Treatise of Human Nature
Book III: Morals

David Hume

[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis .... indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are described, between brackets, in normal-sized type.

First launched: October 2008

Contents

Part i: Virtue and vice in general

1: Moral distinctions aren't derived from reason

All abstract reasoning has this disadvantage: it can silence an opponent without convincing him, because it's as hard to see the force of such an argument as it was to discover the argument in the first place. When we leave our study and get involved in the common affairs of life, the argument's conclusions seem to vanish like the phantoms of the night when sunrise comes, and it's hard for us retain even the conviction that we had so much trouble acquiring. This is even more conspicuous with a long chain of reasoning, where we have to preserve the evidentness of the first propositions right through to the end, and where we often lose sight of accepted maxims of philosophy or of common life. But I have some hope that the system of philosophy that I am presenting here will gather force as it advances, and that my reasonings about •morals will corroborate what I have been saying about •the understanding and •the passions. We care more about morality than about anything else; we imagine the peace of society to be at stake in every decision concerning it, and obviously that has to make our theoretical thinking about morality appear more real and solid than our thoughts about any subject that doesn't much matter to us. Anything that has an effect on us, we think, can't be a chimera ·and so must be real·; and because our passions are engaged on the one side or the other in disputes in morality, we naturally think that the question lies within our intellectual reach, which is something we aren't sure of in other cases of this nature. Without this advantage, I wouldn't have ventured on a third volume of such abstract philosophy, at a time when most people seem to agree in taking reading to be a mere pastime and in rejecting anything that can't be understood without a great deal of concentration.

* * * * * *

I have said that nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and that 'perception' covers all the actions of seeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking. Anything the mind can do is a 'perception'; so our judgments distinguishing moral good from moral evil are as much *perceptions* as anything else the mind does. Approving this character and condemning that are merely two perceptions.

Perceptions fall into two kinds, impressions and ideas; so let us start our enquiry into morals with that distinction, by asking:

> When we distinguish vice from virtue, and declare a given action to be blameworthy or to be praiseworthy, are we doing this by means of our ideas or by means of our impressions?

This will immediately cut short all loose discussions and speeches, and bring us down to something precise and exact concerning our subject.

It has been maintained that

- •virtue is nothing but conformity to reason;
- •there are eternal fitnesses and unfitnesses of things, which are the same to every rational being who considers them;
- •the changeless standards of right and wrong impose obligations not only on human creatures but also on God himself.

All these views have something in common, because they all imply that morality, like truth, is discovered merely by putting ideas together and comparing them. So if we are to judge these theories we need only consider whether unaided reason enables us to distinguish moral good from moral evil, or whether some other principle must be at work to enable us to make that distinction. [**Important note:** More than half of Hume's uses of the word 'principle' in *Treatise* III, including the one two lines up, give it a meaning that it often had in his day, namely that of 'source', 'cause', 'drive', 'mechanism' or the like. From now on, every occurrence of the word in that sense of it will be written as 'principle$_c$', suggesting 'principle = cause'. A 'principle' without the subscript is a proposition, usually a premise but sometimes a conclusion.]

If morality didn't naturally influence human passions and actions, it would be useless to try so hard to inculcate it, and nothing would be achieved by the multitude of rules and precepts that all moralists churn out. Philosophy is commonly divided into •speculative and •practical; and as morality is always classified as •practical, it is supposed to influence our passions and actions, going beyond the calm inactive judgments of the understanding. And this is confirmed by common experience, from which we learn that men are often governed by their duties, deterred from certain actions by the opinion that they would be unjust, and pushed into other actions by the opinion that they were obligatory.

So morals have an influence on our actions and feelings, which implies that they can't be derived from reason because reason alone (as I have already proved) can never have any such influence. Morals arouse passions and produce or prevent actions. Unaided reason is powerless to do such things. So the rules of morality are not conclusions of our reason.

I don't think anyone will deny that this inference is valid; there's no way to escape its conclusion except by denying its premise, namely the principle that reason has no influence on our passions and actions. As long as that stands, it's hopeless to claim that morality is discovered purely through a deduction of reason. An active principle$_c$ can never be based on something inactive; and if reason is intrinsically inactive then it must remain so in all its shapes and appearances, whether it exerts itself in natural subjects (the powers of external bodies) or in moral ones (the actions of rational beings).

It would be tedious to repeat the arguments I presented in II.iii.3 to prove that reason is perfectly inert and can never prevent or produce any action or feeling. . . . I'll return here to just one of those arguments, which I'll try to make still more conclusive and more applicable to the present subject.

Reason is the discovery of truth or falsehood. Truth or falsehood consists in an agreement or disagreement either with the real relations of ideas, or with real existence and matter of fact. So anything that isn't capable of this agreement or disagreement isn't capable of being true or false, and can never be an object of our reason. Now, our passions, volitions, and actions are basic facts and realities; they are complete in themselves and aren't in any way *about* other passions, volitions, and actions; so they aren't capable of either of those sorts of agreement or disagreement; so they can't be sorted into 'true' and 'false', and can't be either in conflict with reason or in accord with it.

This argument serves my purpose in two ways at once. •It proves directly that actions don't get their merit from a conformity to reason, or their blame from a contrariety to it; and •it proves the same truth more indirectly, by showing that because reason can't immediately prevent or produce any action by contradicting or approving of it, it can't be the source of moral good and evil, which *do* have that influence.

Actions can be praiseworthy or blameworthy, but they can't be reasonable or unreasonable; so 'praiseworthy' and 'blameworthy' are not the same as 'reasonable' and 'unreasonable'. The merit and demerit of actions frequently contradict and sometimes control our natural patterns behaviour; but reason has no such influence. So moral distinctions are not the offspring of reason. Reason is wholly inactive, and can't be the source of such an active principle$_c$ as is conscience, or a sense of morals.

You may want to say:

> Although no will or action can be immediately contradictory to reason, perhaps reason can be contradicted by some of the causes or effects of the action. The action may cause a judgment; or it may be obliquely caused by one, when the judgment goes along with a passion; and in such a case we might say that *the action* is in conflict with reason.

Saying this—attributing the conflict with reason to the action itself rather than to some judgment that is a cause or effect of the action—is a misuse of language, and philosophy will hardly allow it. ·But without any such misuse, you can still say that what makes an action right or wrong is the relation to reason—i.e. the truth or falsity —of some judgment suitably associated with it·. That is the issue I will now look into: To what extent can morals arise from the truth or falsehood of judgments that cause or are caused by the actions in question?

I have pointed out that *reason*, in a strict and philosophical sense of that word, can influence our conduct in only two ways. •It can arouse a passion by informing us of the existence of something that is a proper object of it. •It can discover cause-effect connections, thereby showing us how to go about satisfying some passion. These are the only kinds of judgment that can be said to *produce* our actions in any way; and of course these judgments can often be false. •You might be led to have a certain passion by your belief that pain or pleasure would come from something that in fact has no tendency to produce either pain or pleasure—or has a tendency to produce pain (if you predicted pleasure) or pleasure (if you predicted pain). •You might go about achieving your purpose in the wrong way, foolishly doing things that hold back your project instead of pushing it forward. These false judgments may be thought to affect the passions and actions that are connected with them, and may be said to render them unreasonable (in a figurative and improper way of speaking). But it's easy to see that such errors are far from being the source of all immorality—*so* far that they are commonly very innocent, and don't bring any sort of guilt onto the person who has the misfortune to fall into them. All they involve is a mistake of *fact*; and moralists haven't generally thought such mistakes to be criminal, because we don't *choose* to make them. If I am mistaken about what objects will produce pain or pleasure, or if I don't know the right way to go about satisfying my desires, you may feel sorry for me but you won't *blame* me. No-one could think that such errors are a defect in my moral character. . . .

And there's another point: if •moral distinctions are derived from the truth or falsehood of those judgments, •they must be applicable wherever we form the judgments—it won't make any difference whether the judgment in question concerns an apple or a kingdom, or whether the error is avoidable or unavoidable. The very essence of morality is supposed ·by the theory I am discussing· to consist in agreement or disagreement with *reason*; so the other details of a situation make no difference, and can't give any action the character of virtuous or vicious, or deprive it of that character. Also: this agreement or disagreement

doesn't admit of degrees—·there's no such thing as 'fairly much agreeing' or 'greatly disagreeing'·—so on this theory all virtues and vices would be equal.

Someone might say: 'A mistake of *fact* isn't criminal, yet a mistake of *right* often is; and this may be the source of immorality.' I reply that such a mistake can't possibly be the *basic* source of immorality, because it presupposes a real right and wrong—i.e. a real distinction in morals independently of these judgments. So a mistake of right may become a sort of immorality; but it would only be a secondary one, based on some other right/wrong distinction underlying it.

As for judgments that are *effects* of our actions, and which when false might lead us to describe the actions as contrary to truth and reason: notice first that our actions may cause judgments in others, but never in ourselves. It often happens that an action gives rise to false conclusions in others. Someone who sees me through a window behaving in a lewd way with my neighbour's wife may imagine she is my wife. In this way my action is a little like a lie; but with this difference, that I don't act as I do •with any intention of giving rise to a false judgment in someone else, but merely •to satisfy my lust and passion. Still, it does accidentally cause a false judgment in someone, and this falsehood of its effect may be figuratively ascribed to the action itself. But I can't see the beginnings of any reason for claiming that the tendency to cause such an error is the basic source of all immorality.[1]

[1] One might think there was no need to argue for this point if it weren't for the fact that a late author who was fortunate enough to obtain some reputation seriously claimed that such a falsehood *is* indeed the foundation of all guilt and moral ugliness. [This was William Wollaston, who died about 15 years before Hume wrote the *Treatise*.] To see that he was wrong about that, we need only consider this:

> When a false conclusion is drawn from an action, that is because there's some obscurity about the natural forces that were at work: a cause has been secretly interrupted in its operation by contrary causes, making the connection between two items uncertain and variable. But that kind of uncertainty and variety of causes occurs even in natural ·non-human· objects, where it produces a similar error in our judgment. If that tendency to produce error were the very essence of vice and immorality, it would follows that even inanimate objects could be vicious and immoral!

[Hume continues at some length with objections to the feeble version of Wollaston's theory that equates moral wrongness with simple causing-false-beliefs. Then he turns to the much more interesting and substantial thesis that Wollaston is] reasoning in a circle. A person who takes possession of *someone else's* goods and uses them as *his own* does in a way declare them to be his own; and this falsehood is the source of the immorality of theft. But are 'property' and 'right' and 'obligation' intelligible without an antecedent morality? A man who is ungrateful to his benefactor does in a way affirm that he never received any favours from him. But in what way? Is it because it's his duty to be grateful? This presupposes that there is some antecedent rule of duty and morals. . . .

