For Idea and Reality.

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edited

by

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Character and Will.

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[489] Considered zoologically, man stands on the highest rung in the series of animals and takes his place of honor ahead of apes and bats. Whereas older naturalists exerted themselves almost beyond their strength to make the chasm between man and the dumb animals deep and wide, the more recent science has, with particular fondness, pointed out and impressed upon us the natural kinship between animals and men. To be sure, it cannot occur to any reasonable student of nature to deny man an excellent endowment in comparison with the other animals, but the question is how matters really stand with this endowment, whether it points to something original or is merely a difference of degree. That a man has clearer consciousness and more comprehensive understanding than a dog, a horse, a fox, an elephant, not to speak of bats, is beyond all doubt; but if we now compare a fox, which by everyone's opinion has what one must call, in the animal sense, a good head, with an oyster, which is literally headless, then here again is a considerable distance. And yet Nature maintains myriads of individuals who, as far as intelligence is concerned, stand on a lower rung than an oyster. Let us
[490] now suppose that all living beings on the globe are originally of one kind, that the organisms from the beginning have more or less resembled one another, so that the typical differences were developed only gradually in the course of the ages; let us imagine that millions upon millions of years ago there was a period when the earth's foremost creature was a fish, a strangely armored, ambiguous fish; that the breeding of fishes took such remarkable upswings in the course of millions of years that the ambiguous fish, when it at last died, left behind a numerous family of fish-lizards, flying lizards, turtles, iguanodons and crocodiles, which likewise were ambiguous; that then again, after the lapse of millions upon billions of years, a period set in when the old four-legged creatures begot new four-legged creatures, the four-footed ones we call mammals; that among these four-footed creatures there prevailed a striving so many-sided that some, which strove upward, became birds, while others, which strove downward, became moles; that at the very last there appeared a mother-animal so doubly pregnant that her young, even before birth, went in two directions, so that some got no hands and became guinea pigs, but others got no tail and became men: then we have, in rough outline, a picture of the gradual development.

It is by no means our intention in the present context to go to law with the naturalists about the gradual formation of genera and species in the history of the

earth's development; we hold to our old principle that the "heathen, puffed-up sciences" (!), independent of "dogmatics," must have full right to set themselves their own tasks and to pursue their own goal by their own rule. Should the physicists feel the need of a higher rule, should the thirst for knowledge tempt them to take dogmatic glimpses into *[491]* the Garden of Eden, in order to enjoy the sight of the two "absolutely dissimilar trees" and to see how Adam looked before the beasts of prey yet went on the prowl: then philosophy regrets that it has no objective hints to offer; the thirsty for knowledge will, in so important a matter of inquiry, have to seek counsel from bishops and theologians.

Gratifying as it is that knowledge of the most important truths of natural science is spread and taken up into the general cultivation, just as lamentable is the superstition of the present age that the understanding of the inward, psychic life is to be subjected to a scientific yardstick of natural science, that religion is to be grounded on zoology, and conscience derived from physics. It must be impressed again and again that science itself is innocent of this misunderstanding. True science keeps strictly to the law of logic that every conclusion must correspond exactly to its premises. From this it follows that premises that belong exclusively to natural science cannot possibly lead to conclusions whose premises belong to the science of spirit. The science of spirit takes its point of departure in the inner life of man, his basic consciousness, his essential self; but man's inner, essential self is just as little an object for zoology as for geology. It must be impressed that the modern confusion of spirit, whose fibrous roots branch out in an uncanny mixture of superficial considerations and false conclusions, stems from a faulty dealing with objective knowledge; and so it has, from the very first, its ground in the old theological deception, which merely changed its look when one gave up the authority of the Pope in order to submit oneself to that of science.

The inward world has its facts just as fully as the outward. It is a clear, unassailable *[492]* fact that man, among all living creatures on earth, is the only one that has a judgment about itself, the only one that can give itself a name and say within itself: I am a man. In this judgment lies the claim that man is a self, an I. With this word: I, there is set an infinite chasm between the cleverest animal and the stupidest man. To be sure, a clever animal can under certain circumstances show greater cleverness than a thoughtful man, and in a natural sense even be said to stand far above an idiot; but the dazzling quality in this kind of comparisons is easily removed. When one wants to investigate the difference between animal and man, it is really a perverse procedure to set an animal with healthy organs beside a man with sick ones, or to regard the

certainty the animal has in its instinct as of one kind with the assurance man must first fight his way to through reflection and many-sided deliberation. No, the question is something else: what is the animal and what is man, when we look at the original dispositions? The animal is a soul without spirit, the human soul is essentially spirit; from this point of view the natural boundary is clear, unambiguous; the animal is sense-consciousness, man's essence is self-consciousness: this boundary-mark stands firm so long as the animal is animal, and man man.

