

Preface to the Second Edition³⁰

The object of this book for all who resolve to follow it is *to show the good as truth*, i.e., as the one correct path that is true to itself and is to be followed on all occasions in life and to the end. I mean the Moral Good *in its essence*. It and only it justifies itself and justifies our trust in it. Not for nothing do we stand before the open grave, when all else has *obviously* failed and appeal to this essential Moral Good: “Blessed art thou, Lord: teach me Thy *justifications*.”³¹

In our personal life, in the national and social life of a people and in the overall historical life of humanity, the Moral Good justifies itself, i.e., by its own good and correct means. True to the Moral Good and having understood these means in the past, moral philosophy presents them to the present for the future.

If in planning a journey you pick up a guidebook, you seek in it only correct, complete and sensible directions for the path you have chosen. This book will not persuade you to go to Italy or Switzerland if you have decided to go to Siberia, nor will it provide you with the means to sail across the ocean if you only have enough money to go to the Black Sea.

Moral philosophy is no more than a systematic guide to the correct path along the journeys of life both for people and for nations. The author’s responsibility is merely to provide accurate, complete and coherent directions. However, no exposition of moral norms, i.e., of the conditions for attaining the true goal in life, will make any sense to those who have consciously set not this goal, but a quite different one for themselves. For us to point out the necessary stations on the path to betterment when one has deliberately selected the worse, would be not only pointless but also annoying and even insulting. It would serve as a reminder of the bad [4] choice, particularly in those cases when, within the depths of the soul, the choice was involuntary and instinctively felt to be both irrevocable and wrong at the same time.

I have no desire to preach virtue and expose vice. I consider that to be not only an idle but also an immoral occupation for a simple mortal, because it assumes an

³⁰ E] This “Preface to the Second Edition” originally appeared in the second edition of the work from 1899.

³¹ E] Psalms 119: 12. The translation here is from Solov’ev’s Russian. The King James version reads: “Blessed are thou, O LORD: teach me thy statutes.”

unjust and haughty claim to be better than others. What is important for us is not particular deviations from the right path, however powerful they may be, but only the general, decisive and resolute choice between two moral roads when the *choice* is made with complete and clear deliberateness. Does every person make such a choice? Undoubtedly, it is not made by people who die in infancy. But in terms of a distinct self-consciousness, is the majority of adults really that different from them? Still, we should say that if a conscious choice was made, we on the outside cannot tell. The fundamental distinction between the two paths has no empirical *determinacy* and no practical *determinability*. I must have seen many strange and remarkable things, but I have never encountered two things in nature: a person who is genuinely and completely righteous and one who is a genuinely complete villain. And all the pseudo-mystical verbiage associated with some external and practically applicable divisions of humanity into white and black, regenerate and unregenerate, redeemed and condemned, only remind me of the sincere declaration of the miller:

Forty years have I already lived
And up to now I have not seen
Either in a dream or in waking
Copper spurs on water pails³²

At the same time, I recall long ago hearing university lectures on invertebrate zoology and on embryology³³ from which I acquired, among other things, a definite idea of two well-known truths. At the level of the primitive, lower organic world only a learned biologist can distinguish—but sometimes only so-so—vegetable forms from those of animals, and also that at the early stages of fetal development only a learned embryologist can distinguish—but once again only so-so—the human embryo from the embryo of some other, even [5]completely, bad creature. Is it not the same in history and in the moral world? At the start of each, the two paths in life are so essentially close and are outwardly indistinguishable!

Why, however, when speaking of the moral world, do we refer to a choice between only *two* paths? It is because despite the great abundance of forms and manifestations of life only one path leads to life itself, to its fulfillment and the perpetuation that we desire. All others, which at first are so very similar to it, lead in the opposite direction, fatally moving away from it and merging together, turning finally onto the sole path of immortalized death.

