

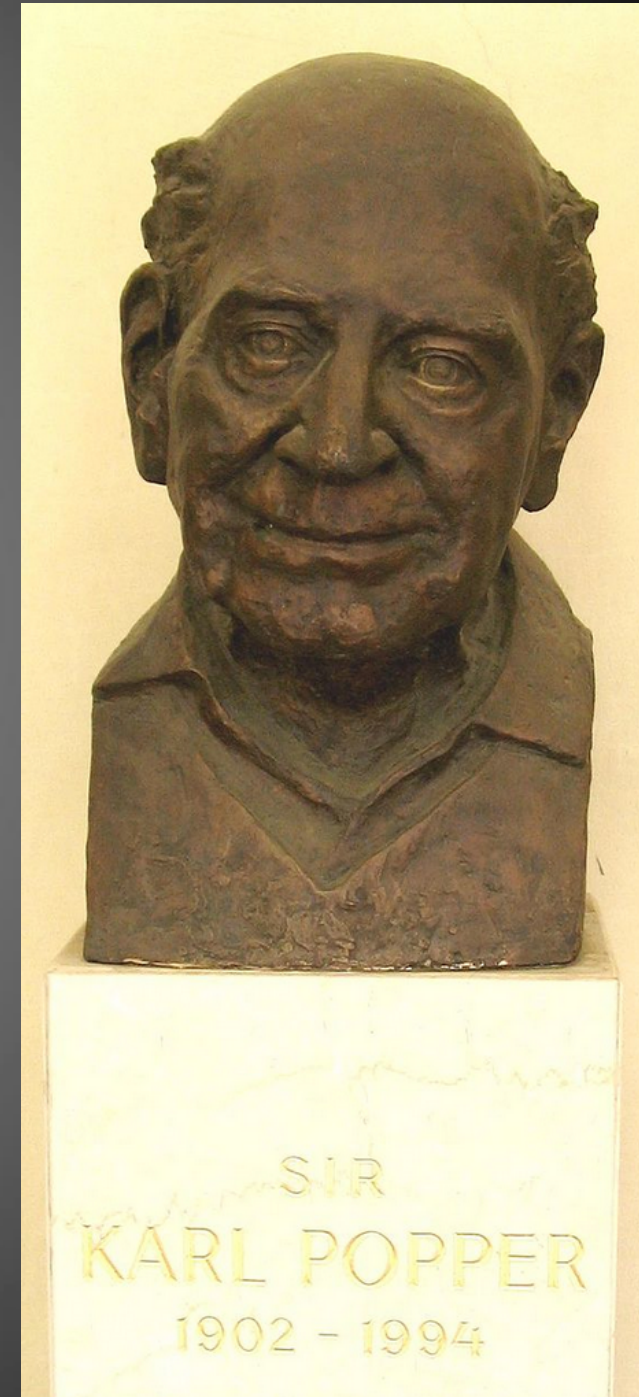
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# *A Puzzling Error of Karl Popper*

Alexey Burov

Fermilab, Oct 8, 2015



also in “After the Open Society”

POPPER: There is the possibility not only of evil but also of ‘radical evil’, a term introduced by Kant.<sup>17</sup> Radical evil is doing to a man that which even the bravest and the best man cannot stand without breaking down in spirit. I don’t think Kant had any idea of what he was talking about. I had no idea before Hitler of what radical evil would mean.

ZERIN: How do you account for the existence of evil?

POPPER: I can’t account for it. It is evil which turns me against God and makes me doubtful whether a God or anything like that exists, and which makes me even more certain that one should not talk about God.

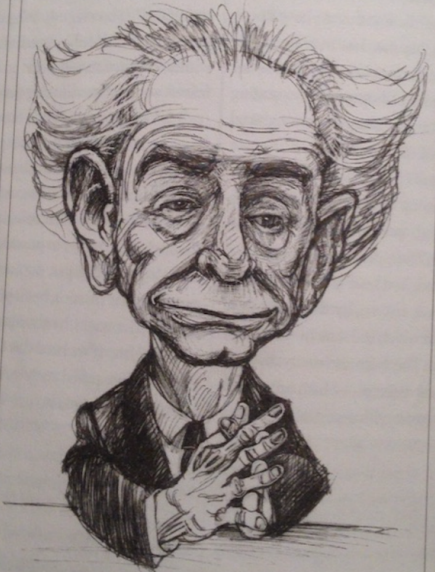
ZERIN: How do you believe that a person should cope with ‘radical evil’?

