§2. Transition from the popular moral philosophy to the metaphysics of morals

1. Some “philosophers...have absolutely denied the reality” of our acting from duty “and ascribed everything to more or less refined self-love.”

2. Nothing we experience prevents them from doing that because the concept of duty is not empirical.
   a. Epistemic point -- “It is absolutely impossible by means of experience to make out with complete certainty a single case in which the maxim of an actin otherwise in conformity with duty rested simply on moral grounds...”.
      i. “…we like to flatter ourselves by falsely attributing to ourselves a nobler motive.”
      ii. And we can “never...get entirely behind our covert incentives” because what matters are “those inner principles of actions that one does not see.” So it may be correct, for all we can know, that we always flatter ourselves even when we think we are acting from duty.
   b. Ontological point -- It is even possible that there has never been an example of a moral action.

2. That we cannot know if an action is moral or whether there are any moral actions at all should not be unsettling.
   a. For things could not be otherwise.
      1. Morality holds “with absolute necessity,” and so “no experience could give occasion to infer even the possibility of such apodictic [necessary] laws.” From our contingent experience we can infer only contingent, not necessary propositions.
      2. Besides it is not possible to infer laws that hold for all rational beings from what is true “under the contingent conditions of humanity.” The contingencies of our experience may provide evidence of how our will is determined, but that is not evidence “of the determination of the will of rational beings as such, or for ours only as rational beings.”
      3. We cannot use examples from our experience as models of what is moral because we are then making a prior moral judgment in choosing them as moral examples. We would thus be presupposing principles of morality rather than eliciting them from experience.
   ii. Our concern should be with what reason commands.
      1. “pure sincerity in friendship can be no less required of everyone even if up to now there may never have been a sincere friend,...”.
      2. What reason commands may be only an ideal, but yet provides the most powerful motive for moral action.
   b. should not be taken to imply that appeals to experience are useless.
      i. Examples serve for encouragement.
      ii. They serve to show that what reason requires is practicable.
iii. They ease comprehension.
iv. They “procure a hearing for [the metaphysics of morals] through popularization.”

3. The practical faculty of reason

a. If morality is possible, what or whom is it possible for?
   i. Everything in nature works according to laws.
   ii. Only rational beings can act according to law.
   iii. But to be moral is to act according to law.
   iv. Therefore, only rational beings can be moral.

b. What is the capacity to act according to law, which is called will?
   i. To act according to law is to perform an action derived from law.
   ii. This derivation is done by reason, i.e., by practical reason, i.e., by reason concerned with practice.
   iii. So “will is nothing else than practical reason” or it is the “faculty of choosing only that which reason, independently of inclination, recognize as practically necessary, i.e., as good.”

c. What are the relations between the will and reason [relations which must exist since only rational beings can act according to will]?
   i. Reason ≠ will
   ii. Reason may infallibly determine the will, in which case the actions “a being recognizes as objectively necessary are also subjectively necessary,” i.e. we want to do (from duty) what reason tells us we ought to do (from duty).
   iii. Reason may not completely determine the will, in which case what “it recognizes as objectively necessary is subjectively contingent,” i.e., “does not agree with subjective conditions,” i.e., we want to do (from inclination) what reason tells us we ought not to do or do not want to do what reason tells us we ought to do.

   1. When this is the case, the rational being is “not by nature necessarily obedient” to the law, i.e., it is necessarily constrained.
   2. This is the case with man.

d. What is the nature of the law of practical reason?
   i. The “formula [of such a law]...is called an imperative.”
   ii. The essential nature of imperatives.

   1. They constrain.
a. Necessary for constraint is that the constitution of the rational being be capable of being determined to act from something other than duty. Man, for instance, chooses to be good, not being good by nature.

  i. Thus “a perfectly good will,” God, would be subject to moral laws, but could not be subject to them as imperatives. God does not choose to be good, but is good.

