

DAWES HICKS LECTURE ON PHILOSOPHY

THE PRIMACY OF PRACTICAL REASON

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TWO things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily they are reflected on: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.¹ These words, which occur in the 'Conclusion' of Kant's *Critique of Practical Reason*, are of course very familiar, and have often been respectfully cited as a succinct expression of his intense and highly characteristic feeling for the sublimity of Nature and of the Moral Law. They have, I think, less often been critically considered. That the starry heavens are a proper object of admiration and awe is a proposition which I do not intend to discuss on this occasion, though it is, no doubt, discussable; but about the Moral Law there are questions, seldom raised, which I think may prove of interest. In a word, my question is this: why was Kant thus awe-struck? Why did he, in this and other passages of similar tone and topic, present the Moral Law as pre-eminently, indeed uniquely, a proper object of reverence, respect, and veneration? I do not particularly wish to suggest that he was wrong to do so, but only to seek to understand why he did.

The interest of this question is by no means purely historical. For in our own day most, if not all, philosophers who discuss the nature of morality appear to agree with Kant in the opinion that, where moral considerations are relevant to some problem of conduct, they must certainly be accorded preponderant weight over all others; but very seldom is anything said as to why this should be so. There are indeed ethical theories which yield the implication that a man's moral views are, simply by definition, those which regularly preponderate in his practical decisions; but if, as I think is clear, such theories are mistaken—if, that is, the question what moral considerations are is logically

¹ This and subsequent quotations from Kant are taken from *The Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings in Moral Philosophy*, translated and edited by L. W. Beck, University of Chicago Press, 1949. The passage here cited is to be found at p. 258 of that volume.

separable from the question what weight they should carry, or do in fact carry for this person or that—then the question arises why moral considerations should be accorded the preponderant weight or authority which, by pretty general consensus, is actually and often tacitly ascribed to them. It would surely be impossible to go further than Kant did in insisting upon the overwhelming authority of the demands of Duty on our obedience; it is of particular interest, accordingly, to consider in his case on what foundation this tremendous authority was supposed to rest. He, if anyone, might be expected to have clear and definite views on this matter. I am not primarily raising here the psychological or genetic question of how or why Kant came to have the feelings that he did towards the Moral Law; that question, in the answer to which the special character of his early upbringing, and particularly his religious upbringing, would doubtless bulk large, is neither unimportant nor irrelevant, but is not here in issue or really within my competence. I shall in fact have occasion to allude to it, very briefly, in my conclusion, but my main and prior question is: does Kant's theoretical account of what the Moral Law is, taken along with his views on other related matters, justify, make reasonable or appropriate, the peculiarly awe-struck attitude towards it which he so readily adopted and so frequently avowed?

What then did Kant find so tremendous, so uniquely deserving of respect, in the Moral Law? One might be inclined to think that in general there are three, not mutually exclusive, possibilities here. First, it might be held that the special respect-worthiness of the Moral Law derives from its source—for example, as some would hold though Kant of course did not, its source in the nature or will of a supreme law-giver and creator. Second, one might seek to derive the 'worth' of the Law from some valuable end which its promulgation and general observance would be calculated to promote. And third, one might argue that its claim to peculiar respect rests upon, and can be substantiated by, consideration of its own nature, of what it itself is. Now it could, I think, be said truly enough that Kant rests his case on considerations of each of these three kinds; but then it must be added that, in one way or another, for him all these seemingly diverse considerations boil down to the same thing. He is indeed anxious, in certain passages, to insist that the Moral Law subserves, and moral action aims at, no end at all—that the worth of moral action, and the respect-worthiness of

the Law, do not consist in anything which either produces, or has an actual or probable consequence. But in another and less ordinary sense moral action does have, he holds, an end—namely, human nature or, more strictly, *rational* nature; that is, that element or capacity in human beings which makes them capable of moral action and proper subjects of moral judgement. ‘Rational nature exists as an end in itself’, and has in itself ‘absolute worth’.¹ But then ‘rational nature’ is taken also to be the source of the Moral Law; for Kant’s celebrated doctrine of the autonomy of the will is exactly the contention that the obligations of morality are (and necessarily are) self-imposed by any rational being in virtue of his rationality; being rational is the condition, both necessary and sufficient, of being a self-legislating member of the ‘Kingdom of Ends’, bound, equally with all others, by laws of one’s own making. And then, finally, it is for Kant another way of saying the same thing to say that the Law demands respect simply because of what it is—namely, an Imperative categorically pronounced by, and unconditionally binding upon, every rational being in virtue of his rationality, of the instantiation in each such being of ‘rational nature’. ‘Rational nature’ is thus at once the source, and end, and essence of the Moral Law; and the peculiar respect-worthiness of the Law is not so much derived from, as indissolubly united with, the ‘absolute worth’ of rational nature.

