



Deposited via The University of York.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:

<https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/131642/>

Version: Published Version

Article:

Clarke, James Alexander and Rhode, Conny (2018) Johann Benjamin Erhard, 'Devil's Apology' (1795). *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*. ISSN: 0960-8788

<https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2018.1441805>

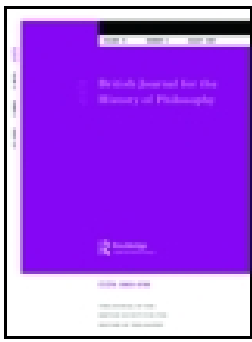
Reuse

This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) licence. This licence allows you to distribute, remix, tweak, and build upon the work, even commercially, as long as you credit the authors for the original work. More information and the full terms of the licence here:

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

Takedown

If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.



Johann Benjamin Erhard, 'Devil's Apology' (1795)

James Clarke & Conny Rhode

To cite this article: James Clarke & Conny Rhode (2018): Johann Benjamin Erhard, 'Devil's Apology' (1795), British Journal for the History of Philosophy, DOI: [10.1080/09608788.2018.1441805](https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2018.1441805)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09608788.2018.1441805>



© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 24 May 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 49



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

TRANSLATION

 OPEN ACCESS

 Check for updates

Johann Benjamin Erhard, 'Devil's Apology' (1795)

Translated by James Clarke and Conny Rhode

Department of Philosophy, The University of York, York, UK

ARTICLE HISTORY Received 2 August 2017; Revised 1 February 2018; Accepted 13 February 2018

About the translation

The translation is based on the original published version of 'Apologie des Teufels' in F. I. Niethammer's *Philosophisches Journal einer Gesellschaft Teutscher Gelehrten*. To facilitate reference to the text, we have numbered the paragraphs, using square brackets to indicate that the numbers are not part of the original text. When citing Erhard's German text in the footnotes to the translation, we have preserved the original orthography (e.g. *Cultur* instead of *Kultur*, etc.). Erhard's own footnotes are indicated using asterisks. Because Erhard draws heavily on Kantian terminology, we have followed recent conventions for translating Kant's terms; thus, *erkennen* is translated as 'to cognize' or 'to recognize' rather than as 'to know'.

'Devil's Apology' (1795)

Johann Benjamin Erhard

[1] If one understands by an *apology* nothing but a defence against the accusation that a person or thing is wicked or harmful, then indeed no apology for the devil can occur. But what compels us to place such narrow limits on the concept of an apology? In accordance with the origins of the word, one understands by it all the reasons that are advanced in favour of something that was vilified. Thus, there can be as many apologies as there are kinds of accusation. But, in general, something can be accused of being either evil, or harmful, or foolish, or absurd.¹ An apology is therefore also possible against each of these accusations. – There is too much agreement that the devil is evil and harmful for an apology in this respect to occur; no one has ever claimed that he is foolish. Thus, only the last accusation that he could be defended against

CONTACT James Clarke ✉ james.a.clarke@york.ac.uk 📧 Department of Philosophy, The University of York, York, UK

¹*ungereimt*. This word can also be translated as 'inconsistent', and the absurdity Erhard has in mind clearly involves logical absurdity.

© 2018 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

remains—namely, that he is something *absurd*. The existence of the devil has not only been frequently denied, but many even claimed that he is something impossible, which cannot even exist. We thus do not have to save the devil's honour as an existing being at all; indeed, we do not even have to prove his existence: we have only to defend him against those who already want to dispute his possibility. That the *concept of a devil* is called into question by many people as an absurdity is a fact so well known that any proof of it would be superfluous. Our apology thus only seeks to defend the devil's honour of being an idea and not a mere chimera.

[2] Once the possibility of the devil has been demonstrated, the issue is whether his existence can be postulated on the basis of reasons. His existence can be proven by facts just as little as the existence of God, because it is located outside of natural appearances. Even if one had a corporeal appearance of the devil, one could not know whether he was the devil except through the characteristics contained in the concept of a devil. However, this concept does not determine which form² the devil must appear in, but rather which inner properties he possesses in himself, which [properties] would therefore have to be abstracted, not from his manner of acting in a specific case, but from his manner of acting in general and in all cases. But this would be impossible because it requires an infinitely long acquaintance with the appearance which the devil is supposed to be. However, the concept of the devil cannot be acquired from experience because it does not consist of external, natural characteristics – like the concept of an animal – but concerns inner dispositions, which never appear as such, but are only placed underneath appearances as the explanatory grounds of their possibility through freedom (not through nature). Before one could observe an appearance with regard to whether it is the devil, one would already have to possess the concept of the devil. The question of the existence of the devil therefore necessarily leads to the question of the possibility of the concept [of the devil]. If this concept itself is a chimera – that is, conceivable only through an illusion of the imagination³ –, then it is absolutely impossible for there to be a devil. But even if the concept of the devil is possible, experience cannot decide about his existence; rather, the latter would have to be postulated, that is, it [viz. the existence of the devil] would have to be proven by being given through the mere conceivability of the devil or of some other object.

[3] The majority of the philosophizing public (and it is especially with regard to them that the devil requires this apology; for the rest of the public, on average, continues to do him the honour of counting him amongst the realities) will perhaps deem an investigation into the devil to

²*Gestalt.*

³*Illusion der Phantasie.*

be superfluous and – even if it were still possible to make such an inquiry entertaining – will ultimately regard it as something as empty and null as the devil himself. I therefore run the risk either of not being read at all or perhaps only out of curiosity to see what might be said about such an absurd subject matter. But this does not deter me from treating in all philosophical seriousness a topic that has hitherto been only an object of mirth for high society. Before my investigation itself can decide whether the idea of a devil is indeed worthy of the serious consideration of a thinker, I ask only that you consider what an important role the devil has played amongst human beings until now, how universal and how old the belief in him is, and with what fervour so many people still argue for his existence. The universality of the belief in the devil at least proves that in the case in which he would be only an illusion, he would nevertheless almost have to be an illusion that is peculiar to the human being. If my readers grasp only this aspect of the matter, I fear less that my topic will fail to arouse interest, than that I will not satisfy this interest.

