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Edited by Robert B. Louden

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Ethics 1812/13: Introduction and doctrine of goods

Introduction

I Transition from critique to real depiction

1 The communication of a single distinct science cannot have any proper starting-point.

2 The individual science cannot have at its head a proposition which is immediately certain.

3 Even when deducing it from a higher science it can only be understood in conjunction with other knowledge which stands in opposition to it.

4 The establishment of this opposition can appear only as opinion.¹

5 Every science has a number of shapes. The very act of beginning creates a basis for one such shape, and yet it contains knowledge only inasmuch as it is comprehended historically in conjunction with the others. The history of the sciences cannot exist without the sciences themselves, however, which gives rise to a circularity.

6 We already know something of every science by virtue of common life and common critique.

7 This influence cannot be to the good where ethics is concerned, because of the unfavorable phenomenon whereby a number of approaches

¹ *Marginal addition:* Since the highest science is only in the process of becoming, and the sufficient deduction of the individual sciences will only be possible once it is perfected, the individual science must begin in imperfection in order to come into being.

Everything [is] imperfect and diverse, and so various forms are posited etc., in such a way as to show how they can be comprehended historically with a diversity in which each refers to the others. In contrast to the necessity of such [perfect] knowledge, the actual beginning is arbitrary, with an order which fluctuates, or hypothetical, as if the highest knowledge were not yet constructed.

The former is vulnerable to the unfavorable influence of what we know from common life and common critique.

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start from very different assumptions but end with the same results, thus [suggesting] either error or scientific inconsistency.

8 Eudaemonistic ethics are hypothetical in the individual instance, because a purpose can be achieved in various ways, which in reality are in opposition to one another, while only one of them may be chosen. At most, therefore, they are an exposition of inclination: in the individual instance on technical grounds, and as a whole, because choice is based on inclination.

9 The Kantian form of rational ethics posits guiding thoughts to any action and can therefore only correct or perfect; it cannot, even were one to submit to it entirely, construct out of nothing.

10 Without concerning itself with what exists, Kantian rationality posits the ought, as the characteristic feature of the ethical, in contrast to the physical. However, [for Kant] even in the physical domain appearance is never adequate to the concept, and in fact ethics must presuppose that the object of ethics, the force from which individual actions proceed, exists and is identical with what ought to be.

11 Both approaches are limited also in a material respect. Without any construction they presuppose much that arises only with acting. However, right behavior in given circumstances and the form that shapes these circumstances must be one and the same thing.

12 Ethics must therefore encompass and catalog all truly human action.

13 At this higher level the opposition between reasonableness and happiness disappears.

14 Ethics must contain a form for all life's occurrences which is able to express its highest character.²

15 As far as a scientific treatment of the subject is concerned, the most appropriate formula is clearly that of reasonableness.

16 We might provisionally define ethics, therefore, as the life of reason, the necessary antithesis of which is acting upon nature.

17³ We may not substitute personality for reason as the object of ethics because the action of the individual and the action of a group cannot be considered in isolation; thus, in a theory of human action, the opposition of personality must be superseded, and this leaves nothing but the life of reason in an organization.

² Marginal note to 12–14 (1816): Omitted.

³ Marginal note: Omitted.

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18 If the life of reason is conceived as acting upon nature, then ethics is conceived at the same time as the science that was opposed to it, namely physics.

II Deduction of ethics by dialectical reasoning

19 Lemma 1 of dialectic. Every kind of knowledge is narrower in scope the more it is determined by a diversity of opposites, and broader in scope the more it is the expression of higher and simpler oppositions.

20 Lemma 2 of dialectic. Absolute knowledge is the expression of no opposition whatsoever, but only of absolute being, which is identical with it.

21 Lemma 3. As such, however, it is not a definite form of knowledge in finite consciousness, that is, not one which may be expressed adequately in a plurality of concepts or propositions, but only the basis for and source of all particular forms of knowledge.

22 Lemma 4. All particular forms of knowledge, and therefore also their systematization, i.e. the real sciences, exist in the form of opposition.

23 Lemma 5. The totality of being as a finite entity must be expressed by means of a single highest opposition, because otherwise it would not be a totality but an aggregate and knowledge of it would have no unity, but would be chaotic.

24 Lemma 6. All finite being in the narrowest sense, i.e. every life, is an image of the absolute and thus an interaction of oppositions.

25 Lemma 7. Real knowledge in its totality is therefore the development of this interrelatedness of all oppositions under the power of both terms of the highest opposition.