Anyway, this whimsical system collapses for another reason. It offers to explain such things as that

> ingratitude is morally wrong

in a manner that presupposes that

> telling or implying a falsehood is morally wrong,

and it has no explanation of *that*. If you insist, I'll agree that all immorality is derived from this supposed falsehood in action *if* you can give me any plausible reason why such a falsehood is immoral! If you think straight about this, you'll see that it takes you right back to your starting-point. . . .

So the distinction between moral good and evil can't possibly be made by reason, because that distinction has something that unaided reason can't have, namely an influence on our actions. Reason and judgment may indeed be the *mediated* cause of an action, by prompting or by directing a passion; but no-one claims that a judgment of this kind is accompanied by virtue if it is true or by vice if it is false. And as for the judgments that are caused by our actions, they are even further from giving those moral qualities to the actions that are their causes.

Here are some more detailed reasons for holding that there's no sound philosophical basis for the view that there are eternal unchangeable fitnesses and unfitnesses of things.

If unaided thought and understanding could fix the boundaries of right and wrong, any item's being virtuous or vicious must consist either in some **relations** between objects or in some **matter of fact** that is discovered by our reasoning. It is obvious that this follows. The operations of human understanding are of two kinds, •the comparing of ideas and •the inferring of matters of fact; so if virtue were discovered by the understanding, it would have to be an object of one of these operations—there's no third operation of the understanding that could discover it.

Certain philosophers have busily propagated the opinion that morality can be demonstrated; and though no-one has ever advanced one step in those demonstrations, it is assumed that this science ·of demonstrative morality· can be brought to a level of certainty equal to that of geometry and algebra. Now, no-one thinks that any **matter of fact** can be demonstrated; so on this supposition ·that morality can be demonstrated·, vice and virtue must consist in some **relations**. Let us put the supposition to the test by trying to *fix* those moral qualities that have for so long eluded our researches, by pointing out the **relations** that constitute morality or obligation. . . .

If you contend that vice and virtue consist in relations that are capable of certainty and demonstration, you must confine yourself to the four relations that are the only ones admitting of that degree of evidentness; and if you do so, you'll run into absurdities from which you will never be able to extricate yourself. [Hume is relying here on a conclusion he reached in I.iii.1.] The four relations I have mentioned can apply to beings that don't think—indeed to beings that aren't even alive—so *they* will have to be capable of moral merit and demerit if you are right that the very essence of morality lies in those four relations. They are:

resemblance,
contrariety,
degrees in quality, and
proportions in quantity and number.

These can relate ·inert· material things as well as they can relate our actions, passions, and volitions, and that settles

[2] As evidence of how confusedly people commonly think about this subject, notice that those who say that morality is demonstrable do *not* say:

•Morality lies in the ·four· relations, and those relations are distinguishable by reason.

All they say is:

•Reason can discover that any action that stands in *these* relations is virtuous, and any action that stands in *those* relations is vicious.

They seem to have thought that all they needed was to bring the word 'relation' into the proposition, without troubling themselves over whether it was really any help! Here is a plain argument ·that they ought to accept; it is obviously valid, its first premise is true, and its second premise is the hypothesis I am now discussing·:

the issue: morality doesn't lie in of any of these relations, and the moral sense doesn't make discoveries about them.[2]

If you say 'The sense of morality consists in the discovery of some relation other than those four, and when you brought all demonstrable relations under four general headings you left something out', I don't know what to say in reply until you have the courtesy to tell me *what* the new relation is. It's impossible to refute a system that hasn't yet been explained. Trying to do so is fighting in the dark, wasting one's blows on places where the enemy is not present.

In the meantime I must rest content with saying that anyone who wants to clear up this system must make it satisfy two conditions. **(1)** It must say that moral good and evil consist in relations between internal ·mental· actions and external objects. (Why? Well, consider the options:

- **(a)** Morality consists in relations of external objects to other external objects.
- **(b)** Morality consists in relations of internal objects to other internal objects.
- **(c)** Morality consists in relations of internal objects to external objects.

If **(a)** were right, it would follow that even inanimate things would be capable of moral beauty and ugliness; so that is out. If **(b)** were right, it would follow that we could be guilty of crimes *within ourselves*, independently of where and how we were situated within the universe; so that is out too. All that remains is **(c)**.) It's hard to believe that any relation can be discovered that will **(c)** relate internal objects to external ones that couldn't also **(b)** relate some of our passions, volitions, and actions to others of our passions, volitions and actions, or **(a)** relate external objects to other external objects.

(2) The second condition that this system must satisfy will be even harder to make good on. Those who maintain an *abstract rational* difference between moral good and evil, and a *natural* fitness and unfitness of things, maintain that because these relations are eternal and unchangeable,

- **(i)** they are the same when considered by every rational creature, and
- **(ii)** their effects must also be the same, which implies that they influence the will of the Deity as much as—indeed *more than*—they influence rational and virtuous human beings.

These are evidently distinct points. It is one thing **(a)** to know virtue, and another **(b)** to conform your will to it. Thus, if you want to prove that the measures of right and wrong are eternal laws that are obligatory on every rational mind, it isn't enough merely to show the relations they are based on; you must also point out the connection between those relations and the will, and to prove that this connection is so necessary that it must have its influence—·the same influence·—in *every* well-disposed mind, even when in other respects the differences between these minds are immense and (·in the case of ourselves and God·) infinite. Now, I have already shown that even in human nature no relation can

---

- Demonstrative reason discovers only relations.
- Reason also discovers vice and virtue.

Therefore

- Vice and virtue are relations.

The hypothesis we are examining isn't intelligible unless it says this: When we blame any action in any situation, the whole complex action-in-situation object must form certain relations that constitute the essence of vice. . . .

ever *on its own* produce any action; and I have also shown in Book I that there is no connection of cause and effect (which is what we are supposed to have here) that can be discovered in any way except through experience, so there is none that could be discovered just by thinking about the objects. All the beings in the universe, considered in themselves, appear entirely loose and independent of each other. It's only by experience that we learn about their influence and connection, and this influence we ought never to ·be said to· extend beyond experience.

So there we have it: it's impossible to fulfill **(1)** the first condition for a system of eternal rational measures of right and wrong, because it's impossible to point to any relations on which the right/wrong distinction could be founded; and it's equally impossible to fulfill **(2)** the second condition, because we can't prove *a priori* that those relations, if they really did exist and really were perceived, would be universally forcible and obligatory.

To make these general reflections more clear and convincing, I shall illustrate them by two particular examples, ones that everyone agrees involve the character of moral good or evil. The first concerns ingratitude, the most horrid and unnatural of all the crimes human creatures can commit —especially when it is committed against parents and expresses itself in wounding and killing. Everyone accepts this, philosophers as well as laymen, and the only question about it that arises among philosophers is this: Is the guilt or moral ugliness of an act of ingratitude •discovered by demonstrative reasoning or •felt by an internal sense through some sentiment that naturally arises from thinking about such an action? The former answer to this question will soon be ruled out if I can show that the same relations hold amongst non-human objects without implying any guilt or wickedness in them. Using reason. . . .is nothing but taking two or more ideas together and discovering the relations among them; and if two instances of the very same relation have different characters, those characters can't be discovered merely by reason. ·I am going to put that truth to work by presenting two instances of a certain relation of which clearly one is morally bad and the other isn't, from which I'll infer that that moral difference isn't discovered by reason·. [Hume is about to use 'inanimate' in a sense that the word had at his time, closer to its etymological sense of 'not breathing' than our sense for it is; thus, 'inanimate' objects included plants as well as sticks and stones.] Let us choose any inanimate object, say an oak tree, and let us suppose that by dropping its seeds this tree produces a sapling below it, the sapling gradually grows until at last it overtops and destroys the parent tree. Doesn't this involve every relation that can be found in parricide or ingratitude? Isn't one tree the cause of the other's existence, and the latter the cause of the destruction of the former, in the same way as when a child murders his parent? You may say 'In the case of the tree no *choice* or *will* is involved', but that won't help you. In the case of ·human· parricide, the act of will of the murderous child is only the cause of the action—it makes no difference to what relations the murderous act involves, these being exactly the same relations as are involved in the tree-killing episode that arises from some other principle$_c$. It is a will or choice that determines a man to kill his parent; and the laws of matter and motion determine a sapling to destroy the oak from which it sprang. The relations have different causes in the two cases, but it's still the same set of relations in both; the discovery of those relations doesn't bring immorality into the picture in both; so that notion doesn't arise from such a discovery, ·which means that immorality is not discovered by reason·.

My second example is even more like its human analogue.

Why is it that in the human species *incest* is criminal, when in non-human animals the very same action and the very same relations haven't the faintest touch of moral baseness and ugliness? [The rest of this paragraph is unduly hard to follow. Its main point is that the rationalist—the person who says that morality is discovered by reason—won't be helped by pointing out that humans have reason while other animals don't, or anyway don't have enough reason to discover how disgustingly wrong incest is. That response doesn't spare the rationalist from the conclusion that incest in non-human animals *is* disgustingly wicked, though they aren't equipped to discover this. To avoid that conclusion on the grounds that such animals don't have reason, the rationalist would have to say not that reason *discovers* moral truths but that it *creates* them. Hume winds up:] This argument deserves to be weighed, because it is in my opinion entirely decisive.

My argument doesn't merely prove that morality doesn't consist in any •relations that are the objects of science [here = 'objects of treatment by strictly demonstrative procedures']; it also proves, just as conclusively, that morality doesn't consist in any •matter of fact that can be discovered by the understanding. This is the second part my argument, and if it can be made evident we can conclude that morality is not an object of reason. [The phrase 'the second part' links with the opening sentence of the paragraph starting 'If unaided thought. . . ' on page 238.] Can there really be any difficulty in proving that vice and virtue are not matters of fact whose existence we can infer by reason? Take any action that is agreed to be vicious—willful murder, for instance. Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find the matter of fact or real existence that you call 'vice'. However you look at it, all you'll find are certain passions, motives, volitions, and thoughts; those are the only matters of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you as long as you focus on the object, ·i.e. the individual action, the murder·. You can never find it until you turn your reflection into your own breast and find a *sentiment of disapproval* that arises in you towards this action. [The next two sentences are verbatim from Hume.] Here is a matter of fact, but it is the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. So when you say of some action or character that it is vicious, all you mean is that you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from contemplating it. [Hume says that you have this feeling 'from the constitution of your nature', by which he means: that you have this feeling is just a fact about how you are built; it's not something that you could derive from some deeper-lying thought or feeling that you have.] So vice and virtue may be compared to sounds, colours, heat, and cold, which modern philosophy says are not •qualities in objects but •perceptions in the mind; and this discovery in morals, like the other in physics, is to be regarded as a considerable advance in the speculative sciences; though it is also like the other in having little or no influence on practice. Nothing can be more real, or concern us more, than our own sentiments of pleasure and uneasiness; and if these are favourable to virtue and unfavourable to vice, this is all that is needed for the regulation of our conduct and behaviour. [Hume uses the phrase 'conduct and behaviour' several times. Perhaps he means 'what we do and how we do it'.]