[4] In order to determine the *concept of the devil*, it is first of all necessary to take it as it is generally found to be determined amongst people, and then to inquire whether this concept can be raised to the level of a thinkable idea. The most general characteristic which the devil is thought of as possessing⁴ is that he is the wickedest of all creatures. All of the ways of representing the devil throughout the different centuries agree on this point. The diversity which is then to be found in the further development of this concept arises from the representations of the history of the devil and of the future fate that he will meet. In Christian dogmatics, he is presented as the highest of angels, who rebelled against God from pride and was therefore cast down and condemned to eternal disgrace and torment. Some Doctors of the Church believed that he could nevertheless still undergo a conversion and would one day again be accepted into grace. But this view⁵ was condemned by the old church councils as heretical and has thus far also been repudiated by the Protestants. Setting to one side the reasons [for these views], which are based on passages from Scripture, the opinion of the church is more consistent than the other. For since the devil rebelled against God without any temptation, from his own evil will, he has no excuse and therefore cannot count on any mercy.⁶ Furthermore, since he is assumed to be the most intelligent of the created spirits, he must have known the omnipotence of God, and thus cannot have rebelled against God from lack of thought,⁷ but from wickedness; because his crime does not arise from ignorance, he cannot repent it either, but must remain eternally impenitent; and because he did

⁴Literally, 'with which the devil is thought'—*mit dem der Teufel gedacht wird*.

⁵*Meinung*.

⁶Or 'grace'—*Gnade*.

⁷*Unbedachtsamkeit*.

not sin against individual Commandments of God, but rebelled against the Holy One himself, he can also not be converted.—To this general concept is added the particular determination⁸ that he seeks to tempt human beings and to cause them the same agony which he suffers. As to whether God let him have more power to do this before the birth of Christ than after, how great his influence still is, and whether he is able to produce phenomena in nature—on these matters, opinions have never been entirely in agreement; and, as far as I am aware, nothing definite on these matters was ever established by the church councils, but instead, the [following] general idea remained, without the details being specified:⁹ that the devil has an influence on human affairs and that a human being can enter into a pact with him and be possessed by him. On the Protestant side, the belief in witchcraft and possession is no longer ecclesiastically obligatory.

[5] The question is now: whether a creature such as the devil can be thought. This depends especially on the following moments: he is a creature; unconditionally wicked; eternally tormented, without thereby being led to repentance; engaged in a constant effort to make human beings eternally unhappy. If these determinations can be thought together in one concept, then the concept of the devil is no chimera, but a concept of an unconditionally wicked creature, an idea of such a creature. To decide about this, we must run through these moments one by one. The most important moment is: unconditional wickedness. Once we have determined precisely how this moment must be thought, and in what way an ideal of wickedness, if the idea can be represented, must be presented, it will be easy to decide whether the other moments are compatible with it or not.

[6] If wickedness is to be thought of as something absolute, then it must be thought of as something positive, or as negative moral goodness. If wickedness is considered only as a lack of moral goodness, then no absolute concept of it is possible, for it would have as its only characteristic the absence of moral goodness without any other real predicate and would thus vanish into nothingness. But if wickedness is considered as something real, whereby that which is good in the disposition is abolished, then it can be thought of as absolute and consists in a way of acting that is opposed to the moral way of acting. Whether wickedness has its own principle, or is only ignorance of the good or weakness in carrying it out, is a question as old as moral philosophy itself, about which non-philosophers have always agreed, whereas professional philosophers continue to argue over it. For common sense¹⁰ it is decided that wickedness is something self-active,¹¹ which is absolutely opposed to the good; and I also do not believe that one

⁸*die besondere Bestimmung.*

⁹*es blieb bei dem Allgemeinen.*

¹⁰Literally, 'healthy human understanding'—*gesunden Menschenverstand.*

¹¹*etwas selbstthätiges.*

philosopher has yet gone so far as – instead of hating the evildoer – granting him sincere and heartfelt, and not merely verbally proclaimed, sympathy on account of his ignorance and weakness. If one reduces moral evil to ignorance, one can never punish a criminal for his wickedness, but must rather pity him. If one wanted to say that this ignorance is his fault, one would thereby be saying: he could have become good, but did not want to; and one would then again be asked: why did he not want to? To this question, one could again give no other answer than: he did not know that it is good to instruct oneself, whereby he would again be rendered innocent. The answer: *because he had an evil will*, would abolish the whole system of deriving moral evil from ignorance and weakness.¹² To be consistent, the philosopher who derives moral evil from ignorance and weakness must also do away with all attribution of responsibility; but this contradicts our awareness of the share that we have in the morality of an action. If moral goodness or morality is derived from cognition¹³ of the good at all,¹⁴ then all merit of virtue also ceases to exist; for virtue is, in light of this claim, rewarded by itself; virtue is not, to be sure, rewarded through the awareness of having done one's duty – which certainly is a reward of virtue – but rather through what it brings to the virtuous person. The claim: *vice is ignorance* necessarily contains the claim: *virtue is wisdom*;¹⁵ and, just as the first claim entails: *the vicious person is not punishable*, but rather to be pitied as unfortunate,¹⁶ so the second claim entails: *the virtuous person is not to be respected*, but rather to be envied as fortunate.¹⁷—Two results which offend the feeling of every human being! In the case of the opposite claim, the following inference is valid on similar grounds: if virtue is something good in itself, then vice is something evil in itself, and if virtue is worthy of respect, then vice is punishable.

[7] If virtue is considered to be the attainment of the highest good for human beings, then it is folly not to strive for it. The conflict¹⁸ between common sense¹⁹ and reason which philosophizes in the first manner [viz. which attempts to derive evil from ignorance and weakness] resides in this—that the former views virtue as compliance with duties that are commanded absolutely, whereas the latter wants to know a reason for this compliance with duty. The question is: whether a settlement between the two parties can be brought about. If a settlement could be brought about only by both parties partially relinquishing their demands, it would not

¹²*das ganze System der Herleitung des moralische Bösen aus Unwissenheit und Schwäche.*

¹³*Erkenntniß.* We translate *Erkenntniß* as 'cognition' and *erkennen* as 'cognize' or 'recognize'.

¹⁴Or 'in general'—*überhaupt*.

¹⁵*Klugheit.*

¹⁶*unglücklich.*

¹⁷*glücklich.*

¹⁸*Collision.*

¹⁹*gesunden Menschenverstand.*

endure; for moral feeling can never renounce itself, and reason can never be satisfied without reasons. It is thus not possible to conceive of a true reconciliation between inquiring reason and unpresuming and faithful²⁰ moral feeling if both parties cannot be completely satisfied. Until now, one mostly attempted to settle the dispute by wanting to sacrifice one party to the other, or by trying to separate them completely. Three important claims arose from this: reason alone must decide; reason must be taken captive under the obedience of faith;²¹ reason and faith each have their own interest.

[8] I have retained the word 'faith',²² which in the past was used especially in relation to these claims, in order to be able to express the propositions as briefly and clearly as possible. If one wanted to introduce the theological meaning of the word 'faith' here, then it would not alter anything at all in those propositions, for there too nothing is understood by 'faith' except that which the human being must absolutely and without further reason make into the guiding principle of all its actions and desires; and it is in this sense that I will use the word, without considering what really ought to be believed, throughout this treatise.

