

IMMANUEL KANT

Religion and Rational Theology

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The end of all things

Translator's introduction

Das Ende aller Dinge was first published in June 1794 in the *Berlinische Monatschrift* 23, pp. 495–522.

By 1792 J. E. Biester, editor of the *Berlinische Monatschrift*, had moved his publication to Jena to avoid the Prussian religious censors. On April 10, 1794, Kant wrote him criticizing the political philosophy of the Hanover conservative August Rehberg and connecting it with the censorship activities of Hermes and Hillmer, who “have taken their positions as overseers of secondary schools and have thereby acquired influence over the universities with respect to how and what is supposed to be taught there.” Then he abruptly ends the letter with this final paragraph: “The essay I will send you soon is entitled ‘The End of All Things,’ which will be partly plaintive and partly funny to read” (AK 11:496–7).

Having endured the difficulties with the censors in getting the *Religion* published, Kant's outlook was anything but sanguine regarding the prospects for free thought and discussion of religious topics in Prussia. “The End of All Things” is a plea for Christians to be true to what is best in their religion by adopting a “liberal” way of thinking; but because it is a plea directed at the Prussian religious authorities, it is one Kant expects to fall on deaf ears. Thus it is couched in the form of a sly, bitter satire, which approaches its political theme only indirectly.

Chiliastic imagery was common at the time. It was used not only by enthusiasts such as Lavater, but also by rationalists, and by the French revolutionaries in particular, who pictured themselves as ushering in a new world by enthroning reason. Kant's aim, as usual, is to bring chiliastic speculation within the bounds of reason. His criticism of those who would meddle in God's affairs is a more or less open criticism of the orthodox in Prussia, who were trying to impose their vision of religious truth by political means. But the choice of the end of the world as his topic might also be seen simply as a way for Kant to express an attitude of black despair regarding the immediate prospects in Prussia for free communication and enlightened education in matters of religion.

In the essay's final pages (8:336–9), Kant rues the counterproductive folly of those who seek to promote Christianity (a religion whose greatness lies in the way it puts love in the service of morality) through the use of earthly threats and rewards, since these means can only corrupt morality

and put an end to love. It is transparent that these criticisms allude to the projects of J. C. Wöllner and his associates; hence Kant could expect this essay only to increase the hostility the authorities had already shown toward him.

When, on May 18, the philosopher finally transmitted to Biester the text of "The End of All Things," he accompanied it with a resigned letter in which he avows that he will "punctiliously obey" any laws which "*command* what is not opposed to my principles," or even those which "*forbid* making known my principles in their entirety, as I have done up to now (and for which I am not sorry in the least)" (AK 11:240-1). These remarks seem already to anticipate the royal reproof of his writings on religion which he was to receive in October of that year, and which led to Kant's promise to the King to refrain from any further writing on religious subjects. The decision to prohibit Kant from writing on religion had been taken by C. G. Woltersdorf, the *Oberkonsistorialrath*, as early as June 1791, and this fact had been reported promptly to Kant by his former student, the royal tutor J. G. Kiesewetter (AK 11:264-6). By 1794 the philosopher must have known that royal action against him could not be delayed much longer.

"The End of All Things" has been translated into English twice previously. The first translation, by Robert E. Anchor, appeared in Lewis White Beck, Emil Fackenheim, and Robert E. Anchor (eds.), *Kant on History* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963). The second, by Ted Humphrey, appeared in Ted Humphrey (ed.), *Perpetual Peace and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1983).

The end of all things

It is a common expression, used chiefly in pious language, to speak of a person who is dying as going *out of time into eternity*.