But, one says, appealing to geology, the whole animal kingdom is, after all, in a gradual development, a quiet, slowly upward-advancing movement; in millions upon millions of years the animals will found states, the sheep hold a council of state, the horses study geology, the hens emancipate themselves, and the cock, crowing, say
[493] I to himself. That is a dark saying, which dare not be understood literally. In the first place, geology has no promise that the living animal forms will in so distant a future still exist on earth; on the contrary, it leads us to the conjecture that the species and genera we know must, when the great turning-point sets in, all be extinct. It will then quite certainly not be these animals that reach up to the human, but other animals, other horses, other hens, horses with spirit, hens with self-consciousness! In the second place, the hypothesis of the gradual transition from animals to men, as regards its plausibility, is as round as a square. For let us suppose that a time came, if it cannot happen at once in millions upon millions, then in billions upon billions of years — geology has time on its side, after all — when the animals really got self-consciousness, what then? Then the gradual transition is burst asunder, there has occurred a transformation: the animals, however they otherwise look, are not animals, but men. Law-giving sheep and self-conscious hens are nonsense; horses with spirit must be more than horses; how, pray, should horses be able to become geologists?

How infinitely deep the difference is between the soul of the animal and that of man, anyone can convince himself who is willing to lay any weight on character and will. To be sure, the animal has character, regrettably not seldom a more consistent character than a man; but the reason is easy to discover. The animal's character is a determination of nature, lying in its species; the animal is from the hand of Nature what it shall and ought to be. If to live in accordance with one's nature is virtue, then all animals are virtuous; that is more than one can say of men. Those who do
[494] not rightly catch sight of the actual difference between man and animal, as far as the positive is concerned, would do well to begin with the negative. For man can

do what the animal cannot, enervate himself and squander his life; man can hang himself, shoot himself, "rip open his own belly," and in general display, as the textbook expresses it, "a cruelty toward himself, of which there are no examples among the wildest animals"; here is a radical difference. Man has by nature no character, but certainly dispositions toward character; his peculiar vocation is that he is, with self-conscious will, to develop his dispositions and give himself his character: character is man's real self, and the real self is in the will.

There is a whole circle of questions of life whose treatment is botched in the common textbooks, because their possible solution rests exclusively on the formation of character. Thus the question of the freedom of the will. Those who maintain that the will, independent of all natural impulses, can choose, resolve and act as it wishes, proceed blindly. If it were so that the will could free itself from all motives, it would have to lie in man's power to remake his being from the ground up and to make his mind and his innate dispositions into what they should be. Experience speaks too emphatically against so wild a doctrine of arbitrariness for us to waste any time on refuting it. But to go to the opposite extreme and to make man's will a nature-bound expression of an innate disposition of mind, which only upbringing, habit and the example of others can at most force into a certain form and guide in a certain direction, is still more dangerous, for in this way of looking at things there is something deceptive. That the will must have a natural ground, and that this natural *[495]* ground may differ in different individuals, is unmistakable. We see it in children. A child of five or six years may in certain lights appear to the attentive observer as a well-equipped little person who is in the process of giving himself a character; a stubborn or a soft mind, vehemence, steadiness, boldness, timidity, openness, reticence, in short, the most diverse appearances, now of something evil, now again of something glorious and good, come forth, often in a highly surprising manner, on the surface of the mind from an obscure ground and in manifold shadings. Since every spiritual activity presupposes a natural endowment, and a natural endowment can often express itself very early, there are those who think that the will too must rest on a peculiar natural gift, that the strong mind necessarily must yield a strong will, the weak mind a weak will, indeed that one can see already in the individual at a very young age whether he will ever get a will or is destined to go through life in the leading-strings of circumstances. Here we have once more one of those half-truths which, by being passed off as whole, become untruths. So long as one one-sidedly regards man from a zoological standpoint, it is quite true that it is with the instinctive will as with

natural courage. One has the nature of the lion and is brave, another the nature of the hare and is cowardly; one got strong drives, great passions and became a man of will, another got only a drowsy drive, a languid mind and a lame will: it is, one says, determination by nature all of it. It is not seldom heard that the man who is
[496] convinced of an evident wrong involuntarily exclaims: "I will not hear anything at all; it is my nature; I am once and for all like this and can never become different." There is in this sort of defense a peculiar mixture of defiance, despair and excuse, which bears witness that the person regards himself zoologically.

