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The action starts with riot. The Imperial Governor of a remote province, venerated by the peasants who are his jural care, has been censured for opposing their conscription as soldiers in a time of famine: and his rude wards have gathered to resist, with their hoes and rakes, his rumoured dismissal. But they are bound serfs, first, to the warrior lords of the earth they work: whose bidding they must do: and whose will the authority of the Governor cannot countermand. The samurai who have come to reprimand him order their slaughter; the Governor will not countenance the deed. That impertinence seems to confirm his disgrace and exile; and the opening scenes end with his being ridden away, obedient and impassive, hedged about by soldiers who cut down easily, perfunctorily almost, such of his recent folk as stand in their way.

Before going the Governor instructs his wife to take herself and their two children back to her father's house. He makes apology to her for the dishonour that has come upon the family: which he has brought upon them by maintaining — more stubbornly than wisely, he concedes — that *all men are entitled to their happiness*. But his steadfastness must excuse, his demeanour seems to imply, all the disorder his doings have produced. He commands his young son to take care of his sister and mother; counsels him to remember that *one must be kind to others however hard one is on oneself* — that *without mercy men are beasts* — and commends to his juvenile understanding that *all men are created equal*. The boy mouths the dicta dutifully; the father wonders aloud if the son will prove as stubborn as the sire; and goes his way.

Literate anglophone viewers, coming newly to Mizoguchi, are apt to have squirmed at the lessoning in morals that, seemingly at least, has just come their way. But the dictum “all men are created equal” will prove, as they look on, neither banality nor risible falsehood. However understood — as statement, or as injunction — the proposition is not, here, the axiom of formal democracy to which their assent will have grown automatic: even if its natural contrary is the overriding maxim of *realpolitik*, that *might is right*, which they will prudently concede as putative citizens of McWorld, when their American præceptors demand that ‘our way of life’ be defended at all cost.[†]

To venture more seems foolish; and I may have erred already in supposing that its intended beholders took our picture for an essay in ethics at all. So inward a culture as the Japanese will have produced beholders of cinema whose movements of mind go askance, surely, the reflexes of feeling creatures trained to empathy by the cinema of Hollywood: and would have gone all the more so only, one thinks, in that fraught time in which the film was made. But I shall persist with the reading I have set out upon; and, trusting with Beckett that a work of art is legible on its own terms how inscrutable ever it may be on any other, I shall try to close somehow upon the pregnant mystery our natal and aboriginal equality comes to seem in *Sansho The Bailiff*.

I should note now that I write most toward those who have seen the picture already: to whom my manner of recalling its events will seem proper I hope. Readers who remember the picture well may readily decide whether or not such redactions as I shall attempt, of the visible surface of the film, are at all apt; and I write on in the hope that they will, besides, indulge such departures from approved or current usage as they will meet. The archaism of “picture” put for

[†] My talk of ‘might’ and ‘right’ might seem laughably naive; so I had better ask that the sophisticate read “power” where he sees “might”, and put in “authority” for “right”.

“film” more than occasionally, to give an egregious instance, is entirely intended; and such uses of the Upper Case as would be found, usually, only in a Book for Children.

More pertinently, the events that were just recalled are intercut, in the film, with scenes of the wife and her children journeying — some few years after now, it would be, for the children are considerably grown — to the place of the Governor’s exile; and they come to the screen as happenings remembered by the lady she was — and the lady she remains, if in manner and comportment only. But these events are not presented as her remembrances; not particularly. They are not meant to be recalled as such, I think, through the course of the film; and my having told them as I have does not, I trust, denature the cinematic passages they make.

Making their way through difficult and unsettled country, with only a serving woman to tend them, the lady wife and her children duly fall to their fate. They are betrayed by a villager — by the priestess of the local shrine, as it happens, who had offered them food and shelter for a night — to thieves the woman seems to know only too well: who separate the children from their mother, and sell them all off: the wife somewhere as a concubine, the brother and sister together to the manor of some lord, whose Bailiff or steward Sansho is. We do not meet with the wife again till much after; and the story proceeds with the brother and the sister, and the doings of their master Sansho now and again, for a good while.

