

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE  
HISTORY OF PHILOSOPHY



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*Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*

## RELIGION WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF MERE REASON

is, however, morally (i.e. imputably) evil but that which is our own deed. And yet by the concept of a propensity is understood a subjective determining ground of the power of choice *that precedes every deed*, and hence is itself not yet a *deed*. There would then be a contradiction in the concept of a simple propensity to evil, if this expression could not somehow be taken in two different meanings, both nonetheless reconcilable with the concept of freedom. Now, the term “deed” can in general apply just as well to the use of freedom through which the supreme maxim (either in favor of, or against, the law) is adopted in the power of choice, as to the use by which the actions themselves (materially considered, i.e. as regards the objects of the power of choice) are performed in accordance with that maxim. The propensity to evil is a deed in the first meaning (*peccatum originarium*),<sup>z</sup> and at the same time the formal ground of every deed contrary to law according to the second meaning, [i.e. of a deed] that resists the law materially and is then called vice (*peccatum derivativum*);<sup>a</sup> and the first indebtedness remains even though the second may be repeatedly avoided (because of incentives that are not part of the law). The former is an intelligible deed, cognizable through reason alone apart from any temporal condition; the latter is sensible, empirical, given in time (*factum phenomenon*).<sup>b</sup> Now the first one is said to be a bare propensity especially when compared with the second, and to be innate, because it cannot be eradicated (for the supreme maxim for that would have to be the maxim of the good, whereas in this propensity the maxim has been assumed to be evil). But the chief reason is that we are just as incapable of assigning a further cause for why evil has corrupted the very highest maxim in us, though this is our own deed, as we are for a fundamental property that belongs to our nature. – In what has just been said can be found the reason why in this section, from the very start, we sought the three sources of moral evil solely in that which affects the ultimate ground for the acceptance or the observance of our maxims according to the laws of freedom, not in what affects sensibility (as receptivity).

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### III.

#### THE HUMAN BEING IS BY NATURE EVIL

*VITIIS NEMO SINE NASCITUR*, HORACE<sup>c</sup>

In view of what has been said above, the statement, “The human being is *evil*,” cannot mean anything else than that he is conscious of the moral law and yet has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from it.

<sup>z</sup> original sin

<sup>a</sup> derivative sin

<sup>b</sup> phenomenal deed

<sup>c</sup> *Satires* I:iii.68. Nobody is born without vice.

"He is evil *by nature*" simply means that being evil applies to him considered in his species; not that this quality may be inferred from the concept of his species ([i.e.] from the concept of a human being in general, for then the quality would be necessary), but rather that, according to the cognition we have of the human being through experience, he cannot be judged otherwise, in other words, we may presuppose evil as subjectively necessary in every human being, even the best. Now, since this propensity must itself be considered morally evil, hence not a natural predisposition but something that a human being can be held accountable for, and consequently must consist in maxims of the power of choice contrary to the law and yet, because of freedom, such maxims must be viewed as accidental, a circumstance that would not square with the universality of the evil at issue unless their supreme subjective ground were not in all cases somehow entwined with humanity itself and, as it were, rooted in it: so we can call this ground a natural propensity to evil, and, since it must nevertheless always come about through one's own fault, we can further even call it a *radical innate evil* in human nature (not any the less brought upon us by ourselves).

6:33 We can spare ourselves the formal proof that there must be such a corrupt propensity rooted in the human being, in view of the multitude of woeful examples that the experience of human *deeds* parades before us. If we wish to draw our examples from that state in which many a philosopher especially hoped to meet the natural goodness of human nature, namely from the so-called *state of nature*, let one but compare with this hypothesis the scenes of unprovoked cruelty in the ritual murders of Tofoa, New Zealand, and the Navigator Islands,<sup>21</sup> and the never-ending cruelty (which Captain Hearne reports)<sup>22</sup> in the wide wastes of northwestern America from which, indeed, no human being derives the least benefit,\* and we find vices of savagery more than sufficient to distance us from any such opinion. If we are however disposed to the opinion that we can have a better cognition of human nature known in its civilized state (where its predispositions can be more fully developed), we must then hear out a long melancholy litany of charges against humankind – of secret falsity even in the most intimate friendship, so that a restraint on trust in the

