No. 32

Ethics. Universal doctrine of arts.

<Self-taming. Total self-responsibility and the absolute ought. Decision for life’s profession of a true existence. The norm to live in ethical seriousness>[[1]](#footnote-0)

Theory, doctrine of arts, type of experiential ways as purposive rational ones. Practice, also practice through projecting one’s thoughts into situations in fantasy, but as an Ego, decided for the rational.

The mechanical-rational procedure. Like in calculating. In the “knowledge” that this is rational, without “vivid”, although secondary rationality of insight. The indispensability of the “mechanical”[technique], the practiced technique, indispensability of the self-taming. But <is> man a tamed animal? Behind it [the animal] there is the man who tamed it, and knows why. But he has tamed himself in taming. Man in responsibility, in the relative one. He has his purpose: Let us take a distant, general purpose he has decided for, and which he is supposed to assert; he needs many kinds of things for that, also self-taming. Bodily ability, taming of the same for certain bodily ways of procedure, movements, etc. But also mental taming. Self-responsibility: He is ready to justify himself to himself any time. He grounds – he can ground the Why, also the Why of the taming. But also that he wants to be ready for self-responsibility, that he is able to always ground the Why, is a purpose; he also considers that according to his practical possibility, he also believes self-taming to be necessary for that. Back-relating of the Ego towards itself.

Is ethics as the doctrine of arts of the ethical humanity a technique, which is directed towards a self-taming, like in playing the piano or in calculating? Can the allness of possible situations be overviewed in a certain way, and can we construct what is the right procedure there, and how you have to tame yourself for that now with the kind [452] of certainty of rational rightfulness, like we have it in calculating and in the otherwise learned procedure practiced in the learning according to grounds that have been understood? The nonsense is to demand the construction of the situations’ infinity, etc. Furthermore, rationality as properly to be taken responsibility for in an individual way goes by the board: If I have forgotten ratio, I cannot take responsibility, if I simply shall take responsibility myself from my actual insight. Otherwise I take responsibility through hinting at the school, at others understanding it and having taught it to me. If I shall be justified against myself, and even universally, if I want to be and live in such a way that I shall decide to do what is the only possible thing for me, the final good, in the consciousness of pure and simple certainty in every moment, can I ever act, live in such a way that I have insight into the whole connection of the mediacies of purposive rationality, always becoming more complex, nay, [that I] even only have [the whole connection] in vivid readiness to ground? Can I ever relinquish the “taming”, the “blindly mechanical” while forgetting the grounding? The taming first of all is bound to the willingness to ground. An important principle here is thus: The evidence of the second step, that of ability without actual doing, and without the doing in the testing intuitive anticipation. My body is the title for such evidence. I do not need to think myself into all-sided movements of the hand or a movement of the hand somehow directed within intuitability. I have the evidence of the “I can” without further ado. I do not need to take special responsibility for the disposal of my body in its primal field of ability. Thus I also do not have to take responsibility there, where I have learned thoroughly, for the irrational of my procedure – at first as long as I am certain of the “reprodu<cible>” ability, a certainty of the same kind, like, when I have a way in front of me, am standing in front of some stairs and the like, <I> have immediate evidence of the ability to walk on, without making evident to me the ability in a more proper way.

But that can also vanish, and the memory of the having had the ability from learning remains and of the possible ability through new learning, etc. – like in the intersubjective connection of all such ability, implying indirect abilities of justification. Thus with regard to single responsibilities.

[453] But what is necessary for my (and our human) total responsibility? How can I not only explain myself with regard to some special purposive rationality and a purpose I simply already have as a single one, but with regard to my whole existence? In detail I can take responsibility, although not absolutely insofar, as I may indeed falter with regard to the actual ability to prove the rationalized ways of procedure, but also eventually relinquish it and may relinquish. There are accidents here, errors, mistakes, failure from clumsiness, mixing up. I brace myself, and do my very best, and I can take on responsibility for what I do. But I possibly say “I need to practice this in a better way”, “I need to ensure that I master my ability in a better way”, etc. We still need to say in the single purpose field: The rational behavior is that one, where the purposefulness has the character of insight or insightfully growing norm justice on all steps of actualization, that is, the whole explaining way has been tread, and has already been designed in advance as one indeed true to the norms, may the norm justice – systematic unity of norm justice – point to groundings in a horizonlike way, which are settled, but not currently present.

How about the total self-responsibility now? This is the totality of my awake, active, doing life in its whole open possibility and of our common life, mine, in the universality of the fellow living ones. I want to have true existence, want to be able to remain true to myself, etc. This will to live encompasses all special purposes only having truth through it, is in its true sense norm of all truth of these purposes themselves and of the life related to them. I absolutely demand this form, and I consider the possibility of such an existence, the possible ways of living, the possible special goals and courses of life of the aiming, constituting a unity of a true life. I find a rational possibility in all generality and as its possibility to put it into action from a state of unsatisfying naivety.

This again demands “self-taming”. Because the consideration and the construction of the ability is not existence in this possibility yet, this is not yet the deed of the self-creation [454] as a consequently on-going self-creation. I need to unsheathe the self-willing, <the> willing <to> be in the absolute, the total truth.

