhaps meaning' suggestion about that obscure sentence—is that it *would* be just but isn't what he is asking about.] So we'll have to look into this change of heart to see whether the *concept* of it enables us to discover **in** this event ills that the new man with a good disposition •can think he

brought on himself in another context and •can therefore regard as punishments, so that divine justice is satisfied.

·START OF FOOTNOTE·

The hypothesis that all the ills in the world are uniformly to be regarded as punishments for past transgressions cannot be thought of as devised for the sake of a theodicy [see Glossary],. . . .because it's too commonly accepted to have been cooked up in such an artificial way. It probably lies very near to human reason, which is inclined to tie the course of nature to the laws of morality, a tie that naturally leads it to the thought that if we want to be •freed from the ills of life, or to be •compensated for them by greater goods, we should first try to become better men. Thus the first man is represented (in the Bible) as condemned to work if he wanted to eat, his wife to bear children in pain, and both to die—all on account of their transgression. [Kant adds remarks about the sufferings of animals, concluding with a joke about the sufferings of horses who aren't being punished for having eaten forbidden hay.]

·END OF FOOTNOTE·

Now a change of heart is a departure from evil and an entrance into goodness, the putting off of the old man and the putting on of the new [echoing *Ephesians* 4:22–24]: the man becomes 'dead unto sin' [echoing *Romans* 6:2] and thus to all inclinations that lead to sin, in order to become alive unto righteousness. But this change. . . .doesn't involve two moral acts—first one, then the other—but only a single act; the •departure from evil is made possible only by the good disposition that produces the man's •entry into goodness, and vice versa. So the good principle [see Glossary] is as much involved in the abandonment of the bad disposition as in the adoption of the good one; and the pain that rightfully accompanies the bad disposition comes entirely from the good one. The emergence from the corrupted disposition into the good one (as 'the death of the old man', 'the crucifying of the flesh') is itself both a sacrifice and a start on a long sequence of life's ills. The new man takes these on in the disposition of the son of God, i.e. purely for the sake of the good, though really they are due as punishments to someone else—the old man, ·the pre-improvement man·, who is indeed morally a different person.

Regarded from the point of view of his empirical nature as an object of the senses, our man is physically the very same punishable person as before and must be judged as such •before a moral tribunal and hence •by himself; but regarded as an object of thought, he is because of his new disposition morally a different person—that's in the eyes of a divine judge for whom this disposition takes the place of action. And this moral disposition that the man has taken on in all its purity (like the purity of the son of God). . . .

(a) as proxy, takes on the guilt of his own sin and that of all who believe (practically) in him;

(b) as saviour, renders satisfaction to supreme justice by suffering and death; and

(c) as advocate, gives men a hope that they will appear before their judge as justified.

Only it must be remembered that in this way of representing the state of affairs, the suffering that the new man must accept throughout life by becoming dead to the old is pictured as a death endured once for all by the representative of mankind. [In **(a)**–**(c)** the man's reformed moral disposition is credited with a startling trio of achievements. The ellipsis just before the trio replaces something meaning 'or (if we personify this idea) this son of God himself', so the trio might be attributed to the son of God rather than to a disposition. But the structure of the German sentence makes •the man's disposition the principal subject and makes the mention of 'the son of God' a parenthetical aside. Admittedly, it's hard to deal with 'his'

and 'him' in **(a)**; replacing them by 'its' and 'it' would seem weird; but the sentence can't be read as applying **(a)** to the son of God and **(b)** and **(c)** to the reformed man's disposition.]

·START OF FOOTNOTE·

The only empirically perceptible achievement of even the purest moral disposition of a man, as a *Weltwesen* [see Glossary], consists in actions in which he is continually *becoming* a God-pleasing subject. In •quality this disposition (since it must be thought of as having a suprasensible basis) should be and can be holy and in tune with the disposition of the man's archetype. But in •degree, as revealed in conduct, it always remains deficient and infinitely distant from the archetype's disposition. Still, because this disposition contains the basis for continual progress in making good this deficiency, it sums up the whole thing in a thought and *stands in for* the completed series of actions. But now a question arises:

> Can someone 'in whom there is no condemnation' [*Romans* 8:1]. . . .believe himself to be justified [= 'morally in the clear'] while also counting as *punishment* the miseries he encounters *en route* to ever greater goodness, thus accepting that he is blameworthy and has a God-displeasing disposition?