\*† Thus the perpetual war between the Arathapescaw Indians and the Dog Rib Indians has no other aim than mere slaughter. In the savages' opinion, bravery in war is the highest virtue. In the civilized state too, bravery is an object of admiration and one reason for the special respect commanded by that estate in which bravery is the sole merit; and this is not without basis in reason. For that a human being should be capable of possessing and adopting as his goal something (honor) which he values more highly still than his life, and of sacrificing all self-interest to it, this surely bespeaks a certain sublimity in his predisposition. Yet we see in the complacency with which the victors boast of their grandiose deeds (the butchery, the merciless killing, and the like) that it is in their mere superiority, and in the havoc that they can wreak, with no other end, that they really place their good.

mutual confidence of even the best friends is reckoned a universal maxim of prudence in social dealings; of a propensity to hate him to whom we are indebted, to which a benefactor must always heed; of a hearty goodwill that nonetheless admits the remark that "in the misfortunes of our best friends there is something that does not altogether displease us"<sup>23</sup>; and of many other vices yet hidden under the appearance of virtue, let alone those of which no secret is made, for to us someone already counts as good when *his evil is common to a class*<sup>24</sup> – and we shall have enough of the vices of *culture* and civilization (the most offensive of all) to make us rather turn our eyes away from the doings of human beings, lest we be dragged ourselves into another vice, namely that of misanthropy. And if we are not satisfied yet, we need but consider a state wondrously compounded from both the others, namely that of a people in its external relations, where civilized peoples stand vis-à-vis one another in the relation of raw nature (the state of constant war) and have also firmly taken it into their heads not to get out of it, and we shall become aware of fundamental principles in the great societies we call *states*\* directly in contradiction to official policy yet never abandoned, principles which no philosopher has yet been able to bring into agreement with morality or else (what is terrible) suggest [how to replace with]<sup>d</sup> better ones, reconcilable with human nature: So *philosophical chiasm*, which hopes for a state of perpetual peace based on a federation of nations united in a world-republic, is universally derided as sheer fantasy as much as *theological chiasm*, which awaits for the completed moral improvement of the human race.

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Now, the ground of this evil cannot (1) be placed, as is commonly done, in the sensuous nature<sup>e</sup> of the human being, and in the natural inclinations originating from it. For not only do these bear no direct relation to evil (they rather give the occasion for what the moral disposition can demon-

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\*† If we look at the history of these simply as a phenomenon of inner predispositions of humanity for the most part concealed from us, we then become aware of a certain machine-like progression of nature according to ends which are not theirs (the peoples') but nature's own. So long as a state has a neighboring one which it can hope to subdue, it strives to aggrandize itself by subjugating it. It thus strives for a universal monarchy – a state constitution in which all freedom would necessarily expire, and, together with it, virtue, taste and science (which follow upon freedom). Yet after this monster (in which the laws gradually lose their force) has swallowed up all its neighbors, it ultimately disintegrates all by itself. It divides through rebellion and factionalism into many smaller states which, instead of striving after a union of states (a republic of free federated peoples), in turn begin the same game all over again, so that war (that scourge of the human race) will not cease. Although not so incurably evil as the grave of universal despotism (or even as a federation of nations pitted against the relaxation of despotism in any state), war, as an ancient said,<sup>25</sup> nonetheless creates more evil men than it takes away.

<sup>d</sup> I am adding "[how to replace with]" in an effort to retain Kant's loose sentence structure yet abide by English syntax.

