

Part: Lectures on Ethics  
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Introduction

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The faculty of knowledge, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure, and the faculty of desire, are the three powers of the human soul. In all three, understanding and sense can come into play. If understanding is present, then the following sciences are possible: (1) logic, in regard to the understanding; (2) aesthetic, the feeling of pleasure and displeasure in the understanding, which is taste; (3) practical philosophy, the faculty of desire in relation to the understanding. A man has taste, who so chooses, that his pleasure is universal to us, and can be universally communicated. So in feeling, we must therefore consider whether it be capable of universal communication (the understanding addresses the universal, and is therefore in play here). In all these sciences, the question is: Can anything be known *a priori* there? With the feeling of pleasure, etc., we get nowhere, for there it is a matter of how I am affected. But we can have cognitions and acts of will *a priori*, in regard to certain objects. There is no *a priori* science of taste. What things are to our taste can assuredly not be known *a priori*. A knowledge of objects *a priori* is possible, and the science thereof is metaphysics. Our will is free, and hence we may conceive of *a priori* laws that determine the will. The *a priori* laws that determine the free will are those of morality. Theoretical philosophy on *a priori* principles is metaphysics; practical philosophy on *a priori* principles is morality. All objective philosophy, that has to do with objects, consists of these two, metaphysics and morality. If the human will is free, then *a priori* laws can be prescribed to it. Practical philosophy and morals are not identical. General practical philosophy is related to morals as logic is to metaphysics. Logic abstracts from content, and treats of the laws whereby the understanding operates. Metaphysic deals with the pure use of reason. General practical philosophy exhibits the rules whereby the will is determined *a posteriori*; morals, the *a priori* rules whereby I ought to determine the will. Like metaphysic, morals is a pure philosophy of objects. Of objects, we have merely a pure philosophy in regard to the objects of knowledge, and a pure philosophy in regard to objects of the will. We might suppose there to be also a pure philosophy of the objects of the feeling of pleasure or displeasure. But this is not so. A metaphysic of the feeling of taste cannot exist, for feeling already indicates that I must feel and experience it. All pure philosophy consists, therefore, of metaphysics

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and morals. Logic is not pure philosophy, for it is not knowledge of objects, but treats only of the form of knowledge alone.

Baumgarten and Wolff say that duty is the necessity of an action according to the greatest and most important grounds of motivation. Now to them it is all one, whether these grounds are from inclinations or from reason. It is thus no pure philosophy that they have in view here, but rather a general practical philosophy. The latter treats of concepts and all actions that proceed from willing. How we ought to act, it does not consider. It makes no mention of the determinations of our willing by pure motivating grounds of reason, but speaks in general of the determinations of the will. In general practical philosophy, nothing of morality must appear.

From what grounds are actions necessary? Every formula which declares here that my action is necessary according to reason, is an imperative. Now we can conceive of imperatives of skill, of prudence, and of morality.

1) The imperative of skill says that I must do this or that (if I wish to attain my end. That presupposes, however, that I desire to do something. Hence, an imperative of this kind is conditioned as means to that end. We are looking here at the ground of motivation. 2) The imperative of prudence assumes that we desire something, namely happiness, which in fact is true of everyone. Since you yourself wish to be happy, you must do this thing. The imperative of prudence establishes an end that is given to me a priori, since happiness is the maximal degree of satisfaction of all our inclinations. 3) The imperative of morality abstracts from all inclinations.

The motivating ground is not drawn from sense, or from happiness, but given solely from pure reason. The motivating grounds and the law itself must be a priori. In general practical philosophy it is undetermined, whether we have motivating grounds or not. Logic abstracts from our cognitions. General practical philosophy, from the grounds of motivation. Moral laws cannot be empirically conditioned. The other practical laws are so. Morality, which discerns purely a priori the laws of freedom, is a metaphysic of freedom, or of morals, just as metaphysics is called a metaphysic of nature, since it contains a priori the laws of nature, as they are known a priori. General practical philosophy is included here, insofar as it furnishes a preparation. The metaphysic of morals, or metaphysica pura, is only the first part of morality; the second part is philosophia moralis applicata,<sup>4</sup> moral anthropology, to which the empirical principles belong. Just as there is metaphysics and physics, so the same applies here. Morality cannot be constructed out of empirical principles, for this yields, not absolute, but merely conditional necessity. Morality says, however, you must do it, without any condition or exception. General practical philosophy