Now these are high words, and words not without their attendant and more or less familiar obscurities. But my concern at the moment is with the content, rather than with the merits or adequacy, of Kantian doctrine—with the question what he is saying, rather than with the question whether what he is saying is right. And what he is saying, I think, is really plain enough. He is saying that there is something in human beings (and possibly, or at any rate conceivably, in other beings too) which itself is, and in virtue of which they are, of pre-eminent value, of ‘absolute worth’; and this is *reason*. But reason necessarily involves—this is his contention—recognition of and subjection to the Moral Law; such recognition and subjection is in a sense the distinctive characteristic of a rational being; and thus, in revering the demands of the Moral Law, one is really paying due reverence to that in oneself and others, namely reason, which has,* and alone has, value for itself, real and unconditional ‘worth’, a proper claim to be not merely admired, or liked, but ‘respected’.

¹ Beck, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

But why, one may now ask, does Kant see reason in this light? Let us suppose, for the sake at least of the present argument, that he is successful in deriving the Moral Law from the concept of 'rational nature', and so in attaching to one the awe-striking properties, if any, of the other; but why is 'rational nature', why is reason, so peculiarly to be valued? Why should one be so particularly, and indeed uniquely, struck by it? The answer that Kant offers is sufficiently plain. It is simply that reason is itself unique. Reason is not valuable, he holds, for any good that it does; that the sedulous employment of reason contributes, for example, to the happiness and well-being of human beings is, he believes, far from certainly the case. Besides, even if that were the case, it would be a purely contingent fact that it was so, and perfectly conceivable that the good produced might have been secured, as effectively or more so, in some different way, for instance by the operation of sheer, blind instinct. That would not make instinct in any way particularly worthy of respect; while by contrast, even if the use of reason were to yield no particular benefits, its worth would thereby not be diminished in any degree. It is what reason *is* that counts—its being, in itself, unique in the universe. In the inanimate world, Kant believed (and believed that he could prove), there can be no occurrence that is not the law-determined resultant of antecedent occurrences and states; in the case of animals, and of men also to the extent that they are animals too, there is a determined, quasi-mechanical succession of 'inclination' and action not essentially different from the operation of physical causes in and on inanimate things. It is only in rational beings that anything different is to be found; and this is precisely the capacity to exercise reason, independently of, and sometimes in opposition to, physical or psychological influences, sensory stimuli, or 'inclinations'. This capacity, in Kant's view, raises 'rational nature' entirely above the natural order; here alone do we find an exception to, and independence of, that natural, law-governed sequence of causes and effects which prevails in all the rest of creation. In this, then, we find what he calls 'the sublimity of our own nature' and, derivatively but inseparably, the sublimity of the Moral Law which reason, freely and yet necessarily, prescribes for itself.

But at this point a further question very naturally arises. Is there not, one may think, a puzzling disparity between the argument Kant thus offers and the conclusion he draws? He insists, repeatedly, eloquently, emphatically, upon the unique-

ness, the astonishing, awe-inspiring, absolute uniqueness, of reason; he insists correspondingly upon the uniqueness in creation, and so the sublimity and 'absolute worth', of rational nature or, as he sometimes expresses it, of personality. But how, we may ask, does he effect the transition from this—why, indeed, does he seem scarcely aware of making any transition—to his impassioned avowals of respect for the Moral Law? For surely there is a transition of some magnitude here. Let us suppose, as before, that Kant is wholly successful in his argument that any rational being is, as such, unconditionally bound by the Moral Law, that *qua* rational he can and must act as Duty requires; yet this, plainly, is not all that a rational being can do. Let us grant that there is, employed in moral deliberation and action, what Kant calls 'practical reason'; but then, there is 'theoretical' reason as well, and all its manifold doings. Indeed, on Kant's own insistence, there are not really two faculties of reason, one practical and the other theoretical; if there were, we might have asked why Kant should have regarded the former as somehow more awe-inspiring (almost more unique!) than the other. But rather, as he says himself, 'in the final analysis there can be but one and the same reason which must be differentiated only in application';¹ and if so, then we may well be inclined to ask all the more insistently why Kant should have regarded, as he evidently did, *one* application of reason, namely its application in moral thought and action, as peculiarly respect-worthy. He seems, indeed, quite often to forget about theoretical reason altogether in this connexion, and to locate the 'worth' of rational beings in their capacity for practical reasoning alone; or, put otherwise, he seems often to write as if practical reasoning, which for him is identical, at least in its pure form, with moral thinking and decision, were the only kind of reasoning there is.