The children of the Governor almost succumb, as one expects, to the rigours of bondage. But they find a benefactor in the Bailiff’s son: whose private care sees them through their harsh weaning, from the soft lives they will have had, to their life as servitors. The son of the Bailiff is not cast in his father’s image. Refusing to brand an aged slave who had tried to run away — and derided by Sansho, iron in hand, as a ‘spineless coward’ — he wanders off and finds himself in the hut he has secured for the children. They reveal to him there — answering the kindness, and the remembered luxury maybe, of roasted rice-cake — who they really are: or once were. He makes the boy repeat the Governor’s dicta: harking to *without mercy men are beasts* as if to gospel. The truth he seems to newly hear decides him; and we see him very soon after leaving his father’s house — repelled by the avarice of a visiting official, sent there by the lord who is his father’s master — for a monastery, it will turn out.

In the manger of his waking soul, if one may put it in so unlikely a way, the Bailiff’s son had bestowed names upon the Governor’s children: who from pride or shame, or both, have neither to their new master nor their fellow slaves revealed their true names. The boy is newly named *Matsuwaka*, after the place of his birth; and the girl *Shinobu*, or *one who endures all*. These cognomens are entirely apt — prefiguring as they do the particular fictions their bearers will become through the course of the film — fictions who will seem, through all their travail, to singularly lack moral interior.

To put things so is to betray the sort of beholder one is. So I should say again that an appreciation of the picture is what I am attempting: where the task is to record the conditions of such understanding as one already enjoys, how naïvely ever: and not secure knowledge of any sort, obtained from some Archimedean vantage on Film. The understanding of *Sansho the Bailiff* I have come to have may not square, at all, with how its intended beholders took in the picture: they may not have expected to encounter fictions with any moral interior. It seems proper enough to say, for instance, that pride and shame keep the Governor’s children from revealing their true names. But they may come no nearer as feeling creatures, thereby, to the moral agents — to the moral individuals *manque*, if you will — that a Hollywood film usually poses its beholders as.^{††} For

^{††} I mean to trade on the sense of “egregious” that “manque” once had: take Aldous Huxley’s *Complaint of a Poet Manque* for instance: and my ‘moral individuals *manque*’ are beholders in whom moral feeling, while they watch, reaches the pitch it would in actual doing.

Zushio and Anju, as the son and the daughter were called in happier days, move in a social world where rightness of action seems contingent on status: where pride and shame would be movements of feeling strangely obverse — too changeably sides of the same coin — to the singular equals that moral individuals must take each other for.

I shall not attempt to excuse my describing moral individuals so: except to note that the radical equality in which Kant grounded moral doing, and in doing so momentarily transformed Occidental ethics, would have seemed distorting to almost any philosopher who had come before him. To come at our picture just so however — in so slant a way, at the work of popular art it seems to be — may be to mistake entirely the sort of fiction it is: especially if the social world of *Sansho the Bailiff* was not so very distant from the world of Sansho the Bailiff: however remote and ‘medieval’ that fictive world seems. And I should mention now that the picture had presented itself, when it began, as the telling over of *an ancient tale full of grief, still told by folk*. To proceed as I mean to may be inappropriate then: and the registry of cinematic doing here — such construals of depicted action as I shall offer, and already have — may be the deliverances of a sensibility improperly diffractive, so to put it, casting illusory breaks across some plane of seamless action. But I can only record, again, the caveat.

We had followed the action as far the going away of Sansho’s son: who is seemingly woken to righteous life, recall, by the realization that *without mercy men are beasts*. The epiphany had followed his refusing to brand a slave: upon gospel heard from the mouth of a child: and we are surely meant to recall that when we come to see Zushio — grown now, and readily Sansho’s man it would seem — doing so without qualm. To beholders cast as moral agents that would come as irony. But one must remember that this is a tale *full of grief*: and the irony must be apprehended in some archaic way, I shall hazard now: felt to bear as much on the order of the world, as on any creature there — and its force may have been felt, by the intended beholders of the picture, as plainest truth: that without mercy men are indeed beasts: and equally so.