The zoological view of man's will stands in close connection with the statistical one. From statistics too one derives proofs against the freedom of the will, and the proofs are so much the more powerful as they can be built straight upon facts and conducted by sure calculation. When one has a table of the actions which over a certain series of years have repeated themselves, in accordance with the character of the population in a certain country, then one can predict with certainty what the free will of this population must will to accomplish in the coming year. One can predict not merely in general how many suicides, how many marriages and how many thefts will occur, but one can go into particulars and calculate, as regards suicide, how many are to hang themselves and how many are to drown themselves, and in which months the free individuals will prefer hanging to drowning and vice versa; as regards marriages, how many will marry widows and how the number of those who marry old widows will stand to the number of those who marry young ones; as regards thefts, how many thefts from fields, how many burglaries and how many pickpocketings the thievish will will carry out in the course of the year, and so forth. But if in statistics one can calculate in advance marriages, suicides, thefts and the like
[497] with the same certainty with which in astronomy one can calculate solar and lunar eclipses, then there seems to lie in this a striking proof that man's character is on the whole nature-bound like the animal's, that the so-called human freedom moves according to laws as necessary as the globes in the heavens.

To get rid of this whole confusion of geology, zoology and statistics there is only one way out: to break off, begin afresh, take the question of the freedom of the will for what it is: not a question of science, but a question of character. If the difference between man and animal is to be recognized as more than a difference of degree, then it is not enough that man conceives himself as thinking and falls to musing over the remarkable likeness that there is between an animal and a man. Man must begin from the ground up by reflecting on his original vocation, pull himself together and seek

his actual self in the will. What thinking is we learn by thinking; but what will is we learn only by willing. To will is the self's innermost act, the act by which it raises itself up out of its natural ground, its possibility, produces itself, makes itself into something real, peculiar, independent. This act does not at once aim at getting this or that accomplished in the world, it is not directed toward the outward, the objective, but unconditionally toward the inward, the subjective.

There are in the present age two dangerous rocks, on which the individual may easily founder when he is in earnest about using his will and becoming a man, the one is a misunderstood practice, the other a misunderstood theory. The practical misdirection is that the will, without deeper self-reflection, turns outward and hastens to get something accomplished; the power of action is sacrificed on the finite in *[498]* temporal business and many kinds of civic affairs. Thus there comes about something that resembles a self, a character, and yet it is hollow within; for this self does not know what it itself is, whether it is really something in itself or merely an organic product of muscles and nerves. It is uncanny to see how a man can exert himself to the utmost to show the world how highly he loves his own self, and when everything then succeeds for him, and he with his dear self quite imagines himself to be on top, then he has no self after all. Where did it go? It was lost to him; it dwindled away in business, it perished in the outward. But if the practical misdirection is dangerous, then the theoretical is still far more dangerous. Theory wants the thinking being not to hasten with the outward, but to sink deep into itself and reflect on what will is, before it begins to will. To will is to think: the pure willing is the pure thinking. So the thinker sits down and thinks: first the objective and then the subjective, first necessity and then freedom, first the zoological and then the psychological; now thought is in metaphysics, now in ethics, now in history, now in statistics; and what comes out of the whole? That the subjective is objective, that freedom is necessity, that the self is a universal thinking. Theory is consistent; it ends as it begins: it begins with thinking and ends with thinking. The objective, universal thinking is everything, has everything, takes everything, drowns everything, the thinker, the self, the will, in eternal necessity; then the will is thought, then the thinker can begin to will — to think.

Only when the question of freedom is transformed into a question of character is *[499]* everything clear. Man is not man in the same sense in which the animal is animal; man is, by his will, to make himself into what he essentially is, into a real man. As regards the real man, it is not the face, the two hands and the upright gait that are

decisive; no, it is the will: such a will, such a man, so much will, so much man, neither more nor less. From this point of view it is then also easy to come to terms with zoology. The disposition of the will makes a difference, a difference valid for time and eternity, between man and animal, but no difference between man and man, for every man has the gift. Powers of mind and passions are highly different in different men; but willing, or rather: being *able* to will, is common to all men. Self-consciousness, self-determination and will are in their disposition one and the same. Here it is not asked how great the natural force of the will is, for the instinctive, nature-bound will stands undeniably in proportion to individual endowment; but here it is asked about the inner essence of self-determination, about the will's exertion to work itself up to real will. Let a man be ever so frail and have fallen into ever so many temptations; if such a man could say to himself with a good conscience: I know that I have honestly summoned the whole strength of my will and resisted to the very utmost, then this man, in the midst of his temporal abasement, would stand as an exalted self with a will more heroic than Alexander's, Caesar's or Napoleon's. The fact is that, when it
[500] is a matter of willing to do what the self recognizes as noble and good, or of willing to resist what it recognizes as base and bad, then the human will never goes to the utmost. This weakness, an incomprehensible self-contradiction, is common to the hero and the most insignificant man. The more developed the consciousness of will is in a man, the more deeply he feels that he has made himself into a more or less botched character, who bears a responsibility; the less there is in an individual of a real man, the more easily he is satisfied with excuses; the more deeply developed the man is, the more he will have to reproach himself with. Self-reproach, this strict boundary-mark between animal and man, is a telling testimony to the originality of freedom, to the will's inner infinity. From this point of view it is easy to come to terms with statistics. Statistics does not deal at all with what men can do, but with what they are wont to do; it does not single out the individuals and assert that these individuals, each for himself, inevitably must will this or that, on the contrary! about the individuals as individuals statistics knows nothing. It takes individuals by the multitude, regards them as atoms in the mass, and so arrives, quite correctly, at an average result which clearly shows that individuals en masse, civilized as well as uncivilized, are as yet not whole, but half men.