It is, I think, a pleasing curiosity in the history of philosophy to observe here how closely, for a moment, Kant's course approaches to that of Aristotle, and then how widely, and as yet unexplainedly, they ultimately diverge. Each seems clearly to employ uniqueness as a sign, or even as a proof, of distinctive worth; for each, the question what is distinctively valuable in man is to be answered by finding that respect in which man is unique; and, though Aristotle of course does not share Kant's belief in the strict determinism of nature in general, they agree in the conclusion that reason, 'rational nature', is what really

¹ Beck, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

distinguishes men from all other beings—at least from all other terrestrial beings. But at this point Aristotle finds it natural to conclude that theoretical reasoning must be the highest of human activities; for, though reason is indeed employed in practical matters, he thinks it plain that the timeless, incorruptible, non-sensuous objects of theoretical contemplation provide a worthier field for reason's activity than the humdrum situations and predicaments with which practical deliberation has, often inconclusively, to do. But Kant, so far unaccountably, turns the other way; the theoretical employment of reason is by him given scant regard, and is never, I think, spoken of in the exalted, awe-struck tones which he so regularly feels to be appropriate to practical reasoning. But why, we may ask, did Kant not draw Aristotle's conclusion, having reasoned so far as he did along substantially the same line?

It is both true and, as I shall suggest in a moment, highly significant, that this is a question of which Kant was only flickeringly aware. The primacy of pure practical reason, and so of the Moral Law, impressed him so forcibly that he was conscious only occasionally of any need to account for it; and such accounts as he offers may well be found perfunctory and unconvincing.

There is one passage of the second *Critique* in which Kant addresses himself formally and explicitly to argument for the 'primacy' of practical reason; but before considering that I would like to mention another matter which carried, I believe, some weight with him on this issue. Kant frequently observes, in a manner which implies that the observation is peculiarly striking, that reason in its practical use can 'determine the will'. He regards it, with some justice, as a distinctive feature of moral decision, at least in human beings, that such decisions can be and often are made independently of and often contrary to 'inclination'; and indeed the capacity so to decide seems to be for him just what the possession of a 'will' consists in. Now he is, I think, clearly of the opinion that in the use of theoretical reason no such thing is to be found; there is absent here the peculiarly striking capacity of reason to determine the will, so that, in this respect, practical reason is much the more extraordinary and distinctive phenomenon of the two. I believe, however, that this supposed contrast, by implication so much to the advantage of practical reason, actually vanishes if one examines more closely what it is taken to consist in. We must note that, in the practical employment of reason, it is 'the will' that reason is

said to 'determine'; Kant is not saying, and it seems indeed that he could not consistently with his own principles have said, that reason can 'determine' physical happenings, for example, movements of the limbs in human action. We may say, then, that it is the inner, intellectual performance of decision, or of resolution, which is determined by reason; and if so, what Kant is saying is that, in the practical employment of reason, we are able to decide in the light of what we take to be reasons for so doing, and do not merely pass quasi-mechanically from thought to action as would creatures governed solely by 'inclination' or re-action to stimuli. But if so, it seems no longer at all clear in what respect this exercise of reason is to be regarded as essentially different from, and much more striking than, its purely theoretical exercise. For in the exercise of theoretical reason also we are, or at least we are no less inclined to suppose that we are, able to think, to believe, to argue, to conclude, in the light of what we take to be reasons for so doing, and do not merely slide, as it were, from thought to thought in sequences capable only of causal description and explanation. It is true that, outside the context of practical reasoning, we do not naturally, or not often, speak of the will as being involved, but there seems to be nothing in this point that would serve Kant's turn. For one thing, if practical reason determines our decisions rather than our actions, it is not clear in any case that Kant can properly speak of it as determining the will; for one might reasonably hold that, if the notion of a 'will' is to be employed at all, it should be supposed to be employed at the point at which decisions are put into execution, rather than in the process of arriving at decisions; practical reasoning, one may think, terminates in a practical conclusion, and it is only after that point, in the executive rather than the deliberative phase, that 'the will' takes over. Alternatively, if 'the will' is taken to be exercised merely in reasoning independently of, and perhaps contrary to, the influence of 'inclinations', then it would seem pertinent to point out that we may, for reasons, reach non-practical conclusions, just as we may reach practical conclusions, that may run counter to our inclinations. We may be reluctant to believe things no less than to do things. Just as we may find that there are reasons for doing what we would much prefer not to do, we may find that there are reasons for thinking what we would much prefer not to think.