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<sup>4</sup> applied moral philosophy

phy is a *propaedeutica*. Moral anthropology is morality applied to men. *Moralia pura* is based upon necessary laws, and hence it cannot be founded upon the particular constitution of a rational being, such as man. The particular constitution of man, and the laws based upon it, come to the fore in moral anthropology under the name of ethics. In general practical philosophy, the metaphysic of morals, or *metaphysica pura*, is also presented in a mixed fashion.

The ancient Greeks concentrated the determining of the principle of morality on the question: What is the highest good? Among all that we call good, the major portion is good in a conditional sense, and nothing is good without restriction, save the good will. Understanding, bodily strength and prudence are good, but united with a bad will, are exceedingly harmful. Health, capacity, well-being and constant cheerfulness of heart are good only provided that the agent has a good will, in order even to make use of them. Thus a good will is simply good without restriction, for itself alone, in every respect and under all circumstances. It is the only thing that is good without other conditions, but it is also not completely good. A thing can be unconditioned, and yet not complete. It does not yet comprise the whole of goodness. The highest good is unconditionally good, and also comprises the whole of goodness. Were there a being in the world, such that his good will frequently led to his ruin, his good will would shine all the brighter. But the possession of virtue is not yet the whole of goodness. Virtue is the greatest worth of the person, but our state must also be worth wishing for. The greatest worth of one's state is happiness. So virtue combined with happiness is the highest good. Virtue is the condition under which I am worthy of happiness; but that is not yet the highest good. . . .

We have to see that these two elements, not merely do not contradict each other, but can also be united. The course of nature does not show us that. Reason prescribes laws to the former; to the latter they are also prescribed by our needs. Reason cannot satisfy my needs. If both are to be united, we have to postulate a universal world-ruler. The Stoics, too, had the concept of God, but only in *superfluo*,<sup>5</sup> for they thought that otherwise morality would lose its unity, and men act merely in their own interest. They said that, even if everything goes wrong for a sage, he still has a refuge, namely the hope of a future life. Thirdly, they also confounded the *principia* of morality, and how I ought to pursue it.

Objective *principia* are laws, and differ from subjective principles, or from maxims by which I act. Objective *principia* are those in which morality consists, and subjective, those whereby I attain to morality; the ancients did not distinguish them.

<sup>5</sup> as an extra

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A knowledge of the former must precede, but is much easier than knowledge of the latter, which is based on anthropology. We might attain to morality either naturally, through some cause that lies in our nature, (of supernatural, through the influence of a supreme being. Plato assumed a hyperphysical cause, the immediate intuition of God in his Ideas. The others take it to be natural, but are divided, in that Diogenes says that it rests on the simplicity of nature, whereas Epicurus and Zeno hold that it would need to be learnt, and that a major science therefore pertains to it. Rousseau in modern times, has maintained that it does not need to be learnt, while Humboldt argues that it is a science. By nature we do not, indeed, have knowledge of right and wrong, but only a very small degree of culture is requisite for this, and our capacity is almost equal to it. Diogenes had to develop the concepts in his pupils by himself. He wholly rejected propriety, and thought it an obstacle to virtue. Among the ancients, we have the following ideals:

1. For Diogenes, the ideal of the most perfect man was the man of nature;
  2. For Epicurus, it was the man of the world.
- Epicurus has been poorly understood. We still have a letter of his, in which he invites someone to dine, but promises him no other welcome beyond a cheerful heart and a dish of pottage. This would make a sorry meal. Since he turned morality into the means to happiness, he deprived virtue of its worth.