I cannot tell if, in construing seeming irony thus, I am using a common word in a way grown uncommon: English is now quite another language than it was in the middle of the last century. But using the word so would not have seemed only odd then, I trust: not to readers of William Empson’s *The Structure of Complex Words* say, or to the intended readers of Raymond Williams’ *Keywords* and *Culture and Society* even: which would be likely registrations of literate usage to begin with, now, should one seek to probe the question. The punctilious reader could supply a word more apt than “irony” I am sure, to name the terminus of that ‘archaic apprehending’ I have ventured to postulate; and I must undertake, for my part, to resist what glamour ever may sheen *ironia* still.

Zushio brands without demur a slave who has been caught stealing away to see her own child; a woman who, as it happens, has been conspicuously protective of Anju ever since they came to Sansho. She becomes very ill soon thereafter; and, too feeble to work now, is to be cast off. It falls to Anju and Zushio to take her, with a guard to watch them, to the place in the surrounding forest where the aged or infirm slaves of the manor are left to die. Solicitous to the end, Anju takes from Zushio the idol of the goddess of Mercy which their father had entrusted to him the day they parted, and places it in the bosom of her once protectress. The idol is the household deity — as anthropologists would have termed it once — of the Governor’s family; she has already played her part, we have seen, in the conversion of Sansho’s son; and will figure largely in what is to come; and a more expert retailing of the film’s action would surely have contrived to mention her, somehow or other, before now.

Anju wants some semblance of shelter for the dying woman, besides the protection and consolation the goddess of Mercy will afford; and tries to break a near branch off a tree to set over her. She can't quite; Zushio comes to help; and together they succeed — just as they had as children, bid by their mother to make up a shelter, the day their misfortunes began — and their remembering that together seems to decide Anju. She presses Zushio to attempt escape: to seek out their mother. He must take the dying woman with him as well, to a monastery which is somewhere near, they seem to know; though she herself must not fly if he is to get clear away. Zushio swears he will return for her. She returns to his keeping the family goddess of Mercy — to put it so seems most apt — and talks the guard into going back to the stockade of the manor-house with her, persuading him that Zushio will soon follow.

Carrying on his back the slave he had so readily branded, Zushio sets off through the forest: and so schematic a coupling now, of peccant act and seemingly penitentiary consequence, might easily have embarrassed. But it does not; or did not embarrass me, at least; and that the picture can be as direct as a parable is a circumstance of considerable importance, mention of which I shall often resort to. Zushio's absence does not, of course, too long remain unnoticed after Anju and the guard have returned; and men are sent out to look for him. His flight will surely be guessed at; and, as she will surely be tortured to discover where he has gone, and will almost certainly succumb, Anju must do away with herself. With the connivance of the elderly slave set to watch over her, she drowns herself.

So bare a recounting of event will not register cinematic success: but does somehow mime, I hope, the spare delivery of a lived world — the economy of *material* disclosure, I shall hazard saying — which is a condition of the picture succeeding as parable. Anju drowns herself in a pool; and just how we are shown the deed completes the *moving figura* of Endurance, one wants to say, that the name "Shinobu" had forecast. But I cannot, to note it again, guess at whether or not the intended beholders of the picture would have noticed just so its visible surface: whose texture may have been continuous, in some generic way, with how popular theatre came at their eyes for instance. What I take for conspicuous achievement may have been only competent doing, then, to the commonalty of Japanese beholders; and a genuinely popular art of cinema would be formally conservative, one is tempted to think — to just the extent even, it may be, that the mass art of Hollywood seeks novelty of spectacle. But such speculations are not to my purpose; and I have ventured them only to emphasize the character of parable our picture displays.

Zushio gains the monastery before his pursuers; who run amok there almost, looking for him; before the Abbott intervenes, reminding them that he and his monks are under the protection of the Emperor. The Bailiff's son is at the monastery, a monk now: to whom Zushio delivers himself and his burden, and seeks counsel. Doubtful though he is of the outcome, he advises Zushio to go to the Imperial abode of Kyoto, to seek out there a high official of the Court who is likely to have known his father, and present himself as the Governor's son; and he will write Zushio a letter attesting him as such.

