

Section I

Transition from common rational to philosophic moral cognition

It is impossible to think of anything at all in the world, or indeed even beyond it, that could be considered good without limitation except a **good will**. Understanding, wit, judgment³ and the like, whatever such *talents* of mind⁴ may be called, or courage, resolution, and perseverance in one's plans, as qualities of *temperament*, are undoubtedly good and desirable for many purposes,⁵ but they can also be extremely evil and harmful if the will which is to make use of these gifts of nature, and whose distinctive constitution⁶ is therefore called *character*, is not good. It is the same with *gifts of fortune*. Power, riches, honor, even health and that complete well-being and satisfaction⁷ with one's condition called *happiness*, produce boldness and thereby often arrogance⁸ as well unless a good will is present which corrects the influence of these on the mind and, in so doing, also corrects the whole principle of action and brings it into conformity with universal ends⁹ – not to mention that 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, so that a good will seems to constitute the indispensable condition even of worthiness to be happy.

Some qualities are even conducive⁹ to this good will itself and can

³ *Geistes*. Compare Kant's use of *Geist* in *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (7:225) and of *Geisteskräfte* in *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:445).

⁴ *in mancher Absicht*, perhaps "in many respects"

⁵ *Beschaffenheit*, occasionally translated as "character." "Constitution" is also used to translate *Einrichtung* and sometimes *Anlage*, which is used rather loosely in the *Groundwork*.

⁶ Kant uses a great variety of words for what could be called "pleasure" (*Lust*) in the most general sense. Although he later draws broad distinctions among pleasures in terms of their origins (e.g., between the pleasure of taste and that of sensation, and between both of these and moral pleasure), these distinctions still leave a number of words problematic. Within the *Groundwork* (4:396) he suggests a distinction between *Zufriedenheit* or "satisfaction" in general and reason's own kind of *Zufriedenheit*, which in that context I have translated as "contentment." However, his vocabulary is not consistent, and I have not attempted to make it so.

⁷ *Mut . . . Übermut*

⁸ *allgemein-zweckmäßig mache*

⁹ *beförderlich*. Compare *The Metaphysics of Morals* (6:407–9). *Befördern* is usually translated as "to further" or "to promote."

4:394 make its work much easier; despite this, however, they have no inner unconditional worth but always presuppose a good will, which limits the esteem one otherwise rightly has for them and does not permit their being taken as absolutely good. Moderation in affects and passions, self-control, and calm reflection are not only good for all sorts of purposes but even seem to constitute a part of the *inner* worth of a person; but they lack much that would be required to declare them good without limitation (however unconditionally they were praised by the ancients); for, without the basic principles of a good will they can become extremely evil, and the coolness of a scoundrel makes him not only far more dangerous but also immediately more abominable in our eyes than we would have taken him to be without it.

A good will is not good because of what it effects or accomplishes, because of its fitness to attain some proposed end, but only because of its volition, that is, it is good in itself and, regarded for itself, is to be valued incomparably higher than all that could merely be brought about by it in favor of some inclination and indeed, if you will, of the sum of all inclinations. Even if, by a special disfavor of fortune or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should wholly lack the capacity to carry out its purpose – if with its greatest efforts it should yet achieve nothing and only the good will were left (not, of course, as a mere wish but as the summoning of all means insofar as they are in our control) – then, like a jewel, it would still shine by itself, as something that has its full worth in itself. Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither add anything to this worth nor take anything away from it. Its usefulness would be, as it were, only the setting to enable us to handle it more conveniently in ordinary commerce or to attract to it the attention of those who are not yet expert enough, but not to recommend it to experts or to determine its worth.

End here.



4:395 There is, however, something so strange in this idea of the absolute worth of a mere will, in the estimation of which no allowance is made for any usefulness, that, despite all the agreement even of common understanding with this idea, a suspicion must yet arise that its covert basis is perhaps mere high-flown fantasy and that we may have misunderstood the purpose of nature in assigning reason to our will as its governor. Hence we shall put this idea to the test from this point of view.

In the natural constitution of an organized being, that is, one constituted purposively for life,^z we assume as a principle that there will be found in it no instrument for some end other than what is also most appropriate to that end and best adapted to it. Now in a being that has reason and a will, if the proper end of nature were its *preservation*, its *welfare*, in a word its *happiness*, then nature would have hit upon a very bad

^z *zweckmäßig zum Leben eingerichteten*. *Zweck* is translated as “end” except when it occurs as part of *zweckmäßig*, *Zweckmäßigkeit*, and *zwecklos*.