For Idea and Reality.

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On Self-Understanding in Evil,

with Reference to Shakespeare's Richard the Third.

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[521] When a bird of prey swoops down upon a sea creature, and the contending forces on both sides are about equal, the outcome of the struggle will depend chiefly on the element in which it is fought. If the inhabitant of the sea succeeds in drawing its winged enemy down beneath the waves, then it wins a double advantage: it fights in its own element, and the element fights for it. Now it is not merely in animal life that the strength of the forces in a struggle is conditioned by the element; in the life of the spirit, too, something corresponding shows itself. The spiritual forces in faith and knowledge are, with regard to principles and presuppositions, representations and concepts, so different that the corresponding ideas must be said to move in two absolutely dissimilar regions, and the struggle between them must every time depend on the element in which it is conducted. To draw the religious thoughts of life down into the stream of knowledge is arbitrarily to take sides for the antireligious; for knowledge fights in its own objective element, and the element fights for it. It is an age-old error, a thousand-year-old theological deception, to confound the elements, to deify the objective, and to drown the eagle of faith in the waters of science.

[522] It is a principle which anyone who wishes can understand, that a matter of conscience is religious and moral, but not scientific; or is there perhaps some reasonable human being who in real life confounds a concern of conscience with a scientific problem? Nor, surely, the other way round! When a Jesper Ridefoged feels in his conscience that the earth is not round, one laughs; and why? Because one involuntarily feels that physics and conscience must each speak its own language, each have its own circle of thought with its own foundation of its own grounds. That scientific questions cannot immediately be submitted to the verdict of conscience means that science itself is impersonal, that the element of knowledge is objective. The religious and ethical truths are, in the last instance as in the first, truths of conscience; all true and thorough understanding of these truths rests on self-understanding, but the element of self-understanding is subjectivity. Hereby the objective in religion and morality is by no means weakened, still less denied; only this is to be emphasized, that the judgment upon it is subjective, for the judge is in the human being's self. If one fails to hear this inner judge, or reduces him to a subordinate official and seeks the supreme judge in the scientific, then it is easy to foresee what the consequence

must be. It is thus of great importance, not only for the sake of religiosity but also for that of cultural history and humanity, to give oneself an account of the difference between scientific truth and truth of conscience.

In all countries where science and literature keep pace with the times, there now exist literary documents which clearly prove that theology, with its learned baggage, *[523]* is without principle, that its medieval role is played out. But, one will perhaps object, if this is so, how then is one to explain that a fact so manifest, so deeply affecting culture and humanity, has not yet really dawned on the cultivated public at large? The matter is easily explained. By forcing faith down into the objective element of knowledge, theology has from generation to generation bewitched itself and its age into the fixed idea that theology and religion are inseparable; "if theology falls, religion falls"—that is the dogmatic watchword meant to strike into the civilized world terror of atheism and respect for theology. How false this watchword is can be seen from the dispute about faith and knowledge. The supreme principle of theology and of atheism is, namely, one and the same. "If theology falls, religion falls"—only on this presupposition can it be explained that an atheistic criticism which has scientifically dissolved theology can imagine that it has at the same time dissolved positive religion and thus won a double victory. That theology's "objective faith" has fallen to the weapons of knowledge is manifest to all who know, and yet, strangely enough, a public secret. How such a secret can maintain itself in an enlightened age, in spite of so many telescopes and so many clear eyes, is readily understood when one considers that it is not only in the well-understood interest of the theologians but also of the atheists that the common people, "the great mob", do not get to peep too deep into the pot. From both sides one finds one's account in covering the fact with a thin veil. As to theology, it would indeed be a suicide if it trumpeted forth its own defeat and *[524]* had it made known by advertisements that it really is a sham science; it becomes the business of its opponents to see to the announcement. One would now think that among these opponents the atheists, with their double victory, must stand in the foremost rank. So it was, too, in the last century; but in the present one the situation has strangely changed. A psychological experience has been made. The atheist, when he duly reflects, will see that he cannot be served by the theological science of faith losing all credit in the judgment of the people, for when the enemy he lives by combating is dead and gone, he has essentially nothing more to do; his esoteric knowledge is a negative power that dare not expose its positive foundation. As long as atheism has the metaphysical veil over it, it is not unlike the goddess of

Sais; one feels a shudder before the dark secret, the enigmatic, petrifying truth. But when the veil is lifted, the likeness is over. The youth does not go mad with horror; on the contrary, he becomes peevish, because there is no horror, because his expectation is disappointed: "Is this the truth itself, is this the goddess's countenance? Such a face one can meet with at any dance-hall"! The flat denial can content itself with the testimony of the five senses. To understand the doctrine that there is no personal God and no immortality of the soul, the practical consciousness of culture need not trouble itself with obscure philosophical phrases; such a wisdom of the commonplace one
[525] breathes in with the common air. From atheism one may therefore expect a complete unveiling just as little as from theology. Under such circumstances public opinion, whether it at a given time inclines to theology or to atheism or perhaps—according as the display is in the "shop"—to both at once, must feel within itself that it is without insight, without conviction, only an opinion, and so the secret can well be preserved.