I can't forbear adding an observation that may be found of some importance. In every system of morality I have met with I have noticed that the author •proceeds for some time reasoning in the ordinary way to establish the existence of a God, or making points about human affairs, and then he suddenly surprises me by •moving from propositions with the usual copula 'is' (or 'is not') to ones that are connected by 'ought' (or 'ought not'). This seems like a very small change [Hume writes 'This change is imperceptible', but he can't mean that literally], but it is highly important. For as this 'ought' (or

'ought not') expresses some *new* relation or affirmation, it needs to be pointed out and explained; and a reason should be given for how this new relation can be—inconceivably!—a deduction from others that are entirely different from it. Authors don't ordinarily take the trouble to do this, so I recommend it to you; and I'm convinced that paying attention to this one small matter will •subvert all the vulgar systems of morality and •let us see that the distinction between vice and virtue is not based merely on the relations of objects, and is not perceived by reason.

2: Moral distinctions are derived from a moral sense

So the course of the argument leads us to conclude that since vice and virtue aren't discoverable merely by reason, i.e. by comparing •ideas, what enables us to tell the difference between them must be some •impression or sentiment that they give rise to. Our decisions regarding moral rightness and wrongness are evidently •perceptions; all perceptions are either impressions or ideas; so ruling out ideas leaves us with impressions. It is therefore more correct to speak of *moral feelings* than of *moral judgments*; though this feeling or sentiment is commonly so soft and gentle that we are apt to confuse it with an idea, according to our common custom of taking closely resembling things to be the same.

The next question is: What kind of impressions are these, and how do they operate on us? We needn't spend long on *this* question! Clearly, the impression arising from virtue is agreeable, and the impression coming from vice is unpleasant. Every moment's experience must convince us of this. No spectacle is as fair and beautiful as a noble and generous action; none more disgusting to us than one that is cruel and treacherous. No enjoyment equals the satisfaction we get from the company of those we love and esteem; and the greatest of all punishments is to be obliged to live with those we hate or have contempt for. Even plays and romantic fiction can provide us with examples of the pleasure that virtue conveys to us, and of the pain that arises from vice.

Now, since the impressions by which we distinguish moral good from moral evil are nothing but particular pleasures or pains, it follows that when we want to understand why a certain ·personal· character is praiseworthy or blameworthy, all we have to do is to discover what the principles$_c$ are in us that make us feel a satisfaction or uneasiness from the survey of that character. Why is this action or sentiment or character virtuous (or vicious)? Because seeing it ·or even just thinking about it· causes in us a pleasure (or uneasiness) of a particular kind. So when we have explained •the pleasure or uneasiness we have also sufficiently explained •the virtue or vice. Having a sense of virtue is nothing but feeling a particular kind of satisfaction as a result of contemplating a character. Our praise or admiration *is* that feeling. . . . What happens here is *not* this:

> •We find that this character pleases us, and from that we *infer* that it is virtuous.

What happens is this:

> •We feel that this character pleases us in a certain

> way, and in having that feeling we are in effect feeling that the character is virtuous.

It's the same with our judgments concerning all kinds of beauty, and tastes, and sensations. Our approval is contained in the immediate pleasure they convey to us.

Against the theory that there are eternal rational measures of right and wrong, I have objected:

> There aren't any relations in the actions of thinking creatures that aren't also to be found in external objects, so that if morality always came with these relations it would be possible for inanimate matter to become virtuous or vicious.

Something like this may be objected against my theory:

> If virtue and vice are determined by pleasure and pain, they must in every case arise from pleasure and pain; so that any object, animate or inanimate, thinking or non-thinking, might become morally good or evil by arousing satisfaction or uneasiness.

But although this objection seems to be the very same as mine, it has nothing like the force that mine has. There are two reasons why.

It's obvious that the term 'pleasure' covers sensations that are very different from one another, having only the distant resemblance that is needed for them to fall under a single abstract term. A good musical composition and a bottle of good wine equally produce pleasure, and their goodness is determined merely by the pleasure. But is that going to lead us to say that the wine is harmonious or that the music has a good flavor? Well, in the same way we may get satisfaction from an inanimate object x and from the character or sentiments of a person y; but the satisfactions are different, which keeps our sentiments concerning x and y from getting confused with one another, and makes us ascribe virtue to y and not to x. Also, it is *not* the case that every sentiment of pleasure or pain arising from ·personal· characters and actions is of the special kind that makes us praise or condemn. The good qualities of an enemy are hurtful to us, but may still command our esteem and respect. It is only when a character is considered in general, without reference to our particular interests, that it causes the kind of feeling or sentiment that qualifies it as morally good or evil. It's true that sentiments from self-interest are apt to be confused with moral sentiments. We usually think that our enemy is vicious—not distinguishing his opposition to our interests from real villainy or baseness. But this doesn't stop it from being the case that the sentiments *are* in themselves distinct; and a man with a good temperament and good judgment can preserve himself from these illusions. Similarly, although a musical voice is nothing but one that naturally gives a particular kind of pleasure, it is hard for a man to be aware that an enemy has an agreeable ·singing· voice or to admit that it is musical. But someone who has a fine ear and good command of himself can separate these feelings—·the hostility and the music-based pleasure·—and give praise to what deserves it.

You will notice an even greater difference among our pains and pleasures if you think back to something in my account of the passions. [Hume is referring here to his account of pride and humility, love and hatred. His explanation of his point is stunningly obscure, and we don't need it for what follows.]

You may now want to ask in a general way: 'What principle$_c$ in the human mind creates this pain or pleasure that distinguishes moral good from moral evil?' The **first** thing I have to say in reply to this is that it would be absurd to imagine that in every particular case these sentiments are produced by a *basic* feature of our innate constitution. There is no end to the list of our duties; so it's impossible

that we should have a basic instinct corresponding to each of them; if we did, that would mean that from our earliest infancy our minds were imprinted with all the multitude of precepts that are contained in the completest system of ethics! If nature had gone about things in that way, that would have been quite out of line with its usual procedure, in which a few principles$_c$ produce all the variety we observe in the universe, and everything is carried on in the easiest and simplest manner. So we need a shorter list of primary impulses—i.e. some more general principles$_c$ on which all our notions of morals are founded.

In the **second** place, if we take the question to include this: 'Ought we to search for these principles$_c$ in nature, or rather elsewhere?', I say that how we answer this question depends on the definition of the word 'Nature'—as ambiguous a word as there is! **(1)** If 'nature' is opposed to *miracles*, the distinction between vice and virtue is natural, but so also is every event that has ever happened in the world, apart from the miracles on which our religion is founded. So we aren't announcing much of a result when we say that the sentiments of vice and virtue are 'natural' in *this* sense.

(2) But 'nature' may instead be opposed to 'rare and unusual'; and in this sense of the word—the common one—there can often be disputes about what is or isn't 'natural', and it's safe to say that we have no precise standard by which these disputes can be decided. •'Frequent' and 'rare' depend on how many examples we have observed; that number may gradually increase or lessen; so we can't possibly fix any exact boundary between •them. All I can say about this is that if it is *ever* right to call something 'natural' in this sense, the sentiments of morality are certainly natural, because no nation or individual person has ever been utterly deprived of such sentiments, showing not the least approval or dislike of ways of behaving. These sentiments are so deeply rooted in our human constitution that the only way they could be erased and destroyed is by the relevant mind's being thrown into confusion by disease or madness.

(3) But 'nature' can also be opposed to *artifice* as well as to what is rare and unusual; and in *this* sense it is open to question whether the notions of virtue are natural or not. We readily forget that men's designs and projects and opinions are principles$_c$ that are as *necessary* in their operation as are heat and cold, moist and dry; we instead take them to be *free* and entirely our own, contrasting them with the other principles$_c$ of nature. Is the sense of virtue natural or artificial? I don't think that at this stage I can give any precise answer to this question. It may appear later on that our sense of some virtues is artificial while our sense of others is natural. The topic will be better discussed when we come to the details of each particular vice and virtue.[3]

Given these ·three· definitions of 'natural' and 'unnatural', we can see how utterly unphilosophical it is to say that virtue is the same as what is natural, and vice the same as what is unnatural. •In **(1)** the first sense of the word 'nature', in which it is contrasted with 'miraculous', vice and virtue are equally natural; and **(2)** in the second sense of 'nature', in which it is contrasted with 'unusual', it may be found that virtue is the unnatural one of the two! You must at least agree that that heroic virtue is as unnatural—in *this* sense—as the most brutal barbarity. **(3)** As for the third sense of the word 'nature', it is certain that vice and virtue are equally artificial and out of nature. Whatever disputes there may be about whether the notion of merit or demerit in certain actions is natural or artificial, there is no disputing

[3] In the remainder of this work, 'natural' is also sometimes contrasted with 'civil', and sometimes with 'moral'. In each case, the contrasting term will tell you in what sense 'natural' is being taken.

that the actions themselves are artificial, and are performed with a certain design and intention; if that weren't so, they couldn't count as either virtuous or vicious. So there is no way in which the contrast between 'natural' and 'unnatural', in whatever sense you take it, can ever mark the line between vice and virtue.

So we are still brought back to my first position, namely that virtue is distinguished by the pleasure, and vice by the pain, that we get from encountering or thinking about an action, sentiment, or character. This thesis is very *useful*, because it lets us tackle the question

> •What is the origin of an action's moral rectitude or depravity?

without searching for any incomprehensible relations and qualities, without looking around for something that never did exist in nature or even in the clear and distinct part of our imagination. It spares us all that, because it answers *that* question in the same way that it answers *this*:

> •Why is it that thinking about certain general kinds of action or sentiment causes in us a certain satisfaction or uneasiness?

I flatter myself that I have carried out a great part of my present plan just by getting the question into that form, which appears to me so free from ambiguity and obscurity.

Part ii: Justice and injustice

1: Justice natural or artificial?

I have already hinted that •it's not the case that our sense of every kind of virtue is natural, because •there are some virtues that produce pleasure and approval by means of an artifice or contrivance that arises from mankind's needs and circumstances. I contend that justice is of this kind, and I'll try to defend this opinion by a short and (I hope!) convincing argument, before considering *what* the artifice is from which the sense of virtue is derived.