[9] But all these propositions contradict our ineradicable moral interest, and only entangle us in new difficulties. For, if reason alone should decide, then it must not contradict itself; and yet, philosophical history proves, as an indisputable fact, that reason has until now constantly contradicted itself in its representatives, the philosophers, and has done so even about the principles of morality. If faith should dominate reason, then it is equally difficult to specify a criterion of true faith that would not have to be cognized through reason. If both parties should be separated, then either only one party must exert an influence on the determination of actions, and then we come back again, at least as regards practical interest, to one of the foregoing propositions;²³ or they would have to divide actions between them, certain actions being regulated by reason, and others by faith. But on what grounds should this be decided, and reason and faith be assigned their [respective] domains? This [viz. the attempt to do this] would lead either to

²⁰*anmaßungslosen gläubigen.*

²¹*die Vernunft muß unter den Gehorsam des Glaubens gefangen genommen werden.* This phrase, which alludes to 2 Corinthians 10:5 (in Luther's translation: 'wir [...] nehmen gefangen alle Vernunft unter den Gehorsam Christi'), is discussed and criticized in an important work of *Aufklärung* theology—the *Fragmente des Wolfenbüttelschen Ungenannten. Ein Anhang zu dem Fragment vom Zweck Jesu und seiner Jünger* (Berlin: Wever, 1788). The *Fragmente*, which was compiled by G. E. Lessing from the unpublished work of H. S. Reimarus, is a defence of deism that subjects revelation to historical criticism. It proved highly controversial and triggered a heated dispute—the *Fragmentenstreit*. The author of the *Fragmente* criticizes the requirement 'daß wir unsre Vernunft gefangen nehmen sollen unter den Gehorsam des Glaubens' on the grounds that it deviates from the 'words and meaning' of Paul, and points out that Paul writes, not of obedience to faith, but of obedience to Christ (*Fragmente*, 5, 18).

²²Or 'belief'—*Glauben*.

²³*einen der obigen Sätze.*

the subordination of reason to faith, or of faith to reason, and would thus lead back again to one of the former propositions.²⁴

[10] To find a way out [of these difficulties], it was claimed that reason and faith do not contradict each other. As true as this might be in itself, it has always been difficult to prove, because faith always demanded absolute compliance with duty, and reason always demanded that compliance be for the sake of an ultimate reason.²⁵ The philosophers called this ultimate reason the highest good. Thus, as long as there is the question of the highest good, reason and faith must contradict each other. Of course, recent philosophers believed that they could avoid this quandary to a certain extent by speaking only of a principle, and not of an end, of morality. However, as long as this principle is material, or contains something that is supposed to be produced by morality – e.g. make yourself and others as happy as possible; use every thing in accordance with its purpose,²⁶ etc. –, it is irrelevant whether we then immediately establish the thing contained in the principle as the highest good or refrain from doing so. Every material principle can therefore be placed under the moral point of view that proceeds from a highest good.

[11] The diversity in the determination of the highest good that one finds in the philosophers is a proof that morality can never be based on the concept of the highest good. For the philosophers must have been convinced that what they took to be the highest good is in fact that which announces itself as such in the inner consciousness of human beings, and that it must be thought of as determined by reason in the way that they determined it. One would therefore have to assume either that the philosophers were several kinds of specifically different human beings,²⁷ or that human nature, as soon as it wants to represent morality as something that ought to attain a specific end,²⁸ is subjected to a necessary illusion; from which it would follow either that a moral action and an action subordinated to an end contradict each other, or that morality, as it announces itself in an inner feeling, is itself a mere deception. Now, if morality could not be thought with any predicate that is peculiar to it,²⁹ morality would be a chimera, as, then, would be its opposite—wickedness.

[12] I now proceed further and claim that the opposite inference is also valid: if the ideal of wickedness is a chimera, then so too is the ideal of morality. If the ideal of wickedness is nothing – because wickedness is not the

²⁴*einen der ersten Sätze.* Presumably, the propositions in question are 'reason alone must decide' and 'reason must be taken captive under the obedience of faith'.

²⁵*eines letzten Grundes.*

²⁶*Bestimmung.*

²⁷*verschiedene Sorten spezifisch verschiedener Menschen.* Erhard might have the philosophical sense of 'specifically different' in mind, where to say that *X* and *Y* are specifically different is to say that they belong to different species of the same genus.

²⁸*einen gewissen Zweck.*

²⁹*ihr eigenthümlichen Prädicat.*

opposite of morality, but only the lack of it –, then morality will be thought of as something efficacious, a reality to which no other is opposed; and, in order that it can be thought of in this way, a highest good that is to be attained by it must be presupposed, a highest good that is not abolished by another way of acting [viz. a way of acting other than the moral one], but only not attained to the same degree. But this presupposition cannot be proven, not only because human beings never agree in their desires and a highest good would nevertheless have to be that which all desires strive for, but also because the moral capacity³⁰ would be thought of as an acting force³¹ that is determined in one way only and thus completely compelled, and would therefore be abolished entirely [as a moral capacity] and placed in one class with natural effects. For, even if one could conceive of a unanimity of human beings [in their striving] towards the highest good, all virtue would thereby cease to exist since one would have to call ‘virtue’ only that which attains this final end or satisfies the greatest self-interest and ‘vice’ that which unfortunately fails to do so—something which absolutely contradicts the moral feeling of human beings who are not sophists.

[13] In the investigations into the highest good (*summum bonum, finis bonorum*) as the ground of morality, reason can therefore never come to an agreement with faith; indeed, it cannot even come to an agreement with common sense.³² There is thus nothing else to do but to move one step further in our investigation, and to inquire whether the ground of morality lies in the absolutely good. The latter cannot be regarded as something that is attainable through morality, for if it were, it would be only a highest good; it would rather have to be considered as something that is given through morality itself. The highest good would, after all, be a good only for the one who attains it, and thus not anything good in itself. The good in itself must be something which, when thought of apart from all relation, is good; it thus cannot be anything that is striven for, but [must be] something that is posited in itself. The absolute good can therefore never be the end of an action, but would have to be the action itself. Until now, people’s common way of thinking³³ has located this absolute good in the virtuous disposition, and nothing else can be thought of that bears the characteristic of the absolute good. Reason, which asks for the *why* of duty in general,³⁴ is thereby referred back to itself, and the answer to the question: why should I act in accordance with duty?³⁵ would be: because I recognize it as in accordance with duty.