The public secret has, however, one good about it that we ought not to fail to recognize. There runs through the civilized world a sense that the dispute for and against the religious dogmas is impractical, that the practical side of the matter, that on which it really turns, is morality and moral self-understanding; for, it is said, "he whose conduct is pure and right, his faith cannot possibly be bad". Theories that attack revealed religion—call themselves Deism, Pantheism, Atheism, or whatever they please—are by no means dangerous to society, so long as they do not attack morality. From the standpoint of the state and of humanity, a capable, sound and vigorous moral doctrine is far to be preferred to obscure, mystical speculations about revelation. Let a sober philosophical thinker, it is said, furnish us a defensible ethics, a practical moral doctrine that maintains duty and right and gets to the bottom of the opposition of good and evil, and he shall be welcome to us: we shall certainly not trouble him with pressing questions about confession of faith. That the view which in the popular sense can so easily be stamped as atheism does not just, as regards the moral, always stand behind orthodox doctrinal systems, the example of
[526] the elder Fichte has sufficiently shown. This great, moral, popularly minded thinker was, when one could not otherwise get at him, finally accused before the government as an atheist. That helped, speaking in the civil sense, for he was as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Jena actually deposed from his office; but what it signified in the scientific and moral sense can be seen from his manly, open defense. Because a human being gives up faith in a personal God, he does not therefore give up faith in a divine world order. "This faith", says Fichte, "one must not imagine as

an arbitrary assumption, which a human being can make or not, as it pleases him, as a free resolution to hold for true what the heart wishes because it wishes it, as a completion or substitute for convincing grounds by calling hope to one's aid. What is grounded in reason is simply and plainly necessary; and what is not necessary is for that very reason contrary to reason. To assume such a thing is imagination and dream, however piously one may dream. The true good is cognized only under the condition that I find myself free from all influences of the world of the senses, absolutely active in myself, thus as a power exalted above everything sensible. This freedom is not indeterminate; it has its goal, only that it does not receive it from without, but sets it for itself by itself. Of this freedom and this its vocation I cannot doubt without giving up myself. I cannot doubt, I say—cannot even conceive the possibility that it should not be so, that that inner voice could deceive, that it would first have to be authorized and grounded from elsewhere. Here no reasoning avails, no reinterpreting or artificial interpretation. That voice is absolutely positive and categorical. I cannot get further *[527]* without disturbing my own inner being; I cannot go further precisely because I cannot will to go further. Here lies that which sets its limit to the otherwise untamed flight of ratiocination, that which binds the spirit, that which binds the heart; here is the point which unites thinking and willing into One and brings harmony into my being. This is the true faith; the moral order is the *Divine* which we assume. It is constructed by acting rightly. This is the only possible confession of faith: freely and impartially to accomplish what duty each time commands, without doubting and reasoning over the consequences. Thereby the Divine becomes living and real to us, each of our actions is accomplished in the presupposition of this, and the consequences are preserved therein".

One sees from this utterance where Fichte is heading, and in what his moral consciousness is grounded. If Fichte were only in agreement with himself about the element in which the Idea of the good is to move and live, then we could safely follow his guidance; for that he earnestly wishes to maintain faith in the good as that which is in itself true and divine, there is no doubt. But precisely in the confusion of the spheres of faith and knowledge, that is, in the confounding of the elements, lies his self-contradiction. He rejects faith in a personal God; this is by no means out of defiance, unbelief or ungodliness, it is by virtue of scientific grounds, it is because a personal God, according to his concept, must be a limited God and a limited God is unthinkable. We hear him in his defense: "You attribute personality and consciousness to God. What do you then understand by personality and consciousness? Surely that

[528] which you have found in yourselves and designated by this name? But that you in no way think or can think this without limitation and finitude, the slightest attention to your construction of this concept can teach you. By attributing to this being that predicate you make it, then, a finite being, a being that is like yourselves, and you have not, as you wished, thought God, but only multiplied yourselves in thought". But if we now ask our philosopher on what ground we are then to believe in the reality of the good and in a divine government of the world, then it seems as if he suddenly wished to move us over into a wholly different sphere, another element. "The conviction of our moral vocation", he says, "itself already proceeds from a moral disposition, and is faith, and one says so far quite rightly: the element of all certainty is faith.—Thus it had to be; for morality, however certain it is, can simply only be constructed by itself, by no means by any logical compulsion of thought". Here one sees the inconsistency: the question of the personality of God is to be decided in science, about this, then, one may well reason; but the question of the validity of morality is not to be decided in science, for about this one may not reason. The inconsistency becomes greater still when we note that the author, having established the principle of the self subjectively in faith—thus outside science—nonetheless wants its development from "the simply and plainly necessary" carried over into science. When, then, someone says: I cannot give up morality without giving up myself, he is declared free of the summons of science; here no logical compulsion of thought applies; but if someone says: I cannot
[529] give up the personal God without giving up myself, then science ought to summon him, for the personal God is deposed by "logical compulsion of thought".

Only moral zeal to carry through an unconditionally rational self-understanding in the good could have misled a thinker like Fichte into committing so glaring an inconsistency. The ethical error that is here at hand can best be illuminated if, instead of speaking in general of the general good and considering whether there is a rational self-understanding in the good, we cast a glance at the opposite of the good and ask whether there is not also a rational self-understanding in evil. So long as the talk is merely of the good, one easily settles into repose with general considerations. The good, it is said, is One with the true nature of man; in choosing the good I essentially choose my own self; that I do the good for the sake of the good means that I, in the deepest sense, do it for my own sake, etc. Since it goes so smoothly with such fine, general phrases, one is easily tempted to treat truths of conscience as scientific doctrines and to draw the highest concerns of personality down into an impersonal element. Otherwise when the talk is of evil. Here the pure general considerations

will not suffice. If the essence of evil is to be comprehended in science, then the explanation in the end amounts to this, that evil is only a deception, an appearance. To understand oneself in evil would, according to this way of viewing it, have to be regarded as just as impossible as to do evil because it is evil. Only by exchanging the general considerations from a distance for a real view from near, that is: for a conception answering to idea and reality of the personal in character and will, will *[530]* it be possible for thought to reach the root of evil. A character portrait illuminating from this point of view we have in Shakespeare's Richard the Third, the knight of radical evil, a royal Satan of flesh and blood, an incarnate devil.

