Let us consult the human heart, and there we shall find the foundation of the sovereign's right to punish; for no advantage in moral policy can be lasting which is not founded on the indelible sentiments of the heart of man. Whatever law deviates from this principle will always meet with a resistance which will destroy it in the end; for the smallest force continually applied will overcome the most violent motion communicated to bodies.

The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work: it will be proper therefore at the outset to give an explicit and determinate account of what is meant by it. By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.

At the annunciation of Principles, of Ideas, the soul of man awakes, and starts up, as an exile in a far distant land at the unexpected sounds of his native language, when, after long years of absence, and almost of oblivion, he is suddenly addressed in his own mother tongue. He weeps for joy, and embraces the speaker as his brother. How else can we explain the fact so honourable to Great Britain, that the poorest amongst us will contend with as much enthusiasm as the richest for the rights of property? These rights are the spheres and necessary conditions of free agency. But free agency contains the idea of the free will; and in this he intuitively knows the sublimity, and the infinite hopes, fears, and capabilities of his own (English) nature. On what other ground but the cognateness of ideas and principles to man as man, does the nameless soldier rush to the combat in defence of the liberties or the honour of his country? Even men, woefully neglectful of the principles of religion, will shed their blood for its truth.

In the mean time their learned men, their sages, as they were called, but who soon took the more modest appellation of philosophers, or friends of science and wisdom, wandered in the immensity of the two vast and comprehensive plan which they had embraced. They were desirous of penetrating both the nature of man, and that of the Gods; the origin of the world, as well as of the human race. They endeavoured to reduce all nature to one principle only, and the phenomena of the universe to one law. They attempted to include, in a single rule of conduct, all the duties of morality, and the secret of true happiness. Thus, instead of discovering truths, they forged systems; they neglected the observation of facts, to pursue the chimeras of their imagination; and being no longer able to support their opinions with proofs, they sought to defend them by subtleties.

The use of mathematical knowledge is no less considerable in the examination of the terrestrial bodies that surround us. All the properties we observe in these bodies have relationships among themselves that are more or less accessible to us. The knowledge or the discovery of these relationships is almost always the only object we are permitted to attain, and consequently the only one we ought to propose for ourselves. Thus, it is not at all by vague and arbitrary hypotheses that we can hope to know nature; it is by thoughtful study of phenomena, by the comparisons we make among them, by the art of reducing, as much as that may be possible, a large number of phenomena to a single one that can be regarded as their principle. Indeed, the more one reduces the number of principles of a science, the more one gives them scope, and since the object of a science is necessarily fixed, the principles applied to that object will be so much the more fertile as they are fewer in number. This reduction which, moreover, makes them easier to understand, constitutes the true “systematic spirit.” One must be very careful not to mistake this for the “spirit of system,” with which it does not always agree. We will speak more fully of this matter later.

There is what may be called a first Principle in every Science, as there is a first Principle of all Science, and when a Principle is given, we have a fixed standard to which we may refer propositions, and effects. Such principles compared to the multitude of their consequences, are doubtless very few; and it must be a matter of long time, and much difficulty, analytically to investigate them; the great advantage therefore to be expected form one who professes to instruct, is to have those principles, as sources of knowledge pointed out at once. A tutor who should insist upon his pupils treading in his steps, and proceeding to investigate all Principles by analysis, acts much like one who having gained the summit of a mountain, with the utmost difficulty, should direct another to attempt it, by the same steep and broken precipices he ascended it himself.

I believe I have omitted mentioning that , in my first voyage from Boston, being becalmed off Block Island, our people set about catching cod, and hauled up a great many. Hitherto I had stuck to my resolution of not eating animal food, and on this occasion I considered, with my master Tryon, the taking every fish as a kind of unprovoked murder, since none of them had or ever could do us any injury that might justify the slaughter. All this seemed very reasonable. But I had formerly been a great lover of fish, and when this came hot out of the frying-pan, it smelt admirably well. I balanced some time between principle and inclination, till I recollected that, when the fish were opened, I saw smaller fish taken out of their stomachs. Then thought I, "If you eat one another, I don't see why we mayn't eat you." So I dined upon cod very heartily, and continued to eat with other people, returning only now and then occasionally to a vegetable diet. So convenient a thing it is to be a reasonable creature, since it enables one to find or make a reason for everything one has a mind to do.