That the question of the freedom of the will is most closely connected with the question of religion and faith no one will surely deny. If now the question of freedom, taken originally, is not a question of science, but a question of character, then the

same must surely hold of the question of faith. "Show me thy faith by thy works," this proposition, which, although its truth is both great and clear, has aroused so many *[501]* disputes, misled so many souls and confused so many brains, may at last be freed from all misunderstanding and set in its proper light, when it reads: "*Show me thy faith by thy character*!" Character is something more than a sum of works, and yet works belong to the mirroring of the real character; works are like lineaments in the physiognomy of character, but character itself is inwardness, is spirit and essence. If it has hollowed out Catholicism and struck Pietism with spiritual unfruitfulness to want to hang everything on works, then Lutheran orthodoxy has surely likewise had to suffer for wanting to keep works outside the essence of faith. Both wrong paths have their point of departure in the theological disputes about the law, in which a scholastic acuteness has been tempted to separate what absolutely must be united in the religious character. It is perfectly true, what Luther has taught, that faith is essence, that this essence is life, that life in inwardness is a power of God unto salvation; but when the powers of inwardness stir, then works come forth, and then we have character. If the demand for character is left out, consciousness generally divides into two halves; the one half belongs to eternity, the other to temporality, and then one can again go different ways. If it does not depend on works at all, but only on faith, then it lies near at hand to conceive faith as a matter by itself; a disposition of mind that accepts the pure doctrine, lets itself be edified by the ceremonies ordained in a Sunday church, and beside this has its works in the temporal, attends to its office, its trade, lives with all civic rectitude in the civic outside the eternal. It has rightly *[502]* been maintained that "the Christians" nowadays are not to be distinguished from other decent people. What difference is there, pray, in the cultivated world between Jews and Christians? The Jews go to the synagogue on Saturday, the Christians go to church on Sunday; that is the whole difference. At the pinnacle of the present European civilization there are — thanks to classical intelligence — neither Christians nor Jews nor heathens: we are all neutral men of culture. But when intelligence dares not give up religion, although the faith, separated from works, is too inwardly feeble to give itself real character in a real world, then the consequence is a spiritual deadness, which is all the more destructive to the inward man as it not seldom takes pleasure in the conceit that one nevertheless really has religion, when one vigorously holds to the state church and cherishes a vague respect for the dogmas. How far such a deadness can go in an old culture, and how easily it lets itself be combined with a conceited regard for something holy, ideal and exalted, of this the following example

is a telling proof.

The missionary Huc relates[1], how exceedingly difficult it is to make proselytes for Christianity in China, since indifferentism, the religious characterlessness, is so great that nothing can overcome it. It is far from the case that the missionary is received only with anger; on the contrary! The Chinese listens to the stranger with pleasure;
[503] it interests him and awakens his thirst for knowledge. He accepts, approves, all that is said to him, and raises not the slightest difficulty or objection; he finds that what is said is true, beautiful and excellent, indeed he himself appears as a preacher, and now one hears him speak of plundering the images of the gods in favor of Christianity. He laments the blindness of the people who attach themselves to the goods of this world, and he would, if it were asked of him, deliver a splendid speech on the happiness of knowing the true God, of serving him, and in this way winning eternal life. Hearing him, one would think that he was already a Christian, but he has not come a step further. And yet one must not think that his words are not, to a certain degree, sincere; he believes what he says, he likes to talk about it, but always as of a thing that does not exist for him and does not concern him. The Chinese admirer of the Christian faith then sometimes ends by declaring to the missionary, who begs him to hasten his conversion, that, though he is not blind to the beauty and sublimity of the Christian religion, he nevertheless does not see why one should increase the afflictions and cares of life more than necessary by occupying oneself with another life than the present one and striving beyond one's capacity. The body that we see and touch costs us every day the greatest attention and care; should we then on top of that occupy ourselves with a soul that we do not see, and a life that we do not know? — Poor Chinese, he has faith, but lacks merely a couple of works. Had he been born in the maternal womb of a European Protestant state church, then the works would have come as if of themselves; for he has the gifts, after all. Imagine that such a man had
[504] studied theology, and learned to preach in the Pastoral Seminary: he would have become something great; he would surely have become more than a dean, he would have become a bishop and a witness to the truth.