What is peculiar to Richard's character is not that he is bloodthirsty, cruel and commits crimes; in this respect he is only a son of his time. The time in which Richard lives is an evil time: violence and insolence, murder and perjury belong to the order of the day. The medieval state with its strong, self-willed aristocracy is in the fifteenth century given over to passions of party that threaten it with ruin; the struggle between the white and the red rose, a civil war of more than thirty years, in which threescore persons of the royal house and half the English nobility lost their lives, is a bloody chapter in England's history. No, that Richard is a tyrant is not the characteristic thing; the characteristic lies in the consciousness with which he exercises his tyranny. The acting persons in his surroundings, whatever misdeeds they commit, have yet a kind of excuse in their excited passions; whirled into the vengeful war of the moment, all are more or less blinded, only not Richard. It is a trait of his terrible superiority that whereas none among his fellow combatants, friend or foe, is really able to see through him, he sees through them all, looks down upon them, despises them and uses them as blind tools; yes, what is more—for his demonic gaze is just as inward as outward—in seeing through the others he sees through himself as well and has, as it *[531]* seems, a complete self-understanding in evil.

The monologue with which the first scene of the first act begins lets us gain a deep insight into Richard's soul. The tumult of war is his element, he is bored in peace; the effeminate court of his brother Edward the Fourth is loathsome to him. Not from moral indignation, but because he has his own plans, and then because, "ugly- stamped", treated like a stepmother by Nature, he has no luck with the ladies of the court, he declares that he will be a villain "and hate the idle pleasures of these days".—"Plots and conspiracies I have laid by dark omens, dreams and libels, which shall set my brother Clarence and King Edward at hatred and enmity against one another, and if King Edward keeps his word, as surely as I am cunning, false and

faithless, Clarence shall this very day be shut up in prison." So we hear at once from the beginning what Richard is, and what he wants: he is a resolute man, a man who is at one with himself. The horrifying purpose with which Richard appears, and the manner in which he motivates it, has occasioned a misunderstanding which we must here reject. His words have been understood as if in his natural ugliness he sought an excuse for the malice with which he will avenge himself on human society, from which as a deformed being he is excluded. So A. W. Schlegel. "Malice", says this author, "is nothing other than a deliberately unconscientious egoism; yet it can never quite lay aside the form of morality, because this is law for all thinking beings; it must seek to
[532] trace its perverse way of acting back to principles. Although Richard knows very well the abomination of his disposition and his mission from hell, he nevertheless seeks to justify himself to himself by specious grounds; since the happiness of being loved is denied him, what is left to him but the happiness of ruling?" This remark, which is incidentally not without a certain psychological fineness, does not fit Richard; it fits scorned love, but he who has never loved anyone but himself alone cannot feel the torments of a scorned love. The love of which Richard speaks is also not of such a nature that it can be regarded as a virtue. When he says that he cannot "play the lover", that he cannot "court himself in the mirror" and "is not made to strut before a wanton nymph", he by no means means that it is anything virtuous or good that is lost to him. Richard does not at all think of a distinction between virtue and vice, but rather of a choosing between different vices; he is not fitted for the one vice, and therefore he chooses the other;—"since I cannot play the lover and entertain these fair ladies, I am determined to be a villain"; it is in the form of an excuse, as if one were to say: "Since I cannot steal, I am determined to be a robber." It is literally the case that Richard knows what a villain is, and *in spite of that*, or rather *on that very account*, has determined to be a villain. "So he wills evil, then, because it is evil, what a monstrous contradiction!" Certainly it is an inconceivable contradiction so long as we regard him from the general objective standpoint of knowledge, but by no means when we
[533] understand him personally. So long as the word villain is a designation for the evil man in strict opposition to the good man, in other words: so long as the difference between good and evil is not yet effaced from the ground up, so long it will certainly be impossible for a human being to will evil because it is evil. But the difference between good and evil Richard has personally effaced. By effacing this difference he has by no means come to stand on neutral ground as one who is neither good nor evil; on the contrary, he has become sunk in evil; for to deny the difference between