Between these two paths, both based on principle, some want to find yet another path—neither good nor evil, but natural or animal. The highest practical principle of this path is expressed best of all by a German aphorism, though known neither to Kant nor to Hegel: *Jedes Thierchen hat sein Phäsierchen*.³⁴ This formula expresses an indisputable truth and demands only supplementation by another just as indisputable truth: *Allen Thieren fatal ist zu krepieren*.³⁵ And with such a necessary

³² E] Pushkin 2002: 492

³³ E] Solov'ëv attended lectures on zoology in the 1869/70 academic year at the University of Moscow.

³⁴ E] German: to each his own.

³⁵ E] German: all animals are destined to croak.

supplementation, this pseudo-third path, that of animality in principle, reduces to the second path of death.³⁶ In any case, the human being cannot escape this dilemma, the decisive choice between the two paths, that of good and the other of evil. Let us suppose, however, we decide to choose the third path, the animal path, which is neither good nor evil, but only natural. For animals it is surely natural, precisely because animals decide nothing and themselves do not choose one path over some other. Rather, they passively follow the sole path they were provided by a power alien to them. However, when people *actively* decide to follow the path of moral *passivity*, they obviously lie; they create an untruth and lawlessness and evidently enter not onto the path of animality, but onto the path (one of the two human paths) which, if not at first then at the end, turns out to be the path of eternal evil and death. It is easy now to see that this is *worse* than the path of animality. Although devoid of genuine understanding, our younger brothers [6]undoubtedly possess emotional feeling. Although they cannot really condemn and be ashamed of their nature and its bad, mortal path, they manifestly are burdened by this; they manifestly long for something better that they do not know but can feel. This truth, once expressed with great force by the Apostle Paul (Romans 7: 19–23) and then repeated, although with less force, by Schopenhauer, can be confirmed by observation. You never see on a human face the expression of profound, desperate melancholy that sometimes without any apparent reason looks at us through some zoological physiognomy. That is, it is impossible for the human being to stop with self-satisfied animality, because animals are not at all self-satisfied. The conscientious person cannot be an animal. Willy-nilly, we must choose between two paths: Either we become higher and better than our given material foundation, or we become lower and worse than the animal. That which in us is human, properly speaking, and inalienable consists not in *what* it becomes, but in the fact that it *becomes*. What do people get from slandering their younger siblings and from falsely labeling as animal and natural the path of devilish self-confidence in the wrong—a path that we ourselves have chosen and that is contrary to life and to nature?

In this book, I wanted most of all to explain how the one path of the Moral Good, remaining true to itself and consequently justifying itself, becomes more definite and complete as the vital historical and natural surroundings become more complicated. The chief claim of this moral philosophy is to establish the inner and all-round connection between the true religion and sensible politics in the unconditional moral principle. This claim is completely harmless, since the true religion cannot impose itself on anyone, and politics is permitted to be senseless—of course at its own risk. At the same time, moral philosophy decisively refuses to serve as any kind of guide for particular individuals by setting down external and unconditionally definite rules of conduct. If you the reader seem to find somewhere in this book something resembling [7]“moralizing,” I assure you that either you have not understood the passage or I did not express myself clearly.

³⁶ F] The pseudo-superhuman path, which was vividly illuminated by the madness of the unhappy Nietzsche, amounts to the same thing. For more on this, see the preface to the first edition.

However, I have striven for clarity of expression. While preparing this second edition, I re-read the entire book five times in the course of 9 months, each time making new explanatory insertions, both large and small. Although my exposition suffers from many defects even after this, I hope they do not lay me open to the threat, “Cursed be he that doeth the work of the LORD deceitfully.”³⁷

While I was writing this book I sometimes experienced moral benefit from it. Perhaps this will assure the reader that my work will also not be entirely useless for him or her too. That would be sufficient justification for this “justification of the moral good.”

Moscow
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Vladimir Solov’ëv

³⁷ E] Jeremiah 48: 10

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Moral Philosophy

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