However, Kant's explicit case for the 'primacy' of practical reason is not made to turn on the notion of the will. In a

somewhat contorted passage of the second *Critique* which deals with this issue he writes in part as follows:

If practical reason may not assume and think as given anything further than what speculative reason affords from its own insight, the latter has primacy. But suppose that the former has of itself original *a priori* principles with which certain theoretical positions are inseparably bound but which are beyond any possible insight of the speculative reason (although not contradictory to it). Then the question is: Which interest is superior? It is not a question of which must yield, for one does not necessarily conflict with the other. . . . But if pure reason of itself can be and really is practical, as the consciousness of the moral law shows it to be, it is only one and the same reason which judges *a priori* by principles, whether for theoretical or for practical purposes. Then it is clear that, if its capacity in the former is not sufficient to establish certain propositions positively (which however do not contradict it), it must assume these propositions just as soon as they are sufficiently certified as belonging imprescriptibly to the practical interest of pure reason.¹

What does this amount to? Kant's argument could fairly be summed up as follows. The power of reason in its speculative employment is, as the whole of the first *Critique* had been directed to establishing, strictly limited. It is not the case indeed, as Hume had contended, that nothing whatever about the world can be established *a priori*. Nevertheless, it can be shown, Kant thinks, that by theoretical arguments nothing whatever can be established about the world except as an object of 'possible experience'; and this implies, as the 'Dialectic' in the first *Critique* seeks to show in detail, that the traditional grand objects of metaphysical ambition are in principle unattainable by speculative reasoning. No valid argument from known premises, set out in intelligible terms, can have as its conclusion that there is a God; that the soul is immortal; that the will is free; or can tell us anything at all of the world as it is 'in itself'. But the case, he holds, is otherwise with the practical employment of reason; here we do find, at least, reason to believe at least some of these speculatively indemonstrable propositions. For some of these propositions are, as he calls them, 'postulates' of pure practical reason; they are not exactly proved by, but nevertheless must be accepted as the basis or condition of, practical reasoning. 'These postulates are those of immortality, of freedom . . . , and of the existence of God.'² Briefly: we must believe that the soul is immortal since we are conscious of the

¹ Beck, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-5.

² *Ibid.*, p. 235.

requirement to achieve moral perfection, and have no prospect of doing so in the course of any finite existence; we must believe that the will is free since only on that supposition is morally assessable action, indeed *action* of any kind, a reality; and we must believe that there is a God since the 'highest good', an ideal coincidence of happiness with desert, can be supposed to be attainable only if a beneficent Creator has designed that sooner or later it should be attained. But these are propositions which, by the purely speculative exercise of reason, we could find no reason to believe, and which indeed could be shown to be theoretically indemonstrable; if, therefore, in the exercise of practical reason and the implications of that exercise, we do find reason, and indeed the necessity, to believe these propositions, then it must be concluded, in Kant's submission, that practical reason has, in this very crucial respect, the edge. It would not do, indeed, for the postulates of practical reason to conflict with anything that can be theoretically demonstrated; but since these are topics on which speculative reason is necessarily quite silent, we may be sure that that is not the case here.

Such is Kant's central argument for the primacy of practical reason, and hence for the peculiar veneration with which he regards the Moral Law; and it is fairly evident, I think, that it does not amount to much. It is, for one thing, very far from clear that what he offers as the indispensable 'postulates' of practical reasoning have any very serious claim to be so regarded. That the will is free, at least in some sense or other of that profoundly obscure and perplexing phrase, no doubt is presupposed in our attitudes towards and beliefs about the actions of others and, perhaps most importantly, of ourselves; but the two other supposed 'postulates' would probably be regarded by many as singularly dispensable. It may well be the case that moral perfection, as perhaps for that matter perfect physical health, is not attainable in the course of any finite span of terrestrial existence; but why is it necessary to believe that it is attainable at all? If it is said that its being attainable is implied by the proposition that we ought to attain it, we may reply that that implication is easily avoided by substituting the proposition that we ought to *strive* to attain it, a proposition which seems to have just as good a claim to express the substance of the moral conviction in question. Similarly, it is far from clear that it is necessary to believe that the 'highest good' is actually attainable; and if so, then it is not necessary to believe in any supernatural arrangements for its realization.