It's obvious that when we praise an action we are attending only to the motive that produced it; we are taking the action as a sign or indication of certain principles$_c$ at work in the person's mind and temperament. The external ·physical· performance has no merit. We must look within the person to find the moral quality; but we can't do this directly; so we attend to the person's action as an external sign of his state of mind. But we're taking it *only* as a sign; the ultimate object of our praise and approval is the motive that produced it.

In the same way, when we require someone to act in a certain way, or blame a person for not acting in a certain way, we always have in mind the proper •motive for such an action, and if the person doesn't have •that, we regard this as an instance of vice. If on further enquiry we find that the virtuous motive *was* still powerful over his breast but was blocked from operating by some circumstances unknown to us, we retract our blame and give the person as much esteem as we would if he had actually performed the action that we required of him.

So it appears that all virtuous actions get their merit purely from virtuous motives, and are considered merely as signs of those motives. Now what, basically, makes a motive a virtuous one? Here is a clearly *wrong* answer to that question:

> •The fundamental virtuous motive is the motive of wanting to perform a virtuous action.

To suppose that the mere concern to act virtuously is the first motive that produced the action, making it virtuous, is to reason in a circle. A concern to act virtuously is possible only if there is something *other than* this concern, this motive, that would make the action virtuous if it were performed. So ·at least· *some* virtuous motives must be some **natural** motive or principle$_c$—·'natural' in the sense of not involving any such moral notion as that of virtue·.

This isn't a mere metaphysical subtlety; it enters into all our reasonings in common life, though we may not always be able to state it with such philosophical clarity. We blame a father for neglecting his child. Why? because it shows a lack of **natural** affection, which is the duty of every parent. If **natural** affection were not a duty, the care of children couldn't be a duty; and we couldn't be motivated to care for our children by the thought that it is our duty to do so. This, therefore, is one of the cases where everyone supposes that the action comes from a motive other than a sense of duty.

Consider a man who performs many benevolent actions—relieves the distressed, comforts the afflicted, and extends his generosity even to perfect strangers. No character can be more lovable and virtuous ·than his·. We regard these actions as proofs of the greatest •humaneness, and •this

confers merit on the actions. So our thought about the merit of the actions is a secondary consideration; it comes from the ·primary, underived· merit and praiseworthiness of the humaneness that produced the actions.

So we can take this as established and beyond question: For an action to be virtuous or morally good, ·the agent's· human nature must contain some motive to produce it other than the sense of its morality.

You may want to object: 'But can't a person's sense of morality or duty produce an action, without any other motive?' Yes, it can; but this is no objection to what I am saying. When a virtuous motive or principle$_c$ is common in human nature, a person who feels his heart to be lacking in that motive may hate himself on that account, and may perform the action without the motive, doing this from a certain sense of duty, in order to acquire through practice that virtuous principle$_c$ or at least to hide *from himself*, as much as he can, the fact that he doesn't have it. A man who really *feels* no gratitude is still pleased to perform grateful actions, and he thinks that in performing them he is fulfilling his duty. Actions are at first considered only as signs of motives; but here as everywhere else we usually fix our attention on •the signs and to some extent neglect •the thing signified. But although it may *sometimes* happen that a person performs an action merely out of a desire to do his moral duty, this presupposes ·that there *is* such a thing as doing one's duty, which in turn presupposes that· human nature contains some distinct principles$_c$ whose moral beauty confers merit on the actions that are produced.

Now let us apply all this to the following case: Someone has lent me a sum of money, on condition that I return it in a few days; and at the end of those few days he demands his money back. I ask, What reason or motive have I to return the money to him? You may answer:

> 'If you have the least grain of honesty, or sense of duty and obligation, your respect for justice and your hatred for villainy and knavery provide you with enough reasons to return the money.'

And this answer is certainly true and satisfactory for a man in his civilized state, one who has been brought up according to a certain discipline. But as addressed to a man who is in a crude and more natural condition—if you'll allow that such a condition can be called 'natural'— this answer would be rejected as perfectly unintelligible and sophistical. Someone in that '·natural·' condition would immediately ask you: 'What *is* this honesty and justice that you find in repaying a loan and not taking the property of others?' It surely doesn't lie in the external action, so it must be in the motive that leads to that action. And the motive can't be a concern for the honesty of the action; because it is a plain fallacy to say that •an action is honest only if its motive is virtuous, while *also* saying that •the motive in question is a concern to perform an honest action. We can't be motivated by a concern for the virtue of an action unless the action ·can· be antecedently virtuous, ·i.e. virtuous for some reason that doesn't involve the virtuous motive·. . . .

So we have to find some motive for acts of justice and honesty distinct from our concern for honesty; and there is a great difficulty about this. Suppose we say this:

> The legitimate motive for all honest actions is a concern for our **private** self-interest or reputation,

it would follow that when that concern ceases, there is no longer any place for honesty. ·That would be a dismal outcome, because· it is certain that when •self-love acts without any restraints, instead of leading us to act honestly •it is the source of all injustice and violence. A man can't ever correct those vices without correcting and restraining the natural emotional thrusts of the appetite ·of self-love·.

Well, suppose instead that we say this:

> The reason or motive for such actions is a concern for the **public** interest, to which nothing is more contrary than acts of injustice and dishonesty.

Anyone who thinks that this might be right should attend to the following three considerations. **(1)** Public interest is not *naturally* attached to the keeping of the rules of justice. It is connected with it only through an *artificial* convention for establishing the rules of justice. I'll defend this in detail later on. **(2)** ·Sometimes the public interest doesn't come into it. We have been discussing the repayment of a loan·. Well, it might be that the loan was secret , and that for some reason the lender's interests require that it be repaid in secret too (perhaps he doesn't want the world to know how rich he is). In this case, the interests of the public aren't involved in how his borrower behaves; but I don't think that any moralist will say that the duty and obligation ceases. **(3)** Experience shows us well enough that when men in the ordinary conduct of their life pay their creditors, keep their promises, and refrain from theft and robbery and injustice of every kind, they aren't thinking about the public interest. Service to the •public interest is too remote—too lofty—to affect most people and to operate with any force in actions of justice and common honesty, contrary as those often are to •private interest.

·A concern for the public interest might be thought to arise from a love of mankind; but that is wrong because· in general it can be said that there is no such passion in human minds as

> •the love of mankind, merely as mankind,

as distinct from

> •love ·for one person because· of his personal qualities or his services or his relation to oneself.

It is true that there's no human creature—indeed no sentient creature—whose happiness or misery doesn't have *some* effect on us when it is brought near to us and represented in lively colours. But this comes merely from *sympathy*, and is no proof of a universal affection towards mankind, because it extends beyond mankind to other species. Consider an affection that obviously *is* an ingrained feature of human nature, namely the affection between the sexes. This shows itself not only in •specifically sexual feelings but also in its effect of intensifying every other principle$_c$ of affection, e.g. the love we have for someone because of his or her beauty, wit, or kindness. ·A man would be grateful to •anyone who relieved the pain in his neck by massage, but his gratitude would be stronger if the massage were given by •a woman·. If there were a universal love among all human creatures—·a love that was also ingrained in human nature·—it would show up in the same way, ·intensifying our positive reactions to people. That is·, if

> **(1)** someone's having a certain degree of a bad quality BQ would cause people in general to hate him with intensity H_{BQ}, and if
>
> **(2)** someone's having an equal degree of a good quality GQ would cause people in general to love him with intensity L_{GQ},

•L_{GQ} would be a greater intensity than H_{BQ}, ·because •it would involve the response to GQ in particular *amplified by* input from the universal love for mankind·. And that is contrary to what we find by experience. Men's temperaments are different: some have a propensity for the tender affections, others for the rougher ones; but it's safe to say that man in general = human nature is nothing but the ·potential· object both of love and hatred. [The word 'potential' is inserted into Hume's 'nothing but. . . ' phrase because his point seems be that from the mere information that x is a human being we can infer that x could be loved or could be hated, depending on further details about him; and that there

is nothing here that tilts the probability towards the 'love' rather than to the 'hate' side.] For either of these passions to be aroused there has to be some other cause—·something more than the mere fact that this is a human being·—producing love or hate by a double relation of impressions and ideas [see note late in II.1.7]. There's no escape from this conclusion. There are no phenomena that indicate any such *kind* affection towards men simply *as men*, independently of their merit and every other detailed fact about them. We love company in general, but that's like our love for any other way of passing the time. In Italy an Englishman is a friend; in China a European is a friend; and it may be that if we were on the moon and encountered a human being there, we would love him just as a human being. But this comes only from the person's relation to ourselves, ...·and not from a universal love of everyone for everyone·.

So •public benevolence—a concern for the interests of mankind—can't be the basic motive for justice; and it's even less possible for the motive to be •private benevolence, i.e. a care for the interests of the person concerned. What if he is my enemy, and has given me good reason to hate him? What if he is a vicious man who deserves the hatred of all mankind? What if he is a miser, and can't make use of what I would deprive him of ·by theft or by not repaying a loan·? What if he is a profligate debauchee, and would get more harm than benefit from large possessions? What if I am in great need, and have urgent motives to get something for my family? In all these cases, the ·supposed· basic motive for justice would fail; and so justice itself would fail, and along with it all property, right, and obligation. ·There would be no injustice in stealing from someone you justly hate, or not repaying a loan that you had from a miser·.

[The next extremely difficult paragraph is given just as Hume wrote it.] A rich man lies under a moral obligation to communicate to those in necessity a share of his superfluities. Were private benevolence the original motive to justice, a man would not be obliged to leave others in the possession of more than he is obliged to give them. At least, the difference would be very inconsiderable. Men generally fix their affections more on what they are possessed of, than on what they never enjoyed; for this reason, it would be greater cruelty to dispossess a man of any thing, than not to give it him. But who will assert that this is the only foundation of justice? The chief reason why men attach themselves so much to their possessions is that they consider them as •their property and as •secured to them inviolably by the laws of society. But this is a secondary consideration, which depends on independent notions of justice and property.

A man's property is supposed to be fenced ·by justice· against every mortal, in every possible case. But private benevolence is and ought to be weaker in some persons than in others; and in many persons—indeed in *most* of them—there is absolutely no private benevolence ·towards very many other people·. So private benevolence isn't the basic motive for justice.

From all this it follows that our only real and universal motive for conforming to the laws of equity is that it is equitable and meritorious to do so; but no action can be equitable or meritorious unless it can arise from some separate motive. If there weren't a separate motive, the situation would be this:

> I am motivated to do A because that would equitable and meritorious; and what makes A equitable and meritorious is its being done from a good motive.