This expression would in fact say nothing if *eternity* is understood here to mean a time proceeding to infinity; for then the person would indeed never get outside time but would always progress only from one time into another. Thus what must be meant is an *end of all time* along with the person's uninterrupted duration; but this duration (considering its existence as a magnitude) as a magnitude (*duratio Noumenon*) wholly incomparable with time, of which we are obviously able to form no concept (except a merely negative one). This thought has something horrifying about it because it leads us as it were to the edge of an abyss: for anyone who sinks into it no return is possible ("But in that earnest place/ Him who holds nothing back/ Eternity holds fast in its strong arms." Haller);¹ and yet there is something attractive there too: for one cannot cease turning his terrified gaze back to it again and again (*nequeunt expleri corda tuendo*. Virgil).² It is frighteningly *sublime* partly because it is obscure, for the imagination works harder in darkness than it does in bright light. Yet in the end it must also be woven in a wondrous way into universal human reason, because it is encountered among all reasoning peoples at all times, clothed in one way or another. – Now when we pursue the transition from time into eternity (whether or not this idea, considered theoretically as extending cognition, has objective reality), as reason does in a moral regard, then we come up against the *end of all things* as temporal beings and as objects of possible experience – which end, however, in the moral order of ends, is at the same time the beginning of a duration of just those same beings as *supersensible*, and consequently as not standing under conditions of time; thus that duration and its state will be capable of no determination of its nature³ other than a moral one.

8:328

Days are as it were the children of time, because the following day, with what it contains, is an offspring of the previous one. Now just as the last child of its parents is called the youngest child, so the German language likes to call the last day (the point in time which closes all time) the

¹ "They cannot satisfy their hearts with gazing" (Virgil, *Aeneid* 8:265).

² *Beschaffenheit*

youngest day.^c The last day thus still belongs to time, for on it something or other *happens* (and not to eternity, where nothing happens any more, because that would belong to the progress of time): namely, the settling of accounts for human beings, based on their conduct in their whole lifetime. It is a *judgment day*; thus the judgment of grace or damnation by the world's judge is therefore the real^d end of all things in time, and at the same time the beginning of the (blessed or cursed) eternity, in which the lot that has fallen to each remains just as it was in the moment of its pronouncement (of the sentence). Thus the last day also contains in itself simultaneously the *last judgment*. – Now if among the *last things* there should yet be counted the end of the world as it appears in its present shape, namely the falling of the stars from heaven, considered as a vault, and the collapse of this heaven itself (or its disappearance, as a scroll when it is rolled up),² both being consumed in flames, with the creation of a new earth and a new heaven as the seat of the blessed and of hell as that of the damned,³ then that judgment day would obviously not be the last day; instead, different days would follow upon it, one after another. Yet since the idea of an end of all things takes its origin from reasonings not about the *physical* but rather about the *moral course* of things in the world, and is occasioned only by it, while the latter alone can be referred to the supersensible (which is to be understood only morally) – and it is the same with the idea of eternity – so consequently the representation of those last things which are supposed to come *after* the last day are to be regarded only as a way of making sensible this latter together with its moral consequences, which are otherwise not theoretically comprehensible to us.

But it is to be noted that from the most ancient times there have been two systems pertaining to the future eternity: one is that of the *unitists*,^e awarding eternal blessedness to all human beings (after they have been purified by a longer or shorter penance), while the other is the system of the *dualists*,* which awards blessedness to *some* who have been elected,

* In the ancient Persian religion (of Zoroaster), such a system was grounded on the assumption of an eternal struggle between two original beings, the good principle Ormuzd and the evil Ahriman. – It is strange that in the naming of these two original beings the language of two lands distant from each other, and still farther removed from the present seat of the German language, is German. I remember reading in Sonnerat that in Ava (the land of the Burmese) the good principle^f is called “Godeman”^g (which appears also to lie in the name *Darius Codomannus*; and the word “Ahriman” sounds very similar to [the German for] “wicked man”^h – present day Persian also contains a lot of originally German words; so it ^c *Jüngster Tag* is the German term for what we call (the biblical) “judgment day”; this term will be translated henceforth as “last day.”

^d *eigentliche*

^e *Unitarier*

^f *Princip*

^g “Godeman” sounds similar to the German “*guter Mann*”

^h *arge Mann*

but eternal damnation to all *the rest*. For there would probably be no room for a system according to which all were predestinedⁱ to be *damned*, because then there would be no ground which could justify their being created at all; but the *annihilation* of all would indicate a defective wisdom, one which is dissatisfied with its own work and knows no other way of remedying the flaws except to destroy it. – Just the same difficulty stands in the way of the dualists as the obstacle to thinking the eternal damnation of everyone; for why, one could ask, were even a few created – Why even a single individual? – if he is supposed to exist only to be rejected for eternity? For that is worse than never having been at all.