But let us suppose, again for the sake of the present argument, that these allegedly necessary 'postulates' really are necessary; even so, I believe that it can quite readily be seen that argument on this basis for the primacy of practical reason is far from conclusive, and may, indeed, be regarded as positively double-edged. Much turns, it seems to me, on the question in exactly what terms the argument is set out. Kant would wish to put it in this way: in the 'practical use' of reason we find grounds for accepting those important propositions which are its postulates, but which speculative reason is demonstrably powerless to establish. This seems to say that practical reason yields, so to speak, a bonus or dividend not procurable by any other means. But some might feel disposed to express the matter in this way: in the 'practical use' of reason, we find ourselves obliged to accept as its pre-conditions propositions which cannot conceivably be shown to be true, and which otherwise we have no reason whatever to believe. And this seems to say that reason in its practical use lies under the logical disability of leaving, so to speak, intellectual loose ends, of constraining us to accept what we cannot possibly show to be true. What is the real difference between these two ways of expressing the matter? They do not differ structurally, or logically; in each case it is said—and this is the substance of Kant's argument—that certain propositions which cannot be theoretically established play the role of 'postulates' in the employment of reason in practical matters. The difference is that our hypothetical anti-Kantian takes it to be a bad thing to be committed to accepting what cannot be established as true, whereas Kant very evidently regards it as a good thing that at any rate these propositions should be accepted. But why is it a good thing? It seems that his answer would be that acceptance of these propositions is morally and spiritually salutary, and that this 'interest' far outweighs any speculative, rationalistic discontent that might thereby be occasioned. But this, of course, is to assume the conclusion of his own argument—namely that, at any point of divergence between the practical and theoretical uses of reason, it is to its practical use that 'primacy' is to be accorded. It seems clear that, if the argument does not begin with this tacit conviction, it can quite naturally be read as establishing the opposite position—the position, namely, that the theoretical use of reason is more admirable, more impressive, more fully satisfactory than its practical use, since it does not, as the latter does, lie under the dialectical disadvantage of committing its practitioner to

mere assumptions for which no support is conceivably forthcoming.

I believe that in fact one must now say, without further beating about the bush, that Kant's convictions on this matter really cannot be adequately supported, or even explained, within the confines of his own theory of morals. It is the fundamental contention of that theory that, to exhibit man as a moral being, nothing further is required than the supposition that man is a *rational* being; the source, and indeed the content, of the Moral Law is to be located in or extracted from 'concepts of pure reason' alone. It is thus inevitable that sentiments of 'respect', or even of awe, towards the Moral Law should have to be explained in terms of the peculiar respect-worthiness of reason; and this poses for Kant the difficulty, from which in my submission he does not escape, that while he does not really wish to accord such respect to reason in general, this is actually what his own theory would require him to do. He might have made a case, and indeed does make something of a case, for the idea that the faculty of reason is, when considered in a certain light, peculiarly striking, perhaps quite unique, very crucially distinctive of humans from other (at any rate terrestrial) creatures and objects. It would have been understandable, even, that he should have been somewhat awe-struck by this remarkable and seemingly unique phenomenon. But the fact is that, to beat no further about the bush, this simply is not the conclusion that he wanted to reach; he really wanted to display as the proper object of veneration not Reason, but Virtue; and the fatal difficulty was that his own theory of morals precluded him in effect from distinguishing relevantly between the two.

It is interesting, but perhaps not surprising, to observe that Kant was apparently not always unmoved by that more general, as it were Aristotelian, respect for reason which was, I have suggested, the natural outcome of his theoretical position. In a note written probably in the 1760s, he says: 'By inclination I am an inquirer. I feel a consuming thirst for knowledge, the unrest which goes with the desire to progress in it, and satisfaction at every advance in it. There was a time when I believed this constituted the honour of humanity, and I despised the people who know nothing.'¹ This attitude—which, discounting a certain romanticism of expression, is indeed sufficiently Aristotelian—is one which, Kant implies even at that relatively early date, he had decisively abandoned. But we find him again, in an essay