good and evil is to devote oneself to evil. How then did Richard originally come to abolish the separation of good and evil? By denying God, thus by taking an atheistic standpoint! But Richard's atheism has a peculiar coherence; it shuns the objective element and keeps consistently to the subjective. Richard's grounds are not scientific, but unconditionally personal. To write a critical metaphysical piece in which he abolished revealed religion and announced a new era when the human race was to be made blessed by "an immanent development of its immanent principle", he had indeed no time; to introduce a new liturgy with the formula: there is no God, and Richard is his prophet, he did not consider expedient, so he took the matter subjectively, so subjectively that he contented himself with "becoming transparent to himself", without becoming transparent to others. The inner certainty with which Richard has given up God shines forth precisely from the insolence with which he feigns fear of God and uses religion, where it can serve him as a means, for the attainment of his end. His thoughts on this are expressed plainly enough in the monologue (First Act, *[534]* third scene, toward the end): "I do the wrong, and first begin the brawl; the secret evil I spread abroad, its burden I lay on others' shoulders.… Now they believe it, and constantly whet me to revenge on Rivers, Vaughan and on Grey. Then I sigh and show with a scripture text that God bids us repay evil with good. Thus I hide the naked villain with old odd ends stolen out of the Bible, and seem a saint when most I play the devil". To what degree his hypocrisy can shine we see then especially from the divine comedy he plays with the citizens of London. (Third Act, seventh scene.) Clarence is murdered; Edward is dead, and his young sons kept in the Tower, Rivers, Grey and Vaughan and even the noble, unsuspecting Hastings have all mounted the scaffold; thus Richard has prepared everything, and now it only matters that his accession to the throne may get the appearance of occurring at the people's invitation and be as legitimate as possible. Richard must of course pretend that he is most unwilling to take the heavy burden of government upon himself. Seized by dark forebodings, the citizens then also are unwilling to choose him. But Buckingham, Richard's copy and tool, knows how to build the future on "a holy plan". "Play", he says to Richard, "the timorous; let yourself be long entreated before you are seen. Stand, my lord, between two clergymen and take a prayer book in your hand"… When now the citizens with their Lord Mayor and Aldermen come, they are of course turned away by the pious Richard, absorbed in godly contemplation. So that the good faithful souls may nevertheless not lose heart altogether because the "noble Duke" hesitates *[535]* to receive them, Buckingham now explains the real connection of the matter, saying:

"No, my lord, this prince is no Edward; he does not stretch himself on the soft day-bed, but on his knees in godly contemplation. He toys not with a pair of wanton wenches, but with two clergymen he searches deep." When then the Lord Mayor at last sees Richard on a balcony between two bishops, all doubt vanishes, and he exclaims in pious rapture: "See yonder his Grace between two bishops, two pillars of virtue for a Christian prince, who guard against the glitter of vanity! and see, a prayer book is in his hand, the true ornament by which one knows piety" … To become what he afterwards himself calls, "the Lord's anointed", Richard may well feel a need to search with two clergymen, and, if need be, to go to confession to two bishops: a man who daily confesses so sincerely to himself may well have a few confessions to spare for the bishops. He is a perfect hypocrite; hypocrisy is a kind of denial of God, perfect hypocrisy a thoroughgoing denial of God.

Therefore: Richard is an atheist; from this standpoint his self-understanding and the consequences in his character must be judged. If it now appears that an atheistic ethics is not in a position to master Richard, then it is thereby proved at once that atheistic ethics does not possess the principle from which a moral opposition between the good and evil can be developed and maintained. We shall now try how the matter stands.

When God is denied, thus the will of God excluded, man, seen in the Idea, is
[536] unconditionally his own master, his own lawgiver, his own judge. This must of course not be understood as if the individual in his inner being—for as regards the outer, no explanation is needed here—could arbitrarily make himself whatever he will: the individual will is conditioned by and so far bound to the individual nature, and the development of character is at once a personal development of both nature and will. It avails nothing in this connection to take shelter under the metaphysical universal and talk at length of the universally human, the universal nature, the universal reason, the universal thought, the universal will; for in every real human being the universal is limited and assumes a peculiar shape; therefore every human individuality has indeed its nature, its reason, its thought and its will: the universal is not excluded, but it is individualized. We cannot now say that the real human nature, nature existing in real human beings, is either unconditionally good or unconditionally evil; it is, as is well known, a mixture of both. As we must assume that in the evil nature, however dark and corrupt it may be, there must yet always be something good, since an absolutely evil nature would be un-nature, and an absolute un-nature an impossibility, so we must likewise assume that in the good nature, however noble and pure it may

otherwise be, in so far as it is of Adamic principle, there must be something evil. But then it is expressly admitted hereby that the evil in human nature has its universality just as well as the good. But when the universal can just as well correspond to evil as to the good, then it is in vain to want to maintain the moral demand by referring the individual to what is universal in human nature. The difference between the good *[537]* and the evil nature is relative and has as its extremes on the one side such individuals in whom the good has an original preponderance over the evil, on the other such as in whom the reverse is the case; this difference acquires a far-reaching significance when the task is to determine the moral principle. Let us hear Fichte again, the man of whom Goethe, though his fine worldly wisdom could not approve the ethicist's energetic conduct, himself admits that he was "one of the most capable personalities that has ever been seen", a man in whose "way of thinking there is in a higher respect nothing to be criticized": so we feel that Fichte speaks out of the innermost of his soul when he declares that he cannot doubt moral freedom and its vocation without giving up himself, and thus points to "the point which unites thought and will into One and brings harmony into his being." He wills the good as he wills his own true will; he cannot go further without disturbing his own inner being; he has his self-understanding in the good, because his nature is good. If we turn next to Richard, we get the same explanation with the same ground and yet in a wholly opposite direction. Richard, too, has the law for his actions unconditionally in himself; he too wills what he, according to his peculiar natural endowments, must will. As little as a Fichte can change his nature, just as little can a Richard change his; if he tries, he sinks and perishes instantly. From this point of view the self-contemplation in which he with evident satisfaction emphasizes the ugliness of his shape—"Of man's image am an *[538]* abridgment; deceitfully the hypocritical nature described my features. I was sent into the world before my time, kicked out of my mother's womb, scarcely half finished, so lame, so unfinished, that dogs bark when I linger by them"—has no other meaning than to serve as an empty excuse, because he does not want what men call the good. Richard does not complain, does not excuse himself; he takes himself as he is, he does not wish to be otherwise or to be another: he is "himself alone." His outward ugliness is a symbol of a devilish inwardness; but he is by no means dissatisfied with his exterior; he has no ground for that, quite the contrary! The deformity is for the demonic Richard what the repulsive exterior, the snub nose, the protruding eyes, the warts, the hanging belly and the clumsy feet were for the ironic Socrates,—an excellent mask that suits his role. The question here is not what is ugly and what is