Yes he can, but only in his quality of the man he is continually putting off. Everything that would be due him as punishment in that quality (of the old ·pre-improvement· man)—i.e. all the miseries and ills of life in general—he gladly accepts in his quality of new man simply for the sake of the good. So far as he is a new man, consequently, these sufferings aren't ascribed to him as *punishments* at all, except in this special and limited sense:

> In his quality of new man he willingly accepts, as opportunities for testing and exercising his disposition to goodness, all the ills and miseries that assail him—things that the old man would have had to regard as punishments and which he too (·the new man·), given that he hasn't completed the process of becoming dead to the old man, accepts as such.

This punishment is both effect and cause of •such moral activity and consequently of •the contentment and moral happiness that consists in an awareness of progress in goodness (= progress in forsaking evil). Back when he had the old disposition, on the other hand, he would have had not only to *count* those ills as punishments but also to *feel* them as such. . . .

·END OF FOOTNOTE·

Here, then, is that surplus—the need of which was noted previously [page 38]—over the merit of good actions, and it's a merit that is credited to us by *grace*. Something that in our earthly life (and perhaps at all future times and in all worlds) is never anything but a *becoming*, namely, becoming a God-pleasing man—that this should be credited to us exactly as if we had already finished the *becoming* and reached the goal is something we have no legal claim to,[1]—or so we judge on the basis of the empirical self-knowledge that gives us no direct insight into the disposition but merely permits an estimate based on our actions; which is why the accuser within us would be more likely to favour a guilty verdict. So when we come to be cleared of all liability because of our faith in such goodness, the clearing is always a judgment of *grace* alone, although—because it is based on an atonement which for us consists only in the idea of an improved disposition,

[1] † But only the ability to receive it, which is all that *we* can credit ourselves with. When a superior decrees that a good is to come to a subordinate who has nothing but the (moral) receptivity to it, that's what we call *grace*.

known only to God—it is fully in accord with eternal *justice*.

This deduction [see Glossary] of the idea of a *justification* of someone who is indeed guilty but who has changed his disposition into one well-pleasing to God—does it have any **practical** use? and if so, what is it? It apparently can't give any positive help to religion or to the conduct of life, because the question concerns someone who already *has* the good disposition whose development and encouragement all practical use of ethical concepts properly aims at. What about bringing comfort? No, because someone who is conscious of having a good disposition already has both comfort and hope (though not certainty). So the only good we get from the deduction is an answer to a **speculative** question that needs to be confronted. If it weren't for the deduction, reason could be accused of being wholly unable to reconcile •man's hope of absolution from his guilt with •divine justice—an accusation that might be damaging to reason in many ways, but most of all morally. ·So much for the positive benefit of the deduction·. But it brings far-reaching negative benefits to everyone's religion and morality. We learn from this deduction that

- •we can't think of the absolution at the bar of heavenly justice of a man burdened with guilt except on the assumption that he has already undergone a complete change of heart [*Herzensänderung*]; that therefore
- •in the absence of this change of heart no expiations. . . .or expressions of praise (not even those appealing to the vicarious [see Glossary] ideal of the *Son of* God) can be successful; and that
- •when the change of heart has occurred none of those other things can increase its validity before the divine tribunal. . . .

Another question: On the basis of the life he has led, what should a man expect—and what should he fear—at the end of a his life? To answer this the man must know his own character. He may believe that his disposition has improved, but he must also take into consideration the old (corrupt) disposition that he started with; he must be able to infer

- •·quantity·: how much of this disposition, and what parts of it, he has cast off;
- •the quality of the assumed new disposition, i.e. whether it is pure or still impure, and
- •degree: its strength to overcome the old disposition and to guard against a relapse.

