No. 27

<The absolute obliging in the development of humanity and in the single subject’s life. The new categorical imperative>[[1]](#footnote-0)

<§ 1. Rational and irrational (instinctive) willing. The irrational in the absolute obligation. Rational grounding of the irrational>

The rational willing: I want the better and the best of the practically possible. If I choose the less good thing or remain passive, I am stupid.[[2]](#footnote-1)

The irrational willing: I feel the instinctive drive to care for the well-being of my child, to afford him every possible sensuous joy while the child is growing up and his soul has not awakened yet. “Considered more closely”: “Because” he <is> then healthy and grows up to strength. The view of his physical development is a “good” I foster. His sensuous joy is a sign for his thriving. But at first it is judged and demanded without any reason, instinctively, directly, irrationally. The end is uncovering experience and rational consideration. The one soon goes hand in hand with the other. Experience, instinctive demand. Sensuous lust of the child accompanied by painful results, also leads to bodily decline. Bodily thriving instinctively joyful.

Then the “mental” awakening. He becomes a man. He shall become a mentally beautiful <man>. Instinctive joy in the human. But at the same time being lovingly directed towards a development, which increases in value. Every value I have by conviction, and which may be projected into this child’s development, becomes an obligatory task for me. I can [384] of course act in a quite wrong way thereby, since possibly my opinions of value are the wrong ones, my evaluations of men, etc. I judge as positive every development of man as such, leading to some value supposed by me, and in a preferably undisturbed and best possible way. That is what I like. I also enjoy helping. But differently [regarding] my child. He is “trusted” to me, I have obligations there, I must not neglect.

I possibly also have obligations towards other ones. He is in danger to go astray. I plan ahead, I save him when he is sinking. I feel here: You should intervene there, you must not only watch, etc. Every original absolute obligation has something irrational. Do we not need to stress this sharply? But does not every man become a theme of absolute obligation for everyone? That is, basically different as a value from every extra personal value?

I cannot devote myself to all after all; the practical impossibility makes the difference here. But my child is the “nearest” to me of all men in my surrounding world, and this implies some irrationality of the absolute obligation.[[3]](#footnote-2) Other men now and then enter my circle and possibly also become most near, unless some absolute obligation demands to prefer something else as nearer and most near. Does the nearest determine the practical possibility? Or is the instinctive preference to be grasped as an auxiliary moment made by rationality? Love for science and “to devote” life to science. The artist and the arts, etc.

Does the irrational demand a rational grounding? And what does this mean?

Every instinct is blindly directed towards a goal. If it is uncovered, it does see the goal indeed, which wanted <to be> awakened and wanted to awaken, and yet it does not see what it “properly intends”. This means: There is something to be uncovered even after this uncovering, which the instinct subject itself would probably never be able to understand (uncover). The animal does not know anything of the “preservation of species”. And “preservation of species” is a title, itself possibly still [385] “meaning” something more in the world’s connection and demanding further uncovering. Certainly this is a bold claim. This implies: If the subject of the instinct was able to incrementally uncover the instinct, then it would have to arrive at chains of values and should not merely wish for the next uncovered goal on every step, but the goal for the value’s sake, and these values again for the higher values’ sake, etc. Is such an endless uncovering possible in all instincts? And <is it> not the other way round? As far as the uncovering of the connections shows something rational, so far the obligation is justified? Evidence of the obligation then simply emerges as absolutely being directed towards me.

Considering the man, the instinct of love for his parents is uncovered for his thinking, but only to a certain degree. And as far as it is implied therein, so far does he want what he wants, rationally, for the intellectually seen value’s sake – whereby though the instinctive obligation remains with an invisible content. Likewise acquired instincts growing in men’s development within community as unconditioned devotion for a professional goal, from unconditioned love for science, art, etc. Science is the title for value formations, e.g. mathematics. Love for mathematics is love for these values, and decisiveness to get to know such things, and then, generating [them] oneself, to shape [them] as an inventor. But these are common goods, and science transcends me and my shapings. I enjoy what I have shaped, but I multiply the “treasure of science”. I vanish, and the science lives on. I see that my product has not only a value for me and for those presently enjoying it, but is a value member of lasting science, and appointed to enable higher values within it, and to remain lifted into it as a basic step, which is not dispensable or is a specialty, which can be retrieved any time as a deductively natural consequence within higher generalities. Science is an open system of development; and it holds true for every present that its system simply is such a basic step, that it is condition and phase of an “endlessly” developing system.