Indeed, as far as we have insight into it, as far as we can investigate it ourselves, the dualistic system (but only under *one* supremely good original being) has – for the *practical* aims of every human being judging himself (though not for being warranted to judge others) – a preponderant ground for it: for as far as he is acquainted with himself, reason leaves him no other prospect for eternity than that which his conscience opens up for him at the end of this life on the basis of the course of his life as he has led it up to then. But this ground, as a judgment of mere reason, is far from sufficient for making this into a *dogma*, hence a theoretical proposition which is valid in itself (objectively). For what human being knows^j himself or others through and through? Who knows enough to decide whether if we subtract from the causes of a presumably well-led course of life everything which is called the merit of fortune – such as an innately kind temperament, the naturally greater strength of his higher powers (of the understanding and reason, to tame his drives), besides that also his opportunity, the times when contingency fortunately saved him from many temptations which struck another – who knows if he separates all these from his actual character (from which he must necessarily subtract them if he is to evaluate it properly, since as gifts of fortune he cannot ascribe them to his own merit) – who will then decide, I say, whether before the all-seeing eye of a world-judge one human being has any superiority over another regarding his inner moral worth? And, on the basis of this superficial self-knowledge,^k might it not perhaps be absurd self-conceit to pronounce any judgment at all to one's own advantage concerning one's own moral worth or that of others (or of the fates they deserve)? – Hence the unitist's system, as much as the dualist's, considered as dogma, seems to transcend completely the speculative faculty of human reason; and everything brings us back to limiting those ideas of reason

8:330

might be a task for those who do research into antiquity to use the guiding thread of *linguistic* affinity to inquire into the origin of the present day *religious* conceptions of many peoples. (See Sonnerat's *Travels*, Book 4, Chapter 2, B.)⁴

ⁱ *bestimmt*^j *kennnt*^k *Selbsterkenntnis*

absolutely to the conditions of their practical use only. For we see nothing before us now that could teach us about our fate in a future world except the judgment of our own conscience, i.e. what our present moral state, as far as we are acquainted with it, lets us judge rationally concerning it: namely, that those principles^l we have found ruling in ourselves during the course of our life (whether they be good or evil) will continue after death, without our having the slightest ground to assume that they will alter in that future. Hence for eternity we would have to anticipate for ourselves the consequences suiting that merit or guilt under the dominion of the good or evil principle; in this respect, consequently, it is wise to act *as if* another life – and the moral state in which we end this one, along with its consequences in entering on that other life – is unalterable. Thus from a practical point of view,^m the system to be assumed will have to be the dualistic one – especially since the unitistic system appears to lull us too much into an indifferent sense of security – yet we might not try to make out which of the two systems deserves superiority from a theoretical and merely speculative point of view.

8:331 But why do human beings expect *an end of the world at all*? And if this is conceded to them, why must it be a terrible end (for the greatest part of the human race)? . . . The ground of the first point appears to lie in the fact that reason says to them that the duration of the world has worth only insofar as the rational beings in it conform to the final end of their existence; if, however, this is not supposed to be achieved, then creation itself appears purposeless to them, like a play having no resolution and affording no cognition of any rational aim. The latter point is grounded on our opinion about the corrupt natureⁿ of the human race,* which corrup-

* In all ages self-styled sages (or philosophers), without paying enough attention to the worth of the disposition to good in human nature, have exhausted themselves in repellent, partly disgusting parables, which represent our earthly world, the dwelling place of humanity, as contemptible: (1) As an inn (caravansarai), as that dervish regards it, where everyone arriving there on his life's journey must be prepared to be driven out soon by his successor; (2) as a *penitentiary* – an opinion to which the Brahmanists, Tibetans and other sages of the Orient (and even Plato) are attached – a place of chastisement and purification for fallen spirits driven out of heaven, who are now human or animal souls; (3) as a *madhouse*, where each not only annihilates his own intents, but where each adds every thinkable sorrow to the other, and moreover holds the skill and power to do this to be the greatest honor; finally (4), as a *cloaca*, where all the excrement from the other worlds has been deposited. The latter notion is in a certain way original, and for it we have a Persian wit to thank; he transposed paradise, the dwelling place of the first human couple, into heaven, where there was a garden with ample trees richly provided with splendid fruits, whose digested residue, after the couple's enjoyment of them, vanished through an unnoticed evaporation; the exception was a single tree in the middle of the garden, which bore a fruit which was delicious but did not dry up in this way. As it now happened, our first parents now lusted after it, despite the prohibition