³⁰*moralische Vermögen.*

³¹*handelnde Kraft.*

³²Literally, ‘healthy understanding’—*gesunden Verstande.*

³³Or perhaps ‘people’s common opinion’—*Die gemeine Denkart der Menschen.*

³⁴*dem Warum der Pflicht überhaupt.*

³⁵*pflichtgemäß handeln.*

[14] The character of an action that conforms with duty has never been mistaken;³⁶ indeed, the philosophers themselves admire common sense so much on this point that they thought it the best proof of their systems when they showed how easy it is to derive from their principles actions that are universally recognized as right.³⁷ The character of virtue has never been sought in what it yields; it has rather been sought in the disposition from which virtue arises. Thus its character lies in its being an action arising from a disposition that is good in itself. If a disposition is to be good in itself, then it must not contain any intention which can be recognized as good only by its result; rather, everything that arises from the disposition must be good because of it. Such a disposition must be universally valid; it must be unassuming³⁸ and it must have no ends that relate specifically to the subject in which it is found, i.e. it must be completely unselfish;³⁹ it must itself be produced freely and actively⁴⁰ and not be the consequence of something else; nor should it presuppose any other human being as necessary for its realization. This disposition therefore cannot itself be established as a principle of morality; we can only indicate the distinctive character which allows us to recognize whether a principle that we want to make the specific determining ground of our actions is compatible with it or not.

[15] In accordance with the characteristics of the moral disposition that we have just given, a maxim that ought not to contradict it must possess the following properties: 1) I must be able to will that the maxim would be adopted by all human beings; this proves its unselfishness. 2) I must be aware that I have not adopted the maxim for the sake of any other human being; this proves its freedom. 3) I must be aware that the maxim has not arisen from any particular inclination towards something; this proves its universal validity. The briefest expression of these demands is simply called the *moral law*. It may be formulated as follows: 'Act in such a way that the maxim in accordance with which you act can be followed by all other human beings at all times without conflict'.⁴¹ The essence of morality consists in the moral disposition which is, when thought of as a principle, a formal principle, which does not lead to a highest good.

[16] These characteristics of a moral maxim do not determine which actions are moral, but only which actions could be moral. The disposition with which they are followed is the only sure sign of the morality of the action, but it occurs only in the consciousness of the agent; only the morality of the maxim is recognized on the basis of the moral law. *Morality* as a science is

³⁶*ist noch nie verkannt worden.*

³⁷Or perhaps 'generally recognized as right'—*allgemein für recht erkannten Handlungen.*

³⁸*anspruchslos sein.*

³⁹Or perhaps 'non-self-interested'—*uneigennützig.*

⁴⁰*freithätig erzeugt.*

⁴¹*Collision.*

not a doctrine of virtue⁴² – for virtue is something unique, consisting in one and the very same disposition, which as such does not need to be taught – but rather a doctrine of what does not contradict virtue. The purpose⁴³ of morality is not to make human beings virtuous, but to make them just, or to show how their maxims, which are applicable to determinate circumstances⁴⁴ and are thus necessarily material, must be constituted so that they do not contradict the virtuous disposition. Morality does not ground virtue, but is grounded on it. However, morality does ground natural right,⁴⁵ which contains nothing but material maxims which have been recognized as compatible with morality. Morality does not establish the idea of morality either – the latter is its foundation – but only shows what contradicts an ideal of morality. Hence all its doctrines⁴⁶ are, as long as they do not pass into the domain of right, prohibitive.

[17] According to what we have established so far, the *ideal of morality* consists in a subject that acts solely in accordance with formal principles, having no reason other than the moral disposition. The *ideal of wickedness* that is opposed to it would therefore consist in a subject that acted solely in accordance with material principles. The ideal of morality can be thought of in two ways—namely, as bound to a given content⁴⁷ of its actions or as producing all content itself in accordance with a formal principle. The moral disposition is not impaired in its purity when the impetus for its manifesting itself comes from outside; it is just as moral to leave everyone that which is his as it is to give everyone that which is his—to obey laws that are moral as it is to give such laws. In the first respect, the moral ideal is an ideal of humanity; in the second, an ideal of divinity.⁴⁸ The equal dignity of both ideals, as ideals of morality, was first taught by the Christian religion. In the case of wickedness, only the content can be thought of as given, because the material principle cannot precede the cognition of its content.

[18] We now want to examine more closely whether an ideal of wickedness can be presented. As long as the moral disposition, or its most abbreviated expression, the moral law, is thought of as a law that belongs to our reason or to some other capacity, and is thus at the same time [thought of as] the capacity by means of which we determine ourselves in conformity with the

⁴²Or 'theory of virtue'—*Tugendlehre*.

⁴³*Bestimmung*.

⁴⁴Or 'particular circumstances'—*bestimmte Verhältnisse*.

⁴⁵*Naturrecht*. We follow recent translators of Kant and Fichte in rendering *Naturrecht* and *Recht* as 'natural right' and 'right' rather than as 'natural law' and 'law'. *Recht* covers all of what is meant in English by 'right', 'law', and 'justice'. See Neuhouser, 'Introduction' in J. G. Fichte, *Foundations of Natural Right* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000): vii.

⁴⁶Or 'teachings'—*Lehren*.

⁴⁷Or 'matter'—*Stoff*.

⁴⁸*in der ersten Rücksicht ... in der zweiten*. In the first respect, the moral ideal involves leaving everyone's possessions alone and obeying moral laws; in the second respect, it involves bestowing possessions on everyone and imposing moral laws upon them.

law, then: either the law cannot be the highest, all-encompassing law of this capacity—which it must be, since it is purely formal and contains every other law within itself; or this capacity must determine itself in accordance with this law, which cannot fail to have its effect if it is not limited by something else that has nothing in common with morality. If the ground of the moral disposition's demand and the ground of the decision to act in accordance with it reside in one and the same capacity, then the decision must be determined through the strength of the demand, and its execution [viz. the execution of the decision] depends on the force of the capacity and the absence of obstacles coming from elsewhere to oppose it. Morality thus becomes contingent, and one cannot say that the subject of morality acts morally, but only that it is determined morally. The ideal of morality would thus become a mere *exemplar*, in accordance with which one could determine contingent morality, but it would not be a *goal* towards which the human being could strive. A being would be moral to the degree that it acted self-actively; but the degree of its self-activity would be set absolutely without any contribution on its part. This would do away with all attribution of responsibility. As for the person who claims that he finds no attribution of responsibility in his inner consciousness, and that neither his actions nor the actions of others appear to him as punishable, but only as deficient actions to which no personal blame attaches—this objection admittedly cannot prevent him from conceiving of things in this way; however, he must then also declare all of morality to be mere illusion and, insofar as he does this, it is impossible to reach any agreement with him about the essence of morality. If 'morality' and 'virtue' are not to be an empty name,⁴⁹ then the moral law and the determination to act in accordance with it must be thought of as belonging to two capacities which do not determine each other at all. The capacity that brings about the moral disposition can, insofar as this capacity demands something merely formal and is determining, be called *practical reason*; and, insofar as it seeks to bring forth actions without a determinate desire⁵⁰ for something, it can be called the *unselfish drive*. The capacity of moral decision is *freedom*, which can decide for and against the moral law and which thereby gives the maxim to the will, the will manifesting itself as *will* only through consistency in the maxims.