By letting the works go to the temporal and faith to the eternal one can also enter upon another wrong path, closest to the Pietist. The feeling presses itself upon one that here in the temporal one really must do something for the eternal; but what is one to do? The temporal is temporal and never becomes anything else. So one must begin by renouncing the temporal. How much is one now to renounce? Not everything

[1] *L'empire chinois* 1, 173; cf. Oscar Ræder: "Historical Laws". Copenhagen 1871, pp. 20—21.

temporal; for if one literally renounces everything temporal, one dies at once; one takes one's own life. So one divides temporal things and works into two classes. The first class comprises the necessary and permissible works, such as: eating, drinking, sleeping, founding a family, pursuing a civic occupation, etc.; the temporal contained in these is accordingly not to be renounced. To the second class belong not only such vices and bad habits as the police punish, but also actions that moral society otherwise regards as innocent and permissible, e.g. dancing, playing cards and going to the theater, indeed, what is more: loving one's people and defending one's fatherland, grieving at its misfortunes, rejoicing in its honor, honoring its memories and working together for its future, are reckoned among the follies by which the Devil in particular weaves his snares, when he goes about craftily and catches souls in the temporal. But who now does not see that a register-like enumeration of what is to be renounced and not renounced is better suited to hatching screwed-up individuals than to cultivating characters. We honor the Pietist earnestness when we warn against its mistakes. It is, *[505]* with regard to the great, perhaps terrible, crises of the spirit that the future holds in prospect, a true good fortune for our fatherland that it possesses in its literature a writer who, from a Pietist standpoint, has in the most comprehensive and thorough manner dissolved the whole of Pietism; that is S. Kierkegaard.

To break with the world, renounce the world, die away from the world, this is and remains, as long as there is Christianity, a Christian basic demand, an unrejectable demand of character, inasmuch as by the world is then understood what we all know, the sensual, selfish, temporal, vain being. The demand is negative, an unmistakably genuine demand of the Law. Wherein, then, does the Pietistic consist? Not in this, that "the ideals are proclaimed," that the demand is made to hold in its whole extent; for that is precisely the Christian, and anyone who, under the mask of mildness, on behalf of softness, permits himself to keep silent about, tone down or veil the holy demand is certainly not a Christian character, still less a witness to the truth, but a traitor who kisses the Crucified. No, the Pietistic consists in something else; it consists in this, that the negative demand of the Law is put in the place of the Gospel, set up by itself, as if it itself contained the conditions for its fulfillment. This is what is unevangelical. Now it lay not only in S. Kierkegaard's exclusively nervous individuality — either *obedience* in faith or a place in the madhouse — and in his quite peculiar development of character, but also in the way in which he conceived his mission, his struggle against what he regarded as an Epicurean, enervated age, bewildered in worldliness, stupefied by "priestly twaddle," that he put the demand as he did. Thereby it came *[506]*

about that his presentation of Christianity, although it indisputably contains all the basic determinations of the Gospel, took on a peculiar sheen, a touch of Pietism.

But the Pietists will hardly rejoice when they consider how their renunciation of the world is here carried through. To set religious earnestness in abstaining from plays, cards and dance, whining over the ungodliness of the world and for the rest being like the others — a bit of a thief in one's trade, is not earnestness; when such a renunciation wishes to pass for more than what in many cases it may well be, an advisable caution against falling into temptation, wishes to count as full earnestness, holy, deep and godly earnestness, then this sort of godly earnestness, as anyone can see, is simply "handed over to comic treatment" by S. K. No, the demand is that all, unconditionally all, — the means of livelihood too — shall be renounced. The demand is that the interests of temporality shall all be burned up in the fire of the spirit, and the selfish consumed by the flame. The unconditionality in the demand, that all, all temporal things without exception, shall be renounced, is the equal, and this equality is again what is exalted in the earnestness.

But let us now see how the exalted earnestness looks when the ideals are proclaimed and a human will is to try to set the eternal into character. "Wherever the Christian is," says S. Kierkegaard in "Works of Love" (p. 63), "there is also self-denial, which is the essential form of Christianity… But erotic love and friendship are precisely the highest of self-feeling, are the I intoxicated in another I. The more firmly
[507] the two I's join together to become one I, the more this united self shuts itself out selfishly from all others. In erotic love and friendship at their highest the two really become one self, one I. This is explicable only because in preferential love there is contained a determination of nature (drive — inclination) and self-love, which can selfishly unite two in a new selfish self. The love of the spirit, on the contrary, takes away from my self all determination of nature and all self-love, therefore love of the neighbor cannot make me one with the neighbor in a united self… Are you, my hearers (p. 67) perhaps, as the saying goes, a cultivated person, well then, I am also cultivated; but if you believe that by means of 'cultivation' you come nearer to this highest, then you are gravely mistaken. And here precisely lies the error; for cultivation we all wish, and cultivation has the highest constantly in its mouth, indeed, no bird that has learned but one single word calls out more incessantly this single word, and the crow no more incessantly its own name than cultivation always calls out 'the highest.' But the Christian is by no means the 'highest' of cultivation, and the Christian cultivates precisely through the repulsion of offense.… You *shall*