This obviously involves sophistry, reasoning in a circle. Presumably we won't say that nature has established this sophistry, making it necessary and unavoidable ·for us to think in this circular manner·; so we have to accept that

the sense of justice and injustice isn't derived from •nature, but arises artificially—though necessarily—from •upbringing and human conventions.

Here is a corollary to this reasoning: Because no action can be praiseworthy or blameworthy unless it comes from some motives or impelling passions distinct from the sense of morals, these distinct passions must have a great influence on the moral sense. It's *their* general force in human nature that determines how and what we blame or praise. In judging the beauty of animal bodies, we always have in mind the economy of a certain species [= 'the way the parts of an animal of that species fit and work together to constitute a functioning animal']; and where the limbs and features are proportioned in the way that is common for the species, we declare them to be 'handsome' and 'beautiful'. Similarly, when we reach a conclusion about vice and virtue we always have in mind the natural and usual force of the passions; and when someone has a passion that is a long way—on one side or the other—from the common degree of intensity of that passion, we disapprove of it and regard it as vicious. Other things being equal, a man *naturally* loves his children better than his nephews, his nephews better than his cousins, his cousins better than strangers. Those facts are what generate our common measures of duty—e.g. our judgment that a man has a greater duty to his son than to his nephew. Our sense of duty always follows the common and natural course of our passions.

To avoid giving offence, I must here remark that when I deny that justice is a natural virtue, I am using the word 'natural' only as opposed to 'artificial' [i.e. using 'natural' in a sense that rules out *everything that in any way involves deliberate actions of human beings*]. In another sense of the word, no principle$_c$ in the human mind is more 'natural' than a sense of virtue, so no virtue is more 'natural' than justice. Mankind is an inventive species; and when an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, the word 'natural' applies to it just as well as it does to anything that comes of nature immediately from basic principles$_c$ without the intervention of thought or reflection. Though the rules of justice are artificial, they aren't simply *decided on* by some one or more human beings. And there's nothing wrong with calling them 'laws of nature', if we take 'nature' to include everything that is •common to our species, or even if we take it more narrowly to cover only what is •inseparable from our species.

2: The origin of justice and property

I'm now going to examine two questions: **(1)** In what way are the rules of justice established by the artifice of men [i.e. by men's thoughts and deliberate activities]? **(2)** What are the reasons that make us attribute moral beauty to conformity to these rules, and moral ugliness to departures from them? I shall begin with **(1)**, ·and will embark on **(2)** on page 258.·

Man seems at first sight to have been treated more cruelly by nature than any of the other species of animal on this planet, because of the countless wants and necessities with which she has loaded him and the slender means she has

given him for getting what he needs. In other creatures, these two particulars—·i.e. needs and means to satisfy them·—generally match each other. If we think of the lion as a voracious and carnivorous animal—·needing a lot of food, and needing it to be meat·—we shall easily see that he is very needy [Hume: 'necessitous']; but if we attend to his physical structure, his temperament, his agility, his courage, his weapons, and his strength, we'll find that his advantages match up to his wants. The sheep and the ox don't have all these advantages; but their appetites are moderate, and their food is easy to get. To observe a total mismatch—an unnatural conjunction of needs and weakness in its most complete form—we must look to the case of *man*. The food he needs for survival either •runs away from him or •requires his labour to be produced, and he has to have clothes and lodging to protect him from being harmed by the weather; and yet if we consider him only in himself—·looking at any individual man·—we see that he doesn't have the weapons or the strength or any other natural abilities that match up to his enormous needs.

It is only through *society* that man can make up for his defects and raise himself to the level of his fellow-creatures or even to something higher. Through society all his weaknesses are made up for; and though in the social situation his wants multiply every moment, his abilities multiply even more, leaving him in every respect happier and more satisfied than he could ever become if he remained in his savage and solitary condition. When each individual person works alone and only for himself, **(a)** he hasn't the power to do anything much; because he has to work at supplying all his different needs, **(b)** he never reaches perfection in any particular skill; and **(c)** his power comes and goes, and sometimes his projects fail because he has run out of power or run out of luck, so that he is constantly at risk of ruin and misery. Society provides a remedy for these three drawbacks. **(a)** By combining forces we increase our power; **(b)** by dividing up the work we increase our level of ability; and **(c)** by helping one another we are less exposed to bad luck. It's this addition to our power, ability, and security that makes society advantageous to us. [Hume wrote in **(c)** of ruin and misery being 'inevitable' upshots of 'the least failure' in power or luck; but that can't have been his considered view.]

For society to be formed, however, not only must it be advantageous but men must be *aware of* its advantages; and they can't possibly get this awareness through study and reflection in their wild uncultivated ·non-social· state. So it is very fortunate that along with all the needs whose remedies are •remote and •obscure there's another need the remedy for which is •present and •obvious, so that it can fairly be regarded as the first—the basic—principle$_c$ of human society. What I am talking about here is the natural appetite between the sexes, which brings them together and keeps them together ·as a two-person society· until their concern for their offspring binds them together in a new way. This new concern becomes also a principle$_c$ uniting the parents with their offspring, and creates a society with more than two members, where the parents govern through their superior strength and wisdom while also being restrained in the exercise of their authority by their natural affection for their children. It doesn't take long for custom and habit to work on the tender minds of the children, •making them aware of the advantages that they can get from society, as well as gradually •fitting them to be in society by rubbing off the rough corners and inappropriate affections that prevent them from joining in. [In speaking of inappropriate (his word is 'untoward') affections, Hume is using 'affection' with a broader meaning than we give to it, sprawling across feelings and mental attitudes of all kinds; the same broad meaning is at work •when he speaks of 'kind

affections', which are pretty much what you and I would call, simply, 'affections', and •when on page 255 he says that the two principal parts of human nature are 'the affections and [the] understanding'.]

However much the circumstances of human nature may make a union necessary, and however much the passions of lust and natural affection may seem to make it unavoidable, some *other* features of **(a)** our natural temperament and of **(b)** our outward circumstances are *not* conducive to the needed union—indeed they are even *contrary* to it. **(a)** The most considerable of these features of our temperament is our selfishness. I'm aware that what philosophers have written about this has generally been highly exaggerated; the descriptions that certain philosophers love to give of mankind's selfishness are as wide of nature as any accounts of monsters in fables and romances. So far from thinking that men have no affection for anything but themselves, I hold that although we don't often meet up with

> •someone who loves some one person better than he loves himself,

it is equally rare to find

> •someone whose selfish affection is not outweighed by the totality of his kind affections, taken together.

Consult common experience: the whole expense of a family is generally under the direction of the head of it, and almost always the head of a family spends most of his wealth on the pleasures of his wife and the upbringing of his children, reserving the smallest portion for his own individual use and entertainment. That's what we see concerning those who have those endearing ties; and we can assume that it would be the same with others if they came to be heads of families.

Such ·paternal· generosity must be counted as to the credit of human nature; and yet this noble affection, instead of fitting men for large societies, is almost as contrary to them as the most narrow selfishness. As long as each person loves himself better than any other single person, and has a greater loving affection for his own relations and friends than for anyone else, there are bound to be opposing passions and therefore opposing actions, which must be dangerous to the newly established union ·of a just-formed society·.

(b) But it's worth pointing out that this opposition of passions would be relatively harmless if a certain fact about our outward circumstances didn't give it an opportunity to exert itself. The goods that we are possessed of are of three kinds:

> •the internal satisfaction of our minds;
> •the external advantages of our body; and
> •the enjoyment of such possessions as we have acquired by hard work and good luck.

We are perfectly secure in the enjoyment of the first. We can be robbed of the second, but they can't bring any advantage to the robber. It's only the third category of possessions that are both •exposed to the violence of others, and •transferable from one person to another without undergoing any loss or alteration; and—·to make things even worse·—there's not enough of them to satisfy everyone's desires and needs. So the situation regarding •ownable and transferable goods is this: the chief advantage of society is that it enables us to get more of •them, and the chief impediment to society is the instability of their ownership and their scarcity.

There's no chance of finding in uncultivated nature any remedy for this trouble; or of finding any non-artificial principle$_c$ in the human mind that could control those partial [= 'not impartial'] affections and make us overcome the temptations arising from our circumstances. The *idea of justice* can't possibly serve this purpose; we can't regard it as a natural principle$_c$ that could inspire men to behave fairly towards each other. The virtue of justice, as we now understand it, would never have been dreamed of among

savage uncivilised men. ·Here is why·. The notion of injury [here = 'wrongful harm'] or injustice involves the notion of an immoral act committed against some other person. Every immorality is derived from some defect or unsoundness of the passions, and any judgment that something is morally defective must be based to a large extent on the *ordinary* course of nature in the constitution of the mind. So we can easily learn whether we are guilty of any immorality with regard to •others, by considering the *natural and usual force* of the various affections ·of ours· that are directed towards •them. Well, it seems that in the basic ·untrained· frame of our mind, our strongest attention is confined to ourselves, our next is extended to our relations and friends, and only the weakest reaches to strangers and persons who don't mean anything special to us. So this partiality and unequal affection must influence not only our •behaviour and conduct in society but even our •ideas of vice and virtue; making us regard anything that departs much from that usual degree of partiality—by involving too great an enlargement or too great a contraction of the affections—as vicious and immoral. We can see this in the way we judge actions: we blame both the person who centres all his affections in his family and the person who cares so little for his family that whenever there's a conflict of interests he gives the preference to a stranger or mere chance acquaintance. What all this shows is that our natural uncultivated ideas of morality, far from •providing a remedy for the partiality of our affections, •conform to that partiality and •add to its force and influence.

So the remedy for what is irregular and inappropriate in the affections has to come not from •nature but from •artifice; or, more properly speaking, it comes from nature working through the judgment and the understanding. [Hume's 'more properly speaking' version expresses his view that *everything* that happens is natural, and that although we talk of an art/nature divide, art—i.e. everything that involves human thought and human skill—is really a part of nature.] ·Here is how it happens·. When

> •men's early upbringing in society makes them aware of the infinite advantages of having society, and also leads them to have a new liking for company and conversation,

and when

> •they notice that the principal disturbance in society comes from the goods that we call 'external'—from their looseness, the ease of transferring them from one person to another,

they must try to remedy the situation by putting those goods as far as possible on the same footing with the fixed and constant advantages of the mind and body. The only possible way to do this is by a convention entered into by all the members of the society to make the possession of those external goods *stable*, leaving everyone in the peaceful enjoyment of whatever he has come to own through luck and hard work. This enables everyone to know what he can safely possess; and the passions are restrained in their partial and contradictory motions. The restraint ·imposed by this convention regarding property· is not contrary to **these passions**—if it were, it couldn't be maintained, and couldn't even be entered into in the first place. All that it is contrary to is **the heedless and impetuous movement of the passions**. In keeping our hands off the possessions of others we aren't departing from our own interests or the interests of our closest friends. In fact, the best way we have of serving both those sets of interests is by adhering to such a convention, because that is how we maintain society, which is so necessary to the well-being and survival of ourselves and of our friends.