26 Lemma 8. There are thus only two real sciences, which must incorporate all subordinate disciplines.

27 Lemma 9. The sense of opposition is inborn in the form of soul and body, the ideal and the real, reason and nature.

28 Lemma 10. Ethics is thus the depiction of finite being under the power of reason, i.e. viewed from that aspect where, in the interrelatedness of oppositions, reason is the active principle and reality that which is acted upon; physics is the depiction of finite being under the power of nature, i.e. where reality is the active principle and the ideal is what is acted upon.

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29 Lemma 11. In finite existence, just as in finite knowledge as a depiction of the absolute, opposition is only relative. In their perfected state ethics is physics and physics ethics.

30 Lemma 12. Thus, as we progress towards this destination, the life of the ideal is an acting upon the real and the life of the real is an acting upon the ideal.

III Ethics considered as a process of becoming

31 In the face of this identity every science is incomplete: it is conditional upon the state of the others and has disintegrated into diverse shapes.

32 Ethics is directly conditional upon physics, inasmuch as its depictions of reality must be based upon the concept of the object to be considered, that is, nature.

33 And indirectly inasmuch as science is conditional upon disposition, which in its turn is conditional upon our domination of nature, which is dependent upon cognition of nature.

34 At no time therefore is ethics better than physics; the two must always run parallel.

35 As long as science is incomplete it will also exist in diverse forms, none of which can have universal validity. What is scientifically uncertain must reveal itself in a diversity of appearances.

36 The form taken by incompleteness may be one-sidedness of viewpoint. Here very frequently a false sense of certainty and the least appropriate respect for other points of view.⁴

37 It may also take the form of an insufficient thinking-through, both in relating backwards to causes and forwards to consequences. Here very frequently an apparent arbitrariness in the face of a robust reality in matters of detail, and very frequently a hidden feeling of uncertainty.⁵

38 Or else a coexistence of certainty and uncertainty in equal measure. Here very frequently a straightforward approaching of the goal and, as a result of the clearcut divergence of certainty and doubt, the most accurate evaluation of others.

39 Reason is to be found in nature, and ethics does not depict any action in which it arose originally. Ethics can only depict the possibility of penetrating and forming nature to an ever-increasing degree, of spreading

⁴ *Marginal note:* 8–10 belong here.

⁵ *Marginal note:* 11 and 12 here, also 17.

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as broadly as possible the unification of reason and nature, taking as its starting-point the human organism, which is a part of general nature in which, however, a unification with reason is already given.

40 It is also not within the scope of ethics to depict the perfect unification of reason and nature, because for that to take place such isolated shapes must already have come to an end.

41 Ethics has therefore to depict a sequence, where each element consists of a unification which both has and has not taken place, and whose exponent expresses an increase in one factor and a decrease in another.

42 The ethics of imperatives addresses only the side of the equation where unification has not taken place, and therefore cannot express the gradual disappearance of this factor.

43 Consultative ethics addresses only the side of the equation where unification has taken place, for only then can it be a matter of indifference whether this is to be expressed in the form of reason or of sensibility.

44 A complete account must therefore supersede the opposition of the two forms.

45 Since all knowledge of reality is the imprint left in the ideal by finite existence, there cannot be any form other than depiction or narrative.

46 Physics and ethics, given their interdependence and the fact that they are opposed only in the proportional relationship of their material, can only have one and the same form.

47 Since there can be no real anti-reason, in which case there would also have to be an anti-God, the opposition of good and evil can only express the positive and negative factors in the process of gradual unification, and therefore can nowhere be better understood than in the pure and complete depiction of that process.

48 Since the opposition between freedom and physical necessity indicates in its product these two factors, which are based predominantly a) in reason and b) in nature; and in action points to something that expresses a) the inner character of the person who is acting and b) its coexistence with an external factor, that opposition can only clearly be understood by contemplating the way in which reason and nature coexist in totality.

49 Since the opposition between freedom and moral necessity is principally concerned with the discrepancy between an individual and a whole of which he is a part, where the extent of unification in the individual represents freedom, and that of the whole necessity, it can also only be

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correctly understood by means of a depiction which shows how the development of an individual and of a whole are mutually dependent.

50 Ethics, as the depiction of the way in which reason and nature coexist, is the science of history.

51 Just as ethical development in its entirety consists not only of a practical side, but also of a theoretical one, in the same way ethics is not merely a matter of action in the narrow sense of the word, but also of knowledge as a form of action.

52 Just as natural science renders both the fixed forms and the fluid functions of nature comprehensible, and reduces each to an aspect of the other, in the same way ethics explains both the fixed forms of moral existence, family, state, etc., and the fluid functions, or their various moral capacities, and reduces each to an aspect of the other.

