

## Excerpts from English translation

We have established that respectable people are deeply attracted to crime, though of course only in their imagination. We might add that criminals, to hear them talk, would almost without exception like to be regarded as respectable people. So we might arrive at a definition: Crimes are the concentrated form, within sinners, of everything other people work off in little irregularities, in their imagination and in innumerable petty everyday acts and attitudes of spite and viciousness. We could also say: Crimes are in the air and simply seek the path of least resistance, which leads them to certain individuals. We could even say that while they are the acts of individuals who are incapable of behaving morally, in the main they're the condensed expression of some kind of general human maladjustment where the distinction between good and evil is concerned. This is what has imbued us from our youth with the critical spirit our contemporaries have never been able to get beyond!"

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Most of us may not believe in the story of a Devil to whom one can sell one's soul, but those who must know something about the soul (considering that as clergymen, historians, and artists they draw a good income from it) all testify that the soul has been destroyed by mathematics and that mathematics is the source of an evil intelligence that while making man the lord of the earth has also made him the slave of his machines. The inner drought, the dreadful blend of acuity in matters of detail and indifference toward the whole, man's monstrous abandonment in a desert of details, his restlessness, malice, unsurpassed callousness, moneygrubbing, coldness, and violence, all so characteristic of our times, are by these accounts solely the consequence of damage done to the soul by keen logical thinking! Even back when Ulrich first turned to mathematics there were already those who predicted the collapse of European civilization because no human faith, no love, no simplicity, no goodness, dwelt any longer in man. These people had all, typically, been poor mathematicians as young people and at school. This later put them in a position to prove that mathematics, the mother of natural science and grandmother of technology, was also the primordial mother of the spirit that eventually gave rise to poison gas and warplanes.

The only people who actually lived in ignorance of these dangers were the mathematicians themselves and their disciples the scientists, whose souls were as unaffected by all this as if they were racing cyclists pedaling away for dear life, blind to everything in the world except the black wheel of the rider in front of them. But one thing, on the other hand, could safely be said about Ulrich: he loved mathematics be-

cause of the kind of people who could not endure it. He was in love with science not so much on scientific as on human grounds. He saw that in all the problems that come within its orbit, science thinks differently from the laity. If we translate "scientific outlook" into "view of life," "hypothesis" into "attempt," and "truth" into "action," then there would be no notable scientist or mathematician whose life's work, in courage and revolutionary impact, did not far outmatch the greatest deeds of history. The man has not yet been born who could say to his followers: "You may steal, kill, fornicate - our teaching is so strong that it will transform the cesspool of your sins into clear, sparkling mountain streams." But in science it happens every few years that something till then held to be in error suddenly revolutionizes the field, or that some dim and disdained idea becomes the ruler of a new realm of thought. Such events are not merely upheavals but lead us upward like a Jacob's ladder. The life of science is as strong and carefree and glorious as a fairy tale. And Ulrich felt: People simply don't realize it, they have no idea how much thinking can be done already; if they could be taught to think a new way, they would change their lives.

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Anyone who came up against this face for the first time, a face blessed by God with every sign of goodness, would stop as if rooted to the spot, because Moosbrugger was usually flanked by two armed guards, his hands shackled with a small, strong steel chain, its grip held by one of his escorts.

When he noticed anyone staring at him a smile would pass over his broad, good-natured face with the unkempt hair and a mustache and the little chin tuft. He wore a short black jacket with light gray trousers, his bearing was military, and he planted his feet wide apart; but it was that smile that most fascinated the reporters in the courtroom. It might be an embarrassed smile or a cunning smile, an ironic, malicious, pained, mad, bloodthirsty, or terrifying smile: they were groping visibly for contradictory expressions and seemed to be searching desperately in that smile for something they obviously could find nowhere else in the man's entire upright appearance.