2. Thus, they express a relation, namely, that between the objective law and “the subjective imperfection of the will of this or that rational being.”

3. They constrain hypothetically or categorically.

   a. Categorical imperatives (“apodictical (practical) principles,” or commands of morality) -- These present an “action as of itself objectively necessary, without regard to any other end” so that “what is essentially good in it [the action] consists in the intention, the result being what it may.”

   b. Hypothetical imperatives -- These present an action as “practically necessary...as a means of achieving something else one desires” or may desire, that is, these say “only that the action is good for some purpose, possible or actual.”

      i. Problematical practical principles [really technical practical principles, or rules of skill] -- These are hypothetical imperatives when the purpose is possible only.

         1. The possible purposes are infinite, and thus rules of skill are infinite.

      ii. Assertorical practical principles [pragmatic practical principles, or counsels of prudence] -- These are hypothetical imperatives where the purpose is actual.

         1. One end holds for all rational beings “so far as imperatives apply to them, that is, so far as they are dependent beings,” namely, happiness.

            a. Thus, any command “which refers to the choice of means to one’s own happiness” is hypothetical only.

4. How are imperatives possible?

   a. Imperatives of skill

      i. These command only means to some end.

      ii. But it is analytic that “if I fully will the effect, I must also will the action necessary to produce it.”

      iii. But if it is analytic, it is possible.

   b. Imperatives of prudence
i. Like imperatives of skill, these relate means to some end.

ii. If the end were known, such imperatives would be analytic and thus possible.

iii. But the end of imperatives of prudence is happiness, and the concept of happiness is indefinite so that one cannot state what it is that one really desires in desiring happiness.

1. So imperatives of prudence cannot “command, that is, present actions objectively as practically necessary.”

2. They can only be counsels and only be empirical such as “those of diet, economy, courtesy, restraint, etc., which are shown by experience best to promote welfare on the average.”

c. Imperatives of morality

i. These are not possible in the same way imperatives of skill and prudence are, for they are hypothetical and these are not.

ii. These are not shown to be possible by appeal to experience, for we cannot know that categorical imperatives are true of experience. For instance, “who can prove by experience the non-existence of a cause when experience shows us only that we do not perceive the cause”?

iii. Only these imperatives are law, for what is necessary for a purpose is itself contingent: only “the unconditional command leaves the will no freedom to choose the opposite.”

iv. What do we know from “the mere concept of a categorical imperative”?

a. It contains the law, that is, “the objective principle valid for every rational being, and the principle by which it ought to act.”

b. The law “contains no condition to which it is restricted,” that is, it is categorical, not hypothetical.

c. There exists (though not as part of the law) the maxim of action, that is, “the subjective principle of acting...which reason determines according to the conditions of the subject (often its ignorance or inclinations) and [which] is thus the principle according to which the subject acts.”

d. The categorical imperative “contains...the necessity that the maxim should accord with this law” which it contains as well.

e. Therefore, what we know from the mere concept of a categorical imperative is that there is [and can be] only one categorical imperative: “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law” or “Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature.”

v. Can all imperatives of duty be derived from this one imperative, that is, from the mere concept of a categorical imperative?

a. Perfect duties, that is, duties “of such a nature that their maxim cannot even be thought as a universal law without contradiction.”
1. To oneself -- e.g. suicide

2. To others -- e.g. promising without intending to keep one’s promise.

b. Imperfect duties, that is, duties of such a nature that it is “impossible to will that their maxim should be raised to the universality of a law of nature, because such a will would contradict itself.”

1. To oneself -- e.g. neglecting one’s gifts.

2. To others -- e.g. not helping others in time of need.

vi. Imperatives of morality are thus possible since all possible kinds of duty have been “completely exhibited by these examples in their dependence on the one principle” [and since that one principle is possible, i.e., is contained without contradiction in the very concept of a categorical imperative].