[19] The *ideal of morality* is therefore a subject who always acts in accordance with the moral disposition through freedom; the *ideal of wickedness* is a subject who acts against the moral disposition in order to act contrary to it. As long as the moral law and freedom are considered as being in harmony⁵¹ – i.e. if the moral law appears to be itself given through freedom, no conflict

⁴⁹*kein leerer Name.*

⁵⁰Or 'particular desire'—*bestimmtes Begehren.*

⁵¹Or 'accord'—*Einstimmung.*

between the two can be thought. Insofar as both are united in one subject, and freedom announces itself in consciousness as expressing itself in the moral law against inclinations – thereby proving itself to be freedom –, this harmony can be thought, and it seems impossible to act freely and not morally. But, insofar as the moral law is given independently of freedom through practical reason, freedom seems bound in its compliance with the moral law, and it seems impossible to demonstrate one's freedom and to act morally. The theoretical capacity that is analogous with freedom, the active imagination, necessarily connects the moral law, which is foreign to freedom in itself, with the fiction of a master. Morality thus appears to be slavery, and determination by pure freedom without regard for anything appears to be absolute strength of mind.⁵² Hence wickedness, or a way of acting opposed to the moral law, is thereby possible.

[20] The *moral ideal* acts in accordance with a *formal* principle; the *wicked ideal* must therefore act in accordance with a *material* principle. However, if freedom should not appear to be limited by a material principle, then that principle must return completely into the subject, and the subject must make itself the ultimate final end of its actions. The character of the wicked disposition thus has the following moments: 1) *Singularity*,⁵³ the maxim in accordance with which you act pertains absolutely to you alone and makes it impossible that it could be followed by anyone apart from you. 2) *Selfishness*,⁵⁴ the maxim relates absolutely to you. 3) *Exclusive freedom*,⁵⁵ the maxim treats everything else as means for your use. If we were to encapsulate this character in an *intention* – for it cannot be called a law, because it can have no universal validity – then it might be expressed in this way: 'I want to act in such a way that my self⁵⁶ is the only possible end of my action and appears as the only free being'.

[21] Just as a system of maxims that are compatible with the moral disposition can be derived from the moral law, so a system of wickedness that is opposed to morality but equally consistent can be derived from this intention. The [following] sketch of this system will make this clearer.

[22] The maxims which initially follow from this intention would be: 1) Never be truthful, yet appear to be. For if you are truthful, others can count on you; you therefore serve them, and they do not serve only you. But if you do not appear to be truthful, they will not count on you, and you will not be able to make use of them so conveniently. 2) Recognize no property, but claim that it is holy and inviolable, and appropriate everything for yourself. If you can possess everything as your acknowledged

⁵²*unbedingte Geistesstärke.*

⁵³Or 'Individuality'—*Einzelheit.*

⁵⁴Or 'Self-interestedness'—*Eigennützigkeit.*

⁵⁵Or 'Sole freedom'—*Alleinfreiheit.*

⁵⁶*mein Ich.*

property,⁵⁷ then everything depends upon you. 3) Use the morality of others as a weakness to promote your ends. 4) Tempt everyone into sin while you appear to recognize morality as something necessary. As a result, everyone else will become dependent on your mercy because you can punish them as criminals. 5) Love no-one. 6) Make everyone who does not want to depend on you unhappy. 7) Be completely consistent and never let yourself regret anything. Once you have resolved to do something, do it, whatever the cost may be. You thereby demonstrate your complete independence and acquire, in virtue of the uniformity of your manner of proceeding, the semblance of justice, which provides you with a handy means of making others into slaves before they even notice it.

[23] From these general maxims one could – as the reader can easily discover for himself – develop a system down to the minutest detail, according to which, in any given case, one could cognize just as determinately how consistent wickedness will act as perfect virtue will act. We have shown that such a way of acting can be thought of as possible; we have also proven that it would be the distinctive character of an ideal of wickedness. We thus now only have to investigate whether it can be realized.

[24] First of all, it is clear that the moral disposition is satisfied by each moral action, but that the wicked disposition could be satisfied only by a totality of actions which stands in a precise relation, along with all possible objects, to [individual] actions. This latter disposition, being consistent, thus presupposes that absolute immortality is necessarily cognized.⁵⁸ The human being can therefore never realize this disposition, nor even act consistently in accordance with it, because it cannot demonstrate immortality on theoretical grounds, but can only postulate it on practical grounds. Furthermore, the human being is far too restricted in its theoretical knowledge⁵⁹ to recognize everything that is appropriate for its egoistic intention. That is why the ideal of wickedness cannot be thought of as possible through the human being.⁶⁰ Scripture does not represent the human being as immediately wicked either, but as occasionally led astray.⁶¹ It depicts the wickedness of the human being as folly, which is also completely correct, because the human being, as merely rational – which is not yet to think of it as morally good –, must see that it cannot realize its wicked intention. The human being may indeed act wickedly, but it cannot attain the highest wickedness, and in this respect it is to be considered as led astray by its evil heart. Wickedness in the human being is thus not to be viewed as a free decision to act in accordance with an intention which contradicts the moral law, but as a baleful propensity to sacrifice the moral law to selfish drives.

⁵⁷*alles als Dein anerkannt besitzen kannst.*

⁵⁸*Sie setzt also als consequent schlechterdings Unsterblichkeit als nothwendig erkannt voraus.*

⁵⁹*Kenntnissen.*

⁶⁰Or perhaps 'as humanly possible'—*als durch den Menschen möglich.*

⁶¹Or 'tempted'—*verführt.*

The ideal of wickedness can only be presented as a being who is certain by itself of its immortality and theoretically omniscient, so as to be able to calculate all natural effects in its plan. Freedom is the only thing that can destroy its plans. Insofar as human beings act in accordance with⁶² desires, they stand entirely under its power.