<sup>e</sup> *Sinnlichkeit*

strate in its power, for virtue): we also cannot presume ourselves responsible for their existence (we cannot because, as conatural to us, natural inclinations do not have us for their author), though we can well be responsible for the propensity to evil which, since it concerns the morality of the subject and hence is to be found in the latter as a freely acting being, must be capable of being imputed to the subject as itself guilty of it – this despite the deep roots the propensity has in the power of choice, on account of which we must say that it is found in the human being by nature. – The ground of this evil can also not be placed (2) in a *corruption* of the morally legislative reason, as if reason could extirpate within itself the dignity of the law itself, for this is absolutely impossible. To think of oneself as a freely acting being, yet as exempted from the one law commensurate to such a being (the moral law), would amount to the thought of a cause operating without any law at all (for the determination according to natural law is abolished on account of freedom): and this is a contradiction. – *Sensuous nature*<sup>f</sup> therefore contains too little to provide a ground of moral evil in the human being, for, to the extent that it eliminates the incentives originating in freedom, it makes of the human a purely *animal* being; a reason exonerated from the moral law, an *evil reason* as it were (an absolutely evil will), would on the contrary contain too much, because resistance to the law would itself be thereby elevated to incentive (for without any incentive the power of choice cannot be determined), and so the subject would be made a *diabolical* being. – Neither of these two is however applicable to the human being.

But even though the existence of this propensity to evil in human nature can be established through experiential demonstrations of the actual resistance in time of the human power of choice against the law, these demonstrations still do not teach us the real nature of that propensity or the ground of this resistance; that nature rather, since it has to do with a relation of the free power of choice (the concept of which is not empirical) to the moral law (of which the concept is equally purely intellectual), must be cognized *a priori* from the concept of evil, so far as the latter is possible according to the laws of freedom (of obligation and imputability). What follows is the development of this concept.

6:36 The human being (even the worst) does not repudiate the moral law, whatever his maxims, in rebellious attitude (by revoking obedience to it). The law rather imposes itself on him irresistibly, because of his moral predisposition; and if no other incentive were at work against it, he would also incorporate it into his supreme maxim as sufficient determination of his power of choice, i.e. he would be morally good. He is, however, also dependent on the incentives of his sensuous nature<sup>g</sup> because of his equally

<sup>f</sup> *Sinnlichkeit*

<sup>g</sup> *Sinnlichkeit*

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innocent natural predisposition, and he incorporates them too into his maxim (according to the subjective principle of self-love). If he took them into his maxim *as of themselves sufficient* for the determination of his power of choice, without minding the moral law (which he nonetheless has within himself), he would then become morally evil. But now, since he naturally incorporates both into the same maxim, whereas he would find each, taken alone, of itself sufficient to determine the will, so, if the difference between maxims depended simply on the difference between incentives (the material of the maxims), namely, on whether the law or the sense impulse provides the incentive, he would be morally good and evil at the same time – and this is a contradiction (as we saw in the Introduction). Hence the difference, whether the human being is good or evil, must not lie in the difference between the incentives that he incorporates into his maxim (not in the material of the maxim) but in their *subordination* (in the form of the maxim): *which of the two he makes the condition of the other*. It follows that the human being (even the best) is evil only because he reverses the moral order of his incentives in incorporating them into his maxims. He indeed incorporates the moral law into those maxims, together with the law of self-love; since, however, he realizes that the two cannot stand on an equal footing, but one must be subordinated to the other as its supreme condition, he makes the incentives of self-love and their inclinations the condition of compliance with the moral law – whereas it is this latter that, as *the supreme condition* of the satisfaction of the former, should have been incorporated into the universal maxim of the power of choice as the sole incentive.

In this reversal of incentives through a human being's maxim contrary to the moral order, actions can still turn out to be as much in conformity to the law as if they had originated from true principles – as when reason uses the unity of the maxims in general, which is characteristic of the moral law, merely to introduce into the incentives of inclination, under the name of *happiness*, a unity of maxims which they cannot otherwise have. (For example, when adopted as principle, truthfulness spares us the anxiety of maintaining consistency in our lies and not being entangled in their serpentine coils.) The empirical character is then good but the intelligible character still evil.