^l *Principien*

^m *Absicht*

ⁿ *Beschaffenheit*

tion is great to the point of hopelessness; this makes for an end, and indeed a terrible one, the only end (for the greatest part of humanity) that accords with highest wisdom and justice, employing any respectable standard. – Hence the *omens of the last day* (for where the imagination has been excited by great expectations, how can there fail to be signs and miracles?) are all of a terrible kind. Some see them in increasing injustice, oppression of the poor by the arrogant indulgence of the rich, and the general loss of fidelity and faith; or in bloody wars igniting all over the earth, and so forth; in a word, in the moral fall and the rapid advance of all vices together with their accompanying ills, such as earlier times – they think – have never seen. Others, by contrast, [find them] in unusual alterations in nature – in earthquakes, storms and floods, or comets and atmospheric signs.

8:332

In fact it is not without cause that human beings feel their existence a burden, even if they themselves are the cause. The ground of this appears to me to lie in this. – In the progress of the human race the culture of talents, skill and taste (with their consequence, luxury) naturally runs ahead of the development of morality; and this state is precisely the most burdensome and dangerous for morality just as it is for physical well-being, because the needs grow stronger than the means to satisfy them. But the moral disposition of humanity – which (like Horace's *poene pede claudio*)^o always limps behind, tripping itself up in its hasty course and often stumbling – will (as, under a wise world governor, one may hope) one day overtake it; and thus, even according to the experimental proofs of the superior morals of our age as compared with all previous ones, one should nourish the hope that the last day might sooner come on the scene with Elijah's ascension⁵ than with the like descent of Korah's troops into hell,⁶ and bring with it the end of all things on earth. Yet this heroic faith in virtue does not seem, subjectively, to have such a generally powerful influence for converting people's minds as a scene accompanied by terrors, which is thought of as preceding the last things.

. . .

Note. Here we have to do (or are playing) merely with ideas created by reason itself, whose objects (if they have any) lie wholly beyond our field of vision; although they are transcendent for speculative cognition, they

against tasting it, and so there was no other way to keep heaven from being polluted except to take the advice of one of the angels who pointed out to them the distant earth, with the words: "There is the toilet of the whole universe," and then carried them there in order to relieve themselves, but then flew back to heaven leaving them behind. That is how the human race is supposed to have arisen on earth.

^o "Punishment with a lame foot"; the line actually reads: *Raro antecedentem scelestum/ Deseruit pede Poena claudio* ("Rarely does punishment fail to catch the guilty, though it runs with a lame foot"), Horace, *Odes* 3.2.32.

8:333

are not to be taken as empty, but with a practical intent they are made available to us by lawgiving reason itself, yet not in order to brood over their objects as to what they are in themselves and in their nature, but rather how we have to think of them in behalf of moral principles directed toward the final end of all things (through which, though otherwise they would be entirely empty, acquire objective practical reality): hence we have a *free* field before us, this product of our own reason, the universal concept of an end of all things, to divide it up and to classify what stands under it according to the relation it has to our faculty of cognition.

Accordingly, the whole will be brought about, divided up and represented under three divisions: (1) the *natural** end of all things according to the order of divine wisdom's moral ends, which we therefore (with a practical intent) can *very well understand*; (2) their *mystical* (supernatural) end in the order of efficient causes, of which we *understand nothing*, and (3) the *contranatural* (perverse) end of all things, which comes from us when we *misunderstand* the final end; the first of these has already been discussed, and what follows now is the remaining two.

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In the *Apocalypse* (10:5–6): “An angel lifts his hand up to heaven and swears by the one who lives from eternity to eternity who has created heaven, etc.: *that henceforth time shall be no more.*”⁷

If one does not assume that this angel “with his voice of seven thunders” (v. 3) wanted to cry nonsense, then he must have meant that henceforth there shall be no *alteration*; for if there were still alteration in the world, then time would also exist, because alteration can take place only in time and is not thinkable without presupposing it.