[25] This being cannot, however, be thought of as a creator or as an evil God, because creation is an act through which matter⁶³ is produced from formal principles. The freedom of the creator, since everything exists through him, cannot be thought of as expressing itself through his making himself [into] a material end, but only as expressing itself through his producing free creatures who are ends to themselves. Wickedness is opposed to the power to create⁶⁴ because the latter furnishes what wickedness seeks—the dependence of all beings upon it alone. Only the aim of being freely revered can be united with the power to create. Also, an evil being may well be thought of in relation to the good as a creature, but not as equal in power to the good; for in that case, it would be necessary either that one of them is subject to the other or that their reciprocal effects completely cancel each other out. But that the creator can tolerate a wicked being follows from his seeking reverence and obedience out of freely given love, which would be impossible if the reciprocal behaviour entailed destruction.

[26] The first moments, on which, as we have shown above, everything especially depends if the devil is not to be a chimera, have been found, in the course of this investigation, to be conceivable as they are in themselves [viz. independently of each other] and as united with each other. The devil is a completely wicked creature. A more detailed determination of our ideal will [allow us to] decide about the remaining moments.

[27] Wickedness has a material principle, which has, however, the peculiarity of being exclusively subjective⁶⁵ and of never being able to be followed by two beings at the same time without conflict. The highest good of wickedness can thus indeed be happiness, but excluded therefrom is all joy in objective happiness, which, given our assumption that happiness is the highest good, may indeed occur. It belongs to the highest good of wickedness that happiness is not to be found anywhere except through wickedness. The ideal of wickedness must therefore be engaged in a constant effort to disturb any happiness that does not depend on it; and it is – insofar as the highest ideal of the good is not only itself completely independent of it, but can also bring about the happiness of other moral beings independently of

⁶²Or perhaps 'upon'—*nach*.

⁶³Or 'content'—*Stoff*.

⁶⁴*Vermögen zu erschaffen*.

⁶⁵*ausschließend subjektiv*. This might also be rendered as 'exclusionarily subjective', which captures the idea that other subjects are excluded, on pain of conflict, from following the principle that the wicked agent follows.

it – engaged in a constantly fruitless effort and thus tormented continuously. Since morality is the condition under which the highest ideal of the good is supposed to bestow happiness on moral beings, the evil ideal must necessarily be thought of as engaged in an endless striving to lead moral beings – insofar as it is possible for it to do so – away from morality; for by doing this it deprives them of that happiness, over the distribution of which it is entitled to no direct control. Since the evil ideal must be thought of as completely subject to the highest ideal, it also has no other protection for itself against the highest ideal except the latter's justice, insofar as it might show that other beings, who would be no better than it is, would be dealt with more kindly by the highest ideal or God. It is thus at once the accuser and tempter of other moral beings.

[28] It is now proven, if we have inferred correctly, that all the moments of the concept of the devil can be thought together and are necessarily united.

[29] If one compares the highest ideal of goodness and the highest ideal of wickedness, one discovers the following difference. The highest ideal of morality is compatible with the attainable ideal of morality and wants the latter to be realized by all moral beings. The ideal of wickedness is possible only in a single being, whom the others would have to be subjected to as slaves. The highest ideal of goodness can be loved by all moral beings; the ideal of wickedness must be loathed by all. The striving for the attainment of the ideal of morality unites all moral beings and combines them all into an ethical state;⁶⁶ the striving for the ideal of wickedness separates all moral beings and would, if it could be realized by one of them, necessarily make all the others into the slaves of this one being. The community of moral beings who strive for the good ideal is a kingdom⁶⁷ of love and light; for they love one another as having the same disposition,⁶⁸ because they enjoy their complete freedom through this same disposition⁶⁹ and because cognition of the good is their common end. The co-existence⁷⁰ of moral beings who strive for the evil ideal is a kingdom of servitude and darkness; for unity is possible only through the absolute dominance of one of them, and the others' cognition is an obstacle to this domination.

[30] I believe that I have shown that the ideas of wickedness and morality can be presented as two ideals which, as such, have equal claims to conceivability and are equally grounded in human nature. Traces of them must therefore be found in every religion. But, since both ideas depend on each other, neither can be conceived of correctly without the other. The Christian religion, which was the first to establish the true character of the moral good as

⁶⁶*ethischen Staat.*

⁶⁷Or 'realm'—*Reich.*

⁶⁸Or 'as disposed alike'—*gleichgesinnt.*

⁶⁹*diese gleiche Gesinnung.*

⁷⁰*Zusammensein.*

unconditional compliance with duty and the first to establish the highest ideal of morality as an object of respect and love, was therefore also the first to correctly present the ideal of wickedness. As long as morality was conceived of, through an illusion, as that way of acting which brings about the highest good, wickedness also had to be misunderstood and to appear as mere ignorance. That is why one does not find a devil in any people before the birth of Christ.

[31] The view⁷¹ of the Manicheans – even if there were complete agreement that it is descended from an ancient doctrine of the Indians and Persians (that of two powerful beings, one evil and one good) – can provide no objection to this point. The Manicheans' main proof of the existence of an evil being – namely, that otherwise evil would have no foundation – already shows that both ideas were not practical, but only speculative, and that they arose not from the ideals of morality and wickedness, but from the endeavour to explain the evil in the world. Since the origin of moral evil cannot be sought outside of freedom, and, if freedom is assumed, cannot be thought of [as located] in anything else, the endeavour to explain it on the basis of reasons shows clearly that good and evil were conceived of as something that is contingent and that coincides with the useful and harmful. The ideal of morality, or God, was thus conceived of just as incorrectly as the ideal of wickedness. One thought of one powerful being, in which the emotion⁷² of love dominated, and of another, in which the emotion of envy dominated. That both beings bear no resemblance to God and the devil will be clear from what has been said thus far.

[32] The foundation upon which the illusion of a highest good is based is located in theoretical reason, which seeks to cognize the effect of everything that it thinks of as a cause and which, if the cause is thought of as freely active, thinks of the effect as an end of the cause. Theoretical reason therefore has two questions: 1) what arises from morality?, and 2) what is the end of morality? We have already given the answer above. Morality exists for its own sake, and its cause is freedom, and it is thus incomprehensible for theoretical reason.

[33] Theoretical reason would have been satisfied with this, and would perhaps never have made a further demand, if moral action did not have consequences in experience just as immoral action does; and thus the following question remained: even if moral action in itself must occur and does occur, it is nevertheless certain that it has consequences and that these consequences may yet be an object of cognition, and that their difference from the consequences of an immoral action may yet be sought. Since this question is drawn from experience, it must also be answered from experience, and

⁷¹*Meinung.*

⁷²*Affect.*

[yet] the latter does not determine a single characteristic of the moral goodness of an action that justifies recognizing it as moral.

