§1. Transition from the common rational knowledge of morals to the philosophical

1. Only a good will is good without qualification.
   a. All other goods -- e.g. talents of the mind, qualities of temperament, gifts of fortune -- “can...be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature...is not good.”
   b. Some goods which may seem good in themselves because they are “conducive to a good will” -- “moderation in affects and passions, self-control” and so on -- presuppose a good will.
   c. A good will seems “an indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy” because “an impartial rational spectator can take no delight in seeing the uninterrupted prosperity of a being graced with no feature of a pure and good will.”

2. In what sense is a good will good?
   a. It is good “only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself.”
   b. It is not good because it is good for some end.
      i. A good will is good even if it “should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose.”
      ii. Nature did not appoint reason as the ruler of our will in order to determine or to effectuate ends.
         1. That would be “a very bad arrangement” because “reason is not sufficiently competent to guide the will surely with regard to its objects and the satisfaction of all our needs.”
         2. Instinct is a surer guide “not only of ends but also of means.”
         3. We also “find that the more a cultivated reason purposely occupies itself with the enjoyment of life and happiness, so much the further does one get away from true satisfaction.”
   c. But we must have been given practical reason for some reason, “to influence the will.”
      i. “Its true vocation must be to produce a will that is good, not perhaps as a means to other purposes, but good in itself,...”.
      ii. If the end of practical reason is to determine a will that is good in itself, independent of whatever effects it may have, we may discover that reason may limit “in many ways...the attainment of...happiness” and may even “reduce it below zero.”
      iii. Reason has “its own kind of satisfaction,” and that may run counter to the satisfaction of our inclinations and so counter to our happiness.

3. We shall now examine “the concept of duty, which contains that of a good will.” It is the concept of acting from duty that is of concern.
   a. Not just case of acting from duty will do to illustrate it.
      i. There is no sense referring to actions that are contrary to duty.
ii. There is little sense referring to an action that is in conformity to duty “to which human beings have no inclination immediately,” but which they are “impelled to do...through another inclination,” for in that case it is easy to tell if the action is done from duty.

iii. “It is much more difficult to note this distinction when an action conforms with duty and the subject has, besides, an immediate inclination to it” -- as when a shopkeeper gives the correct change and gets a reputation for honesty or when we preserve our lives, as a duty, when we wish to, or when we strive for our own happiness.

iv. The best examples to illustrate the concept of acting from duty are those in which a person has an immediate inclination not to do his or her duty but does it anyway -- as when someone “preserves his life without loving it,” or the philanthropist who is so “overclouded by his own grief’ that he has no “sympathy with the fate of others” still benefits them, or the philanthropist to whom nature has given little sympathy for the fate of others still gives to others, or when we love our enemies.

a. First proposition: “To have moral worth an action must be done from duty.”

i. Conforming to duty is not enough to give an action moral worth.

1. For we may perform an action from inclination, and that means that we are performing it

   a. because we have a natural inclination to do such things, and we should get no moral credit for having an inclination that is natural to us,

   b. or because we happen to want to perform that particular action because, perhaps, it helps achieve an end we want, and we should get no moral credit just for doing what we want to do.

2. Or we may perform what is “in the common interest and in conformity with duty and hence honorable,” but, again, our performance lacks moral content, “namely that of doing such actions not from inclination but from duty.”

ii. What is required is that an action not just conform to duty, but be done from duty.

b. Second proposition: “an action from duty has its moral worth not in the purpose to be attained by it but in the maxim in accordance with which it is decided upon.”

i. Moral worth “does not depend upon the realization of the object of the action but merely upon the principle of volition in accordance with which the action is done.”

ii. Moral worth “can lie nowhere else than in the principle of the will without regard for the ends that can be brought about by such an action.”

c. Third proposition: “Duty is the necessity of an action from respect for law.”

i. The proposition is a consequence of the first two.

ii. As we know, the object of my proposed action provides no moral worth to my decision to pursue it.

iii. As we also know, we “cannot have respect for inclination as such,” whether it is mine or someone else’s. That is, an inclination to pursue the object of my proposed action -- my
wanting that object either for myself or for someone else -- provides no moral worth to my decision to pursue it.

iv. “Only what is connected with my will” so as to exclude inclination “altogether from calculations in making a choice...can be an object of respect and so a command.”

v. But if the proposed object of my action and the inclination I might have to do the proposed object are both excluded from consideration in deciding what I ought to do, what I should will, then nothing is left “that could determine it except objectively the law and subjectively pure respect for this practical law, and so the maxim of complying with such a law.”

1. The practical law is the objective principle upon which we act.

2. The maxim of action is the subjective principle of volition.

3. The two would be identical if reason had complete control over desire.

vi. The law, or principle of action, cannot “borrow its motive” from any expected effect.

vii. Only “the representation of the law in itself...can constitute the preeminent good we call moral.”

d. Fourth proposition: “I ought never to act except in such a way that I could also will that my maxim should become a universal law.”

i. The only kind of law possible when considered without regard to the expected results is a universal law, that is, one that holds regardless of what the results are.

ii. For example, I cannot will that it be a universal law that one ought to make a promise while not intending to keep it.

1. It may be prudent to make such a promise.

   a. though it is not sufficient in making such a determination to consider only the present difficulties one is under

   b. and it is not easy to determine future difficulties one may be under as a consequence of one’s action.

2. It might be more prudent to make “it a habit to promise nothing except with the intention of keeping it.”

   a. But such a habit would be based “only on results feared,” “from anxiety about detrimental results.”

   b. And it would not guarantee morality because “if I am sometimes unfaithful to my maxim of prudence this can sometimes be very advantageous to me.”

3. But it is not moral to make such a promise.
a. We may test its morality by asking, “Would I indeed be content that my maxim (to get myself out of difficulties by a false promise) should hold as a universal law (for myself as well as for others)’’

b. In this case the test is negative, for “according to such a law there would properly be no promises at all.”

iii. “the necessity of my action from pure respect for the practical law is what constitutes duty…”.

4. We have now found the main principle of “the moral cognition of common human reason,” which explains how it is that “common human reason,...knows very well how to distinguish in every case that comes up what is good and what is evil, what is in conformity with duty or contrary to duty.”

a. [It is thus not the fourth in a series of moral principles, but the first in order of importance.]

b. We can all elicit this principle from common human reason, in Socratic fashion.

c. We can do so because the practical facility of appraising has an advantage “over the theoretical in common human understanding.”

i. “In the latter, if common reason ventures to depart from laws of experience and perceptions of the senses it falls into sheer incomprehensibility and self-contradictions.”

ii. “in practical matters, it is just when common understanding excludes all sensible incentives from practical laws that its faculty of appraising first begins to show itself to advantage.”

1. Common reason “can...have as good a hope of hitting the mark as any philosopher can promise himself.”

2. Philosophers readily get confused, in fact, “by a mass of considerations foreign and irrelevant to the matter.”

3. So philosophy’s job is only “to present the system of morals all the more completely and apprehensibly and to present its rules in a form more convenient for use.”

5. There is a “natural dialectic, that is a propensity to rationalize against those strict laws of duty and to cast doubt upon their validity.”

a. Common reason tells us what we ought to do.

b. Our inclinations and needs are often at odds with what common reason tells us so that we feel within ourselves “a powerful counterweight to all the commands of duty,...the counterweight of...needs and inclinations, the entire satisfaction of which [we sum] up under the name happiness.”

c. We must thus “step into the field of practical philosophy, in order to obtain there information and distinct instruction regarding the source of its principle and the correct determination of this principle in comparison with maxims based on need and inclination.”