But science is uncoverable as a “necessary” function of a developing humanity with value, that it is [386] at the same time a purpose itself and a means for higher values in endless progress. Mathematics for the other sciences, the sciences singly for the universal science.[[4]](#footnote-3) This encompasses the whole human life in its shapings of value, and it establishes the prospect of imprinting higher values on human life and its surrounding world. Thus science would receive a further sense of uncovering.

This relates to all “instincts”, all blind directions of striving, emerging in the character of an unconditioned obligation and willing. The uncovering takes place in one with the evident testing by a norm, determining and delimiting a rational sense, and on the other hand driving away from the rational sense towards some new rational sense, from the realms of one obligation to that of another one. And eventually a unity of an absolute drive goes through the whole humanity in its development, in its history, the uncovering of which not only determines a fact, but makes it rational and understandable: a hidden rationality, albeit possibly justifying itself in an imperfect way, and on an average guiding humanity as if it was guided by some rational insight. It is though in the form of absolute obligation following criticism. What does rationality consist of? Not of blind, average turning-towards a universal system of tasks to be determined as an absolute obligation, towards which humanity needs to live in order to be true humanity, in order to satisfy itself?

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<§ 2. Uncovering of ration acting covertly in humanity’s development, and of the ideal goal of striving guiding it>

It is humanity’s essence to go on developing as humanity in a striving way. And a unity of striving at the same time is a unity of a striving for unification in accordances. Self-preservation through all disturbances and contradictions, i.e., acquisition of inner balance, of satisfaction. Steps of development now need to be part of its essence, forms of relative stability, and adapted for it.

But as soon as the human step is there and that of scientific humanity, the possibility of scientific uncovering grows, self-communication, of humanity’s scientific consciousness, adapted for universality, of what it is as humanity, i.e., [what it] strives for as humanity, what it instinctively intends, what might ideally univocalize it with itself, practically satisfy. If it has risen to self-communication, it and every single one, understanding there as well, gains the absolute norm in it – with insight.

It is thereby conscious of the reason[[5]](#footnote-4), governing obscurely within it, and has now as being uncovered discerned its evident universal obligation, unifying every special obligation, and to the unity of ration, completely understood as the final obligation, still not abandoning any absolute obligation, which is rather served by each, and from which each receives its normative sense.[[6]](#footnote-5)

The uncovering of the sense, the “final sense” of the de facto life of humanity is the uncovering of the world’s sense, <this> is the absolute norm of life and of world itself, is its absolute truth, the being of which is implied in the infinity of actualization. As an absolute norm it is an absolute obligation. Only the limited obligation has irrationality, the total and uncovered one is rationality through and through. We cannot [388] do otherwise as men, than to say yes in the willing, and initially say yes in a universal way, to that, which evidently presents itself as what we properly intend in all life, what we had to strive for through all willing, however full of sins: biggest possible univocality of fulfilling all our striving, directed towards the idea of a perfect univocality; or through all decay into the illusion and joy of the senses, in error and sin, through all resulting inner brokenness, discordance, restlessness, unblissfulness towards harmony, towards inner unity, towards pure satisfaction. This though in the then necessary rising of pure values towards ever higher values, and on top in the conscious direction of life towards infinity, towards the value of all values, depriving them all of their relativity, and the striving against them of all finalization, and giving their final sense to them alone, their final meaning of value.