5. How is immorality possible if we cannot think or will the principles of immoral action?

   a. “If we weighed everything from one and the same standpoint, namely, reason, we would come upon a contradiction in our own will…”.

   b. But we in fact weigh things “at one time from one point of view of a will wholly conformable to reason” and at another time “from that of a will affected by inclinations” and there is thus “actually no contradiction, but rather an opposition of inclination to the precept of reason.”

6. Do imperatives of morality really exist, that is, “is it a necessary law for all rational beings that they should always judge their actions by such maxims as they themselves could will to serve as universal laws”?

   a. If such imperatives are to exist, then

      i. There must exist something “which in itself [has] absolute worth, something which, as an end in itself, could be a ground of definite law.”

      ii. And that end “must be connected…with the concept of the will of a rational being as such”; in particular, its conception alone, that is, “the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself” must form “an objective principle of the will.”

   b. But there is such an end, namely, rational nature: “every rational being exists as an end in himself and not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will.”

   c. And that is end is so connected: the objective principle of the will is that one “act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.”

   d. And “all laws of the will” are derivable from that principle:

      i. Perfect duties

         1. To oneself.

         2. To others.
ii. Imperfect duties

1. To oneself.

2. To others.

e. Therefore, if morality is real, such imperatives do exist.

7. Recapitulation

a. What about other theories, which depend upon the heteronomy of the will?

i. As long as one thinks of a rational being as such constrained by a law, one must think of that being as bound by an interest: for some “stimulus or compulsion to obedience” is needed since “the law did not arise from his will.”

ii. But, then, one never arrives “at duty but only at the necessity of action from a certain interest.”

iii. [So other supposed moral theories are not really about what is moral.]

b. What about our own theory, which depends upon the autonomy of the will?

i. There has been a progression through three principles:

1. According to the first, “objectively the ground of all practical legislation lies...in the rule and in the form of universality, which makes it capable of being a law...; subjectively, it lies in the end.”

2. According to the second, “the subject of all ends is every rational being as an end in itself.”

3. According to the third, there arises “the idea of the will of every rational being as making universal law.”

ii. The progression is from the possibility of a rational being acting out of interest, since it is subject to law, to its acting out of duty alone, that is, categorically: for “if we think of a will giving universal laws, we find that a supreme legislating will cannot possibly depend on any interest, for such a dependent will would itself need still another law which would restrict the interest of its self-love to the condition that [the maxims of this will] should be valid as universal law.”

8. The concept of a realm of ends.

a. What is it? It is “the systematic union of different rational beings through common laws,” a union “of rational beings as ends in themselves as well as of the particular ends which each may set for himself.”

b. What is in it?

i. Members -- those who give universal laws in it while also being subject to the laws.

ii. Sovereign -- the rational being who, “as legislating, is subject to the will of no other.”
c. What relation does it bear to morality? “Morality...consists in the relation of every action to that legislation through which alone a realm of ends is possible.”

d. What is the motive in it for action? It is not “feelings, impulses, [or] inclinations,” but “the relation of rational beings to one another,” that is, one is moral “not for the sake of any other practical motive or future advantage but rather from the idea of the dignity of a rational being who obeys no law except that which he himself also gives.”

e. What is of value in the realm of ends?

i. What has price

1. Market price -- “that which is related to general human inclinations and needs.”

2. Affective price -- “that which, without presupposing any need, accords with a certain taste, that is, with pleasure in the mere purposeless play of our faculties.”

ii. What has dignity, namely, “morality and humanity, so far as it is capable of morality.”

f. What alone gives dignity value? Autonomy, for “a thing has no worth other than that determined for it by the law.”

9. Rigor and popularization -- The three ways of presenting the law in 7.b.i “are fundamentally only so many different formulas of the very same law,” the difference in them being “more subjectively than objectively practical.” That is, it is useful to “gain a hearing for the moral law” to distinguish its form, its material, and its being autonomously legislated, but in rigor the moral law states simply that one ought to “act according to the maxim which can at the same time make itself a universal law.”