POPPER: Cope? That’s a dare word. I don’t know. All that we can do is try as far as we can to make people realize by rational means, and by not entirely rational means such as subtle appeals to their feelings, that violence and cruelty should be avoided at any price.

# KARL POPPER ON GOD

*The Lost Interview*

By Edward Zerlin



Karl Popper

Something is wrong in this reference to Kant...

**Radical evil** is a phrase coined by Kant in

Religion within the Bounds of Reason Alone (1793):

“The **depravity of human nature**, then, is not so much to be called badness, if this word is taken in its strict sense, namely, as a disposition (subjective principle of maxims) to adopt the bad, as bad, into one’s maxims as a spring (for that is devilish); but rather perversity of heart, which, on account of the result, is also called a bad heart. This may co-exist with a will good in general, and arises from the frailty of human nature, which is not strong enough to follow its adopted principles, combined with its impurity in not distinguishing the springs (even of well-intentioned actions) from one another by moral rule.”



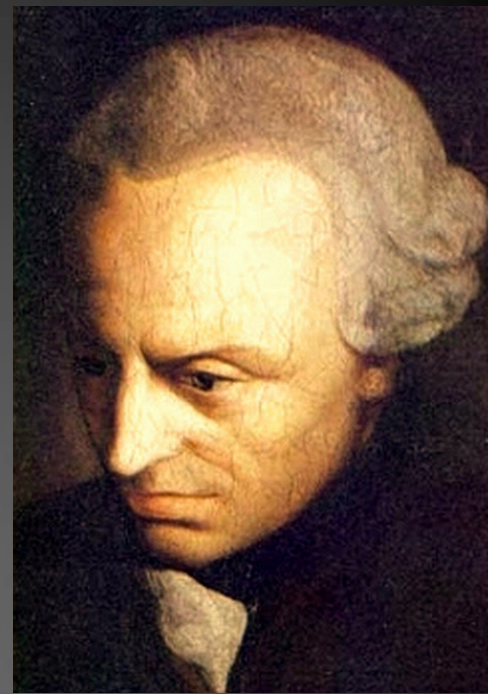
Immanuel Kant  
1724-1804

The human being in whom radical evil dwells is one who “has incorporated into his maxim the (occasional) deviation from” the moral law (Religion, 6: 32):

“...we can call this ground a natural propensity to evil, and, since it must nevertheless always come about through one’s own fault, we can further even call it a **radical innate evil** in human nature (not any the less brought upon us by ourselves).”

**Note: Kant’s radical evil is different from what Popper said to Zerin....** How was it possible?

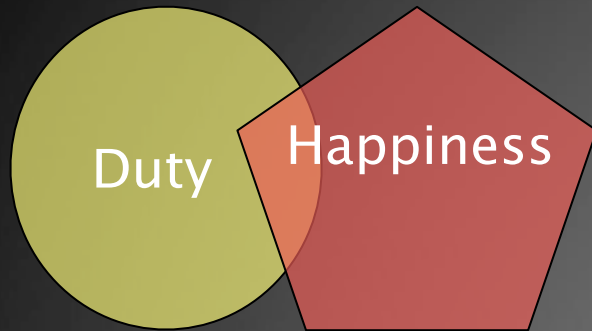
“A member of the English Parliament exclaimed in the heat of debate: “Every man has his price, for which he sells himself.” If this is true (and everyone can decide by himself), if nowhere is a virtue which no level of temptation can overthrow, if whether the good or evil spirit wins us over only depends on which bids the most and affords the promptest pay-off, then, what the Apostle says might indeed hold true of human beings universally, “There is no distinction here, they are all under sin – there is none righteous (in the spirit of the law), no, not one.” ” (Religion...)



Immanuel Kant

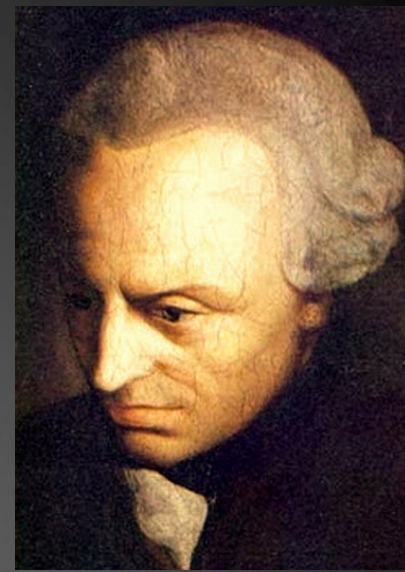
1724-1804

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## Categorical Imperative:

Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law.