<§ 3. The absolute obligation of the respectively special profession and the general profession to be a man>

But has not an unclarity remained? Are not all values only values as targets of an absolute obligation? Truth of judgment is something practically obliging – for the scientist. It is in itself a possible practical good for everyone striving towards having the fact itself through all judgments, and then being within obligation in such a way that his absolute obligation points into this direction. In how far is truth some beautiful thing? Having something itself is not a beautiful thing in itself already, as not every experience as such is a beautiful thing. But it is a beautiful thing to reach truth in a striving way and to rise to higher truth in further striving, and thinking vaguely and erring thereby is not beautiful. The one who loves truth in a striving way and makes it his profession, is moved by this beauty, and this value takes hold of him in the absolute obligation.

To pursue science for “distraction”, to enjoy science, is allocating values without any higher vocation, like always occupying oneself with something beautiful as an esthete without profession. Who occupies himself without any task now with art, now with science, now with charity events and the like, [389] always acquires values, but not a personal value. On the other hand, the one who works may enjoy, he has an instinctive drive for that, for mental relieve, in which he resides in the land of beauty enriching him. The “I first have to do something else, I want to and have to recreate myself” is itself, made comprehensible, an absolute obligation, based in the absolute obligation of the profession. It is secondary and changing, insofar as it does not habitually link to one direction. To raise myself in view of something great, to be lifted above everyday life into a realm of the sublime, this is not joy and in addition to the firmly directed habitual obligation [it] belongs to a more general class of the absolute obligation. If we have once become aware of sublime values, those of science and the high art, let alone of religion, but also of the values in view of great personalities from biographies, etc., then the absolute vocation of obligation emerges there, even if the size of inseparable tasks of life may demand restrictions. I even have to “sacrifice” the great and sublime then.

Do something good. Do your best! But what does this “Do!” mean? The one sitting in theater does not do anything, and the one who “does” nothing else but such things is rightfully called a do-nothing by the people. And yet he recreates something beautiful in inner “activities”, possibly some most valuable thing, and acquires it in a certain way. Even the one being moved by the most sublime in such a way is a do-nothing. But the one recreating himself in something beautiful and searching for sublimation and finding it in theater or in a concert, is not called a do-nothing, but someone recreating himself, and educating himself in his time off work. Everyone has, in addition to his specific profession, the general profession to be a man – if he simply is a true man, whose truth is his will to be a true man. The doing is implied everywhere in the doing, according to an absolute obligation, that is, in the universal of the ethical disposition being a disposition of deed, an always productive doing, directed towards actualization of the works imposed upon me, entrusted to me, performances of any kind, and towards my self-actualization simply by that, but also through its enrichments and enhancements, which may be sources of my true becoming and my true strength in my special profession.

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<§ 4. Revision of Brentano’s categorical imperative>

Do the best among the attainable things! And yet I am not satisfied, when doing so. Is this dissatisfaction unreasonable? No. I would not be rid of it, even if I had always acted and would act as if, and all the other ones no less. This remains <thus> as long as I and we all <remain bound> to the incoherent single demands and their values. The higher demand is indeed: Do your best, as which is the best you can do in the sense of the absolute best, to which your sense of life should direct itself as well as that of all men! Therefore direct your view towards the absolute, this is what uncovers the final sense of your absolute obligation! Cognize that all value of obligation and the demand to help provide actualization to the absolute obligation of all men has its highest rational sense making understandable in a world of God! This is the now necessary rational belief in God.

Thus Brentano’s rule is insufficient. Everyone has his absolute obligation, and his choice is effected in the question “What shall I do?”; and where I am supposed to do multiple things: “Which is now my necessary thing?”, not simply: “Which is the better thing in comparing the goods?” Playing a sonata by Mozart is nicer than washing the child, but the latter is a duty, because the time simply has come.