This convention ·about property· is not a *promise*; for promises themselves arise from human conventions, as

I'll show in due course. The convention is only a general sense of common interest—a sense that all the members of the society •have and •express to one another, which leads them to regulate their conduct by certain rules. I see that it will be in my interests to leave you in possession of your goods, provided you will act in the same way towards me. And you are aware of its being in your interests to regulate your conduct in the same way, ·provided that I do·. When this shared sense of where our interests lie is mutually expressed and is known to both of us, it produces a suitable decision and suitable behaviour. This can properly enough be called a 'convention' or 'agreement' between us, though not one that involves a promise; because the actions of each of us are related to actions the other, and are performed on a supposition about how the other is going to act. Two men pulling the oars of a boat do this by an •agreement or •convention, though they haven't made any •promises to each other. The rule concerning the stability of ownership comes into existence gradually, gathering force by a slow progression and by our repeated experience of the drawbacks of transgressing it; but that doesn't detract from its status as a human convention. . . . This is how languages are gradually established by human conventions, without any promise being made; and how gold and silver become the common measures of exchange, and are accepted as sufficient payment for something that has a hundred times their value.

After this convention about keeping one's hands off the possessions of others is entered into, and everyone has his possessions in a stable manner, there immediately arise the ideas of

•justice and •injustice,

as well as the ideas of

•property, •right, and •obligation.

These last three ideas are altogether unintelligible to anyone who doesn't understand the first two. For something to be my *property* is for it to be permanently assigned to me by the laws of society, i.e. the laws of justice. So anyone who uses any of the words 'property', 'right', and 'obligation' before he has explained the origin of justice. . . .is guilty of a very gross fallacy, and can never reason on any solid foundation. A man's property is some object related to him ·in a certain way·, and the relation is not •natural but •moral—it is based on justice. So it is preposterous to think that we can have any idea of *property* without fully grasping the nature of *justice* and its origin in the artifice and contrivance of men. The origin of justice explains the origin of property. The same artifice gives rise to both. Our first and most natural moral sentiment is based on the nature of our passions, and prefers ourselves and our friends above strangers; so there can't possibly be any such thing as a •fixed right or as •property while the opposing passions of men push them in contrary directions without restraint from any convention or agreement.

No-one can doubt that the convention for marking things out as *property*, and for the stability of ownership of property, is the most necessary single thing for the establishment of human society, and that when men have agreed to establish and obey this rule there remains little or nothing to be done towards establishing perfect harmony. All the *other* passions—other than this one concerning the interests of ourselves and our friends—are either •easily restrained or •not so very harmful when acted on without restraint.

- •Vanity should be counted as a social passion, and as a bond of union among men.
- •So should pity and love.
- •Envy and vengefulness are indeed harmful, but they operate only intermittently, and are directed against

individuals whom we regard as our superiors or enemies.

It's only this avidity [= 'greed'] to acquire goods and possessions for ourselves and our closest friends that is •insatiable, •perpetual, •universal, and •directly destructive of society. Almost everyone is actuated by it, and everyone has reason to fear what will come from it when it acts without any restraint, giving way to its first and most natural emotions. So our view about how hard it is for society to be established should be proportioned to how hard it is to regulate and restrain *this* passion.

It is certain that no affection of the human mind has enough force and the right direction for counterbalancing the love of gain, making men fit for society by making them abstain from taking the possessions of others. Benevolence to strangers is too weak for this purpose; and the other passions all inflame our avidity when we notice that the more possessions we have the more able we are to gratify all our appetites. So the only passion that can control this affection (this ·avidity·) is that very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction. . . . No issue about the •wickedness or •goodness of human nature is raised by the facts about the origin of society. All we have to consider are the degrees of men's •foolishness or •good sense ·in taking care of their long-term interests·. It makes no difference whether we regard the passion of self- interest as vicious or virtuous, because all that restrains it is *itself*. Thus, if it is virtuous then men become social by their virtue; if it is vicious, they become social by their vice.

This passion ·of avidity· restrains itself by establishing the rule for the stability of ownership; so if that rule were very abstruse and hard to discover, we would have to conclude that society is in a way *accidental*—something that came into being through the centuries. But if we find that

- •nothing can be simpler or more obvious than this rule; that
- •every parent has to establish it in order to preserve peace among his children; and that
- •these first rudiments of justice must be constantly improved, as the society enlarges;

if all that seems obvious (and it certainly does), we can conclude that it is utterly impossible for men to remain for long in the savage condition that precedes society, so that we are entitled to think of mankind as *social* from the outset. It is still all right for philosophers to extend their reasoning to the supposed 'state of nature', as long as they accept that this is a mere philosophical fiction, which never had—and never *could* have—any reality. Human nature has two principal parts, the affections and the understanding, which are required in all its actions; the blind motions of the affections without direction from the understanding would certainly incapacitate men for society. Still, there's nothing wrong with our considering separately the effects of the separate operations of these two component parts of the mind. [In the next sentence, 'natural philosophers' refers to natural scientists, and 'moral philosophers' refers to philosophers in our sense; Hume is thinking of them as scientists who study the human condition.] Natural philosophers often treat a single motion as though it were compounded out of two distinct parts, although they accept that the motion is in itself uncompounded and unsplittable; and that same approach is followed by moral philosophers who examine the affections and the understanding separately from one another.

So this •state of nature is to be regarded as a mere fiction, rather like that of •the 'golden age' that poets have invented, except that •the former is described as full of war, violence, and injustice, whereas •the latter is depicted as charming and peaceful. If we're to believe the poets, the seasons in that

first ·golden· age of nature were so temperate that men didn't need clothes or houses to protect them from the violence of heat and cold. The rivers flowed with wine and milk, the oaks yielded honey, and nature spontaneously produced her greatest delicacies. And these weren't even the chief advantages of that happy age! The age was free not only from storms and tempests in the weather but also from the more furious tempests in human breasts that now cause such uproar and create so much confusion. Avarice, ambition, cruelty, selfishness, were never heard of; cordial affection, compassion, sympathy, were the only feelings the human mind had experienced. Even the distinction between *mine* and *thine* was banished from that happy race of mortals, so that the very notions of property, obligation, justice and injustice were banished also.

Although this is no doubt an idle fiction, it deserves our attention, because nothing can more plainly show the origin of the virtues that are the subjects of our present enquiry. I have already remarked that justice comes from human conventions, which are intended as a remedy to some drawbacks that come from a way in which certain •qualities of the human mind—

> namely, selfishness and limited generosity—

are matched by certain •facts about external objects—

> namely, that they are easy to move around and that they are scarce in comparison of the wants and desires of men.

But however bewildered philosophers may have been in those speculations, poets have been guided more infallibly by a certain taste or common instinct which, in most kinds of reasoning, goes further than any of the art and philosophy that we have so far been acquainted with. The poets easily perceived that if every man had a gentle concern for every other, or if nature abundantly fulfilled all our needs wants and desires, there would be no place for the conflicts of interests that justice presupposes, and no use for the distinctions and boundaries relating to property and ownership that at present are in use among mankind. Make a big enough increase in •the benevolence of men or •the bounty of nature and you make justice useless by replacing it with much nobler virtues and more valuable blessings. . . .

We didn't have to go to the fictions of poets to learn this,. . . .because we could discover the same truth from common experience and observation. It is easy to see that a cordial affection makes all things common among friends; and that married people, especially, share their property [Hume: 'mutually lose their property'] and aren't acquainted with the *mine* and *thine* that are so necessary and yet so troublesome in human society. The same thing can be brought about by an alteration in the circumstances of mankind—e.g. when there is enough of some commodity to satisfy all the desires of men, so that ·for that commodity· property-distinctions are lost and everything is held in common. We can see this with regard to *air* and *water*, though they are the most valuable of all external objects; and we can easily conclude that if men were supplied with everything as abundantly as they are with air and water, or if everyone had the same affection and tender regard for everyone else as he does for himself, justice and injustice would be unknown among mankind.

I think we can regard this proposition as certain:

> **J**: Justice gets its origin from •the selfishness and limited generosity of men, along with •the scanty provision nature has made for men's wants.

If we look back we'll find that proposition **J** adds extra force to some of the things I have already said on this subject.

(i) We can conclude from **J** that our first and most basic motive for the conforming to the rules of justice is *not* a concern for the public interest or a strong extensive

benevolence, because proposition **J** implies that if men did have such a benevolence the rules of justice would never have been dreamed of.

(ii) We may conclude from **J** that the sense of justice is *not* based on reason, or on the discovery of certain connections and relations of ideas—connections and relations that are eternal, unchangeable, and universally obligatory. We have just seen that an alteration such as I have described in the temperament or the circumstances of mankind would entirely alter our duties and obligations; so a defender of the common theory that *the sense of virtue is derived from reason* has to show how the relations of ideas would be changed ·by either of those alterations—i.e. by a great increase in the benevolence of men or by the abundance of nature·. But it's obvious that

> the only reason why •extensive human generosity and •perfect natural abundance of everything would destroy the very idea of justice is that •they would make that idea useless;

and that

> the only reason why •limited human benevolence and human •needs that nature doesn't abundantly meet give rise to that virtue is that they make virtue necessary for the public interest and for each person's private interest.

·There's nothing in this that involves changes in relations of ideas·! What made us establish the laws of justice was a concern for our own and the public interest; and it's absolutely certain that what gives us this concern is not any relation of ideas, but rather our impressions and sentiments, without which nothing in nature matters to us either way. So the sense of justice is based not on our ideas but on our impressions.

(iii) **J** further confirms my earlier thesis that the impressions giving rise to this sense of justice are not natural to the mind of man, but arise from artifice and human conventions. Any considerable alteration in the human temperament and circumstances destroys justice and injustice equally; and because such an alteration has an effect only by changing our own and the public interest, it follows that the basic establishment of the rules of justice depends on these different interests. But if men pursued the public interest naturally and with a hearty affection, they would never dream of restraining one another by these rules; and if they pursued their own interest without any precaution—·i.e. naturally·—they would run headlong into every kind of injustice and violence. So these rules are artificial, and seek their end in an oblique and indirect manner; and the interest that gives rise to them is of a kind that couldn't be pursued by the natural and unartificial passions of men.