For Moosbrugger had killed a woman, a prostitute of the lowest type, in a horrifying manner. The reporters described in detail a knife wound in the throat from the larynx to the back of the neck, also the two stab wounds in the breast that penetrated the heart, and the two in the back on the left side, and how both breasts were sliced through so that they could almost be lifted off. The reporters had expressed their revulsion at this, but they did not stop until they had counted thirty-five stabs in the

belly and explained the deep slash that reached from the navel to the sacrum, continuing up the back in numerous lesser cuts, while the throat showed marks of strangulation. From such horrors they could not find their way back to Moosbrugger's good-natured face, although they were themselves good-natured men who had nevertheless described what had happened in a factual, expert manner and, evidently, in breathless excitement. They hardly availed themselves of even the most obvious explanation, that the man before them was insane - for Moosbrugger had already been in various mental hospitals several times for similar crimes - even though a good reporter is very well informed on such questions these days; it looked as though they were still reluctant to give up the idea of the villain, to banish the incident from their own world into the world of the insane. Their attitude was matched by that of the psychiatrists, who had already declared him normal just as often as they had declared him not accountable for his actions. There was also the amazing fact that no sooner had they become known than Moosbrugger's pathological excesses were regarded as "finally something interesting for a change" by thousands of people who deplore the sensationalism of the press, from busy officeholders to fourteen-year-old sons to housewives befogged by their domestic cares. While these people of course sighed over such a monstrosity, they were nevertheless more deeply preoccupied with it than with their own life's work. Indeed, it might happen that a punctilious department head or bank manager would say to his sleepy wife at bedtime: "What would you do now if I were a Moosbrugger?"

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If someone were to discover, for instance, that under hitherto unobserved circumstances stones were able to speak, it would take only a few pages to describe and explain so earth-shattering a phenomenon. On the other hand, one can always write yet another book about positive thinking, and this is far from being of only academic interest, since it involves a method that makes it impossible ever to arrive at a clear resolution of life's most important questions. Human activities might be graded by the quantity of words required: the more words, the worse their character. All the knowledge that has led our species from wearing animal skins to people flying, complete with proofs, would fill a handful of reference books, but a bookcase the size of the earth would not suffice to hold all the rest, quite apart from the vast discussions that are conducted not with the pen but with the sword and chains. The thought suggests itself that we carry on our human business in a most irrational manner when we do not use those methods by which the exact sciences have forged ahead in such exemplary fashion.

Such had in fact been the mood and the tendency of a period - a number of years,

hardly of decades - of which Ulrich was just old enough to have known something. At that time people were thinking - "people" is a deliberately vague way of putting it, as no one could say who and how many thought that way; let us say it was in the air - that perhaps life could be lived with precision. Today one wonders what they could have meant by that. The answer would possibly be that a life's work can as easily be imagined as consisting of three poems or three actions as of three treatises, in which the individual's capacity for achievement is intensified to its highest degree. It would more or less come down to keeping silent when one has nothing to say, doing only the necessary where one has nothing special to do, and, most important, remaining indifferent unless one has that ineffable sense of spreading one's arms wide, borne aloft on a wave of creation. One will observe that this would be the end of most of our inner life, but that might not be such a painful loss. The thesis that the huge quantities of soap sold testify to our great cleanliness need not apply to the moral life, where the more recent principle seems more accurate, that a strong compulsion to wash suggests a dubious state of inner hygiene. It would be a useful experiment to try to cut down to the minimum the moral expenditure (of whatever kind) that accompanies all our actions, to satisfy ourselves with being moral only in those exceptional cases where it really counts, but otherwise not to think differently from the way we do about standardizing pencils or screws. Perhaps not much good would be done that way, but some things would be done better; there would be no talent left, only genius; the washed-out prints that develop from the pallid resemblance of actions to virtues would disappear from the image of life; in their place we would have these virtues' intoxicating fusion in holiness. In short, from every ton of morality a milligram of an essence would be left over, a millionth part of which is enough to yield an enchanting joy.

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I've only just noticed for the first time that I loathe evil. Until today I really didn't know how much. My dear Agathe, you have no idea what it's like," he complained moodily. "Take science, for instance! For a mathematician, to put it very simply, minus five is no worse than plus five. A scientist researching a problem musn't recoil in horror from anything, and under certain conditions he might get more excited by a lovely cancer than a lovely woman. A man of knowledge knows that nothing is true and that the whole truth will be revealed only at the end of time. Science is amoral. All our glorious thrusting of ourselves into the Unknown gets us out of the habit of being personally concerned with our conscience; in fact, it doesn't even give us the satisfaction of taking our conscience entirely seriously. And art? Doesn't it amount to a creation of images that don't correspond to the realities of life? I'm not talking about

bogus idealism, or the paintings of voluptuous nudes in a period when everyone goes around covered up to the eyeballs," he joked again. "But think of a real work of art: have you never had the feeling that something about it is reminiscent of the smell of burning metal you get from a knife you're whetting on a grindstone? It's a cosmic, meteoric, lightning-and-thunder smell, something divinely uncanny!

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