love, you shall love your neighbor as yourself! (p. 70—71). Do not refrain from believing, because the commandment almost offends you, because the speech does not sound ingratiating like the poet's, who with his songs ingratiates himself in your happiness... No, love the beloved faithfully and tenderly, but let love of the neighbor be the sanctifying thing in the covenant of your union with God; love your friend sincerely and devotedly, but let love of the neighbor be what you learn from each other in the confidence of friendship with God!.. As the glad tidings of Christianity are contained in the doctrine of man's kinship with God, so its task is man's likeness *[508]* to God.... Insofar as you love the beloved, you do not resemble God, for with God there is no preferential love.... Insofar as you love your friend, you do not resemble God, for with God there is no distinction. But when you love the neighbor, then you resemble God."

Anyone who earnestly wishes to take to heart how the opposition between self-love, the unchristian, and love of the spirit, the Christian, is here presented, must necessarily become aware that the presentation contains two explanations which explain one another in such a way that light with light gives darkness.

First explanation. The Christian has no beloved, no wife, no friend; he has only the neighbor! If anyone points out to him that he must necessarily stand in a different relation of love to his beloved, if he is betrothed, than to other girls, to his wife, if he is married, than to other wives; it does not help. If he really is in the character of what is here set forth as the Christian, he will love all girls, all men and all wives in the whole world equally, in the same spirit, with the same inwardness and in the same way, for he loves in them all — the neighbor. If anyone reminds him that besides the universal love for all human beings he must necessarily cherish a quite special love for certain human beings, that in his beloved he is indeed to love his neighbor, but yet also conversely in *this* neighbor his beloved, in *this* neighbor his friend: it is in vain. The eye with which he should see the beloved as the beloved, the friend as friend, has been put out; it was a heathen eye, after all; so they are both, the beloved and the friend, gone for him: in their place stands the neighbor. Even if he could discover *[509]* them, how should he be able to love them. Love of the beloved is preferential love, love of the friend is preferential love; preferential love is self-love, self-love is selfish, and the selfish ungodly.

Second explanation. Although the Christian in all human beings loves only the neighbor, he nevertheless has permission to have a friend and a beloved, whom he may love in particular. "Love the beloved faithfully and tenderly, but".... "love your friend

sincerely and devotedly, but"... The meaning cannot possibly be that the beloved and the friend are merely to be loved as the neighbor; in that case the repeated But would be without all significance. The permission, if one will, the admonition must be explained thus: If you, the Christian, only do not forget to love every human being without distinction, your friend, your beloved too, as your neighbor, then add just so little preferential love: love — with preferential love — your beloved faithfully and tenderly; love your friend with sincere and devoted preferential love! But what was preferential love according to the first explanation? Selfishness, sin, ungodliness! "Insofar as you love the beloved, you do not resemble God, for with God there is no preferential love. Insofar as you love your friend, you do not resemble God, for with God there is no distinction." And what is preferential love according to the second explanation? A little indulgence, which the author offers us, not for money, that would be a sin to say, but gratis and from a good heart. But is it not — from the standpoint of the Law — as if the author said to his earnest reader in plain words: Now you know what sin is, that it is love of distinction, preferential love. But when
[510] you know it, acknowledge it, feel it and bow deeply before the ideal; then sin, only — "faithfully and tenderly" with the beloved, "sincerely and devotedly" with your friend.

That it cannot occur to any sober-minded person to want to foist on S. Kierkegaard so insane a distortion of the Holy hardly needs to be remarked; nor does the contradiction lie in the demand of the ideal as ideal. No, the basic contradiction, the icy, cutting contradiction, arises from this, that the Law immediately is to demand of the believer's will that it be set into character as law. This is what, for all godly talk of regeneration, sealing and sanctification, is the Pietistic. To unfurl the banner of the ideal with the inscription of the Law is to dissolve Pietism.