For this he'll have to examine his disposition throughout his entire life. Now, he can't form a secure and definite concept of his real disposition by being immediately conscious of it; he can only pick it up from the way he has actually lived. So when he considers the verdict of his future judge—i.e. of his own awakening conscience, together with the self-knowledge that he has gathered empirically—the only basis for judgment he'll be able to think of is a conspectus of *his whole life*, and not a mere segment of it, such as the last part or the part most advantageous to him; and to this he would add his prospects in whatever further life he is to have in the future. In this exercise, he won't be able—·as in the procedure described on page 40·—to let a previously recognised disposition take the place of action; on the contrary, he has to infer his disposition from his action. Now, I ask you: When a man—not necessarily a very bad man—is told

> 'I have reason to believe that that some day you will stand before a judge',

and this puts him in mind of much ·discreditable conduct· that he has long since casually forgotten, what will he think lies in store for him, given the life he has led? If the question concerns the verdict of the judge within the man, he will judge himself severely, because a man can't bribe his own

reason. But if he is to be placed before another judge (and some people claim to know from other sources that *there is* another judge), then he has a store of defences against the severity of that judge, all involving pleas of human frailty. His policy will be to *get past* the judge, either by

> forestalling his punishments by offering self-inflicted penances that don't arise from any genuine disposition toward improvement; or else by
>
> •softening him with prayers and entreaties, or with formulas and confessions that he claims to believe.

And if he is encouraged in all this by the proverb 'All's well that ends well' he will plan early in his life to make these moves late, so as not to forfeit needlessly too much of the enjoyment of life and yet near the end to settle his account, quickly, on favourable terms.[1]

2. The bad principle's legal claim to dominion over man, and the conflict between the two principles

The Christian part of the Bible presents this intelligible moral relationship—·this conflict·—in the form of a narrative in which two principles [see Glossary] in man, as opposed to one another as is Heaven to Hell, are represented as persons outside him; persons who pit their strength against each other and also try (one accusing, one defending) to establish their claims legally as though before a supreme judge.

Man was originally given ownership of all the goods of the earth (*Genesis* 1:28), though only in a subordinate way with his creator and Lord as supreme owner. At once a bad being appears on the scene; how such an originally good being became so bad as to be untrue to his Lord is not known. Through his fall he has been deprived of everything he might have had in Heaven, and now he wants to acquire property on earth. As a being of a higher order—a spirit—he can't get satisfaction from earthly and material objects, so he aims for dominion over spiritual natures by causing man's first parents to be disloyal to their overlord and dependent on *him*. Thus he succeeds in setting himself up as the supreme owner of all the goods of the earth, i.e. as the prince of this world. One might wonder why God didn't avail himself of his power against this traitor,[2] destroying at its inception the kingdom the traitor had intended to found. But supreme wisdom ·doesn't behave like that: it· exercises its power and government over beings equipped with reason, according to the principle of their freedom, and *they* will have to take responsibility for any good or evil that comes their way. A kingdom of evil was thus set up in defiance of the good principle, a kingdom to which all men naturally descended from Adam became subject; and this happened with their consent, because the false glitter of this world's goods drew their gaze away from the abyss of ruin that awaited them. Because of •the good principle's legal claim to sovereignty

[1] † Those who at the end of life want to have a clergyman summoned usually want him as a comforter—not for •the physical suffering brought on by the last illness or even for •the fear that naturally precedes death (death itself can be the comforter for these sufferings and fears by bringing them to an end), but for •their moral anguish, the reproaches of conscience. But at that time conscience should rather be stirred up and sharpened, so that the dying man doesn't neglect to do what good he still can, or to make reparation for the remaining consequences of his bad actions. . . . To administer instead a sort of opium to the conscience is an offence both against the man himself and against those who survive him. . . .

[2] Father Charlevoix reports that when he told an Iroquois pupil about the evil that the wicked spirit had brought into a world that was good at the outset, and how that spirit still persistently seeks to frustrate the best divine arrangements, his pupil asked indignantly 'But why doesn't God strike the devil dead?'—a question that the priest candidly admits to having no immediate answer for.

over man, it was able to secure itself by establishing a form of government instituted solely for the public veneration of •its name; I am talking about the Jewish theocracy. But this institution did no substantial injury to the realm of darkness, and served merely to keep reminding people of the unshakable right of the first proprietor. Why didn't it do more? Because

- •the minds of this government's subjects were moved solely by the goods of this world; and consequently
- •they wanted to be ruled in this life only through rewards and punishments; with the result that
- •they were capable only of laws that partly •required burdensome ceremonies, and partly •did concern morality but only in a way that made external compulsion the key, so that they were really only civil laws that paid no attention to the inner nature of the subject's moral disposition.