[34] Thus, reason is indeed thoroughly rebuffed, but it is not satisfied. The drive for happiness is so determinate within us,⁷³ and we can just as little renounce it in our consciousness as we can renounce practical reason. Theoretical reason, which is dismissed by practical reason without being satisfied, now seeks its satisfaction in the drive for happiness and attempts to attain it by assuming that the satisfaction of this drive is the consequence of morality. It also has a reason for doing this in the necessary unity of the human being, which cannot have two drives that cancel each other out. It thus remains to be investigated whether the moral disposition is not at the same time the cause of happiness; and, since this cannot be decided in experience – because experience indicates only the consequences of individual actions but not the consequences of morality, the latter being thought of as the real ground [of our actions], lying outside of experience –, the hope still remains of realizing a highest good, even though it is immediately understood that morality cannot consist in making this realization into its end.

[35] Before the character of morality was cognized through reflection, the question of the highest good must therefore necessarily have been confused with the principle of morality; and after the precise determination of morality, the task remains of finding out whether one cannot think of a highest good that would not be the end, but rather the result of morality, the latter being thought of as the real ground [of our actions] lying outside of [the realm of] appearance.

[36] Morality is in itself good; it must therefore necessarily be contained in the highest good. If morality is at the same time productive, then morality is, along with that which exists through it, necessarily the highest good. The highest ideal of morality is God. If the world is thought of as that which exists through God, then God and the world constitute the highest good. But this highest good does not satisfy our search for a highest good, because it is not an ideal, but something absolute towards which no approximation takes place. The human ideal of morality is not productive, but only regulative;⁷⁴ thus, no highest good can be thought of as an immediate effect of it. But since it, as the mere ideal of morality, is not distinct from the highest ideal, the effects of the highest ideal must be thought of as completely consistent with morality. The highest good of humanity, or the ideal of the highest good, can thus be thought of as morality only in conjunction with the demand – which refers to the world – of the subject who strives after the ideal of morality. Thus, the human being is thought of as completely dependent on itself as moral and as completely dependent on God as happy; and

⁷³Or perhaps 'so fixed within us'—*bestimmt in uns*.

⁷⁴*ordnend*.

morality is not made into the cause of the highest good, but into the sole condition of the enjoyment of it.

[37] By means of this way of representing things, theoretical reason is certainly quietened⁷⁵ in its demand for cognition of an effect of morality, but it is not yet satisfied. The essence of faith consists in rejecting the demands made by theoretical reason in its conflict with practical reason; but, on the other hand, the possibility of unbelief⁷⁶ resides precisely in the compulsion to silence theoretical reason.⁷⁷ Now, since the ideal of morality is given through practical reason, and since theoretical reason is *quietened* by the highest ideal in the manner indicated, the stubborn resistance to belief in God⁷⁸ – insofar as it is based on the fact that the demands of theoretical reason have not been satisfied *in accordance with laws of experience* – can be regarded as a denial, and not as mere ignorance, and even less as cognition of the contrary, which is impossible; and [thus] unbelief becomes, in this regard, a crime. *Moral faith* is not something passive; it is rather active, and a quashing, through an act of freedom, of theoretical doubts about the demand of practical reason. *Moral unbelief* is the opposite way of proceeding, which sacrifices – also through an act of freedom – the demands of practical reason to the interest of theoretical reason for the end of the selfish drive.

[38] Since this presentation of faith and unbelief is possible only after the presentation of the ideal of morality, the doctrine of faith and unbelief could not precede the Christian religion either. Since unconditional compliance with the demand of practical reason, or faith, is necessary for the efficacy of the moral disposition, the ideal of wickedness must also be thought of as undermining faith.

[39] I believe that it is clear from what has been said thus far that the ideals of morality and wickedness are opposed to each other, and that neither can be thought of without the other. The moral good is possible only in a being for whom the opposite is possible.⁷⁹ The question is now: must they both be thought of as existing?

[40] As we saw above, God, or the highest ideal of morality, is necessarily presupposed as existing for the quieting of theoretical reason and for the possibility of harmony⁸⁰ between practical reason and the drive for happiness. Belief in God is an act of freedom in accordance with the command of practical reason, and unbelief is immoral. On the other hand, the devil, or the ideal

⁷⁵*beruhigt*.

⁷⁶*Unglaube* can also be translated as 'lack of faith' or perhaps even as 'unfaith', which the *OED* defines as 'lack of faith or belief, esp. in religion'.

⁷⁷Literally, 'the necessitation to silence theoretical reason'—*der Nöthigung, sie zur Ruhe zu verweisen*. In Kant, the concept of *Nöthigung* is closely related to the concept of moral obligation, which is presumably why Secrétan's French translation renders *Nöthigung* as 'obligation'.

⁷⁸*die Widerspenstigkeit gegen den Glauben an Gott*.

⁷⁹*Das moralische Gute ist nur in einem Wesen möglich, dem das Gegentheil möglich ist*.

⁸⁰*Eintracht*.

of wickedness, is not presupposed [as existing] for any satisfaction of theoretical reason, and belief in his existence is not connected with any interest of practical reason. Furthermore, since the ideal of wickedness is not, unlike the ideal of morality, something set up for all human beings to comply with and attainable by all without conflict – only one single subject can strive after the ideal of wickedness without conflict, and the highest good of this ideal is not to be realized at any time –, to assume that this ideal exists contradicts even the interest of wickedness. The moral human being consequently has no interest in believing in a devil, and the wicked human being has an interest in denying that there is a devil. Thus, there is no basis for postulating the existence of the devil, and that is why it is problematic for theoretical reason and a matter of indifference for practical reason. For the idea of the devil, we can thus obtain neither an explanatory ground from a theoretical perspective, nor a determining ground from a practical perspective. His existence is therefore a matter of complete indifference, and believing in him or not believing in him has no influence on the efficacy of the moral disposition in the human being. In any case, the supposition of such an evil principle must be completely banned from the explanation of natural phenomena.

[41] However, the utility which the presentation of the idea of the highest wickedness, or the concept of the devil, has is nevertheless of very great importance for morality. Insofar as it has been proven that only one being possessing freedom can be supremely wicked – a being whom the others must serve –, there arises an interest of theoretical reason in the maxims of practical reason since only these maxims can be followed consistently by all human beings, and consistency is a demand of reason in general. The doctrines⁸¹ of morality thus appear to be the only possible way of acting in the social condition of human beings to prevent conflicts between them; and from this arises the *concept of right*, or of that way of acting which the other [person] must absolutely permit us to follow.⁸²

[42] The concept of right is, with regard to its possibility, dependent on morality; however, with regard to its distinguishing characteristics, it is completely determinable by theoretical reason. *Right in general* is what is morally possible, but *a right* is the capacity to act in accordance with material maxims without another [person] being permitted for any reason to prevent it by force. In order to have a right, it is not at all necessary that the action which arises from my right be moral; it need only, when considered as a way of acting in general, be able to be moral. The *principle of right* is the following reciprocal proposition: what has once provided the reason for an action⁸³

⁸¹Or 'teachings'—*Lehren*.

