IMMANUEL KANT

LECTURES ON ETHICS

Translated by LOUIS INFIELD

Foreword to the Torchbook Edition
by LEWIS WHITE BECK

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CONTENTS

Foreword to the Torchbook Edition ix
Introduction xy

UNIVERSAL PRACTICAL PHILOSOPHY

Proem 1
The Ethical Systems of the Ancients 6
The General Principle of Morality 11
De Obligatione Acta et Passa 20
Moral Compulsion 27
Practical Necessitation 29
Laws 34
The Supreme Principle of Morality 36
De Liurea Lueis 47
The Lawgiver 51
Reward and Punishment 52
De Imputate 57
Responsibility for Consequences of Actions 59
Grounds of Imputatio Moralis 60
Imputatio Facti 62
Degrees of Responsibility 62

ETHICS

Introductory Observations 71
Natural Religion 78
Errors of Religion 85
possess; haughtiness feels itself superior to others and undervalues them. The proud man does not underrate his fellows, but he insists upon his own merits; he will not bow and scrape before them; he considers that he has a definite worth and will yield to none in that respect. Such pride is right and proper, provided it is kept within bounds; but in common parlance we call a man proud when he advertises his worth and his pride becomes a fault by passing the limits of what is proper. Haughtiness does not consist in claiming to be worth as much and to be as important as others, but in claiming an extraordinary worth and an especial importance for oneself while underestimating others; it is detestable and ridiculous, for its self-estimation is subjective. If I want to be held in honour, it is useless to set about it by demanding honour and depreciating others; that will not arouse respect, but only ridicule for my presumption. All haughty people are fools; their sole preoccupation is their own superiority and this makes them contemptible.

Fastus, or snobbery, shows itself when a man gives himself airs and claims precedence, not on account of any intellectual or intrinsic merit, but on the ground of external appearances. The snob is vain in matters of social precedence, attaches importance to things which are of little account, and on any and every occasion, no matter how trifling, he claims the limelight. He would deprive himself of food rather than of his fine clothes and his carriage and pair. He aims at titles and position, and the appearance of gentility. A man of true merit is neither haughty nor a snob; he is humble, because he cherishes an Idea of true worth so lofty that he can never rise high enough to satisfy its demands. Therefore he is humble, in the consciousness of his own shortcoming. Snobbery is particularly rampant amongst the lower, and especially the middle, classes; it is amongst these classes that one finds the social climbers, and snobbery is just the scramble for social position.

The scoffer may be either scornful (médisant) or mocking (moquant). Scorn is malicious, mockery frivolous. The mocker seeks to make fun at the expense of other people's faults; the slanderer is full of malice. The latter is frequently a person lacking in conviviality who dwells upon and magnifies the defects of others so that his own may appear small by comparison; his self-love prompts him to malice. But we fear calumny less than we fear railery. The slanderer works surreptitiously: he speaks behind our backs; he must choose his company and we cannot overhear him; but the mocker is no respecter of company or occasion. Raillery lowers our self-esteem more than malice, for it makes us a laughing-stock for others, strips us of our worth and holds us up to ridicule. We need not always grudge the mocker his pleasure, because often it means nothing either to us or to him and we lose nothing by it. But an habitual scoffer betrays his lack of respect for others and his inability to judge things at their true value.

Baumgarten speaks of duties towards beings which are beneath us and beings which are above us. But so far as animals are concerned, we have no direct duties. Animals are not self-conscious and are there merely as a means to an end. That end is man. We can ask, 'Why do animals exist?' But to ask, 'Why does man exist?' is a meaningless question. Our duties towards animals are merely indirect duties towards humanity. Animal nature has analogies to human nature, and by doing our duties to animals in respect of manifestations which correspond to manifestations of human nature, we indirectly do our duty towards humanity. Thus, if a dog has served his master long and faithfully, his service, on the analogy of human
service, deserves reward, and when the dog has grown too old to serve, his master ought to keep him until he dies. Such action helps to support us in our duties towards human beings, where they are bounden duties. If then any acts of animals are analogous to human acts and spring from the same principles, we have duties towards the animals because thus we cultivate the corresponding duties towards human beings. If a man shoots his dog because the animal is no longer capable of service, he does not fail in his duty to the dog, for the dog cannot judge, but his act is inhuman and damages in himself that humanity which it is his duty to show towards mankind. If he is not to stifle his human feelings, he must practise kindness towards animals, for he who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals. Hogarth depicts this in his engravings. He shows how cruelty grows and develops. He shows the child’s cruelty to animals, pinching the tail of a dog or a cat; he then depicts the grown man in his cart running over a child; and lastly, the culmination of cruelty in murder. He thus brings home to us in a terrible fashion the rewards of cruelty, and this should be an impressive lesson to children. The more we come in contact with animals and observe their behaviour, the more we love them, for we see how great is their care for their young. It is then difficult for us to be cruel in thought even to a wolf. Leibnitz used a tiny worm for purposes of observation, and then carefully replaced it with its leaf on the tree so that it should not come to harm through any act of his. He would have been sorry—a natural feeling for a humane man—to destroy such a creature for no reason. Tender feelings towards dumb animals develop humane feelings towards mankind. In England butchers and doctors do not sit on a jury because they are accustomed to the sight of death and hardened. Vivisectionists, who use living animals for their experiments, certainly act cruelly, although their aim is praiseworthy, and they can justify their cruelty, since animals must be regarded as man’s instruments; but any such cruelty for sport cannot be justified. A master who turns out his ass or his dog because the animal can no longer earn its keep manifests a small mind. The Greeks’ ideas in this respect were high-minded, as can be seen from the fable of the ass and the bell of ingratitude. Our duties towards animals, then, are indirect duties towards mankind.

Our duties towards immaterial beings are purely negative. Any course of conduct which involves dealings with spirits is wrong. Conduct of this kind makes men visionaries and fanatics, renders them superstitious, and is not in keeping with the dignity of mankind; for human dignity cannot subsist without a healthy use of reason, which is impossible for those who have commerce with spirits. Spirits may exist or they may not; all that is said of them may be true; but we know them not and can have no intercourse with them. This applies to good and to evil spirits alike. Our Ideas of good and evil are coordinate, and as we refer all evil to hell so we refer all good to heaven. If we personify the perfection of evil, we have the Idea of the devil. If we believe that evil spirits can have an influence upon us, can appear and haunt us at night, we become a prey to phantoms and incapable of using our powers in a reasonable way. Our duties towards such beings must, therefore, be negative.

DUTIES TOWARDS INANIMATE OBJECTS

Baumgarten speaks of duties towards inanimate objects. These duties are also indirectly duties towards mankind. Destructiveness is immoral; we ought not to destroy things which can still be put to some use. No man ought to mar the beauty of nature; for what he has no use for may still be of use to some one else. He need, of course, pay no heed to the thing itself, but he ought to consider his neighbour. Thus we see that all duties towards animals, towards immaterial beings and towards inanimate objects are aimed indirectly at our duties towards mankind.

1 Philipp Camerarius Operae horarum subcisiarum centuria prima, 1644, cap. XXI.
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1 Hogarth's four engravings, 'The Stages of Cruelty', 1751.