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Now if a propensity to this [inversion] does lie in human nature, then there is in the human being a natural propensity to evil; and this propensity itself is morally evil, since it must ultimately be sought in a free power of choice, and hence is imputable. This evil is *radical*, since it corrupts the ground of all maxims; as natural propensity, it is also not to be *extirpated* through human forces, for this could only happen through good maxims – something that cannot take place if the subjective supreme ground of all maxims is presupposed to be corrupted. Yet it must equally be possible to *overcome* this evil, for it is found in the human being as acting freely.

The depravity of human nature is therefore not to be named *malice*,<sup>h</sup> if we take this word in the strict sense, namely as a disposition (a subjective *principle* of maxims) to incorporate evil *qua evil* for incentive into one's maxim (since this is *diabolical*), but should rather be named *perversity* of the heart, and this heart is then called *evil* because of what results. An evil heart can coexist with a will which in the abstract<sup>i</sup> is good. Its origin is the frailty of human nature, in not being strong enough to comply with its adopted principles, coupled with its dishonesty in not screening incentives (even those of well-intentioned actions) in accordance with the moral guide, and hence at the end, if it comes to this, in seeing only to the conformity of these incentives to the law, not to whether they have been derived from the latter itself, i.e. from it as the sole incentive. Now, even though a lawless action and a propensity to such contrariety, i.e. *vice*, do not always originate from it, the attitude of mind that construes the absence of vice as already being conformity of the *disposition* to the law of duty (i.e. as *virtue*) is nonetheless itself to be named a radical perversity in the human heart (for in this case no attention at all is given to the incentives in the maxim but only to compliance with the letter of the law).

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This *innate* guilt (*reatus*), which is so called because it is detectable as early as the first manifestation of the exercise of freedom in the human being, but which must nonetheless have originated from freedom and is therefore imputable, can be judged in its first two stages (those of frailty and impurity) to be unintentional guilt (*culpa*); in the third, however, as deliberate guilt (*dolus*), and is characterized by a certain *perfidy* on the part of the human heart (*dolus malus*) in deceiving itself as regards its own good or evil disposition and, provided that its actions do not result in evil (which they could well do because of their maxims), in not troubling itself on account of its disposition but rather considering itself justified before the law. This is how so many human beings (conscientious in their own estimation) derive their peace of mind when, in the course of actions in which the law was not consulted or at least did not count the most, they just luckily slipped by the evil consequences; and [how they derive] even the fancy that they deserve not to feel guilty of such transgressions as they see others burdened with, without however inquiring whether the credit goes perhaps to good luck, or whether, on the attitude of mind they could well discover within themselves if they just wanted, they would not have practiced similar vices themselves, had they not been kept away from them by impotence, temperament, upbringing, and tempting circumstances of time and place (things which, one and all, cannot be imputed to us). This dishonesty, by which we throw dust in our own eyes and which hinders the establishment in us of a genuine moral disposition, then extends itself also

<sup>h</sup> depravity = *Bösartigkeit*; malice = *Bösheit*

<sup>i</sup> *im Allgemeinen*

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externally, to falsity or deception of others. And if this dishonesty is not to be called malice, it nonetheless deserves at least the name of unworthiness. It rests on the radical evil of human nature which (inasmuch as it puts out of tune the moral ability to judge what to think of a human being, and renders any imputability entirely uncertain, whether internal or external) constitutes the foul stain of our species – and so long as we do not remove it, it hinders the germ of the good from developing as it otherwise would.