I am pre-educated for that from professional life. I know from that what it means: to live seriously within one’s professional field, in the working hours (the duty hours) – and to lack the right seriousness, to perform professional actions only in a passive habitual way, casually, confused or easily to be confused, without being concentrated on the matter with one’s whole personality. I know that here: to have gotten into the job without inwardly having decided for it seriously. I know that here: to become aware of this ungenuineness in a decision of this self’s life, and to now “brace oneself again” and to remain true to oneself as the Ego, having decided for this profession, for the whole of its life (the professional sphere) as a life for the systematically intertwined professional purposes, <having> afterwards decided seriously, and which now as the lasting Ego of the decision is only identical to itself if it acts accordingly.

If I now want to seriously want me as an ethical Ego, to be in the seriousness of the decision, and to remain true to myself in universality, then I have, in other words, life’s profession, including as an absolute and universal one all professions as subordinate ones, which shall be able to be mine, and respectively need to be.

The general possibilities of my being are general ones of my life as a man in a human surrounding world and world as such. I am standing in relativity, in the respective surrounding world, and like me everyone – in the We-community of this surrounding world (whereby the relativity of this We, we professional brethren, we Germans, etc., comes into question). This surrounding world in relation to us has its familiarity for us: the familiar of the practical possibilities, of the traditional ways of proceeding, purposes, means, forms of disturbances, ways of mistakes, etc. I need to consider this, and to criticize it and to evaluate, in how far a best possible life, a life of self-faith could be attained thereby, and need to design it in a general way thus.

An absolutely true [existence] is not to be gained in one go from the existence as it is and proceeded up till now, but it is a basic condition for that as such that I am always aware of the seriousness of life’s decision [455], that I <may> never “forget” it, that I may not let myself drift, that I brace myself in the conflict, in the doubt, whether I am not doing something I will have to regret, in conflict between absolute demands.

In the changing of the manageable situations I have the identical thing of the surrounding world as a lasting practical ground, and in front of or within its traditionality of generally common acceptances a content of such [acceptances] that are distinct through their being absolutely obligatory, that they are “above all criticism”, which I as an Ego, as a willing one, cannot let go, which I possibly have to “sacrifice” certainly, but not otherwise than in favor of exactly such acceptances, which need to precede for me as the case may be, whereas they are still not thus that their acceptance would be merely relative, absorbed through other “higher” acceptances. I might indeed be also attracted passively towards something absolutely obligatory, instinctively, where there is no talking of seriousness. But they are only uncovered as absolutely obligatory in the attitude of seriousness; they are this as inseparably <belonging> to me in my truth. This sphere of obligation determines all other obligatory things as something merely relative, as gaining the value of life from there.

The possibility’s precondition to be able to concretely perform a genuine single decision especially, that of the situation, of the moment, is implied in the seriousness of the decision for a true and genuine existence. Every decision performed in this seriousness is *eo ipso* ethical; and insofar as the decision for true existence is absolutely obligatory itself, it is absolutely obligatory as well.

The norm though “to live in ethical seriousness”, to ethically decide, is still not sufficient. Life’s decision, called “ethical”, changes the whole surrounding world for me in its way of being for me, in its way of the temporal progress for me and from me, or rather for us and from us. Whereas it was a progress before of practical situations, in the next-to-one-another intertwining with one another, in each of which I had to ever again decide, now I have made an absolute decision for all future situations, [a decision] shaping them all in advance. Basically I am now in a single identical situation, in that of my whole future life as to be shaped unitarily in present, a situation remaining identical, but [456] changing its content. The change of the situations formerly following each other, intertwining with one another, has now become subordinate contents shaped in the universal will. My life in present is continuously shaping present of the world into worldly future: but in a new sense. The practical world for me, that is, the practical present one for me (the realm of my immediate practical ability) is merely a beginning phase of the unitary practical world of future for me – the world’s area, receiving an ethical shape from me in future in the wholeness of my life.

But since my pre-ethical [being] thus my ethical being as well, my whole human life of intention, my world life as such, is related to the being in the world through the other ones, since my ethical being is inseparably intertwined with the possible one of the others, since my ethical will, my absolute ethical obligation necessarily is a will that other ethical subjects are or become, and ethical world necessarily needs to become ethical common world, thus my ethical will can never be actually fulfilled in the merely private self-responsible life and action.

I am ethical in the ethical serious action, in which I never let myself flow, but live in the ethical “self-consciousness”, in the ethical self-will, <in> self-decision: and it is my ethical question what I have to do for me. But this question also encompasses what I can do for others, and this quite especially. This again leads to considering the universality of the human existence’s complexity, and the possibility of an all-human ethical being or to consider coming to ethical existence. Without ethical self-examination no ethical combination, no ethical, i.e. universal life horizon than that of an existence true to itself. At first not individually and then not socially and all humanly. Ethical self-examination results in a first general norm of ethical existence, but it also shows the relativity of the ethical value, of the ethical intention’s fulfillment, it shows the possibility of man’s progress who is always already ethical and does the best he can do at the moment, and which is not the purely and simply best though. The purely and simply best – the idea of an apo-[457]dictically necessary existence, such an [existence], which necessarily needs to choose and want the Ego – this leads to an apodictical humanity though.

1. Probably about 1930. – Editor’s note. [↑](#footnote-ref-0)