8:334

Now here is represented an end of all things as objects of sense – of which we cannot form any concept at all, because we will inevitably entangle ourselves in contradictions as soon as we try to take a single step beyond the sensible world into the intelligible; that happens here since the moment which constitutes the end of the first world is also supposed to be the beginning of the other one, hence the former is brought into the same temporal series with the latter, which contradicts itself.

But we also say that we think of a duration as *infinite* (as an eternity) not because we have any determinate concept of its magnitude – for that is impossible, since time is wholly lacking as a measure – but rather because that concept – since where there is time, *no end* can come about – is merely a negative one of eternal duration, by which we come not one step

* *Natural* (*formaliter*) means what follows necessarily according to laws of a certain order of whatever sort, hence also the moral order (hence not always the physical order). Opposed to it is the *nonnatural*, which can be either supernatural or contranatural. What is necessary from *natural causes* is also represented as maternally natural (physically necessary).

further in our cognition, but we will have said only that reason in its (practical) intent toward its final end can never have done enough on the path of constant alterations; and if reason attempts this with the principle^p of rest and immutability of the state of beings in the world, the result is equally unsatisfactory in respect of its *theoretical* use; on the contrary, it would fall into total thoughtlessness, and nothing would remain for it but to think as the final end an alteration, proceeding to infinity (in time) in a constant progression, in which the *disposition* (which is not a phenomenon, like the former, but something supersensible, hence not alterable with time) remains the same and is persisting. The rule for the practical use of reason in accord with this idea thus says no more than that we must take our maxims as if, in all alterations from good to better going into infinity, our moral condition, regarding its disposition (the *homo Noumenon*, "whose change takes place in heaven") were not subject to any temporal change at all.

But that at some point a time will arrive in which all alteration (and with it, time itself) ceases – this is a representation which outrages the imagination. For then the whole of nature will be rigid and as it were petrified: the last thought, the last feeling in the thinking subject will then stop and remain forever the same without any change. For a being which can become conscious of its existence and the magnitude of this existence (as duration) only in time, such a life – if it can even be called a life – appears equivalent to annihilation, because in order to think itself into such a state it still has to think something in general, but *thinking* contains a reflecting, which can occur only in time. – Hence the inhabitants of the other world will be represented, according to their different dwelling places (heaven or hell), as striking up always the same song, their "Alleluia!," or else eternally the same wailing tones ([Rev.] 19:1–6; 20:15): by which is indicated the total lack of all change in their state.

8:335

Likewise this idea, however far it surpasses our power to grasp it, is very closely related to reason in its practical reference. Even assuming a person's moral-physical state here in life at its best – namely as a constant progression and approach to the highest good (marked out for him as a goal) –, he still (even with a consciousness of the unalterability of his disposition) cannot combine it with the prospect of *satisfaction* in an eternally enduring alteration of his state (the moral as well as the physical). For the state in which he now is will always remain an ill compared with a better one which he always stands ready to enter; and the representation of an infinite progression toward the final end is nevertheless at the same time a prospect^q on an infinite series of ills which, even though they may be outweighed by a greater good, do not allow for the possibility of

^p *Princip*^q *Prospect*

contentment; for he can think that only by supposing that the *final end* will at sometime be *attained*.

8:336 Now the person who broods on this will fall into *mysticism* (for reason, because it is not easily satisfied with its immanent, i.e. practical use, but gladly ventures into the transcendent, also has its mysteries), where reason does not understand either itself or what it wants, but prefers to indulge in enthusiasm rather than – as seems fitting for an intellectual inhabitant of a sensible world – to limit itself within the bounds of the latter. From this comes the monstrous system of Lao-kiun⁸ concerning the *highest good*, that it consists in *nothing*, i.e. in the consciousness of *feeling* oneself swallowed up in the abyss of the Godhead by flowing together with it, and hence by the annihilation of one's personality; in order to have a presentiment of this state Chinese philosophers, sitting in dark rooms with their eyes closed, exert themselves to think and sense their own nothingness. Hence the *pantheism* (of the Tibetans and other oriental peoples); and in consequence from its philosophical sublimation *Spinozism* is begotten, which is closely akin to the very ancient *system of emanation* of human souls from the Godhead (and their *final* reabsorption into it). All this because people would like at last to have an *eternal tranquillity* in which to rejoice, constituting for them a supposedly blessed end of all things; but really⁷ this is a concept in which the understanding is simultaneously exhausted and all thinking itself has an end.