A member of the English Parliament exclaimed in the heat of debate: “Every man has his price, for which he sells himself.”<sup>26</sup> If this is true (and everyone can decide by himself), if nowhere is a virtue which no level of temptation can overthrow, if whether the good or evil spirit wins us over only depends on which bids the most and affords the promptest pay-off, then, what the Apostle says might indeed hold true of human beings universally, “There is no distinction here, they are all under sin – there is none righteous (in the spirit of the law), no, not one.”<sup>27\*</sup>

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### IV. CONCERNING THE ORIGIN OF EVIL IN HUMAN NATURE

Origin (the first origin) is the descent of an effect from its first cause, i.e. from that cause which is not in turn the effect of another cause of the same kind. It can be considered as either *origin according to reason*, or *origin according to time*. In the first meaning, only the effect's *being*<sup>1</sup> is considered; in the second, its *occurrence*, and hence, as an event, it is referred to its *cause in time*. If an effect is referred to a cause which is however bound to it according to the laws of freedom, as is the case with moral evil, then the determination of the power of choice to the production of this effect is

\* The appropriate proof of this sentence of condemnation by reason sitting in moral judgment is contained not in this section, but in the previous one. This section contains only the corroboration of the judgment through experience – though experience can never expose the root of evil in the supreme maxim of a free power of choice in relation to the law, for, as *intelligible*<sup>1</sup> deed, the maxim precedes all experience. – From this, i.e. from the unity of the supreme maxims under the unity of the law to which it relates, we can also see why the principle of the exclusion of a mean between good and evil must be the basis of the intellectual judgment of humankind, whereas, for the empirical judgment, the principle can be laid down on the basis of *sensible*<sup>2</sup> deed[s] (actual doing or not doing) that there is a mean between these extremes – on the one side, a negative mean of indifference prior to all education; on the other, a positive mean, a mixture of being partly good and partly evil. This second judgment, however, concerns only human morality as appearance, and in a final judgment must be subordinated to the first.

<sup>1</sup> *intelligibile*

<sup>2</sup> *sensibler*

<sup>1</sup> *Dasein*



6:40 thought as bound to its determining ground not in time but merely in the representation of reason; it cannot be derived from some *preceding* state or other, as must always occur, on the other hand, whenever the evil action is referred to its natural cause as *event* in the world. To look for the temporal origin of free actions as free (as though they were natural effects) is therefore a contradiction; and hence also a contradiction to look for the temporal origin of the moral constitution of the human being, so far as this constitution is considered as contingent, for constitution here means the ground of the *exercise* of freedom which (just like the determining ground of the free power of choice in general) must be sought in the representations of reason alone.

Whatever the nature, however, of the origin of moral evil in the human being, of all the ways of representing its spread and propagation through the members of our species and in all generations, the most inappropriate is surely to imagine it as having come to us by way of *inheritance* from our first parents; for then we could say of moral evil exactly what the poet says of the good: *genus et proavos, et quae non fecimus ipsi, vix ex nostra puto.*<sup>\*\*\*</sup> – We should note further that, when we enquire into the origin of evil, at the beginning we still do not take into account the propensity to it (as *peccatum in potentia*)<sup>6:41</sup> but only consider the actual evil of given actions according to the evil's inner possibility, and according to all that must conspire within the power of choice for such actions to be performed.

Every evil action must be so considered, whenever we seek its rational origin, as if the human being had fallen into it directly from the state of innocence. For whatever his previous behavior may have been, whatever the natural causes influencing him, whether they are inside or outside

\* The three so-called "higher faculties" (in the universities) would explain this transmission each in its own way, namely, either as *inherited disease*, or *inherited guilt*, or *inherited sin*. (1) The Faculty of Medicine would represent the inherited evil somewhat as it represents the tapeworm, concerning which certain natural scientists are actually of the opinion that, since it is not otherwise found either in an element outside us nor (of this same kind) in any other animal, it must already have been present in our first parents. (2) The *Faculty of Law* would regard it as the legal consequence of our accession to an *inheritance* bequeathed to us by these first parents but weighted down because of a serious crime (for to be born is just to inherit the use of the goods of the earth, inasmuch as these are indispensable to our survival). We must therefore make payment (atone) and, at the end, shall still be evicted (by death) from this possession. This is how the justice of law works! (3) The *Theological Faculty* would regard this evil as the personal participation by our first parents in the *fall* of a condemned rebel: either we were at the time ourselves accomplices (though not now conscious of it); or even now, born under the rebel's dominion (as Prince of this World), we prefer his goods to the supreme command of the heavenly master and lack sufficient faith to break loose from him, hence we shall eventually have to share in his doom.