beautiful, any more than what is right and what is wrong: might is right. Richard's right is the might of self-will in the powers of the mind, and there are powers in Richard. The spirit will out, the dark spirit that glows in his lust for dominion, his bitter feeling of hatred and revenge; a volcano burns in him, and the volcano must erupt. Atheistically, then, Richard may in this respect be said to understand himself in evil just as unconditionally as the ethicist understands himself in the good: the directions are opposite, but the standpoint is the same, the principle the same.

To maintain the principled difference between good and evil, atheistic ethics must
[539] now seek to give the matter another turn. It began by giving up "the logical constraint of thought"; this rashness it must bitterly regret. If it is to be able to master Richard, it must begin, not personally with the subjective unity of reason and nature, but impersonally with the objective unity of reason and thinking. If it is true, as Fichte says, that moral self-consciousness finds itself "free from all influences of the sensible world, absolutely active in itself, thus as a power exalted above everything sensible," then it must give up existence, take refuge under the "universal" of metaphysics, and carry the struggle over into the logical element of knowledge. The self of which the ethicist thinks, when in the name of the good he speaks of knowing himself and willing himself from pure necessity, is then not the individual but the universal. Only the sensuous self, bound by drives, is individual; the true spiritual self is universal, it is a theory transparent in itself. Not what the individual wills, but what reason wills through the individual, is the true good; he who thinks the good cannot but will it; to make oneself into the universal is intellectual love of the good, only in such a love is there self-understanding. Richard's fault is now this, that he is unwilling theoretically to make his self into the universal; he loves nothing, no one, in spite of his enormous self-love not even himself: from that comes evil. His inflexible defiance of the divine order of morality is joined with a pain, a secret anguish, a restless longing, which in the bitterness of his soul he does not understand, because he does not wish to understand it. The three unhappy women, Queen Margaret, the Duchess his mother, and Queen Elizabeth, forget for a moment their mutual grudge and unite as three
[540] Furies, in order to pour out a stream of curses over Richard, who just passes them by; but he will hear nothing. "Sound trumpets! — Beat drums to the alarm! Let not heaven hear those gossiping women who rail at the Lord's anointed; strike, strike!" As by defiance and the beating of drums he drowns out the cry of the curse that sounds from without, so he seeks by shrewd, sophistical reasoning to guard himself against the curses from within and to drown out the Furies he harbors in his inner

being. With all the clarity of his penetrating understanding Richard is not able to disperse his moral darkness; his self-understanding is a continual self-stupefaction: his deeper rational self does not come to light.

Such soaring general considerations have something flattering for the moral feeling; the only pity is that they stand in conflict with the principle. In order to maintain the Idea of the good, the atheistic ethicist will wrestle with Richard as Hercules wrestled with the giant Antaeus, will lift him up from the maternal earth of existence and strangle him in the airy region of general thinking; but he overstrains himself on the character; Richard is too heavy for the ethicist: it is precisely the principle that weighs him down. In the abstractly general element one can think, but not will, still less act. The universal human being cannot act; for the universal human being is a concept, and a concept cannot act. In order to determine the real, the universal must go through the individual; but when the universal goes through the individual, then necessity enters under freedom, thought under the will, and then Richard has a secure footing. Even the reproach that there is an inner voice he drowns out, a thought he does not think because he does not wish to think it, he puts to his *[541]* own account; for by this it is without further ado admitted that the thoughts of moral character are thoughts of the will, that the course of thoughts depends on the will. With this admission Richard is content; his thought is in all his actions equal to itself and goes consistently as one with his will; self-will is his law, the only law he does not violate: to will in everything his own will is his honor. But on these terms he is even in literal agreement with the ethicist.

"There is something," says our ethicist, "that counts for me above everything, and for the sake of which I set everything else aside, from whose assertion I let myself be deterred by no possible consequence, something for which I would without hesitation sacrifice my whole earthly welfare, my good name and reputation, my life, the weal of the whole world, if it could come into conflict with it. I will call it honor." This Fichtean pledge Richard will at once sign without demur; indeed, he will positively be moved and fall in rapture into the ethicist's arms, when he hears the closer explanation. "This honor I by no means place in the judgment of others on my actions, not even if it could be the unanimous judgment of my age and of posterity; but in the judgment I myself pass upon them." That rings true! Richard listens attentively and hears further: "The judgment I pass upon my actions depends on whether through them I remain in agreement with myself, or through them come into contradiction with myself. In the first case I can approve them; in the latter case I would be dishonored