Letter in hand, and goddess of mercy stowed in his tunic, Zushio makes his way to Kyoto: and what happens next should make the showings of *Sansho the Bailiff* entirely strange: to any reader I can imagine, at least. He skulks to the house of the personage he must approach; and crawls under a walkway in the garden. Scrambling out on hearing their footsteps, and scuttling on his knees alongside the passing courtiers, testamentary missive thrust out toward them, Zushio shrieks out like an animal — in a frenzy almost bestial, seeming barely human now — his name and lineage; to be beaten back by their guards, only, and hauled off to a cell. The family goddess falls out just as he is being locked in. Zushio begs to have it back. But he has stolen it, the guards

decide, from the house; and they will return the idol to their master. Bereft, and all unmanned, Zushio wails to be sent back to Sansho.

His luck has changed however. Brought before the Imperial official Zushio finds himself treated with ceremony: the goddess of Mercy has been recognized as the particular deity of the Governor's family: and the son will succeed to the sire's office, moreover, for the father is no more. The change from abject slave to Imperial personage, in Zushio's demeanour and comportment now, seems as abrupt as the reversal of his fortunes: what the slave endured has left no mark at all: and the man newly master now will seem all a changeling.

One could expect otherwise, of course, only if one took Zushio to have a moral interior: and I trust the phrase "moral interior" acquires sufficient definition here, through the conceding of expectation unmet, for those to whom it might have seemed obscure. But, to note it yet again, I cannot say if Zushio would have seemed, to the intended beholders of the picture, to turn about just so: he may not have looked a changeling, in any way at all, to them. What had struck me as bestial frenzy may have been the approved miming, merely, of desperation: and such conventions of theatre as their cinema had retained or adapted, again, may well have rendered entirely natural to Japanese beholders whatever I have found unnatural.

Zushio the Governor returns in state to where he had fled from as a slave: and takes his appointed place with due ceremony. His first act is to exempt the peasants from their forced labour as serfs: overriding his councillors: whose protest that law and custom do not permit them such licence — that the officials of Emperor do not command in the domains of his feudatory lords — he simply ignores. Placards with the edict are put up on posts around. The henchmen of the lords tear them down. No less secure in his jural authority therefore, Zushio rides out to Sansho's keep, to rescue his sister. The Bailiff starts at his quondam slave; but the reversal does not long abash him, and he is more than willing to accommodate the Governor. Told that Anju has killed herself, Zushio orders his attendant soldiers to seize Sansho. The surprised Bailiff finds himself in chains: rages: but quickly recovers his composure and, as much his lord's man as ever, declares that Zushio will pay for flouting the law.

The serfs have gathered now. Propounding to them that *all men are created equal* their new Governor declares their freedom again — shrilling the words out at their gaping faces — and leaves them to new-found selves. The freed serfs revel unrestrained: grow riotous: and very soon after we see, stood with a Zushio become his impassive official self again, at his condign distance, the manor all in flames. He has proved himself his father's son; and, duty to sister done, Zushio resigns his office, and sets out to look for his mother.

My recounting has scanted the mother and lady wife: but she has figured in the story. We see her trying to flee the island where she is kept as a concubine: and she is hobbled for having tried once too often. That island lies somewhere near, just off where Sansho's keep is; and we have seen the mother limp along its shore, calling to her children — drawing gracefully long the sounds of their names — just as she had the fateful evening of the day before their capture. Anju had seemed to hear herself called to once; had come to know that her mother lived from a slave girl newly come, actually, who was singing to herself a song the mother had often sung; and knowing that their mother still lived, and somewhere near, had made her press escape on Zushio.

Zushio is ferried to the island with some fisher folk: and the boatmen taking them could be kin, one fancies now, to those thieves to whom his mother and sister and he had been betrayed: who had had to peddle the unlikely children about — they didn't look as if they'd make good slaves — rowing them from village to village before they were, at last, taken grudgingly in by Sansho. The reprise of a beginning motif signals the ending: aptly for a parable.