—There came a time when these people •were feeling in full measure all the ills of a hierarchical constitution, and perhaps also •had been influenced by the Greek philosophers' ethical doctrines of freedom, shocking as these were to the slavish mind. These influences had for the most part brought them to their senses and made them ripe for a revolution. At that time there suddenly appeared a person whose wisdom was purer than that of previous philosophers, as pure as if it had come from Heaven. He proclaimed himself as •truly human in his teachings and example, yet also •an envoy whose origin gave him an original innocence that excluded him from the bargain with the bad principle that the rest of the human race had entered into through their representative, the first ancestral father, so that 'the prince of this world had no part in him' [from *John* 14:30].[1] This was a threat to the sovereignty of this prince. If this God-pleasing man were to resist the prince's temptations to enter into that bargain, and if other men then devoutly adopted the same disposition, each of those would be a subject lost to the prince. and his kingdom would risk being completely destroyed. The prince accordingly offered to make this person deputy-governor of his entire kingdom on condition that he paid homage to him as its proprietor. When this attempt failed he not only •deprived this stranger in his territory of everything that could make his earthly life agreeable (to the point of direst poverty), but also •aroused against him all the persecutions by means of which bad men can embitter life, •·caused him· sufferings of a kind that only the well-disposed can feel deeply, namely by slandering the pure intent of

[1] † To think that someone could be free from an innate propensity for evil by being born of a virgin mother—that's an idea [see Glossary] of reason that is hard to explain, but it can't be disowned because it fits a kind of moral instinct. Natural generation can't occur without sensual pleasure on both sides, and it seems to threaten humanity's dignity by making us too similar to the common run of animals; so we regard it as something we should be *ashamed* of (that's the real source of the notion that celibacy is holy)—signifying for us something •unmoral, •irreconcilable with perfection in man, but •grafted into his nature and thus inherited by his descendants as a bad predisposition. This obscure view of natural generation (combining a sense-based account of it with something that is moral, and therefore intellectual) fits nicely with this idea of a child who is free from moral blemish because his birth was a virgin one, a birth that didn't arise from sexual intercourse. There is a •theoretical problem in it (not that this matters from the •practical point of view): according to this virgin-birth idea, the mother—who came from her parents through natural generation—would be infected with this moral blemish and would pass it to her child, at least by half, despite his being supernaturally generated. The only way around this would be to adopt the theory that the seed ·of evil· is present in the man and the woman but doesn't germinate in the woman, only in the man. . . . But what's the point of this **theoretical** to-and-fro, when all we need for **practical** purposes is for this virgin-birth idea to be presented to us as a *symbol* of mankind raising itself above temptation to evil (and withstanding it victoriously)?

his teachings so as to deprive him of his followers, and finally •pursuing him to the most ignominious death. Yet the prince's onslaught (through the agency of a worthless mob) on the stranger's steadfastness and forthrightness in teaching and example achieved nothing. And now for the outcome of this struggle! It can be looked at a **legal** upshot or as a **physical** one.

If we look at the physical outcome—the event that strikes the senses—we see it as a defeat for the good principle [see Glossary]: after many sufferings he has to give up his life because he stirred up a rebellion against a (powerful) foreign rule.[1] However, a realm in which the power is held by principles (whether good or bad) is a realm not of nature but of freedom, i.e. a realm in which events can be controlled only by ruling minds, so that no-one there is a slave but the man who wills to be one, and only for as long as he wills it. So this death (the last extremity of human suffering) was •a display of the good principle—i.e. of humanity in its moral perfection—and •an example for everyone to follow. The account of this death should have had—*could* have had—great influence on human minds at that time and indeed, at all times; for it presents •the freedom of the children of Heaven in a striking contrast to the •bondage of a mere son of Earth. But the good principle has invisibly descended from Heaven into humanity not just •at one time but •from the first beginnings of the human race. . . .and it legally has in mankind its first dwelling place. And since it appeared in an actual human being, as an example to everyone else, 'he came unto his own, and his own received him not, but as many as received him to them gave he power to be called the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name' [*John* 1:11–12]. That is, by the example he sets. . . .he opens the gates of freedom to all who, like him, choose to become dead to everything that ties them to life on earth at the expense of morality; and gathers to himself a people who are 'zealous of good works', a people who are especially *his* and under his sovereignty, while he abandons to their fate all those who prefer moral servitude.