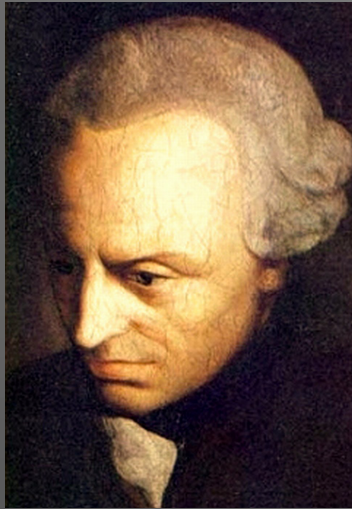
When duty is easy, normal people do not need a special reason to follow its voice. The problem appears when it is hard to follow.

Put yourself, for instance, in a position of a judge under all possible pressures from criminal groups and corrupted authority. On the one side there is justice and the worst threats, on the other—a crooked sentence and good money.

Why should you pay for duty that much? What is the reason to pay the price of life (your own, your family) ??? Do you really owe that much? Owe whom? People? Are you sure you owe people that much?

Beziehungspunkt

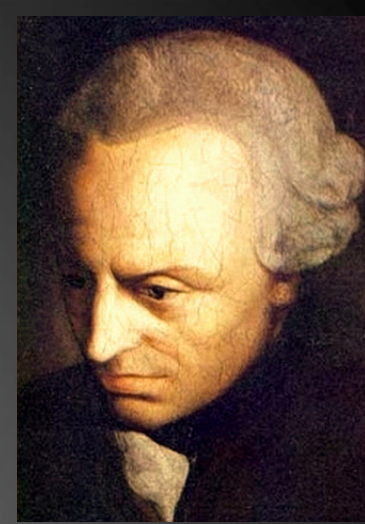
Highest Good



Duty

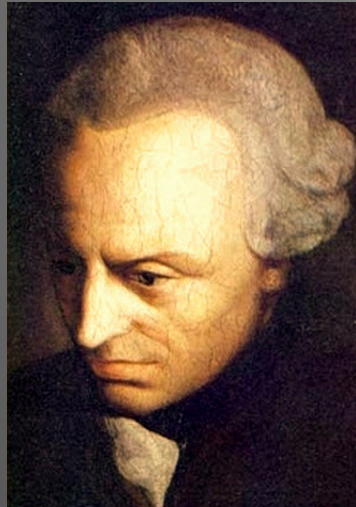
Temptation

Highest Good requires God (the Creator and Heavenly Father) and immortality. Thus, to justify potentially unlimited demands of duty, the trust to God is required. This is Kant's proof of God existence, based on the practical reason.



That which alone can make a world the object of divine decree and the end of creation is Humanity (rational being in general as pertaining to the world) in its full moral perfection, from which happiness follows in the will of the Highest Being directly as from its supreme condition. – This human being, alone pleasing to God, “is in him from all eternity”; the idea of him proceeds from God’s being; he is not, therefore, a created thing but God’s only-begotten Son, “the Word” (the Fiat!) through which all other things are, and without whom nothing that is made would exist (since for him, that is, for a rational being in the world, as can be thought according to its moral determination, everything was made). – “He is the reflection of his glory.” – “In him God loved the world,” and only in him and through the adoption of his dispositions can we hope “to become children of God”.

Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason, pp. 94. Cambridge University Press. Kindle Edition.



Establishing of the holy will results from a mysterious spiritual revolution. The acquisition of the holy disposition through such a revolution requires that we take up the disposition of the human personification of the holy will, present to us in our reason as the archetype of moral perfection, the Son of God. To elevate ourselves to this ideal of moral perfection constitutes our universal human duty.