53 Just as ethics is not the intuition of reason in itself, which would be absolutely simple and therefore a part of absolute knowledge, but instead is the intuition of reason which has become nature in a plurality of functions in the form of oppositions, in the same way it is not the intuition of the individual aspects of an appearance, which might indeed be subsumed under the universal but cannot with any certainty be constructed from it.⁶

54 [Ethics] is a realistic form of knowledge, in that it is not absolute, and a speculative one in that it is not empirical.

55 The distinction between pure and applied ethics is false in this form, which is borrowed from mathematics, but is rooted in the matter itself.

56 Ethical principles in their complete determination cannot be applied to anything belonging outside the domain of ethics.

57 Anything constructed in ethics contains the potential for an infinite number of manifestations. Besides interpreting these empirically, there arises a need to link the empirical more closely with speculative depiction, namely to judge the individual manifestations as depictions of the idea, both in their extent and in terms of their particular limitations.

58 This is the essence of criticism, and there is therefore a cycle of critical disciplines which build on ethics.

59 To the extent that the individual and his moral capacity is comprehended in the production of a given phenomenon, he is placed among particular oppositions and particular natural conditions, and there is a particular need to survey how these are to be regarded.

⁶ *Marginal note:* Omitted.

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60 This is the essence of technology, and there is therefore a cycle of technical disciplines which proceed from ethics.

61 The most telling examples are: the state, political science and statesmanship, art – all forms of moral production may be seen as art – aesthetics, practical instructions for the arts.

62 As a form of knowledge which is indeed speculative and yet at the same time realistic, ethics is concerned neither with pure reason in opposition to nature, nor with pure nature in opposition to reason.

63 However, in general it rests on and is brought into community with the absolute through a form of opposition; for the side of the opposition that is orientated towards the real, no one member exists without the other, while for the side orientated towards the absolute, everything represents the absolute in the identity of the existing [members].

64 The higher critical process, which demonstrates the presence of the absolute in everything which is demonstrably real, transposed onto the level of totality, is a mediation between knowledge of reality and absolute knowledge.

65 Now, given that pure nature and pure reason do not occur in ethics, everything which does occur there is reasonable nature and natural or organic reason.

66 Given that relative identity is to be depicted in the form of becoming, one pole of depiction is a minimum of becoming, the other a maximum of becoming.

67 Ethics begins with a minimum of becoming, that is, by positing a nature in which reason is already present, and by positing a reason in which nature is already present, where the interrelatedness in each form can be traced back to an earlier phase of the same thing.

68 Since nature in the next lowest stage in the identity of the ideal and the real is animal nature, the fundamental intuition of ethics is of human nature in a form such that nothing purely animal can be found, and therefore nothing is merely material any more.

69 What essentially differentiates the human from the animal can be demonstrated first of all in the operation of the senses of perception and feeling, but equally it is also to be assumed in the subordinate functions of animal and vegetable life.

70 Just as reason is not to be posited as a separate entity, apart from its existence in nature, because each individual entity, in relative opposition to the whole, forms a coexistence of receptivity and spontaneity in life, so the

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original positing of reason in human nature means that it is submerged in the receptivity of nature in the form of understanding and in the spontaneity of nature in the form of will.

71 *[Inadvertently omitted by Schleiermacher.]*

72 Each appearance of reason in this form is, however, to be posited as something which has come about, that is, as presupposing that previously it was present to a lesser degree, thus never merely as the capacity for reason, but as a capacity which only comes about with and through the activity of reason.⁷

73 Because the identity of reason and nature only appears in ethics in the form of becoming, the maximum is only a minimum of separateness between reason and nature.

74 In the relative opposition [put forward in no. 63] nature appears on the positive side as the organ and symbol of reason – which are merely two different aspects of the same thing – and on the negative side as the task, that is, as raw material.

75 The ethical process is thus to be extended in every direction until the raw material dwindles to a minimum.

76 The original ethical positing of reason in the form of understanding and will within a nature which is originally organic and symbolic is its positing in the human individual.

77 It is a fault of disposition to posit this beginning as a general formula and to posit reason as definitively personal, as is revealed through the argument that a) in terms of the individual nothing truly emerges as the organ or symbol of reason and b) in terms of the whole the essential distinction between physics and ethics is superseded by placing reason wholly under the power of nature.⁸

78 Only individual beings are to be posited as the original organs and symbols of reason; the action of reason on nature, on the other hand, is the action of the whole of reason on the whole of nature; the ethical process is only complete when the whole of nature – by means of human nature – has been appropriated organically or symbolically to reason, and the life of individuals is not a life lived merely for those individuals, but for the totality of reason and the totality of nature.

79 To place reason at the service of personality in the ethical process is at one and the same time to subordinate intuition to feeling, to accept

⁷ Marginal note to nos. 68–72: Omitted.

⁸ Marginal note to nos. 74–7: Omitted.