All practical goods are not on one level for me, neither all those I might actualize. The voice of conscientiousness, of the absolute obligation, may demand something of me, which I would not at all cognize as the best in comparing the values. That, which is silliness for the reason comparing values, is approved of as ethical, and may become an object of highest adoration. On the other hand though every absolute obligation itself implies a proper source of highest values, simply the ethical values. To follow an absolute obligation, purely and simply, and straight forwardly without any question on the resulting value or even joy, is an objective value and that, which finally determines a value of the personality. It is itself thereby an absolute obligation for everyone, that is, a general thing, an obligatory law that the absolute obligation of everyone belongs to the circle of my absolute obligation, to the circle of my absolute [391] ethical responsibilities and values, according to which I may not inhibit anyone or even distract [him] from his duties without sinning. That is, such a thing is an especially big ethical worthlessness.[[7]](#footnote-6)

Every personal subject is an ethical subject and as that [it] has its universe of ethical values and disvalues. This ethical universe though is not a private matter. All these universes are related to one another in the community of men and form a single universal connection, to which thus every subject is related according to the above, although each has a differently shaped universe, because that, which is an immediate duty for this subject, is not [a duty] for the other one, while this one still is ethically interested in this duty of that other one and the fulfilling of duty.

And now I already tried to show above that all absolute obligation and the universe itself is capable and in need of an “uncovering”, and that this rational uncovering gives a most high absolute obligation to the consciousness in the form of rational consideration of human life as such.[[8]](#footnote-7)

Appendix XXXVI

<The unconditioned “you shall”, not being subject to rational grounding. Departure from Brentano’s ethic of the highest practical good>[[9]](#footnote-8)

The mother should make such considerations on the highest practical good and first of all ponder?!

This whole ethic of the highest practical good, the way it was derived by Brentano, and taken over by me in essential lines, [392] cannot be the final word. Essential delimitations are needed! Profession and inner vocation do not come into their actual own.

There is an unconditioned “You shall, and you must”, directed towards the person, and which is not subject to a rational grounding for the one experiencing this absolute affection, and [which] does not depend on it in rightful binding. This precedes all rational explication, even there, where it is possible. “I would give up myself, if I acted in another way”, “I would never forgive myself”, is the whole justification here. Not “the weal and woe of the child is my weal and woe” is the right designation here, but it is **above** my weal and woe. I can ignore my weal and woe, but not that of my child. My child’s welfare is entrusted to me, I am responsible for it. To foster it is “absolutely demanded” of me. But the child’s grief is still my grief; namely, I suffer his suffering (due to my knowing it), and in such a way, that everything else takes second place behind this suffer. But to remove it is not my goal, but the absolute goal is solely to remove the child’s suffer, whereby of course my own must vanish as well. Is sympathy an analogue to co-judging? Likewise co-evaluating and co-wishing? But the matter is not that easy.

1. Probably about the middle of the 1920s. – Editor’s note. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Values of enjoying, principle of summation, absorption. Values of obligation, ethical values – are these not the only true values? [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Development of the absolute obligation: the family obligation, the national, the human one. Christian brotherly love. But instincts of flight, instinct of revenge, jealousy, etc.? [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. But the usable sense of this explanation simply is only that: Every original and (every) acquired instinct is blind. But if considerations on the value are introduced through ration, and if the immediate and mediate connections of the values are followed, then the instinctive drive, having a blind absoluteness of the „I must“ gains the character of some „I shall“ with insight, and this is necessarily directed towards values, in the evidence simply of the „I shall“; they are entrusted to me, etc. It is thus said that the blind drives, <the> original ones and <the> acquired ones, are not completely, but so to say encompass hidden or already conscious value opinions, as those being subject to criticism and guiding over through them into an evident absolute obligation with a personal sense of value. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Reason as if, insofar as at least not every acquired instinct can be rationalized. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. Nay, this has not been shown. – If this could be shown! This was the futile endeavor of all teleological proves of God. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. The concept of the ethical worthlessness as of the value (value of obligation) needed to be explained especially. Of course, ethical worthlessness is every acting against an absolute obligation. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
8. Simply the universal of the uncovering in individual orientation. Compare margin of the previous page <here page 390.2-16, German edition>. The obligation can only make sense if it is God’s vocation to wish to actualize his absolute perfection as well according to my ability in the world, in the progress of creating value. Community now becomes the biggest earthly duty in the absolute obligation. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
9. Probably from the first half of the 1920s. – Editor’s note. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)