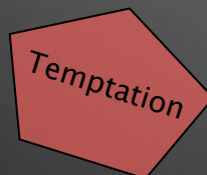
Immanuel Kant: Radical Evil,  
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/rad-evil/>

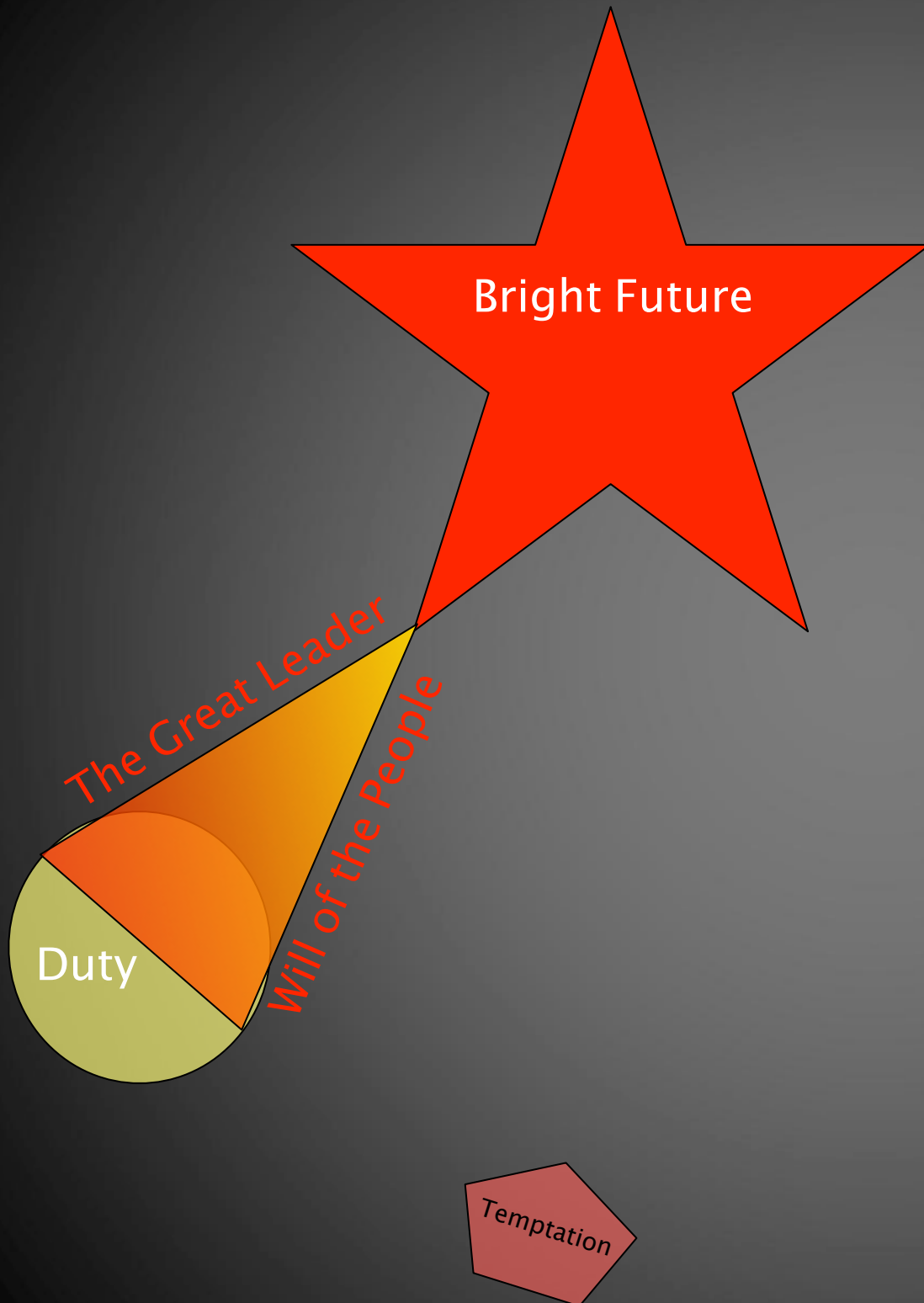




Neither Kant nor anybody else from thinkers of XVIII-XIX centuries foresaw a possibility of tragic utopian transmutations, having apparently the same structure...

Important parts of Kantian moral philosophy were lost though.





Important parts of Kantian moral philosophy were lost:

the freedom of thought as necessary condition of the moral act;

human equality as free moral beings.

How and why did that happen?

We already discussed one of the answers: scientism, the cult of reason (Hayek).