We now turn to the Grundtvigian view, to see how matters stand here with character and will. Grundtvig does not begin with the Law, but with the Gospel; he does not speak of faith and works, but of the power of the spirit in "the living word," of the renewal of life in faith; he does not set the demand of the spirit in hostile opposition to man's determination of nature, but reconciles both and finds the source of unity in the heart. What follows from this? The great commandments of the Law: You shall love God above all things and your neighbor as yourself, are hereby neither overlooked nor pushed back, but presented in the light of the Gospel, so that the commanding: You *shall*, is transformed into a promise: It shall be given you to *be able*. On which side is there now, when what is at stake, mark well, is not merely the demand but the fulfillment, the deepest earnestness? Obviously on the Gospel's. The

Law says: You *shall*, you *shall*! and yet knows very well that man cannot do what he thus shall. But to demand of a being that it absolutely shall do what it demonstrably *[511]* cannot is one-sided earnestness. The Gospel says: You shall, for you can; it is I who give you strength. Precisely the fact that nothing other or more is demanded of man than what man essentially can do raises infinitely the earnestness of the demand. Taken originally, the Gospel does not begin with a demand, but with an offer. It does not demand of man that he shall on his own fulfill this or that law, but it offers a gift, the gift of the spirit and of love, whereby it becomes possible for man to fulfill the law of love, still more clearly: whereby it becomes possible for the divine love itself to perfect its own law in man. The Gospel does not address itself with a commandment of duty, a prescription, to man's will, does not begin by saying: You are obligated to believe in the Crucified, obligated to let yourself be baptized, etc. No, the Gospel goes the way of inwardness, begins with a promise and speaks to man's heart, for the whole man is in the heart. Does the Gospel then perhaps make faith a dim feeling, without spirit and clear thoughts, without character and will? By no means! But the Gospel does not know, will not know any final parceling-out of our inner being; on the contrary, it will heal what is torn asunder, make whole what is divided, and abolish the piecework: feeling and thought, spirit and will must in truth be one if man is to attain uprightness and acquire character. The Gospel does not know, will not know any inner discord between spirit and nature; therefore it seeks at once, without circumlocution, the heart, for only in the heart is spirit nature, and nature spirit. A nature-hostile spirit and a spirit-forsaken nature are uncanny distortions of *[512]* life and truth. Will the Gospel then perhaps lure human beings to itself and win them by flattering the natural heart? By no means! The Gospel knows the human heart from the ground up and knows full well how matters stand in there; but it knows also that the way of the heart is the only possible way of love, that there is no other. If it were only a question of civic probity, of the fulfillment of duties in obedience, the spirit could easily use force, strike terror and compel obedience. But when obedience is to go hand in hand with freedom and have its ground in love, the spirit cannot use force, for love does not let itself be compelled. Love can drive out fear, but no fear in heaven or on earth will be able to drive love in. The Law can threaten, compel, thunder, command: You shall, you shall! to all eternity; its threat is cold and barren and cannot beget love; but the Gospel begets love — in man's heart. If in a human nature there is nothing but selfish craving, sensual desire and the lust of the flesh, then Christ never had a human nature, and his Gospel is an impossibility. But when

the Gospel goes to the heart and makes, in a divine sense, the natural spiritual and the spiritual natural, then it is earnestness, holy earnestness; for it is not man's carnal heart that rules over the Gospel, but the Gospel's spirit that rules in the heart.

On this foundation "the ideals can be proclaimed," characters built up, the will strengthened as the organ of the spirit and "Works of Love" practiced. But it will then
[513] also be seen that the whole concept of love, conceived from the human side, must undergo a transformation. Self-love and preferential love are radical determinations, inseparable from all that human love which from any side, in any sense, in any way can be said to have a natural origin. If we pull up the ramifications of self-love and of preferential love by the roots, then the Gospel departs and leaves behind a nature-hostile spirit with a beginning devoid of nature. Self-love and preferential love are ambiguous words; the ambiguity shows that they can belong to both the lowest and the highest. Take preferential love away, and what becomes of a mother's love? Take self-love away, and what becomes of love of the neighbor? "Love your neighbor as yourself!" But to love oneself is indeed self-love. In the selfish sense self-love is self-seeking love, and self-seeking love incompatible with love of the spirit. In order to master egoism and purge self-seeking love, the spirit of the Gospel enters into a natural alliance with the deeper self-feeling, with the self's need for eternal life, that is, with the true self-love; then the demand of the spirit becomes at bottom a natural impulse, which awakens the will through concern for oneself, and the will awakened through concern for oneself becomes the organ of the spirit. That the instinct of self-preservation is a strong instinct holds true not only in the sensual but also in the spiritual sense. Once it has become evident in earnest to a human being that self-seeking love is his worst enemy, then he will hate self-seeking love, not because he hates himself, no, because he loves himself. That the spirit's will hates self-seeking love and hates it thoroughly, precisely because it hates out of self-love, means, in
[514] other words, that the will with all its strength combats the selfish, does not stop at that, does not set itself at rest until the fury of self-obsession is quenched and the deadly enemy strangled. It is a work of the spirit, and yet it proceeds naturally: in true self-love the natural is spiritual, the spiritual natural. With preferential love the matter stands in the same way. All preferential love is natural and must, insofar as it keeps to sensual selfishness, necessarily be rejected by the spirit. But it is only the selfishly narrowing, the partiality, the bewitchment, the infatuation in preferential love, not preferential love itself, that the spirit hates. Love of others is impossible for human beings without preferential love. Real love must, like everything that is