10. What is an unconditionally good will?

a. in regard to its form -- one “which cannot be bad.”

i. “the only condition under which a will can never come into conflict with itself” and thus be bad are

1. when it is willing for itself what it ought to do, that is, when it is legislating, and

2. when its legislation is universal, that is, when it wills to act according to a maxim it, as a rational being, is always willing to act on.

b. in regard to its material -- which has an “independent end” which it, being rational, proposes to itself

1. This end “is not conceived as one to be effected but as an independent end.”

2. This end is thus “merely negative,” that is, it is one “which must never be acted against.”

c. in regard to its autonomous determination of all maxims -- in the “use of means to every end” to restrict “my maxim to the condition of its universal validity as a law for every subject is tantamount to saying that the subject of ends, that is, the rational being itself, must be made the basis of all maxims of actions.”

11. What is a moral person?
a. A moral person is a rational being who “must act as if he, by his maxim, were at all times a legislative member in the universal realm of ends.”

b. A moral person cannot expect his actions to harmonize with “the realm of nature and its orderly design” or with what other do since they may not be moral: “he cannot count on [his being moral] favoring his expectation of happiness.”

c. But the worthiness of a person consists solely in his being moral.

i. “The essence of things is not changed by their external relations.”

1. The essential worth of a person is thus not to be judged with reference to “any end or advantage...gained” by his actions.

2. The essential worth of a person is thus not to be judged with reference to any incentives to action.

ii. Therefore, the essence of the moral worthiness of a person is to be judged “by the disinterested conduct which they prescribe to themselves merely from the idea [of dignity].”

12. The autonomy of the will as the supreme principle of morality.

a. Mere analysis of the concepts of morality proves that the principle of autonomy “is the sole principle of morals.”

b. Mere analysis does not prove that the principle is an imperative, that is, “that the will of every rational being is necessarily bound to it as a condition,” for that is a synthetic proposition.

13. The heteronomy of the will as the source of other principles of morality

a. Such principles may be empirical, drawn from the principle of happiness.

i. And are of two kinds,

1. based on physical feelings, or

2. based on moral feeling, drawn from the principle of perfection

   a. with “the rational concept of perfection as a possible result.”

   b. with “the concept of an independent perfection (the will of God) as the determining cause of our will.”

ii. What is wrong with empirical moral principles

1. They cannot be universal.

2. One’s own happiness cannot be the proper basis of morality.

   a. It is false that “well-being is always proportional to good conduct.”

   b. It “contributes nothing to the establishment of morality.”
i. since making a man happy is not making him good.

ii. since making a man prudent is not making him virtuous.

c. Worst of all, it undermines morality by putting “the motives to virtue and those to vice in the same class.”

3. It will not do to appeal to a special moral feeling.

a. since such an appeal is “superficial,” those “who cannot think expect[ing] help from feeling.”

b. since it provides no uniform standard

c. since “one cannot validity judge for others by means of his own feeling.”

b. Such principles may be rational.

i. Based on the rational concept of perfection.

1. But it is an empty and indefinite concept and therefore useless.

2. It “tends to move in a circle” and presuppose the morality it is meant to explain.

ii. Based on a most perfect divine will

1. But we cannot “intuit its perfection,” but can only “derive it...from our own concepts” of morality.

2. And if we do not derive it, then we end up with a system “directly opposed to morality” since we end up with a concept of the divine will “made up of the attributes of desire for glory and domination combined with the awful conceptions of might and vengeance.”

12. This section is analytic only.

a. It has thus not been shown

i. how a synthetical practical a priori proposition, that is, a categorical imperative of morality, is possible

ii. why it is necessary

iii. that there is such a proposition

iv. that there is a proof of it

b. It has only been shown that if “the universally received concept of morals” is real, that is, if there is a morality, then “the autonomy of the will...is its foundation.”