⁸²A more literal translation would be: 'that way of acting compliance with which the other [person] must absolutely permit'—*derjenigen Handlungsweise, welche zu befolgen der andere schlechterdings erlauben muß*.

⁸³*Verfahren*.

that was recognized by me as right (or morally possible), must always provide the reason for my judgment about this action, and what has once provided the reason in another's judgment about my action must always provide the reason for the same.—Thus right arises from the demand for complete consistency which human beings reciprocally make on each other (*volenti non fit iniuria*).⁸⁴

[43] The higher condition of this demand is that it does not annul the morality in any human being. Thus, right itself is answerable before the tribunal of morality, and it receives its moral sanction from the fact that the condition in which one acts in accordance with right is the only possible condition of human beings in which morality can successfully appear in external actions and does not remain restricted to inner consciousness alone.*

[44] Nothing can be morally possible that contains within itself the way of acting [characteristic] of wickedness; consequently, nothing can be a right that cannot be a right reciprocally. Thus, right is not derived from morality, but from the possibility of the reciprocal compatibility of the selfish drives of human beings. That is *unrightful*⁸⁵ which, when adopted as a way of acting, would make possible only the satisfaction of the selfish drives of one of the parties.**

[45] Since the recognition⁸⁶ of rights does not presuppose the fully developed idea of morality, the doctrine of right,⁸⁷ as the science of rights, can precede morality; but the human being behaves passively with regard to the rights of others so long as the connection between right and duty is not clearly recognized by him. He sees that it is necessary that right must exist in the world, but he does not understand how this necessity would not restrict his freedom.*** Full compliance with the laws of positive right is therefore no proof of a moral disposition because it can result from the fear of giving others an example of deviation. But even less is a strict administration of right by someone who possesses supreme authority⁸⁸ a proof of his goodness. This could be the devil himself; for his interest would be contradicted only by others being equal to him in rights and power, but not by all

⁸⁴'to a willing person, no injury is done'.

*Right is always positive in its origins [*entsteht allezeit positiv*], and positive right is not based on a right that is natural (appropriate to the moral nature of the human being) but is purified through enlightenment to the level of natural right.

⁸⁵Or 'wrong'—*Unrecht*.

**However, positive right bases its decisions only on the pretensions of the selfish drive which were, prior to the dispute over right [or 'legal dispute'—*Rechtsstreit*], valid as rights on both sides. According to positive right, it can indeed happen that one of the parties has an exclusive privilege which is based merely on custom [*Herkommen*].

⁸⁶*Erkennung*, which can also be translated as 'cognition' or 'identification'.

⁸⁷Or 'theory of right'—*Rechtslehre*.

***This restriction in fact occurs until positive right is purified to the level of natural right.

⁸⁸Or 'supreme power'—*höchste Gewalt*.

others being judged strictly in accordance with a right that pleases him, the first principle of which would be that all others are subjected to him.

[46] Just as the moral disposition occurs in the human being and can be and is effective without him clearly conceiving of its characteristics, so the concept of the opposing wicked disposition is present in him and he seeks to make its realization impossible in others without knowing how to identify it clearly. That is why he is willing to submit to a legislation the aim⁸⁹ of which is to prevent the expression of the wicked disposition in actions. The fear of wickedness wins the selfish drive over to the maxims of morality, and theoretical reason rules out by itself a way of acting which, if I allowed another to act in that way, would have to make me his slave, and which I myself am incapable of realizing completely.

[47] Insofar as many Church Fathers considered the virtues of heathens only from this point of view of consistent behaviour, which is to be regarded as an interest of the selfish drive in relation to theoretical reason, they were right to call these duties *splendida vitia*;⁹⁰ for these duties did not arise from the moral disposition, which acts only for the sake of duty. However, they were wrong to consider them all solely from this point of view.

[48] In addition to the fact that the ideal of wickedness wins theoretical reason over to practical reason and thereby produces at least an analogue of a moral legislation – which is nevertheless suited to preserving peace amongst human beings to some extent and to making their civilization⁹¹ possible –, the utility of the ideal of wickedness is also revealed in an excellent way in the aesthetic presentation of virtue. Insofar as *vice* can act only with the exclusion of all social drives and appears as solitary, without being able to tolerate its equals or to be tolerated by them, and insofar as it must be either the master of slaves or itself a slave, it is *abhorrent* or *abject*. But insofar as it must always, through want of sufficient power, fail to attain its ends, it is *ridiculous*. Without the ideal of wickedness, virtue would not admit of any aesthetic presentation; for virtue itself, as modest observance of duty, is the absolute good, which is elevated above⁹² all the other aesthetic ideas and is thus incomparable. For the imagination, virtue in its sublimity⁹³ can therefore be presented only through its opposite, which – as the product of a free being who gives itself maxims to which it sacrifices all individual inclinations – is equally sublime, but which allows of only one sublime subject whom all the others must serve; by contrast, in the ideal of virtue an infinite number of equally sublime subjects are possible, which possibility makes virtue the only sublime object that does not exclude love.

⁸⁹Zweck.

⁹⁰'glittering vices'.

⁹¹Or 'culture'—*Cultur*.

⁹²*über alle andere ästhetische Ideen erhaben.*

⁹³*Erhabenheit.*

[49] This remark is of importance for the poet who undertakes to depict God and the devil. For if he thinks to elevate God above the devil simply by portraying God's power and greatness, the devil will always have the feeling of the sublime for himself; it is only because God can be loved that the interest of the aesthetic feeling for him becomes greater.

[50] Vice in its fearsome perseverance and obduracy is an excellent object of the feeling of the sublime; for the contemplation of vice reveals a force in us that is elevated above all external coercion, that need recognize no law, and that cannot itself be humbled by any force similar to it. Thus virtue, as a merely aesthetically sublime object, has no advantage over vice. But it contains the possibility that beings that are so terrible can love one another, and that such a being, whom nothing can tame, freely and actively⁹⁴ submits himself to a law, thereby becoming an object of respect and love for all those akin to him who submit themselves to this law. Presented aesthetically, *virtue* is an object that is *sublime* by dint of its nature and *beautiful* by dint of its freedom.

Acknowledgements

We are grateful to Mike Beaney, Christian Piller, and two anonymous referees for helpful advice and comments.

Funding

This work was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number AH/R001847/1].

⁹⁴*freithätig.*