So the moral ·or legal· outcome of the combat, as regards the hero of this story (up to the time of his death), is really not the •defeat of the bad principle—for its kingdom still endures and won't be overthrown until a new epoch dawns—but merely the •breaking of its power to hold those who have so long been its not unwilling subjects. This happens because another dominion (man must be subject to some rule or other), a moral dominion, is now offered to them as a refuge where they can shelter their morality if they choose to desert the former sovereignty. But the bad principle is still called 'the prince of this world', a world where those who adhere to the good principle should always be prepared for physical sufferings, sacrifices, and the crushing of self-interest. We have to see these, in the present context, as persecution by the bad principle; and they have to be expected because the bad principle has rewards in his kingdom only for those who

[1] † That is not to say, as one writer has, that he *sought* death as a brilliant and spectacular example that would further a good cause; that would be suicide. For one may indeed •risk death in carrying out some project, or •accept death at the hands of someone else when the only way to prevent it is morally impermissible; but one may not •produce one's own death as a means to any end whatever. [The footnote continues with remarks about another writer's suggestion that Jesus was merely *risking* his life in an attempt to get political power. This, Kant says, doesn't square with the reported words at the Last Supper—'Do this in remembrance of me'. He continues with some thoughts about what Jesus might have meant by that. [Incidentally, while it's obvious that Kant's narrative about the 'good principle', the 'stranger', is centrally based on Jesus of Nazareth, Kant doesn't refer to him by name anywhere in this work. He uses 'Christ' as a name just twice, on page 78, note 2, and on page 91.

have made earthly well-being their ultimate goal.

This lively way of representing ·the moral situation· was in its time probably the only one available to common folk. Strip off its mystical cloak and you'll easily see that for practical purposes it has been—i.e. its spirit and its meaning for reason have been—valid and binding for the whole world and for all time, because for each man it lies so near at hand that he recognises his duty regarding it. Its meaning is this [to the end of this paragraph]: There's absolutely no salvation for man unless he sincerely brings genuinely moral principles into his disposition; what works against this adoption is *not* man's sensuous nature (often picked on as the culprit), but rather a certain voluntary perversity (wickedness, *fausseté*, Satanic guile through which evil came into the world—call it what you will) that lies in all men and can't be overcome except by a pair of things: •the idea of moral goodness in its entire purity, along with •a consciousness that this idea really belongs to our original predisposition and that if we carefully prevent any impurities from mixing in with it. and register it deeply in our dispositions, its gradual effect on the mind will convince us

(a) that the dreaded powers of evil can't make any headway against it ('the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it' [*Matthew* 16:18]); and that

(b) the only mark of the presence of goodness in us that we should acknowledge is a morally good way of life.

If we didn't have the assurance **(a)** we might make up for that lack either •superstitiously, through expiations that don't involve any change of heart, or •fanatically, through supposed (and merely passive) inner illumination, and so, either way, be kept distant from **(b)** the good that is based on activity of the self.

An attempt like this one to find a meaning for Scripture that harmonises with the holiest teachings of reason is something we should regard not only as allowable but as a duty;[1] and we can remind ourselves of what the wise teacher said to his disciples regarding someone who went by a different route to the same goal: 'Forbid him not, for he that is not against us is for us' [*Mark* 9:39–40].

General remark

[On page 27 Kant says that this General remark could be entitled 'Miracles'.]

A moral religion must consist not in •dogmas and rites but in •the heart's disposition to fulfil all human duties as divine commands. If such a religion is to be established, then any miracles mentioned in the narratives about its inauguration must eventually do away with any need to believe in miracles at all. If there were a need for it, that would be because the commands of duty—commands originally written into the human heart by reason—aren't completely authoritative unless they confirmed by miracles; and anyone who believes *that* is guilty of a culpable level of moral unbelief. 'Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe' [*John* 4:48]. But when a religion of mere rites and observances has run its course, and one based on the spirit and the truth (on the moral disposition) is to be established in its place, the narratives introducing the new one may be accompanied—as it were, *adorned*—by miracles, to announce the end of the previous religion, which without miracles would never have had any authority. This isn't strictly necessary, but it fits in with man's ordinary ways of thought. In the same spirit, wanting to win over the adherents of the older religion to