To make this more obvious, consider the fact that although the rules of justice are established merely by interest, their connection with interest is of a special kind and is different from what may be observed on other occasions [that formulation is Hume's]. It often happens that a single act of justice is contrary to the public interest; if it stood alone, without being followed by other acts, it would be very prejudicial to society. When a good man with a beneficent disposition restores a great fortune to a miser or a seditious bigot, he has acted in a way that is just and praiseworthy ·by giving to the miser or bigot something that is rightfully his property·; but the public is a real sufferer. And it can happen that a single act of justice is not, considered in isolation, conducive to the agent's private interest or to the public interest. It's easy to conceive how a man might impoverish himself by a notable instance of *integrity*, and have reason to wish that the laws

of justice were for a moment suspended in the universe with regard to that single act. But however contrary to public or private interest a single act of justice may be, it's certain that the whole plan or scheme ·of justice· is highly conducive to—indeed absolutely required for—the support of society and the well-being of every individual. It is impossible to separate the good from the ill. Property must be stable, and must be fixed by *general* rules. Even if in one instance the •public is a sufferer, this momentary ill is more than made up for by the peace and order that are established in society by steady adherence to the rule. And every •individual person must find himself a gainer, on balance, because without justice society would immediately dissolve, driving everyone into the savage and solitary condition that is infinitely worse than the worst situation that can possibly be imagined in society. So, when

> men's experience shows them that, whatever may be the upshot of any single act of justice, the whole system of ·just· actions accepted by the whole society is infinitely advantageous to society as a whole and to each individual in it,

it doesn't take long for *justice* and *property* to come into existence. Every member of society is aware of this interest; everyone expresses this awareness to his fellows, along with the decision he has made to act in accordance with it on condition that others will do the same. That is enough to induce any one of them to perform an act of justice if he is the first to have an opportunity to do so. This ·first just act· becomes an example to others; and thus justice establishes itself by a kind of convention or agreement, i.e. by an awareness that everyone is supposed to have of where his interests lie, with every single act being performed in expectation that others will act similarly. Without such a convention, no-one would ever have dreamed that there was any such virtue as justice, or have been induced to conform his actions to it. . . .

(2) We come now to the second of the two questions I raised ·on page 250·, namely: Why do we attach the idea of •virtue to •justice and the idea of •vice to •injustice? Given the results that I have already established, this question needn't detain us for long. All I can say about it now will take only a few words; if you want a fuller answer you must wait until we come to Part iii of this Book. What *naturally* ties us to justice, namely interest, has been fully explained; as for what *morally* ties us to justice—i.e. as for the sentiment of right and wrong—I can't give a full and satisfactory account of that until after I have examined the natural virtues.

[Hume now repeats his account of the basis of a system of justice in men's thoughts about where their interests lie. Then:] But when a society grows large enough to be a tribe or a nation, the interest ·that each person has in maintaining a system of justice· is more remote; and it is harder for men to grasp that disorder and confusion follow every breach of these rules—harder, that is, than in a more narrow and contracted society. But although in our own actions we may often •lose sight of the interest that we have in maintaining order and •follow a lesser and more present interest, we have no trouble seeing the harm to our interests that comes—either mediately or immediately—from unjust acts by others. . . . And even when •the injustice is too distant from us to affect our interests, •it still displeases us because we regard it as harmful to human society and damaging to everyone who comes close to the person guilty of it—·i.e. everyone who is causally 'close' enough to be directly affected by the unjust act·. Through sympathy we share in the uneasiness of such people. Now, the label 'vice' is attached to any action that gives uneasiness when we see or think about it, and 'virtue' is attached to any action that

produces satisfaction when we see or think about it. So this is the reason why the sense of moral good and evil follows from justice and injustice. What I have just said concerns the sense of good and evil as arising from our responses to the actions of *others*, but we do also extend it to cover our own actions. The general rule reaches beyond the instances from which it arose, ·so that it *could* be applied to our own actions. And there is a clear reason why it *does*, namely the fact that· we naturally sympathize with others in the sentiments they have regarding us ·when they see how we act·. Thus the original motive for the establishment of a system of justice is **self-interest**; but what attaches moral approval to justice is **sympathy with the public interest**.

[Hume now describes how politicians *for their own purposes* urge people to behave justly. He says that 'certain writers on morals' have inferred from this that moral concepts are just political dodges that we should throw away; but this is wrong, Hume says, because the politicians' pleas wouldn't have any effect on us if we didn't have moral notions independently of them. Winding up:] The most that politicians can do is to *extend* our natural ·moral· sentiments beyond their original bounds; we still need nature to provide the materials, and give us some notion of moral distinctions.

Just as public praise and blame increase our esteem for justice, so private upbringing and instruction contribute to the same effect. It's easy for parents to see •that the more honesty and honour a man is endowed with, the more useful he is to himself and to others; and •that the principles$_c$ leading towards honest and honourable conduct are more forceful when the work of self-interest and reflection is helped by custom and upbringing; so they have a reason to instill into their children from their earliest infancy the principles of honesty and to teach them to regard obedience to the rules by which society is maintained as worthy and honourable, and disobedience to them as base and infamous. This enables the sentiments of honour to take root in their tender minds, and to acquire so much firmness and solidity that they are almost as strong as the principles$_c$ that are the most essential to our natures and the most deeply rooted in our internal constitution. . . .

One last remark before I leave this subject: Although I say that in the state of nature—i.e. the imaginary state that preceded society—there is neither justice nor injustice, I do *not* say that in such a state it was allowable to violate the property of others. What I do say is that ·in that state· there was no such thing as property, so that there couldn't be any such thing as justice or injustice. I'll say something similar about *promises*, when I discuss them. . . .

3: The rules that settle who owns what

Although the establishment of the rule regarding the stability of ownership is not only useful but outright necessary for human society, it can't achieve anything while it remains in such general terms. We need a method by which to distinguish what particular goods are to be assigned to each particular person to the exclusion of the rest of mankind. That is my next topic: what goes into the detailing of this general rule so as to fit it to the common use and practice of the world. [Hume writes of 'modifying' the general rule, in a now obsolete sense of 'modify'; the word 'detailing' is adopted here as a convenient short-hand for the procedure of moving from the general rule (that people should be allowed to keep what they own) to something more specific that governs what things are owned by which people.]

Obviously the detailing can't tie x's ownership of y to any fact of the type:

> If x owns y, that will bring more utility or advantage to x or to the public than would come from y's being owned by anyone else.

No doubt it would be better if everyone owned what is most •suitable for him ·in particular·; but ·the proposed notion of ownership is no good. For one thing·, this relation of •fitness ·or suitability· may relate an object y to several different people, ·so that the proposed rule wouldn't always yield a unique answer·. Also, the proposed ownership rule is liable to so many controversies, in which men would be so partial and passionate that such a loose and uncertain rule would be absolutely incompatible with the peace of human society. The point of having the convention about the stability of ownership is precisely to cut off all occasions of discord and contention; and that would never be achieved if we were allowed to apply this rule differently from case to case, depending on where the utilities lie in the individual cases. Justice, in her decisions, pays no attention to whether a given object is fit or suitable for this or that person. . . . Whether a man is generous or a miser, he is equally well received by her, and easily gets a decision in his favour, even if the decision gives him the ownership of something that is entirely useless to him.

So the general rule that ownership must be stable is applied not by particular judgments but by other general rules; these must extend to the whole society, and must hold rigidly, not being bent ·in particular cases· by spite or by favour. Starting with the thought of men in their savage and solitary condition, I suppose that their awareness of the misery of that state and their foreseeing the advantages that would result from society will lead them to seek each others' company and offer mutual protection and assistance. I also suppose that they are wise enough to see straight off that the main obstacle to this project of society and partnership lies in the greed and selfishness of their natural temperament; and to remedy that they enter into a convention for the stability of ownership, and for mutual restraint and forbearance. This account of the origin of justice looks unnatural, ·implausible·, but that's because it presents as happening very quickly a train of thoughts that in fact arise imperceptibly and by degrees. Furthermore, it *could* happen that a group of people are somehow cut off from the society they have belonged to, and need to form a new society among themselves; and in *that* case the basic rule of justice might be reached in exactly the way I have described, ·by a fast sequence of thoughts and decisions·.

Clearly their first difficulty after adopting the general convention for •the establishment of society and •the constancy of ownership is to decide how to separate their possessions and assign to each person his particular portion—the items he is to have the use of permanently. This won't hold them up for long, because it must immediately occur to them that the most natural expedient is for everyone to continue to enjoy what he is at present master of, and that •property or •constant ownership should be tied to •immediate possession. [Men would rapidly agree to that rule for ownership, Hume says, because we do in fact—as an effect of custom—like best the things that we are most used to.]. . . .[4] But although the rule according to which x owns y if x is currently in possession of y is natural and thus useful, it is useful only in the first formation of society. If we went on holding to it after that, the results would be dreadful: there would be no such thing as restitution, ·i.e. restoring to someone something that he •owns but doesn't •currently have in his possession·, and every injustice would be authorized and rewarded. So we have to look for some other basis or bases for ownership after society has been established. I find four such bases: **(1)** Occupation, **(2)** Prescription, **(3)** Accession, and **(4)** Inheritance. I shall briefly discuss each of these. [Hume calls **(4)** 'Succession', using that word narrowly to stand for the passing on of a dead parent's possessions or governing power to his nearest descendants; but (starting on page 288) he *also* uses it more broadly to stand for •any process in which a dead ruler is replaced. To avoid confusion, every occurrence of 'succession' in the narrower sense

[4] No questions in philosophy are harder than the ones that arise when a number of causes present themselves for a single phenomenon, and we have to settle which is the principal and predominant one. There's seldom any very precise argument to fix our choice, and men settle for being guided by •a kind of taste or imagination arising from analogy, and by •a comparison of similar cases. In this matter of ownership, no doubt there are reasons of public interest for most of the rules that settle who owns what; but I suspect that these rules are principally fixed by the imagination, i.e. the more frivolous features of our thought and conception. I'll go on discussing these causes, leaving it to you to choose between •the ones that are derived from public utility and •the ones derived from the imagination. I'll begin with *the right of the present possessor*.