Landed on the island Zushio makes for some near hutments. Worn-looking women wait on the close ways between. He says out his mother's name; and is pointed to a hut. The woman there is another; and he retreats, mocked by her and her sister whores. But they seem to have heard of the Lady who was; and say enough to lead Zushio to his mother. He must go to where the island faces the open sea, a fisherman gathering seaweed tells him, to where the *tsunami* breaks: and Zushio finds his mother at last on the desolate shore — dragging her life out by the indifferent sea, one wants to say now. She takes him for a spirit first, some ghostly familiar, come in the shape of her son to torment her; but knows him for her Zushio soon. She asks after Anju; and the death of the daughter seems to complete her defeat. Huddled with his mother Zushio asks if their misfortunes have not followed upon their having obeyed too well his father her lord; and is answered as a child would be. *What are you saying: it is only because we have obeyed*, she pronounces, *that we are together at last*.

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The picture might better have been titled *Zushio the Son*, one will feel at first; for it seems his story most; and the circumstance that it is not called so, but named rather for a figure who, considered as a cinematic presence, is curiously remote from the course of its action, seems in fact the most pertinent feature of the film.

Zushio seems only a child, taken as a moral creature: as innocent, really, of any understanding properly moral of the words he mouths. But Sansho appears, on the other hand, to know that *might is right*: and the corollary that *only parity of power preserves law*: and the particular distance his figure keeps from the beholder seems the mark, here, of a truth necessarily obscure. I put it so to bring to the fore the particular and singular circumstance that moral agency seems to depend on: the circumstance that, however ineluctable the proposition “might is right” may come to seem, the dictum could not be entirely evident: could not be, for merely human beings, the immediate truth it would be for angels or beasts. To the supernal intuition of angels the proposition would be as much theorem as axiom; and as immediate as any tautology to the unerring instinct of beasts, one thinks — should they come, by some strange chance, to think on such things. *Half angel, half beast* was the mediæval Christians' formula, one should recall now, for the creature *man*: who is made all he is, and is not, by the contraposings of those moieties: and it might well be, then, that moral feeling is a confusion of our understanding only, agreeably colouring some defect of animal prudence or angelic rigor. Nevertheless, for anyone who is at all apt to insist with Kant that *men are ends in themselves, not means* — or should be regarded thus, at least — the dictum “might is right” could not be a datum entirely evident: would, were it at all evident, remain always as much darkling truth as lucid demand. A man who really did know that might is right, as clearly and as distinctly as any votary of Spinoza could want, would be either more than or less than human one thinks, not merely human: or so merely moral men must think.^{†††}

His knowing that might is right does not invest the Bailiff with any moral interior either — though that hardly needs saying now — and just what he might thusly know remains obscure to beholders looking out at him as moral individuals. So one should ask if Sansho is not, formally considered, a moral cipher: as much so as Polonius in *Hamlet* say. Yes he is, I shall venture — and precisely

††† The power and the authority of God are distinguishable in thought only, one might say with the Schoolmen, not in reality; and to severe adherents of the religions of the Book the distinction might even be one of words merely. But things are not, in this particular, on earth as in heaven. In a constitutional polity — in the constitutional polities of the anglophone world, at least — the independence of the judiciary depends on distinguishing the authority of the State from the power the executive commands: a distinction which the special overriding of judicial decision by executive fiat does not discountenance: but acknowledges, rather, and confirms.

that, I shall hazard now, is what makes the dictum “all men are created equal” neither banality nor risible falsehood in our picture: but a mystery rather: the sheerly new thing, and strange, that the ethics of Kant would have been to the lately and disastrously martial Japanese.

I have come to the crux of my understanding of *Sansho the Bailiff*: and shall risk setting it down summarily. The proposition that all men are created equal is made just as mysterious there, finally, as the truth of its natural contrary would be to moral individuals — should they come to see their world so, somehow, against the grain of thought and feeling — and the dictum is neither banal nor false, in the world the picture makes, because the man who appears to know that might is right is a cipher.