to become real in the world, necessarily be limited. An unlimited love, a perfectly equal, universal love of all human beings in general is indeed an expansion of the mind in imagination, but as yet no real love, for it is not love of any real human being. If love is to become real, it must limit itself; but in limiting itself and choosing its object, it becomes preferential love. It goes without saying that false preferential love must be related to true preferential love as self-seeking love is related to true self-love. The husband is, according to Paul's exhortation, to love his wife as he loves himself. If the husband's self-love now is nothing other than self-seeking love, then his love for his wife, however inward, tender and enthusiastic it may otherwise look, can likewise be nothing other than a self-seeking love converted into preferential love, a preferential love that selfishly excludes love of the neighbor. If, on the other hand, his self-love is in truth a love of the spirit purified of egoism, then his love *[515]* for his wife will also from the very beginning be love of the neighbor. Let him only begin by having this neighbor as "the beloved" and be as blissfully in love as you like; provided only that his will is in the character of faith, the spirit of the Gospel will vouch that the fire that burns in his soul shall unfailingly purify the sensual being; let the first immediate natural impulses vanish with the years, love will nevertheless not cool, but inwardness will grow with rejuvenating strength and give the character an expression which, although it is not in the bloom of youthfulness, is nevertheless for that very reason just as rich, indeed richer, because it is spiritually transfigured and yet withal not less natural. If ever a man has preserved and nourished such a love for his wife, then there is no need here of any heralds of poetry to trumpet forth his erotic love: religion acknowledges him, that his life has been in the service of the spirit; the Gospel gives him the testimony that he has loved his neighbor as himself. If anyone objects that a limitation such as the one here indicated stands far too low beneath the demand of the ideal, that it is not enough to love a single human being, least of all one's wife, but that one is to love strangers too, many human beings, indeed all human beings: then the answer must be that in this very matter it does not depend on a plurality. The neighbor has, remarkably enough, no plural. We have not many neighbors, but only one neighbor, each time in each real personal relation the neighbor, *this* our neighbor. The neighbor is not only One in All, but also All in One; he who in truth loves a single human being as his neighbor loves from the heart all human beings, every human being without exception, for if in his heart he *[516]* makes an exception, then his love, toward the many just as well as toward the single one, is an egoistic deception. He may for that matter well love ten human beings; if

he makes an exception against the eleventh, then the whole is an illusion. Equality aims at possibility, for it concerns the disposition; but limitation aims at reality, for it concerns the act. He who has learned to love his neighbor as himself has much in the world to love. He loves not only his nearest, his family, his friends, but also his people, his fatherland. To want to love one's neighbor without loving one's family is masked self-seeking love; to want to love one's family and one's friends without loving one's people and one's fatherland is false preferential love. To love one's people and one's fatherland with true preferential love is infinitely different from being infatuated with one's own tribe and deifying such national virtues as in all their naturalness are still always paired with corresponding bad habits and vices; to love one's people with preferential love cannot, as truly as preferential love is in the character of spirit, possibly lead to hating or despising or misjudging the good and excellent that is to be found among other peoples, since an inward, strong and living preferential love for one's own people is on the contrary the only possible way to love the human in real human beings, the only possibility for love to become again flesh and blood, for health, strength and marrow to come into the otherwise so pale, universal love of humanity.

Show me your faith by your character! The temporal is to be renounced, and yet
[517] it is to be used vigorously; the Christian is to "die away from the world," and yet he, precisely he, is to live in the world, work in the world, labor to carry human life forward to richer, truer, fuller development in the world. "The ideals are to be proclaimed," the lofty models of suffering, sacrifice, struggle of soul and renunciation are to be set forth in that light of glory which shines with eternal splendor, and the disciplining commandment of the Law: You shall, you shall! is to sound constantly with all its severity; and yet we human beings, without fear of the Law, in the spirit of freedom, of self-understanding, of the Gospel, of love, are to begin — rightly humanly with the divine, rightly naturally with the spiritual, are to work and act in all confidence, with joy and hope in the imperishable, in the midst of all this perishability, this temporality, this worldliness: these are, to a superficial view, contradictory demands. Show me your faith by your character! for these demands are tasks, urgent tasks, not for objective knowledge and reasoning criticism, but for character and will.

R. *Nielsen.*