[1] † In saying this I'm allowing that Scripture also has other meanings.

the new revolution, the new religion may be interpreted as the final fulfilment of something that the older religion merely predicted as the design of providence. In this context there's no point ·now· in debating those narratives or interpretations; the true religion, which in its time needed to be introduced through such devices, is now *here*, and from now on it can maintain itself on grounds of reason. If there were any point in it, we have to accept that mere faith in and repetition of incomprehensible things (which anyone can do without its making him a better man) is the only way of pleasing God—an assertion to be fought against tooth and nail. The person of the teacher of the only religion that is valid for all worlds may indeed be a mystery. It may be that

- •his appearance on earth,
- •his removal from earth,
- •his eventful life,
- •and his suffering

are all nothing but miracles. Indeed,

- •the •narrative that testifies to all these miracles

may itself be a miracle—a supernatural revelation. If so, we can let each of these rest on its merits ·without our fussing about its authenticity·; we may indeed *honour* them as a fancy-dress that helped the public launching of a doctrine that doesn't *need* any miracles because its authenticity rests on a record indelibly written in every soul. But in our use of these narratives we mustn't make it a tenet of religion that we can make ourselves pleasing to God by knowing, believing, and professing them.

As for miracles in general, sensible men. . . .may say that they believe in theory that there are such things as miracles but they don't warrant them in the affairs of life. That is why wise governments haven't tolerated new miracles, though they have always granted the proposition. . . .that miracles used to occur in olden times.[1] For the ancient miracles had already gradually been defined and so delimited by the authorities so that new workers of miracles couldn't do harm to public peace and the established order.

What is to be understood by the word 'miracle'? Well, we should be asking what miracles are *for us*, i.e. for our practical use of reason; and the answer to that is that miracles are events in the world whose causes—the operating laws of whose causes—are and must remain absolutely unknown to us. So we can conceive of •theistic miracles and •demonic ones; and the latter are divided into •angelic miracles (performed by good spirits) and •devilish miracles (by bad spirits). . . .

As regards theistic miracles: we can of course form a concept of the laws of operation of their cause (as an omnipotent etc. being and also a moral one); but it can only be a *general* concept—we are thinking of him ·in general terms· as •creator of the world and its •ruler according

[1] Even the orthodox teachers of religion who link their articles of faith to the authority of the government follow the government's attitude on this matter. . . . One writer accused these orthodox theologians with inconsistency,. . . .because •they insisted that there had really been workers of miracles in the Christian community 1700 years ago, but were unwilling to authenticate any modern miracles, and couldn't find any biblical statement that miracles would eventually cease altogether, let alone *when* this would happen. (They had their own subtle reasoning [see Glossary] purporting to show that miracles are no longer needed, but those arguments claimed greater insight than any man should credit himself with.) So their refusal to admit contemporary miracles was only a maxim of reason, and didn't express objective knowledge that there aren't any. . . . Some people who don't admit big spectacular miracles have no trouble allowing small ones,. . . .because they think that the small ones require only a small input of force from the supernatural cause.) They are not not bearing in mind •that what matters here is not the size of the effect but rather the *how* of it, i.e. whether it comes about naturally or supernaturally; or •that the easy/difficult distinction is meaningless for God. . . .

to the order of nature and the moral order. ·There's no special problem here· about the laws of the natural order, because we can get direct and independent knowledge of them, knowledge that reason can put to work for its own purposes. But if we think this:

> God sometimes in special circumstances lets nature deviate from its own laws,

we haven't a hope of ever getting the slightest conception of the law God is following in doing this (apart from the general moral concept that whatever he does is for the best, which tells us nothing about what is going on in detail in any particular case). Here [i.e. when faced with the idea of a miracle] reason is crippled, as it were. it is

- •blocked in its ordinary proceedings in terms of known laws,
- •told nothing about any new laws, and
- •without any hope of ever filling that gap.

Reason's situation is worst with demonic miracles. With theistic miracles reason could at least get guidance from a negative rule, namely: Even if something is represented as commanded by God in a direct appearance of him, if it flatly contradicts morality it can't come from God (e.g. a father is to kill his son who is, so far as he knows, perfectly innocent [see *Genesis* 22]). In evaluating a supposed demonic miracle this rule doesn't apply. We might try to adopt its positive opposite:

> when a miracle includes a command to perform a good action, one that we already recognise as our duty, this command has not come from a bad spirit;

but this could still lead us astray, because a bad spirit often disguises itself, they say, as an angel of light.