3. For the Stoic, the ideal was the sage.

Plato's ideal is unthinkable, for it was a supernatural thing. The perfect man of Diogenes is good without virtue. Virtue is the strength of soul to withstand out of duty, the onset of evil. Diogenes' perfect man has no need of virtue, for he has no concept of evil. It has not yet been engendered from his needs. He is happy without wisdom or prudence, and at the smallest price, since he needs the least for his happiness. The ancients called this the short way to virtue. Innocence is certainly desirable, only it does not last, and is easily led astray, for it contains no enduring principle. A man's desires keep on growing, and without realizing it he is out of his innocence. Rousseau has tried to bring it back again, but in vain. Epicurus founded his ideal on science though he said it was that in which contentment lies: the cheerful heart, for which virtue would be the means of attainment, and in which worth would consist. He called it *voluptas*, and the term has been very damaging to his system. His pupils may well thereafter have taken it to mean sensual pleasure. That he did not intend by it any such thing, can be seen from the fact that he did not then demean himself.

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In the Gospel we also find an ideal, namely that of holiness. It is that state of mind from which an evil desire never arises. God alone is holy, and man can never become so, but the ideal is good. The understanding often has to contend with the inclinations. We cannot prevent them, but we can prevent them from determining the will. Holiness is purity of the will, even in thought. We can attain to virtue, i.e., to a moral preparedness to withstand all temptations to evil, so far as they arise from inclinations. The ancient philosophers never got to that point, though it has been said that they have enunciated all that is moral in the Bible. With these four ideals, the whole topic is exhausted.

The ideal of Christianity is hyperphysical, but it must nevertheless serve us as a model. An Idea is a concept that is universal, or the universal concept of a maximum, whose object cannot be presented in *concreta*. A practical Idea is a moral perfection whose object can never be adequately given in experience. It is intrinsic to moral perfection, that an action be done, without any advantage or self-interest, solely from the concept of duty. We shall be unable to name any action where such incentives have not been at work alongside morality. So to expound morality in full purity is to set forth an Idea of practical reason. Such Ideas are not chimeras, for they constitute the guideline to which we must constantly approach. They make up the law of approximation. We have to possess a yardstick by which to estimate our moral worth, and to know the degree to which we are faulty and deficient; and here I have to conceive of a maximum, so that I know how far away I am, or how near I come to it. An ideal is the representation of a single thing, in which we depict such an Idea to ourselves in *concreta*. All ideals are fictions. We attempt, in *concreta*, to envisage a being that is congruent with the Idea. In the ideal we turn the Ideas into a model, and may go astray in clinging to an ideal, since it can often be defective. Mistakes in metaphysics are not so damaging as in morals, for the former remain acts of speculation, whereas in the practical sphere errors are dangerous. The ideal is a *praktikon* of morality. A natural man can never be the ideal, for he is still always subject to weakness. The ancients would certainly seem to have exhausted all the possibilities here. But if we ask: What is moral perfection, and on what principle is it to be judged?, we can and must enter upon new paths at this point.

All practical rules consist in an imperative which says what I ought to do. They are meant to signify that a free action, possible through myself, would necessarily occur, if reason were to have total control over my will. If reason has power enough to determine the will in accordance with its concepts, then it has full control. Do we even have such a reason? We are well aware of what a being with such reason would do; but we do it not, for we have inclinations that are hindrances. A being that, through reason, has total control over his will, has a naturally good will. Such a being has no need of any imperative, for *ought* indicates that it is not natural to the

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will, but that the agent has to be coerced. Our will is not good of its own accord; only God's will is automatically good and perfect, and we cannot say of Him, as we do of men, that He ought so to act. With God, the objective practical law is also, at the same time, a motive. An objective practical law that is not, at the same time, subjective, is an imperative. Necessitation is an *actio* whereby a thing is made necessary, that was not so before. Every imperative is therefore a necessitation. Practical reason affects the will, and shows that we do not really, and by nature, act in that way, but that we must so act. With regard to ourselves, the moral laws are called commands, but not so with regard to God. All created beings are subject to commands, for they all have needs and inclinations which may very well conflict with morality.