The Bailiff is properly characterized so: for he seems to *know that he knows* only as little — or as little much, say — as the child who bests him *doesn't know that he doesn't know* what he mouths out. Such opposing of child to man will seem formulaic: but the picture is a parable remember: and its cinematic success consists in narration achieving the sudden penetrance — the weird *deixis* — that proverb and parable achieve. My recounting of its action has managed to recall that success, I trust, to those readers who have seen the picture: to whose imaginal remembrance the redactions of its doing offered here have been usefully contrapuntal, I can only hope: and it is only in this way, really, that I could have managed any properly cinematic appreciation of our picture at all, for I am not trained to such exercise. I have not seen very much of Mizoguchi; but the films that came after the last world war, in the decade or so that he survived it by, seem very different to those that went before; and to such as have attended to that difference the recounting of action here will, I must hope, seem apt.

I have no means of gauging, to note it for the last time, whether or not the intended beholders of *Sansho the Bailiff* took it in as I have. Their having done so, at all, would turn on whether or not the ethics of Kant were, indeed, a thing sheerly new and strange to them. That the picture comes into a polity newly remade by their Americans conquerors — and upon supernal destruction, visited from heaven as if — is the salient circumstance now. That all men are created equal must be a governing premise of the constitution the Americans had framed for them: however qualified by ‘reasons of state’ the character of citizens as ‘ends, not means’ would have been, in any practicable code of law: and that overwhelming Might proving its Right upon them should just so pronounce would have seemed only singular, I shall finally hazard, to Mizoguchi and his contemporaries.

notes

The appreciation of cinema neither informs nor instructs — in the manner that the professional study of film presumably seeks to — but speaks of cinema in ways that are accountable to experience: and to say so is to confine the text of an appreciation to readers whose organs of experience have been educated much as its author's have been. The phrase “organs of experience” already narrows the circle of willing readers I may expect: but does not, I hope, contract it to a punctum. I could wish for readers willing to use the word “experience” adventurously — as boldly as Michael Oakeshott had, for instance, in *Experience and its modes*: a text anglophone contemporaries of our picture would have known, were they philosophically curious — and assured of even a very few such readers one could risk dilating on ‘the reflexes of feeling creatures trained to empathy by the cinema of Hollywood’.

I do not know how much glossing the phrase “moral interior” will bear. But I shall risk this much: to possess an ‘interior’ properly called so is to recognize in moral imperatives the demand of one's own nature: and to follow their rulings, therefore, in some more than purely prudential or abstractly rigorist way. To employ the word “moral” just so is to use it otherwise than as the adjectival form of “mores” only: and to mean by it what Nietzsche distinguished as slave morality, actually, from a putative master morality: which the generality of his readers would have regarded as immoral only, of course. Kant sought a categorical imperative to ground morality *simpliciter*: which must have seemed to him a primary or elemental character of human action. He does not suppose the moral character of action to consist in conformity with, or derivability from, norms or moral rules: which would be recognitions only rather, however confused

and partial, of some integral nature human beings possess. Kant's categorical imperative receives various formulations: but most pertinently now as follows: *so act that you use humanity, as much in your own person as in the person of every other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means.*¹ An innate attraction to this 'supreme principle of morality' proves it *the flag of our disposition*² — or so Kant would have maintained without reserve, I think. But not Nietzsche: who had brought himself to ask if *precisely morality would be to blame if the highest power and splendour actually possible to the type man was never in fact attained.*³

The proposition that *might is right* may be variously understood. To the many who compose the body of the *Leviathan* Hobbes projects it is a tautology almost: for the will of the Sovereign, to whom they have conceded a monopoly of force, is all their law: and considered assent to the proposition, should the will of the Sovereign issue in egregious demand, would not be moral now — not on Kant's terms, at least — but prudential only. But Hobbes would have answered that there is no more to morality than what you are calling prudence — he himself would reserve the word for the antique virtue of *phronesis* — and gone on to maintain that the dictum could serve for the categorical imperative, even, of prudence: the *locus classicus* of whose articulation as such, without seeming apology, would be the *History* of Thucydides⁴ — over a translation of which Hobbes had laboured, it seems pertinent to note now.