in my own eyes"… "Consistency, agreement with oneself!" how it rings in Richard's
[542] ears! To drown out such lovely voices he surely wants no drummer. The universally rational, of which the atheistic ethicist makes so much, can likewise cause him no difficulties. My resolutions are ethical when they are of such a kind "that to the best of my knowledge I can seriously will that all rational beings in the same position should make the same resolutions." That is surely a lawful defense for Richard. Anyone who thinks himself to be of the same nature as he, set in an age filled with crimes, with his powers, in his place, in his stead, must surely tell himself that at bottom he would have to act as he does. When in a civil society there is war of all against all, what counts then but the right of the stronger? In this respect Richard does only what reason commands: he strikes his enemies to the ground, because he recognizes that each of his enemies, if he were in his place, rationally would have to strike him to the ground: he acts consistently. The consequence of his way of acting by no means entails the destruction of society; it leads only to this, that the stronger defeats the weak, until the contending forces come into equilibrium. Hypocrisy, slander, perjury and murder are means that ought to be used only where they are needed; they fall away of themselves when the times have become different. How consistent Richard is can be seen from his relation to Buckingham. This henchman of tyranny, who until now has followed Richard as friend and counselor, suddenly gets scruples and will not let himself be used to murder the young princes; that is an inconsistency: by coming into contradiction with Richard Buckingham comes into contradiction with himself:
[543] no wonder that such a contradiction costs him his head. Richard, by contrast, is, as the principle demands, consistent in each and every respect, so inflexibly consistent that no Stoic with his "self-agreement" as battle cry can dispute his rank. The hardness of his heart proves precisely that he, exalted above sensuous compassion, feels himself only "as a spiritual power." He really approaches the theory according to which the self's thinking is to be able, with the absolutely objective necessity of knowledge, to pass over into will, into resolution, into action. He acts not from mere natural impulse or from sheer wickedness, but according to a strictly thought-through and deeply laid plan; in acting with freedom he does only what is necessary. Henry the Sixth is murdered, it is necessary; Clarence is murdered, it is necessary; Edward's sons are murdered, it is altogether necessary; Buckingham's head falls, that too is necessary. And what then is freedom? Precisely what an atheistic metaphysics so ingeniously explains to us, the developed concept of necessity, its immanent transition into rational self-consciousness! And so a hero like Richard, a character who satisfies

the theory to so high a degree, is not to be said to understand himself, even if his self-understanding is in evil?

For the atheistic ethicist there is then only the way out left of giving up the merely formal, laying the emphasis on the content of morality, and appealing to the Idea. What agrees with the Idea is good, what conflicts with it is evil; it is not the consistent way of acting in and for itself, but the character's relation to the Idea as Idea, that in ethics is decisive. Richard's blindness then shows itself in this, that he convulsively clings to his egoistic self and violates the Idea in every shape; friendship, family, state, *[544]* everything he sacrifices to his egoism. He is worse than a Machiavellian; for the Machiavellian does still posit the Idea in the form of the state as the absolute, but King Richard pays no heed to the general weal, he takes the state as a prey: for him nothing is absolute but his own domineering ego. This break with all moral powers is the deep contradiction in Richard's being, and the consequence of this break a breakthrough that ends in despair. After his accession to the throne, even before rumor tells him that Henry of Richmond has landed with an army, Richard's self-confidence begins to decline. His strength is broken, his soul has no peace, he is sleepless; sleep itself, which otherwise refreshes the weary, has, when it finally comes, no refreshment for him, it torments him with heavy dreams; gnawing memories in streams of blood, voices from the graves crying: Revenge! The rending of the brotherly bond, the mother's curses, full certainty of everyone's enmity, everyone's loathing, everyone's hatred, all this together oppresses Richard's mind, cows his courage, and lets him feel that there is a moral power that punishes the evil one. Thus the last catastrophe approaches. Richard sleeps in his tent on "Bosworth Field" and dreams. The spirits of the murdered appear to him, one after another, each weighs upon him with his memory, his lament, and through all memories, all laments rings the word of judgment: "despair and die!" Terrified Richard starts up,—"it is dead midnight; the cold drops bubble on his body." Then follows the famous monologue, in which for the first and also for the last time he gets his ethical self to speak. Now at last he understands *[545]* himself, but the self-understanding is the most dreadful self-contradiction. "What do I fear? Myself? I am alone: yes Richard loves Richard—I am I. Is there a murderer here? No;—yes I am one, then flee!—What, from myself? Good ground: why? I will avenge. Whom? Myself, upon myself? I love indeed my own self; why? for all the good I have done myself. O, no! Alas no! I ought rather to hate myself for hateful deeds against my self." The ethical self-contradiction is a literal self-condemnation; to get Richard condemned we need not appeal to a supramundane right; the court is already