The imperative is either a command or a prohibition. Every imperative is a direction of my will by reason, as I picture how a reason, which had free control over my will, would act. Imperatives are drawn from the Idea of a perfect will, and hold good as rules for my imperfect will; duty is the Idea of a perfect will, as the norm for an imperfect one. God, therefore, has no duties. Reason is a use of our will that is fully imperative. Man must not only act in accordance with the willing of reason; he also has hindrances in willing, namely inclinations. Then is appended the *ought*, the Idea of a willing that is in accordance with the laws of reason, as a guideline to our own willing.

All imperatives are (1) hypothetical, i.e., the necessity of the action as a means to ends; (2) categorical, i.e., the practical necessity of the action in an absolute sense, without the motivating ground being contained in any other end. The latter has unconditioned, the former only conditioned practical necessity. The hypothetical imperative commands a thing either *problematically*, i.e., it enjoins a thing under the condition of a merely possible end; or *assertorially*, if it enjoins a thing under the condition of an actual end. The categorical imperative enjoins without any end. The problematic imperative occurs in all practical sciences; in geometry, for example, when I say: If you want to measure a tower, you must do thus and so. Those who have no wish to measure the tower, have no need to do these things. The imperative under a *problematic* condition is the imperative of skill. In youth, when we instruct him, we show the student all possible means to all possible ends, with the intention that, if he knows everything that is needed, it may be useful to him. He who knows the imperatives to very many possible ends, has a great deal of skill.

The imperative where I presuppose an assertoric end is the imperative of happiness, and this I can assume in everybody, since each of us automatically wishes to be happy. The imperatives which teach us how to attain happiness are those of prudence. Skill is dexterity in knowing the means to any desired ends. The influence of men is always directed here to the particular skill, so that to utilize a man for one's own desired end is

prudence; for example, the clockmaker is skilled if he makes a good clock, but prudent if he knows how to dispose of it effectively; true prudence is the use of means to promote or nurture one's own happiness. That is the pragmatic imperative. That which makes us prudent is pragmatic, and that which makes us skilled is practical; or, the pragmatic is that which I can utilize for my freedom.

The categorical imperative is that which enjoins the necessity of such an action, without regard to any end. The hypothetical imperative tells us which action is good, either for any given end, or for an existing one; the categorical, on the other hand, tells us which action is good for its own sake. The questions now arise, (1) Are there indeed actions that are good for their own sake? And then (2) How is a categorical imperative possible? This is the hardest to answer: Everyone knows that nothing in the world is absolutely good without restriction, save a good will, and that this good will sets the limit to everything and for that reason is then good without limitation. The imperative that enjoins something through the good will can thus command. Even happiness in the bad will is nothing good. If a happy man does not have a good will, he laughs at the unfortunate, and does nothing to help. The good will is good without restriction, because everywhere it is itself the restriction. The categorical imperative sets forth the rules of a good will. The will that is intrinsically good cannot act in accordance with the hypothetical imperative, for then it would be good only insofar as the end is good, and no end is good without limitation; hence the good will must stand under a categorical imperative. Would the intrinsically good will indeed be good, if it always had a care only for its own greatest happiness? No. The rule that has objective necessity is necessitating, but for us it is not subjectively necessary. The rule of a good will, for my good will, is subjectively necessary. The divine will is perfect, and in accordance with the rules of a perfect will, but His will is not affected by these rules; it is impossible, rather, that He should will anything else. An imperative is categorical if it is the rule of a will itself intrinsically good; and this rule is imperative because it is addressed to an imperfect will, and is necessitating. The categorical imperative is thus the rule of a will intrinsically good. But that will is one that can in no circumstances be bad. It is thus the rule of effecting that which, taken generally as a rule, can always be the object of willing; and then it is in all circumstances the same, and must in that case therefore be a good will. Lying can be good from many points of view, but from the subjective viewpoint it is not good, but useful; if truth, however, is made into an altogether general rule, I can always will it, and it is always good. Only the will that determines under the rule of the universal validity of its rules, is an absolutely good will. Only the will that wills action no otherwise, save insofar as it does not conflict with the universal validity of a rule, acts rightly.