Hegel appears to yield properly moral assent to the proposition, however, when he declares that the doings of the State, considered altogether, are *the march of God in the world*⁵: for even as he places *the absolute authority and majesty* of the State beyond the reasoning reach of the citizens whose allegiance it commands, Hegel elevates reasons of state to supervening ends which comprehend and subsume such ends-in-themselves as individual citizens themselves are. I do not know what Hegel made of the travails of Job. But he would have been sorely tempted, I shall venture, to suppose that the right he discerned in consolidate and consounding might — as power enjoying absolute authority would be — had been dimly apprehended in the parable: where the remonstrations of Job are finally quieted by his creator's pointing at what he, Yahweh, has most wrought: monstrous Leviathan and Behemoth: who have their place, nonetheless, in the order of creation.

To ask after the right of might would have seemed otiose to Nietzsche; and as much so to his votary Foucault. Spinoza, always singular, could assert the absolute right of might even as he advocated democracy.⁶ But philosophers are not so sanguine anymore; and I shall close with a poet. *Grant inequity from afar to be in equity's covenant*: so Geoffrey Hill seems to ask even as he concedes: faced with *prize apologists/for plebeian nobleness.*⁷

references

1 *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*; rendered thus by Allen Wood in *The supreme principle of morality*, collected in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant and Modern Philosophy*

2 Taken out of Whitman's *Song of Myself*, VI:

A child said *What is the grass?* fetching it to me with full hands;
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more
than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green
stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may
see and remark, and say *Whose?*

Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the
vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,
And it means — sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,
Growing among black folks as among white,
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff — *I give them the same, I
receive them the same.*

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

*

Isaiah 40, 6-8

The voice said, *Cry.* And he said, *What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all
the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades:
for the breath of the Lord blows upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withers,
the flower fades: but the word of our God shall stand forever.*

- 3 *On the Genealogy of Morals*; in the translation of Kaufmann and Hollingdale.
 - 4 *The History of the Peloponnesian War, Book I*; in the translation of Crawley. I reproduce the telling passage, taken from the speech of the Athenian envoys at Corinth:

“ ... it was not a very wonderful action, or contrary to the common practice of mankind, if we did accept an empire that was offered to us, and refused to give it up under the pressure of three of the strongest motives, fear, honour, and interest. And it was not we who set the example, for it has always been the law that the weaker should be subject to the stronger. Besides, we believed ourselves to be worthy of our position, and so you thought us till now, when calculations of interest have made you take up the cry of justice — a consideration which no one ever yet brought forward to hinder his ambition when he had a chance of gaining anything by might. And praise is due to all who, if not so superior to human nature as to refuse dominion, yet respect justice more than their position compels them to.

We imagine[d] that our moderation would be best demonstrated by the conduct of others who should be placed in our position; but even our equity has very unreasonably subjected us to condemnation instead of approval. Our abatement of our rights in the contract trials with our allies, and our causing them to be decided by impartial laws at Athens, have gained us the character of being litigious. And none care to inquire why this reproach is not brought against other imperial powers, who treat their subjects with less moderation than we do; the secret being that where force can be used, law is not needed. But our subjects are so habituated to associate with us as equals that any defeat whatever that clashes with their notions of justice, whether it proceeds from a legal judgement or from the power which our empire gives us, makes them forget to be grateful for being allowed to retain most of their possessions, and more vexed at a part being taken, than if we had from the first cast law aside and openly gratified our covetousness. If we had done so, not even would they have disputed that the weaker must give way to the stronger. Men’s indignation, it seems, is more excited by legal wrong than by violent wrong; the first looks like being cheated by an equal, the second like being compelled by a superior ... “
 - 5 *The Philosophy of Right*; in the translation of Knowles.
 - 6 *Theologico-political Treatise*
 - 7 *Canaan*; in the sonnet titled *Concerning Inheritance*
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