1

The Imanuen people did not last particularly long, as peoples go. Some peculiarity of their culture, or perhaps even of their biology, had shaped them into a race perfectly suited to exist in isolation, with only their own kind for company: each and every member, without exception, behaved exclusively deontologically. Not a one of them ever once went against the principle of the categorical imperative - that is, that one must only act according to rules which could be willed to be universal. One cannot, for example, wish for murder to be a universally-committed act; nor, as a less extreme example, can one wish that every person should be lying universally, for this would render ‘lying’ and ‘truth’ meaningless. This morality does not include in its accountings the consequences of acts, only the act-in-itself.

On the matter of how the Imanuen came to act this way, no report is definitive. There have been hypothesised explanations: of neurology, that perhaps their brains were simply constructed in such a way as to be completely unable even to conceive of consequentialism, or ‘greater good’; of religion, that a firm and universally-held extranatural belief would not allow them to act otherwise; of some other cultural directive so immutable that not a single individual ever so much as dreamed of contravention. None is verifiable, unfortunately.

What is determinable is that the Imanuen went through periods of prosperity and of misfortune. Evidently their inability to act in even the smallest way against their shared moral code fostered enormous interpersonal trust; no Imanuen ever stole from, murdered, lied to, or so much as envied another of their number. In times during which there were no external threats, they were the most co-operative and flourishing of races. The impossibility of an act of sacrifice, however - of causing pain to the one to save the many - perhaps inevitably caused sudden and long-lasting crises. It appears that one early nadir in population density may have been caused by a reluctance to inoculate; of vaccinations, the Imanuen were aware, but the small pain caused by the injection was impossible for them to knowingly administer. Thereafter we can induce that, while they maintained the overall inability to do harm, they reframed their understanding of the act of vaccination: while they could not will universal pain, they *could* will this more specific act of initially-painful medicine.

The end came when an outsider stumbled across an Imanuen settlement at the border of their territory. In pain and fear, the newcomer sought shelter; the Imanuen, as they were compelled to do, took him in and aided him. His pursuers, a marauding band from a nearby tribe, soon found the settlement and asked the Imanuen where they could find the man they hunted. The Imanuen could not lie, and so they told the newcomers, who dragged the man away and killed him brutally before his own people, the Jesmal: the hunters had hoped for some time to kill this man, who was a lord of the Jesmal, because the latter people had once unknowingly killed a horse belonging to them.

The Jesmal, who had by far the greatest weapons, technology, and numbers of any group in the region, immediately killed the entire tribe; then they slaughtered every single member of the Imanuen for facilitating the death of their leader.

One imagines that the Imanuen attempted to defend their own lives - that is certainly an act which could be willed universal - but with no capacity to do harm to their foes, defeat was more than inevitable.

2

The above text appears in three places.

First, in a single defective (technically, but I think that fails to capture the fact that it's also *far more interesting*) copy of a single edition of the Encyclopaedia Arthropa - an 1832 fifth edition, in the 'He-Ko' volume. That text has belonged to the library of Novosibirsk State University, in Siberia, since shortly after the university's establishment in 1959, and very few people have ever been to see it.

The second is as an appendix in an independently-published thesis, '*On Homogeneity of Morality in Isolated Cultures*', by an otherwise unremarkable Dutch scholar (never actually earned a doctorate, let alone been tenured: an *Internet academic* only) named Alexander de Vries. De Vries has verifiably and categorically never even heard of the Encyclopedia Arthropa, never mind read it. His appendix cites independent research which has never been possible for a third party to locate, and so the prevailing theory is that his account is pure fiction.

The third instantiation of the text is an arrangement of small stones in my back garden. I went outside one day - I'd mowed the lawn and swept it clean of leaves and other detritus only the afternoon before - and found thousands of tiny rocks lined up to form the words, punctuation and all. I ought to note that I live alone, in a house by the moor with no neighbours for at least six or seven miles.

What are we to make of this? The Arthropa mentions no sources, but then this is far from unusual; none of its entries include references, with the foreword asserting the text's superiority as a compendium of first-hand original research and discovery. It is the only physical volume in existence to make so much as a mention of anything remotely alike to the Imanuen (the other mentioned race, the Jesmal, are also conspicuously absent from any historical or anthropological report). The peculiarity of it is less the account of the Imanuen than it is the writing style: there is no doubt that this volume is indeed an 1832 original, and yet the language is much more modern than ought to be expected. The book in fact predates the word *vaccination* (and indeed *inoculation* when used in the same sense, not to mention the allusion to neurology), and yet employs it.

De Vries' version (I almost called it a *recreation*, but there is no doubt that his identical text was produced entirely as an original work of his own devising) is perhaps less surprising, but equally peculiar. We might think that the Imanuen are intended to be some sort of satirical presentation of the philosophy of Kant - perhaps the most famous proponent of the deontological morality which defines the race - or a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* against that philosopher, and yet de Vries' other works hold Kant almost in reverence, as

unassailable by reason or by parody. That said, although the Imanuen are wiped out in the story, perhaps de Vries intends us to see them as heroic for keeping to their superior morality. Consider the following passage from de Vries:

'*... with no capacity to do harm to their foes, defeat was more than inevitable*.'

Here de Vries chooses to refer to the destruction of the Imanuen as a gallant refusal to 'do harm', to lower themselves to a lesser standard than their perfect morality, and thus frames their 'defeat' as a heroic tragedy. Compare the passage in the Arthropa:

'*... with no capacity to do harm to their foes, defeat was more than inevitable.*'

You will note that the Arthropa text is more laconic, more judgemental: one can almost hear the disdain when the author describes the Imanuen extinction event as 'more than inevitable', as if scorning the fact that such a race should ever have existed in the first instance.

It is exceptionally difficult to determine from the text precisely when or where the Imanuen people are supposed to have existed. De Vries' prose, resembling a parable, and its placement as an appendix rather than in the main text of his thesis leads me to think that his text is a fiction designed to illustrate a point by analogy. The language of the Arthropa entry (while, I remind myself, in all respects identical) is terribly distinct from de Vries': out of place when compared to the rest of the volume, which uses contemporary grammar - yet the format of the entry is that of the Arthropa's usual narrative account of a verifiable event, and an actual society.

I find myself reading the Arthropa version, therefore, as a historical text. It is of course to be judged as we would judge other accounts of history - can we corroborate the account? - but it is undoubtedly an 1832 piece of writing and I am inclined to think that the publisher believed it to be truthful. I conversely read de Vries as presenting a thought experiment of sorts, and I think his version is the richer for its implied references to modern philosophical thought, which the Arthropa of course lacks.

As for the arrangement of stones in my garden, I cannot conceive that that could possibly have any meaning whatsoever.