Principles are objective rules of action, and maxims are practical princi-

ples, which make themselves, subjectively, into the very rule of their action. The will whose maxims can be objective principles is intrinsically good. I am never to will anything, unless I can also will that this maxim be at the same time a universal law; the will, in that case, is never in conflict with any other. Desire is that which conflicts with reason. An action is morally impossible if (1) its maxim cannot function as a universal law; (2) its maxim can indeed do this, but we simply cannot will it. It is therefore that of whose maxim we cannot possibly will that it be a universal law. There are actions such that, if we wanted to make their maxims into universal laws of nature, they simply could not hold.

If everyone might break a promise when it suited him, and this were to become a universal law, then nobody would trust to a promise, or therefore do anything because of it. In that case, promising would abolish itself, and thus automatically cease. Hence, it is subjectively possible, but morally impossible in practice. A man who fails to keep his promise, does not will that this should become a universal law; he merely wishes to exempt himself alone from this law. Here the action is not impossible because of the man's opinion; but if this maxim were made into a rule, it would be quite untenable. A maxim, qua universal law, whereby nobody gave anyone any help, but also did them no harm, would be able to hold, and so, too, could the world; but injustice, lying, etc. cannot subsist at all, and are therefore, in a strict sense, morally impossible. Although a man may recognize that loves's maxims are possible, and that nature could survive under them, it is nevertheless impossible for him to will it. The latter is a conditional, the former an unconditional, moral impossibility.

The maxim must be so constituted, that I can will at the same time that it become a universal law. If somebody is in distress, and I cannot help him here, then I cannot will that this action should become a universal law. The universalizing of a law that is strictly impossible, cannot occur, for it contradicts itself. Obligation is a moral necessity, namely the idea of the necessity of acting freely from the concept of a good will, whose principle it is that one can will that a maxim thereof should become a universal rule. *Duty (officium)*<sup>7</sup> is the necessity of an action from obligation. Perfect duty is that which conforms to the principle of the will, insofar as the opposite cannot become a universal law; imperfect duties, however, are those which originate from the *principlum*, that we be able to will that the maxims of our actions should become a universal law. All perfect and imperfect duties are both inner and outer in regard to ourselves. With perfect duties, I ask whether their maxims can hold good as a universal law. But with imperfect ones, I ask whether I could also will that such a maxim should become a universal law. Perfect duties are strict duties. Were it to be a general rule, to take away his belongings from everyone,

then mine and thine would be altogether at an end. For anything I might take from another, a third party would take from me. I cannot will that lovelessness should become a universal law, for in that case I also suffer myself. The will that is good under all circumstances must in no way conflict with itself, if I am to turn it into a universal law. The agreement of the will with its own general validity, or its accordancy insofar as it views itself as a universal law, is morality; and by this all men judge the morality of their actions. No man can call his acts good, if he considers them as subject to the universal law, but as an exception to it. That is the supreme canon, that the will should be in agreement with its own general validity. If the action is such that my will can have no general validity in the matter, then it is morally reprehensible. Here the will is considered in the light of its general validity; and in that case it is the intrinsically good will; and this, then, is the moral imperative: Act so that you can will that the nature of your will becomes a general rule. If my will can become such a general rule, then it agrees with itself in all circumstances, and is an intrinsically good will.

We are pleased by the thing we have an inclination to, but the inclination in itself does not please us, for if it did we should not have so many requirements. Inclination is never its own object, for to that we are subordinated; but moral will is its own object, for such a will is not conditional, but unconditional. Inclination is merely conditioned. There are actions whose goodness depends merely on their effect. But moral actions are in no degree less good, even though no effect whatever comes to pass. Here the mere will has the worth. All other kinds of willing are good solely on account of the end. We must make all our decisions in such wise, as if we were legislating with the maxims of our will. Man sees himself, in a system of rational beings, as a legislating member thereof; otherwise we are mere instruments. It is impossible that a man should be able to judge the morality of his actions without moral principles, or consequently arrive at the point of taking no interest in them. Rascals are prepared to steal from others, but among themselves they still wish to be honourable fellows, for they see that otherwise they could not survive at all.

Perfect duties are those whose opposite cannot become a universal law, and imperfect duties are those where the opposite is possible, but I cannot will that it become such a law.

So morality, then, is now also divided thereby into two parts.

<sup>4</sup> office or function