in session: it is no omniscient God on the Day of Judgment, but simply and plainly the moral Idea that condemns Richard. Surrounded by the terrors of judgment he stands as transformed. When he began by declaring that he would be a villain, it was only a presumptuous mockery; there was in his consciousness no moral difference between a villain and a noble hero; but now, when he is struck by the lightning of the spirit and in his soul's anguish cries out: "I am a scoundrel!" now the difference between evil and the good has dawned on him: the Idea has come to revelation, but in order to crush him. How crushed he is we hear from his despair, his soul-shaking self-confession; for "his conscience has a thousand tongues, each tongue brings in a separate tale, each tale condemns him as a villain. Perjury and most false oath in the highest degree, murder, cruel murder in the most fearful degree, and all sins in every degree, to the bar crowd and cry: Guilty, Guilty!" If it were now really the case that
[546] the Idea of the good alone by itself, without ground in God's will, has got Richard condemned and done justice its due, then atheistic ethics has by this immanent act of judgment undeniably celebrated a great triumph. It is then made known once for all that the difference between good and evil can not only subsist, but even first become objectively grounded, when God is denied, and the unclear notion of a judge beyond is completely given up. But if in any scientific inquiry there is ground to speak of "smuggling in," "eclecticism," "self-contradiction" and the like, it is surely here. The whole grounding rests on a smuggling in, in that one imperceptibly lets the *moral*, immediately moral *feeling* take the place of the *moral principle.* That the moral feeling is wounded when evil is put on a par with the good is certain, just as it is also certain that the poet has poetic right in letting Richard's better nature break through and break his defiance. But that is surely not at all what is at issue here. The question, the question the atheist here ought to answer, concerns not the feeling but the principle, the principle by virtue of which the opposition between good and evil alone has validity. Is Richard really condemned by virtue of the atheistic principle? By no means! He is in the proper sense not morally condemned at all; he is merely frightened, overwhelmed by dream visions; what he says, he says, if not half asleep, still in a state in which he is not master of himself and his principle. As soon as he is properly awake and has come to his senses, he also disavows all that he said in
[547] the first fright. "Conscience, you coward, you terrify!" This opening line indicates clearly enough where the following stream of self-reproaches will lead. Richard has had a weak moment, and weak moments even the strongest can have, whether he is otherwise good or evil. To Ratcliff, who has just entered the tent, he says that he has

had a dreadful dream; he "fears, fears"! To Ratcliff's encouraging words: "My good prince, be not afraid of shadows," he answers: "Now by the apostle Paul, the shadows of the night have struck more terror to Richard's soul than ten thousand real warriors, armed, shot-proof, under Richmond could." What kind of terror it is with which he is struck, and what kind of fear he means, is clear enough: it is by no means fear of the judgment of conscience, but only fear of losing the battle. Had Richard been morally overcome in his principle, he would surely have had to be brought, in full possession of his senses, to give the Idea its due and to acknowledge conscience. But far from it. Scarcely has he risen, got his armor on and is about to begin the battle, before we hear in his voice of command once more the wild defiance: "Go, my men, each to his business, let no gossiping dreams frighten the soul; conscience is a word cowards use, introduced to curb the strong. Let our strong arm be conscience, sword our law; so charge forward!" So the "Idea" shall not boast that it has overcome Richard in the name of conscience!

"But," it is said, "precisely because the Idea cannot conquer Richard subjectively, it works as an objective power and conquers him objectively." Now the ethical has been left behind, and the misunderstanding is in full swing; for an arrow, a bullet, a stone, a flash of lightning can also conquer an individual objectively: what an honor *[548]* for the Idea to be set on an equal footing with a mere force of nature! The Idea, it is said, is not a force of nature, it is a force of spirit, spirit itself in history, in the world of freedom; as spirit present in and immanent to individuals, actions and events it governs everything and everyone. It is only in his own imagination that Richard has been able to tear himself loose from the Idea; he is in its power; it holds him fast with an invisible hand from first to last, it uses him as an instrument. Among the powerful, who in that period of terrors had all offended against society, Richard, the blood-dripping hero who hews off the heads of the hydra of civil war, is precisely by the power of the Idea the most powerful. "He is," says Rötscher, "as the Nemesis of the World-Spirit. By this view Richard already gains an exalted pedestal. His foundation is the torn-up state, his goal is the crown; his absolute significance is to be the bearer of the historical spirit, by whom all those heads are mown off which have undermined the universal order, dissolved the state and burdened themselves with crimes. In leveling everyone's right, he levels the ground, so that the unity of the state may once more raise itself out of the discord of interests… But as a product of the whole, dissolving state Richard himself perishes, for the crime must be atoned for and the tool cast away, as soon as it has accomplished its bloody work." From a

historical-aesthetic standpoint there is nothing to object to in this judgment; but what becomes of ethics? Although Richard is just not on any objective familiar footing with the Idea as Idea—such an objective, intimate familiarity must be reserved for
[549] the armchair metaphysician—yet he is for his time the Idea's most zealous servant, its most faithful henchman, the most untiring worker in its vineyard; understood objectively, the spirit is also far more content with him than even with the pious King Henry, not to speak of the others. Had Richard been a saint or at least a noble, upright man, the spirit of history could surely not have used him for its bloody work. But if Richard has done only what the Idea demanded: by what law can the Idea then condemn him? It does happen sometimes that a ruler casts away the instrument that thought it deserved thanks for having fulfilled its lord's wish. Thus Bolingbroke (Richard II, Act 5, end) says to Exton, who brings him the body of Richard the Second in the coffin: "Expect no thanks from me! for you have laid with bloody hand a shame without equal upon me and my renowned realm." Exton reminds the King of his unequivocal exhortation: "Your word, my lord, occasioned my deed," to which Bolingbroke (Henry IV) replies: "He loves not poison who uses poison; I do not love you; his death was needful to me; but you I hate, love him in death; the sting of conscience shall be your wage, but no praise and princely favor from me; go wander friendless like Cain in the horror of the night, and show not your head to the light of day!" Noble feeling, high pathos, a splendid language; poetry exults, but —ethics weeps.