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The end of all things which go through the hands of human beings, even when their purposes are good, is *folly*, i.e. the use of means to their ends which are directly opposed to these ends. *Wisdom*, that is, practical reason using means commensurate to the final end of all things – the highest good – in full accord with the corresponding rules of measure, dwells in God alone; and the only thing which could perhaps be called human wisdom is acting in a way which is not visibly contrary to the idea of that [divine] wisdom. But this assurance against folly, which the human being may hope to attain only through attempts and frequent alteration of his plans, is rather a “gem which the best person can only follow after, even though he *may* never *apprehend* it”;⁸ but he may never let the self-indulgent persuasion befall him – still less may he proceed according to it – that he *has grasped* it. – Hence too the projects – altering from age to age and often absurd – of finding suitable means to make *religion in a whole people pure and at the same time powerful*, so that one can well cry out: Poor mortals, with you nothing is constant except inconstancy!⁹

⁷ *eigentlich*

⁸ cf. Philippians 3:12: “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect, but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which I also am apprehended of Christ Jesus.”

If, meanwhile, these attempts have for once finally prospered far enough that the community is susceptible and inclined to give a hearing not merely to the received pious doctrines but also to a practical reason which has been illuminated by them (which is also absolutely necessary for a religion); if the sages (of a human sort) among the people – not through an undertaking among themselves (as a clergy) but as fellow citizens – draw up projects and for the most part agree – which proves in a way that is above suspicion that they are dealing with the truth – and if the people at large also takes an interest in it (even if not in every detail) through a need, generally felt and not based on authority, directed to the necessary cultivation of its moral disposition: then nothing seems to be more advisable than to let those sages go ahead and pursue their course, since for once, as regards the *idea* they are following, they are on a good path; but as regards the success of the means they have chosen to the best final end, since this – as it may turn out in the course of nature – always remains uncertain, it is advisable always to leave it to *providence*. For however incredulous one may be, one must – where it is absolutely impossible to foresee with certainty the success of certain means taken according to all human wisdom (which, if they are to deserve their name, must proceed solely toward morality) – believe in a practical way in a concurrence of divine wisdom with the course of nature, unless one would rather just give up one’s final end. – Of course it will be objected: It has often been said that the present plan is the best, one must stay with it from now on, that is the state of things for eternity. “Whoever (according to this concept) is good, he is good for always, and whoever (opposed to him) is evil, is evil for ever” (Rev. 22:11): just as if eternity, and with it the end of all things, might now have already made its entrance; – and likewise since then new plans, among which the newest are often only the restoration of an old one, have always been trotted out; and henceforth too there will be no lack of *more ultimate* projects.

I am so very conscious of my incapacity to make a new and fortunate attempt here that I, who obviously possess no great power of invention, would rather advise that we leave matters as they last stood, and as for nearly a generation they have proven themselves tolerably good in their consequences. But since this may not be the opinion of men who are either of great or else of enterprising spirit, let me modestly note not so much what they would have to do as what they will have to take care that they will be up against, because otherwise they would act against their own intention (even if that were of the best).

Christianity has, besides the greatest respect that the holiness of its laws irresistibly instills, something about it which is *worthy of love*. (Here I mean not the worthiness of love of the person who obtained it for us with great sacrifices, but that of the cause itself: namely, the moral constitution which he founded, for the former [worthiness] may be inferred only from

8:338

the latter.) Respect is without doubt what is primary, because without it no true love can occur, even though one can harbor great respect for a person without love. But if it is a matter not merely of the representation of duty but also of following duty, if one asks about the *subjective* ground of actions from which, if one may presuppose it, the first thing we may expect is what a person *will do* – and not a matter merely of the *objective* ground of *what he ought to do* – then love, as a free assumption of the will of another into one’s maxims, is an indispensable complement to the imperfection of human nature (of having to be necessitated to that which reason prescribes through the law). For what one does not do with liking¹ he does in such a niggardly fashion – also probably with sophisticated evasions from the command of duty – that the latter as an incentive, without the contribution of the former, is not very much to be counted on.