<sup>\*\*\*</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XIII:140–141: "Race and ancestors, and those things which we did not make ourselves, I scarcely consider as our own."

<sup>6:41</sup> potential sin

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them, his action is yet free and not determined through any of these causes; hence the action can and must always be judged as an *original* exercise of his power of choice. He should have refrained from it, whatever his temporal circumstances and entanglements; for through no cause in the world can he cease to be a free agent. It is indeed rightly said that to the human being are also imputed the *consequences* originating from his previous free but lawless actions. All that is thereby meant, however, is this: It is not necessary to get sidetracked into the prevarication of establishing whether such actions may have been free or not, since there is already sufficient ground for the imputation in the admittedly free action which was their cause. However evil a human being has been right up to the moment of an impending free action (evil even habitually, as second nature), his duty to better himself was not just in the past: it still is his duty *now*; he must therefore be capable of it and, should he not do it, he is at the moment of action just as accountable, and stands just as condemned, as if, though endowed with a natural predisposition to the good (which is inseparable from freedom), he had just stepped out of the state of innocence into evil. – Hence we cannot inquire into the origin in time of this deed but must inquire only into its origin in reason, in order thereby to determine and, where possible, to explain the propensity [to it], if there is one, i.e. the subjective universal ground of the adoption of a transgression into our maxim.

Now, the mode of representation which the Scriptures use to depict the origin of evil, as having a *beginning* in human nature, well agrees with the foregoing; for the Scriptures portray this beginning in a narrative, where what must be thought as objectively first by nature<sup>o</sup> (without regard to the condition of time) appears as a first in time. Evil begins, according to the Scriptures, not from a fundamental propensity to it, for otherwise its beginning would not result from freedom, but from *sin* (by which is understood the transgression of the moral law as *divine command*); the state of human beings prior to any propensity to evil is however called the state of innocence. The moral law moved forward in the form of *prohibition* (Genesis II:16–17),<sup>28</sup> as befits a being who, like the human, is not pure but is tempted by inclinations. But, instead of following this law absolutely as sufficient incentive (which alone is unconditionally good, and with which there cannot be further hesitation), the human being looked about for yet other incentives (III:6)<sup>29</sup> which can be good only conditionally (i.e. so far as they do not infringe the law). And he made it his maxim – if one thinks of action as originating from freedom with consciousness – to follow the law of duty, not from duty but, if need be, also with an eye to other aims. He thereby began to question the strin-

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<sup>o</sup> *der Natur der Sache nach*

6:43 gency of the command that excludes the influence of every other incentive, and thereupon to rationalize\* downgrading his obedience to the command to the status of the merely conditional obedience as a means (under the principle of self-love), until, finally, the preponderance of the sensory inducements over the incentive of the law was incorporated into the maxim of action, and thus sin came to be (III:6). *Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur.*<sup>9</sup> It is clear from the above that this is what we do daily, and that hence “in Adam we have all sinned”<sup>31</sup> and still sin – except that a prior innate propensity to transgression is presupposed in us but not in the first human being, in whom rather innocence is presupposed with respect to time; hence his transgression is called a *fall into sin*, whereas ours is represented as resulting from a prior innate depravity of our nature. This propensity, however, means nothing more than this: if we wish to engage in an explanation of evil with respect to its *beginning in time*, we must trace the causes of every deliberate transgression in a previous time of our life, all the way back to the time when the use of reason had not yet developed, hence the source of evil back to a propensity (as natural foundation) to evil which is therefore called innate; in the case of the first human being, who is represented with full control of the use of his reason from the beginning, this is neither necessary nor expedient, for otherwise the foundation [of sin] (the evil propensity) would have to be co-created; hence we construe his sin as generated directly from innocence. – We must not however seek an origin in time of a moral character for which we are to be held accountable, however unavoidable this might be if we want to *explain* the contingent existence of this character (hence the Scriptures, in accordance with this weakness of ours, have perhaps so portrayed its origin in time).