In the professions, therefore, miracles can't be counted on or taken into consideration in any use of reason (and reason must be used in every incident of life). A **judge** (however strongly he believes in miracles when he's in church) when he hears an accused person saying 'I was tempted by the devil' treats this exactly as though nothing had been said. If the judge regards this diabolical influence as possible, he might reasonably consider whether in this case an ordinary simple-minded man had been trapped in the snares of an arch-rogue; but he can't summon the tempter and confront the two with each other—in short, he can't *do* anything with it [i.e. with the plea of diabolical influence]. A wise **clergyman** will take great care not to cram the heads of those in his care with anecdotes from *The Hellish Proteus*, thus cutting loose their imaginations. As for good miracles: they're used in the affairs of life as mere phrases. A **doctor** says that there's no help for the patient 'unless a miracle occurs'—which is his way of saying that the patient will certainly die. Then there's the profession of the **research scientist**. ·There's no room for miracles in his thought·: he is searching for the causes of events in their own natural laws; he can verify these laws through experience, although he can't claim to know •what it is *in itself* that operates according to these laws, or •how that would appear to us if we had another sense. And **any man** has his own moral improvement as a ·kind of· professional obligation. Heavenly influences may cooperate with him in this; he may think they are needed to explain how such improvement is possible; but he doesn't understand how to •distinguish them with certainty from natural influences or •draw them—and thereby, as it were, draw Heaven—down to him. So he can't deal directly with them, and therefore excludes them from his thinking about his own moral improvement. If he listens to reason's commands he'll proceeds as though every change of heart—every improvement—depended solely on his own efforts. Then there's the opinion that through the gift of a really firm theoretical faith in miracles one could perform them oneself

and so storm Heaven; this senseless notion goes too far beyond reason's limits to be worth discussing.

·THE REST OF THIS PAGE IS A FOOTNOTE IN THE ORIGINAL·

Those who deceive gullible folk through magic arts, or at least try to get them to believe that miracles do occur, have a common trick—appealing to the scientists' confession of their ignorance:

> 'The scientists proclaim that "we don't know the cause of gravity, of magnetic force, and the like"!'

they say.—But we do know enough about the laws of these forces to know within definite limits the necessary conditions for certain effects to occur; and that's all we need •to use these forces rationally, and •to explain instances of them, with conditional explanations going *downwards* from their laws to an ordering of our experience; though not to move unconditionally •upwards to a grasp of the causes of the forces that operate according to these laws.

This lets us understand an inner phenomenon of the human mind, namely the fact that

- •so-called 'natural miracles'—i.e. well-attested but paradoxical appearances, events that don't conform to laws of nature previously known—are eagerly seized on and raise the spirits as long as they are held to be natural; whereas
- •the spirits are dejected by the announcement of a real miracle.

The first opens up the prospect of something new for reason to feed on, i.e. it awakens the hope of discovering new laws of nature: the second arouses the fear that confidence will be lost in what has previously been accepted as known. For when reason is deprived of the laws of experience, that leaves it in a magicked world in which it is of no use at all, even in fulfilling one's duty. In that kind of world, we no longer know whether our moral incentives are being miraculously altered without our realising it. . . .

Those who think they can't get by without miracles believe that they can make this more palatable to reason by saying that miracles occur only *rarely*. If they mean this to be guaranteed by the concept of *miracle* (a kind of event that often happens doesn't qualify as a 'miracle') they are giving to a question about what is the case in the world an answer about the meaning of a word. But set that aside, and ask: *how rarely*? Once in 100 years? Or in the olden days but no longer? We can't of course base any answer to this on knowledge about miracles,. . . .so we have to be guided by the necessary maxim issued by our reason, which tells us to maintain either

- **(a)** that miracles happen all the time, disguised as natural events, or
- **(b)** that miracles never happen, and have no role in our theoretical or our practical thinking.

Of these, **(a)** totally clashes with reason; so we are left with **(b)**, understood not as a theoretical assertion but as an instruction for judging. . . .