If the Idea really could treat Richard as Bolingbroke treated Exton, things would look black for the distinction between good and evil. Who is it that bears the guilt, "the poison" or "he who uses the poison?"—"The crime must be atoned for!" but
[550] surely not the crime of having satisfied the Idea? When on the atheistic side Richard's crimes are spoken of, one speaks plainly and simply subjectively out of natural human feeling, but by no means metaphysically objectively out of the "spirit of history." It is on the whole characteristic of godless theories in all their forms that, after having put the universally rational in God's place, one is compelled to personify the Idea and, in order to preserve a semblance of morality, to ascribe to it a kind of conscience and to treat it as a moral personality. One insists on the concept and smuggles in notions that stand in jarring conflict with the concept; one deifies the abstraction and paints up the dead abstract to look like a moral being that rewards the good and punishes the evil: it is a mystification equally ghastly for life and for science. The Idea, the Idea torn loose from God's holy, righteous will, is no moral power, neither good nor evil,

neither just nor unjust. Its essence is in the order of nature, in the working of forces, in the necessity of grounds: it lives in the fulfillment of objective laws. Its right is a spiritual natural right: everything that is possible is permitted, only the impossible is forbidden. Evil too happens according to laws; therefore the Idea is just as reconciled with evil as with the good; it is without joy, but also without pain, without wrath, but also without compassion; it is not indignant at violence and plunder, it does not grieve when an executioner is crowned, any more than the ax sighs because an innocent man is executed.

The result of our inquiry is this: from the standpoint of atheism there is just as clear and thoroughgoing a self-understanding in evil as in the good, and that for the *[551]* simple reason that the atheistic principle is not able to maintain the moral difference between good and evil. It is no use appealing to the nature of man, for human nature exists only in real human beings, and real human beings each have their own nature, in so far as they each have their own mind. He who has a good mind prefers the good, he who has an evil mind, evil; if morality is to rest immediately on the mind, then the evil man is just as justified as the good. It is also no use appealing to man's rational being, for the thought that is to grasp the universally rational must,—if it does not wish, through empty theories, to exclude itself from life and reality,— of necessity place the rational being in man's thinking and willing self and make consistent self-satisfaction the supreme principle. But when self-will is law and consistency the measure, the evil man can in his way have just as consistent a self-satisfaction in carrying through his will as the good man in carrying through his. The satisfaction is on neither side perfect; the evil man has a resistance in his better nature and thereby in himself; likewise the good man has a resistance in his lower nature and thereby in himself; the condition for the one as for the other is unavoidable struggle and strife. How great the satisfaction will be depends solely on the strength of character with which the principle is carried through. The consistent character has a great, the inconsistent a slight self-satisfaction, without any regard to good and evil. After having made the principle as subjective as possible and placed the universal in self-will, it is in vain to want to bring the matter before an objective forum and let the Idea judge. The moral Idea is an Idea of the will; if it does not have its center in God's will, then *[552]* it is unconditionally dependent on man's will; the Idea's judgment on man is then only man's own judgment on himself: the judgment is unconditionally subjective. If the Idea is nonetheless to raise itself above the subjective and count as a self-valid objective power, then it ceases to be ethical.

Hereby it is by no means proved that an atheist could not be a moral character, quite the contrary! it is precisely proved that, according as his mind and subjectivity are, he can be both moral and immoral, since it is shown that the opposition of the moral and the immoral is, not for the individual atheist, but for the atheistic principle, without significance.

There are, as is well known, in art, poetry and history certain great orienting points of view of which the cultivated man, however little he may otherwise have occasion to immerse himself in any of the said subjects, will not easily forgive himself for being wholly ignorant. Ought the same not also to hold when the talk is of religion and morality? Among the principal propositions orienting in this respect we count the following:

God's existence, the right of conscience and the soul's immortality are personal presuppositions, belonging so unconditionally to the inner life of the soul that their validity, when we take it strictly, can no more be proved than disproved by science. They are propositions of faith, whose peculiarity science may well illuminate, but not ground.

Theology, which wishes to ground, and atheism, which wishes to undermine
[553] revealed religion, are both equally much in the wrong. The unmistakable superiority of atheism rests solely on this, that the struggle is conducted in the element of knowledge, an element that stifles faith. The impotence of theology is no proof against religion, for religion with its principle has nothing to do with theology.

The true personal proof of the validity of morality is inseparable from the true personal proof of the validity of religion; the proof rests on the unconditional reality of the will. The human will loses instantly its true stamp of eternity, its absolute dependence and with it also its higher moral independence, when faith in God's will is excluded.

Only when the religious-moral principle is recognized in complete independence of objective knowledge and science, can it with all-sided consistency unfold the content of its cognitions in its own sphere, and the doctrine of religion arise reborn to renewed activity. To wish, from an atheistic standpoint, to attack this view by lashing out with "scientific contradictions" is nonsense: since the element of knowledge, according to our chosen standpoint, is opposed to the essence of religion, it follows quite of itself that the doctrine of religion, when it is treated in science, must necessarily swarm with contradictions. The only way to be rid of the contradictions is to separate

religion from science.[*)]

By holding fast to these principles cultivated readers will easily be able to orient themselves in the confusion of theological and atheistic assurances that are put into circulation with an appeal to "grounds," "clear grounds," "irrefutable grounds." It is *[554]* one thing to cry out with grounds, another to give grounds; the former is easier, but the latter is more reliable. Those who cry out most eagerly with grounds are not always reliable, not so reliable as those who cry out with herrings: the latter have at least as a rule the ware they offer for sale, but the former unfortunately often have nothing but the cry.

R. *Nielsen.*

[*)]Cf. Philosophy of Religion pp. 5—11, 74—81, 97—108 ff.