The rational origin, however, of this disharmony in our power of choice with respect to the way it incorporates lower incentives in its maxims and makes them supreme, i.e. this propensity to evil, remains inexplicable to us, for, since it must itself be imputed to us, this supreme ground of all maxims must in turn require the adoption of an evil maxim. Evil can have originated only from moral evil (not just from the limitations of our nature); yet the original predisposition (which none other than the human being himself could have corrupted, if this corruption is to be imputed to him) is a predisposition to the good; there is no conceivable ground for us, therefore, from which moral evil could first have come in us. – The

\* Any profession of reverence for the moral law which in its maxim does not however grant to the law – as self-sufficient incentive – preponderance over all other determining grounds of the power of choice is hypocritical, and the propensity to it is inward deceit, i.e. a propensity to lie to oneself in the interpretation of the moral law, to its prejudice (III:5); wherefore the Bible too (the Christian part of it) calls the author of evil (who is even within us) the Liar from the beginning,<sup>30</sup> and thus characterizes the human being as regards what seems to be the main ground of evil in him.

<sup>9</sup> Horace, *Satires*, I:1: “Change but the name, of you the tale is told.”

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Scriptures express this incomprehensibility in a historical narrative,\* which adds a closer determination of the depravity of our species, by projecting evil at the beginning of the world, not, however, within the human being, but in a *spirit* of an originally more sublime destiny.<sup>32</sup> The absolutely *first* beginning of all evil is thereby represented as incomprehensible to us (for whence the evil in that spirit?); the human being, however, is represented as having lapsed into it only *through temptation*,<sup>33</sup> hence not as corrupted *fundamentally* (in his very first predisposition to the good) but, on the contrary, as still capable of improvement, by contrast to a tempting *spirit*, i.e. one whom the temptation of the flesh cannot be accounted as a mitigation of guilt. And so for the human being, who despite a corrupted heart yet always possesses a good will, there still remains hope of a return to the good from which he has strayed.

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### *General remark Concerning the restoration to its power of the original predisposition to the good*

The human being must make or have made *himself* into whatever he is or should become in a moral sense, good or evil. These two [characters] must be an effect of his free power of choice, for otherwise they could not be imputed to him and, consequently, he could be neither *morally* good nor evil. If it is said, The human being is created good, this can only mean nothing more than: He has been created for the *good* and the original *predisposition* in him is good; the human being is not thereby good as such, but he brings it about that he becomes either good or evil, according as he either incorporates or does not incorporate into his maxims the incentives contained in that predisposition (and this must be left entirely to his free choice). Granted that some supernatural cooperation is also needed to his becoming good or better, whether this cooperation only consist in the diminution of obstacles or be also a positive assistance, the human being must nonetheless make himself antecedently worthy of receiving it; and

\* What is being said here must not be regarded as though intended for Scriptural exegesis, which lies outside the boundaries of the competence of mere reason. We can explain how we put a historical account to our moral use without thereby deciding whether this is also the meaning of the writer or only our interpretation, if this meaning is true in itself, apart from all historical proof, and also the only meaning according to which we can derive something edifying from a text which would otherwise be only a barren addition to our historical cognition. We should not quarrel over an issue unnecessarily, and over its historical standing, when, however we understand it, the issue does not contribute anything to our becoming a better human being – if what can make a contribution in this respect is just as well known without historical demonstration and must even be known without it. Historical cognition that has no intrinsic relation, valid for everyone, to this [moral improvement], belongs among the *adiaphora*, which each may treat as one finds edifying.

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