¹ Beck, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

published some twenty years later, speaking of reason as 'the highest good on earth'—and not, in this context, as being the ground of virtue and the Moral Law, but rather as being 'the ultimate touchstone of truth'.¹ But now, if, as no doubt was natural enough, he was disposed at one time to regard as 'the highest good' reason in its specifically intellectual, non-moral employment, what led him eventually, and with such fervour, to embrace the alternative view—to accord the 'primacy' to *practical* reason, and to consciousness of the Moral Law as its peculiarly awe-striking expression? Was he in fact moved by the arguments which we have considered, and have found to be, in my submission, by no means adequate to their intended purpose? I believe that it is clear that he was actually moved by those arguments. In the note of the 1760s which I have just mentioned, he attributes his conversion from the 'blinding prejudice' of veneration for the theoretical intellect to Rousseau; and what he learned from Rousseau, what actually brought about his conversion, was surely not those arguments which he later deployed in the second *Critique*. Rousseau's gospel was of the sanctity of uncorrupted natural feeling, of the holiness of the heart's affections, of man as a sensitive—some would say, sentimental—rather than a rational being. It was, it seems to me clear, from this Romanticist source—combined, no doubt, with the persistent influences of a Pietist upbringing—that Kant's awe-struck veneration for Virtue was actually derived; such were the grounds on which (with occasional lapses) he came to abstain from speaking in such reverential terms of Reason in general. The trouble is, though, that his later ethical theory is itself unbendingly rationalistic; and thus we find him in search, albeit somewhat perfunctorily in search, of some sort of philosophical grounds for a conviction which it does not occur to him to question, but to which his theory, I believe, can actually offer no support.

Is there anything of more general philosophical interest to be extracted from this brief scrutiny of Kant's dilemmas? I believe that there is something to be learned, if only from the circumstance that, so far as I know, this particular aspect of Kant's moral theory has been so seldom considered. Kant wished to assign to moral virtues a special pre-eminence among human characteristics, to moral 'imperatives' an authority predominant over any other practical considerations. Though much in his moral theory has been exhaustively and critically

¹ Beck, *op. cit.*, p. 305.

examined, this feature of it has, I believe, too often been accepted without any examination at all. But even if one supposes that Kant was obviously right here, should there not be some stateable reason *why* he was right? And if the reasons he offers seem insufficient for the purpose, should one not raise the question whether better reasons are to be found? It is, I think, a just criticism of much recent moral philosophy that from this issue it seems determined positively to avert its gaze.

I would myself be inclined to venture somewhat further than this, and to draw from Kant's example the further supposition that, if the 'worth' of moral virtue is to be effectively argued for, then the argument will surely have to bring in considerations of a type which he was determined to exclude. One will surely have to raise the question: what good does it do? Kant himself, I believe, falls into a not uncommon trap here. When, towards the close of his second *Critique*, he asks 'what pure morality really is', what is 'the distinctive mark of pure virtue', he proceeds at once to describe an extreme example of devotion to duty at a terrible price—specifically, of steadfast refusal to bear false witness, with disastrous consequences to the virtuous man himself and also, along with him, to all his family and friends. In this he presents us, no doubt, with an instance of 'pure virtue'; but do we find here its 'distinctive mark', what pure virtue 'really is'? Is it distinctive of virtue that its practice has disastrous consequences? Is morality 'really' a way of bringing catastrophe upon yourself, your family and your friends? Is this what we are supposed to learn from this dramatic example? Well, of course, it is not; what Kant wishes his example to teach us is that 'pure virtue' is to be valued *without regard* to its consequences. But then it is not clear that the example shows any such thing; for it is by no means impossible, surely, to derive from it the moral that virtue is to be valued even if sometimes the consequences of its practice are disastrous, on the understanding of course that usually they are highly desirable. Kant feels, no doubt rightly, that unswerving devotion to virtue is most admirable, most striking, when the cost to the virtuous man is great; but it is surely fallacious, though perhaps not uncommon, to infer from this that the 'worth' of virtue has *no connexion ever* with the question what comes of its practice. To take thus, as seems often to be done, as the typical, representative, central case of virtuous action that case in which no good, and perhaps much harm, comes of it, is indeed to limit very severely the grounds on which it can

thereafter be urged that the practice of virtue is to be valued above all things. Perhaps our consideration of the case of Kant may further the suggestion that that limitation cannot sensibly be accepted at all. If we eschew the question what good comes of being virtuous, then awe in contemplation of virtue is hard indeed to explain.