Now if to Christianity – in order to make good on it – one adds any sort of authority (even a divine one), even if one’s intention in doing so is well-meaning and the end is actually just as good, then its worthiness to be loved has nevertheless disappeared: for it is a contradiction to *command* not only that someone should do something but that he should do it *with liking*.

Christianity has the intention of furthering love out of concern for the observance of duty in general; and it produces it too, because its founder speaks not in the quality of a commander demanding obedience to *his will*, but in that of a friend of humanity who appeals to the hearts of his fellow human beings on behalf of their own well-understood will, i.e. of the way they would of themselves voluntarily act if they examined themselves properly.

8:339

Thus it is from the *liberal* way of thinking – equally distant from a slavish cast of mind and from licentiousness – that Christianity expects the *effect* of its doctrine, through which it may win over the hearts of human beings when their understanding has already been illuminated by the representation of their duty’s law. The feeling of freedom in the choice of the final end is what makes the legislation worthy of its love. – Thus although the teacher of this end also announces *punishments*, that is not to be understood – or at least it is not suited to the proper nature² of Christianity so to explain it – as though these should become the incentives for performing what follows from its commands; for to that extent it would cease to be worthy of love. Rather, one may interpret this only as a loving warning, arising out of the beneficence of the lawgiver, of preventing the harm that would have to arise inevitably from the transgression of the law (for: *lex est res surda et inexorabilis*. Livy.);³ because it is not

¹ *gern*

² *eigentümliche Beschaffenheit*

³ “The law is deaf and inexorable”; the whole passage reads: *Leges rem surdam, inexorabilem esse, salubriorem, melioremque inopi quam potenti* (“The laws are deaf things, inexorable, more salutary and better to the powerless than to the powerful”); Livy, *History of Rome* 2.3.4.

Christianity as a freely assumed maxim of life but the law which threatens here; and the law, as an unchanging order lying in the nature of things, is not to be left up to even the creator's arbitrary will^m to decide its consequences thus or otherwise.

If Christianity promises *rewards* (e.g. "Be joyful and consoled, for everything will be repaid you in heaven"),¹⁰ this must not be interpreted – according to the liberal way of thinking – as if it were an offer, through which the human being would be *hired*, as it were, to a good course of life; for then Christianity would, once again, not be in itselfⁿ worthy of love. Only the expectation^y of such actions arising from unselfish motives can inspire respect in the person toward the one who has the expectation; but without respect there is no true love. Thus one must not take that promise in this sense, as if the rewards are to be taken for the incentives of the actions. Love, through which a liberal way of thinking is bound to the benefactor, is not directed toward the good received by the needy person, but instead merely to the benefactor's generosity of *will* which is inclined to confer it, even if he does not have the resources or is prevented from carrying it out by other motives which come from a regard for what is universally best for the world.

That is the moral worthiness to be loved which Christianity carries with it, which still glimmers through the many external constraints which may be added to it by the frequent change of opinions; and it is this which has preserved it in the face of the disinclination it would otherwise have encountered, and (what is remarkable) this shows itself in all the brighter light in an age of the greatest enlightenment that was ever yet among human beings.

If Christianity should ever come to the point where it ceased to be worthy of love (which could very well transpire if instead of its gentle spirit it were armed with commanding authority), then, because there is no neutrality in moral things (still less a coalition between opposed principles^z), a disinclination and resistance to it would become the ruling mode of thought among people; and the *Antichrist*, who is taken to be the forerunner of the last day, would begin his – albeit short – regime (presumably based on fear and self-interest); but then, because Christianity, though supposedly *destined* to be the world religion, would not be *favoured* by fate to become it, *the* (perverted) *end of all things*, in a moral respect, would arrive.

^m *Willkür*

ⁿ *für sich*

^y *Ansinnen*

^z *Principien*