Genius is properly the faculty of invention ; by means of which a man is qualified for making new discoveries in science, or for producing original works of art. We may ascribe taste, judgment, or knowledge, to a man who is incapable of invention; but we cannot reckon him a man of genius. In order to determine, how far he merits this character, we must enquire, whether he has discovered any new principle in science, or invented any new art, or carried those arts which are already practiced, to a higher degree of perfection, than former masters? Or, whether, at least, he has, in matters of science, improved on the discoveries of his predecessors, and reduced principles formerly known, to a greater degree of simplicity and consistence, or traced them through a train of consequences hitherto unknown? Or, in the arts, designed some new work, different from those of his predecessors, though not perhaps excelling them? Whatever falls short of this, is servile imitation, or a dull effort of plodding industry, which, as not implying invention, can be deemed no proof of genius, whatever capacity, skill, or diligence it may evidence. But if a man shows invention, no intellectual defects which his performance may betray, can forfeit his claim to genius. His invention may be irregular, wild, undisciplined; but still it is regarded as an infallible mark of real natural genius: and the degree of this faculty, that we ascribe to him, is always in proportion to our estimate of the novelty, the difficulty, or the dignity of his inventions.

But there is a still more irresistible argument proving to us the absurdity of the supposition of innate principles. Every principle is a proposition: either it affirms, or it denies. Every proposition consists in the connection of at least two distinct ideas, which are affirmed to agree or disagree with each other. It is impossible that the proposition can be innate, unless the ideas to which it relates be also innate. A connection where there is nothing to be connected, a proposition where there is neither subject nor conclusion, is the most incoherent of all suppositions. But nothing can be more incontrovertible than that we do not bring pre-established ideas into the world with us.

In a word, his name is not stuck, like so many others, in the firmament of reputation, nobody knows why, inscribed in great letters, and with a transparency of Talents, Genius, Learning blazing round it---it is tantamount to an idea, it is identified with a principle, it means that the population cannot go on perpetually increasing without pressing on the limits of the means of subsistence, and that a check of some kind or other must, sooner or later, be opposed to it. This is the essence of the doctrine which Mr. Malthus has been the first to bring into general notice, and as we think, to establish beyond the fear of contradiction. Admitting then as we do the prominence and the value of his claims to public attention, it yet remains a question, how far those claims are (as to the talent displayed in them) strictly original; how far (as to the logical accuracy with which he has treated the subject) he has introduced foreign and doubtful matter into it; and how far (as to the spirit in which he has conducted his inquiries, and applied a general principle to particular objects) he has only drawn fair and inevitable conclusions from it, or endeavoured to temper with and wrest it to sinister and servile purposes. A writer who shrinks from following up a well-founded principle into its untoward consequences from timidity or false delicacy, is not worthy of the name of a philosopher: a writer who assumes the garb of candour and an inflexible love of truth to garble and pervert it, to crouch to power and pander to prejudice, deserves a worse title than that of a sophist!

I have long entertained a suspicion, with regard to the decisions of philosophers upon all subjects, and found in myself a greater inclination to dispute, than assent to their conclusions. There is one mistake, to which they seem liable, almost without exception; they confine too much their principles, and make no account of that vast variety, which nature has so much affected in all her operations. When a philosopher has once laid hold of a favourite principle, which perhaps accounts for many natural effects, he extends the same principle over the whole creation, and reduces to it every phænomenon, though by the most violent and absurd reasoning. Our own mind being narrow and contracted, we cannot extend our conception to the variety and extent of nature; but imagine, that she is as much bounded in her operations, as we are in our speculation.

Nothing has retarded the progress of philosophy more than an unlucky propensity that makes us grasp at principles without due regard to facts and experiments. Though fond of knowledge, we are willing to purchase it at the easiest rate; and general principles delight us, because they shorten the road to knowledge. This bent of the mind is productive of manifold errors. Prepossessed once by a favourite principle, we are not longer open to conviction. Every phenomenon must be accommodated to that principle, and every phenomenon must be accommodated to that principle, and every opposite fact, however obstinate, must go for nothing. And thus we endeavor to mold nature to our wish, instead of desiring to know nature in her genuine figure.

In this problem we will first inquire whether the mere conception of a categorical imperative may not perhaps supply us also with the formula of it, containing the proposition which alone can be a categorical imperative; for even if we know the tenor of such an absolute command, yet how it is possible will require further special and laborious study, which we postpone to the last section. When I conceive a hypothetical imperative, in general I do not know beforehand what it will contain until I am given the condition. But when I conceive a categorical imperative, I know at once what it contains. For as the imperative contains besides the law only the necessity that the maxims shall conform to this law, while the law contains no conditions restricting it, there remains nothing but the general statement that the maxim of the action should conform to a universal law, and it is this conformity alone that the imperative properly represents as necessary. There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely, this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will that it should become a universal law. Now if all imperatives of duty can be deduced from this one imperative as from their principle, then, although it should remain undecided what is called duty is not merely a vain notion, yet at least we shall be able to show what we understand by it and what this notion means. Since the universality of the law according to which effects are produced constitutes what is properly called nature in the most general sense (as to form), that is the existence of things so far as it is determined by general laws, the imperative of duty may be expressed thus: Act as if the maxim of thy action were to become by thy will a universal law of nature. We will now enumerate a few duties, adopting the usual division of them into duties to ourselves and ourselves and to others, and into perfect and imperfect duties.