A feature of human nature that I noted back in I.iv.5 is that when two objects appear in a close relation to each other, the mind is apt to regard them as related in other ways as well, so as complete their union; and this inclination is so strong that it often pushes us into errors if we find any ·errors· that can serve that purpose ·of completing the union·. [Hume cites 'the conjunction of thought and matter'—his exact phrase—as an example of such an error.] Many of our impressions are incapable of being in any *place*, and yet we suppose them—those very impressions—to be *located* along with the impressions of sight and touch, merely because they are causally connected with them and are already united with them in the imagination. [Hume goes on at some length about the powerful force in our thinking—this propensity for taking pairs of items that are connected in some way and imagining them to be connected in other ways as well, especially ways that are *like* the first one, thereby increasing (we think) the orderliness of things. He starts to link this with his present topic by saying:] The same love of order and uniformity that arranges the books in a library, and the chairs in a parlour, contributes to the formation of society and to mankind's well-being by the effect it has on the general rule about the stability of ownership. If y is owned by x, i.e. is part of x's property, that's one relation between them, and it's natural ·for us to try· to base it on some preceding relation. Now, if x owns y then that ownership or property relation between is just

•x's constantly having y among his possessions,

with this being secured by the laws of society; so it is natural to add it to the relation

•x's having y in his possession right now,

because this resembles the ownership relation. . . .

is replaced in this version by 'inheritance'.]

(1) Occupation: The ownership of all external goods is changeable and uncertain; and that is one of the biggest obstacles to the establishment of society, and is the reason why men restrain themselves by explicitly or tacitly agreeing to abide by what we now call the rules of justice and equity. The misery of men's condition before this restraint came into play is the cause of our submitting to that remedy as quickly as possible; and this provides an easy reason why we attach the idea of property ·or ownership· to the *first* possession or occupation. ·Why 'as quickly as possible'? Because· men are unwilling to leave the ownership of anything undecided, even for the shortest time, or to leave the door open—even a crack—to violence and disorder. And there's also this: the *first* possession always engages our attention most; and if we neglected it there would be no basis for assigning property to any succeeding possession. [5]

There is still the question of what exactly it means to say that someone is 'in possession of' something; and this is harder to answer than you might think. We are said to be in possession of a thing not only when we immediately touch it—·e.g. holding it in our hands, or standing on it·—but also when we are related to it in such a way that we have it in our power to use it, and can move, alter, or destroy it if we choose to. So this relation ·of being-in-possession-of· is a species of cause and effect; and as *owning* something is nothing but having possession of it in a way that is made stable by the rules of justice (i.e. the conventions of men), ownership should be regarded as a cause-effect relation also. But now notice this: our power of using a thing becomes more or less certain, depending on whether the blockages to our using it are less or more probable; and this probability can increase by insensible degrees; so in many cases it is impossible to determine when ownership begins or ends, there being no certain standard by which to decide such controversies. A wild boar that falls into our trap is considered to be in our possession if it's impossible for him to escape. But what do we mean here by 'impossible'? How do we separate this •impossibility from an •improbability? And how do we exactly distinguish the latter from a •probability?. . . .

[5] Some philosophers [notably Locke] account for the right of occupation by saying that everyone is the owner of his own labour, and that when he joins that labour to something, this gives him ownership of the whole. But: **(i)** There are several kinds of occupation where we can't be said to join our labour to the object we acquire, e.g. when we possess a meadow by grazing our cattle on it. **(ii)** This ·labour theory of ownership· accounts for ownership by means of *accession*; which is taking a needlessly roundabout route. **(iii)** We can't be said to join our labour to *anything* except in a figurative sense. Strictly speaking, all we do is to *alter* something by our labour. This gives us a relation to the thing we have altered, and thence arises the property, according to the preceding principles. [The last ten words are Hume's.]

[6] [The in-text key to this footnote is high on the next page.] If we try to solve these difficulties in terms of reason and the public interest we'll get nowhere. And if instead we look to the imagination for help, ·we'll find that it can't help us either, because· obviously the qualities that operate on the imagination run into each other so imperceptibly and gradually that we can't assign any precise boundaries to them; ·which means that the concepts of our imagination are shot through with just the kind of gradualness that we are trying to cure·. And there are other difficulties as well, because our judgment alters very noticeably according to the subject, and the same power and proximity that will count as *possession* in one case won't be so counted in another. Someone who has hunted a hare to the last degree of weariness would regard it as an injustice for someone else to push ahead of him and seize his prey. But when that same person is moving towards a tree to pick an apple, he has no reason to complain if someone else, more alert, gets there first and takes possession of the apple. What is the reason for this difference? It must be that the hare's immobility is not natural to it but is a result of the hunter's work, which creates a strong relation between hare and hunter that is absent between apple and man in the other case.

Disputes frequently arise on this subject.[6]

Such disputes can arise not only about whether something is a case of property and possession at all but also about the extent of the property that is possessed; and these disputes often can't be decided, or can be decided only by the imagination. Someone who lands on the shore of a small island that is deserted and uncultivated is regarded as possessing it—possessing *all* of it—from the very first moment. That is because the island is bounded and circumscribed in the imagination, as well as being proportioned to its new possessor—·he is only one man, but it is only a small island·. If that man lands on a desert island as large as Great Britain, his property doesn't extend beyond his immediate possession; though a large colony are regarded the owners of the whole big island from the instant they set foot on it.

(2) Prescription: [This word is a legal technical term meaning 'uninterrupted possession or use for a very long time'.] It often happens that the title of first possession becomes obscure through time, and that many controversies arise about it and can't be resolved; in that case, •long ownership or •prescription naturally takes place, and gives a person a sufficient property in any thing he enjoys. [Hume explains this by saying that as something recedes further into the past its effect on our mind lessens, so that x's having the *first possession* of y comes through time to be less impressive as a basis for regarding x as owning y; and in that case the gradually weakening sense of that relation is strengthened by the knowledge that (for example) x wasn't just the first person who landed on the island but he has been farming it ever since, this being *prescription*. Hume winds up this discussion thus:] Possession during a long period of time conveys a title to any object, ·i.e. makes one the rightful owner of it·. But even if everything is produced *in* time, nothing real is produced *by* time; and from this it follows that the ownership that is produced by ·the passage of· time is not anything real in the objects, but is the offspring of the sentiments, which are the only things on which time is found to have any influence.[7]

So it seems from this that x's certain and infallible power of enjoying y, not accompanied by touch or some other sensible relation, is often not enough to put y into the possession of x. [Hume is thinking here of the person who could easily pick the apple, when there is no rival picker in the vicinity. He certainly has power to enjoy the apple; but he doesn't possess it.] And I further observe that a sensible relation between x and y, without any present power ·on x's part to make use of y·, is sometimes sufficient to qualify x as owning y. Consider the statement that *x sees y*: that is usually not a considerable relation between them, but it is regarded as considerable when y is hidden or very obscure. When that is the case, we find that x's seeing y is enough to make y x's property, according to the maxim that even a whole continent belongs to the nation that first discovered it. Notice, though, that x's discovering y isn't enough to put y in x's possession unless x *intends* to be y's owner. . . .

All this makes it easy to see how tangled many questions may become concerning the acquisition of property by occupation; and we don't have to think hard to come up with examples for which there is no reasonable decision. If you prefer real examples to invented ones, try this: Two Greek colonies, leaving their native country in search of new places to live, were told that a nearby city had been deserted by its inhabitants. To check on the truth of this, each colony sent a messenger; as they neared the city the messengers found that the information was true, and they began to race towards the city, each intending to take possession of it for his colony. The messenger who was losing the race launched his spear at the gates of the city, and had the good luck to fix it there before the other man's arrival. This created a dispute between the two colonies as to which of them owned the empty city; and this dispute still continues among philosophers. For my part, I find that the dispute can't be settled because the whole question depends on the imagination, which in this case has no precise determinate standard on which to base a decision. . . .

[7] Present possession is obviously also a relation between a person and an object; but unless the possession is long and interrupted it doesn't have enough force to outweigh the relation of first possession. . . .

(3) Accession: We come to own objects by accession when they are intimately connected with objects that are already our property, and at the same time are inferior to them. Thus the fruits of our garden, the offspring of our cattle, and the work of our slaves are all regarded as our property, even before we take possession of them. When objects are inter-connected in the imagination we are apt to put them on the same footing and to suppose them to have the same qualities. ·In our imaginations· we readily pass from one to another and don't distinguish them in the judgments we make about them, especially if the one we pass *to* is inferior to the one we pass *from*.

·START OF A LONG FOOTNOTE· [It ends on page 266]

This basis for judgments about who owns what can only be explained in terms of the imagination, and the explanation doesn't bring in anything else—the causes here are unmixed. I shall now explain these causes in more detail, and illustrate them by examples from common life and experience.

I remarked earlier that the mind has a natural tendency to •combine relations, especially similar ones, and finds a kind of fitness and uniformity in such a •union. This tendency is what gives rise to these two laws of nature:

> •In the first formation of society, property always follows the present possession.
>
> •After the first formation of society, property arises from first or from long possession.

Now it's easy to see that there are different *degrees* of relatedness: by being related to some object we acquire a relation to every other object that is related to that one, ·and then a relation to every object that is related to any of these·,. . . and so on until the chain becomes so long that it can't be thought about. However much the relatedness is •weakened at each stage along the chain, it isn't immediately •destroyed; and it often happens that two objects are related to one another through an intermediate object that is related to both. And this principle$_c$ is of such force as to give rise to the right of accession, giving us ownership not merely of things that we have in our immediate possession but also of things that are closely connected with those.

Suppose a German, a Frenchman, and a Spaniard were quarreling about who was to get which of three bottles of wine—one Rhenish, one Burgundy, and one Port. Any impartial umpire who was asked to resolve this dispute would give each of the three the wine from his own country; and the principle$_c$ that is at work here is also a source of the laws of nature that ascribe property on the basis of occupation, prescription, and accession.

In all these cases, and especially that of accession, there is first •a natural union between the idea of the person and the idea of the object, and afterwards there comes to be •a new and moral union that is produced by that right of ownership that we ascribe to the person. [Hume now devotes a footnote-page to presenting and solving a difficulty. In II.ii.5 he has said that 'the imagination passes more easily from small to large than from large to small', but the phenomenon of ownership-by- accession seems to reverse the direction: owning Great Britain would give one ownership of the Isle of Man, but the converse of this doesn't hold. Thus, we have large to small but not small to large. Hume's solution of this difficulty is not very interesting. After that, the long footnote continues:] Philosophers and legal theorists hold that the sea can't become the property of any nation, because it's impossible to take possession of the sea or to become related to it in any way that would be a basis for ownership. Where this reason ceases, property immediately takes place. [That is Hume's sentence. He means that any part of the sea that *can* be owned *is* owned.] Thus, even the most strenuous advocates for the liberty of the seas—*all* of them—accept

that inlets and bays naturally belong, as an accession, to the owners of the surrounding land. These inlets and bays aren't any more united with the land than the Pacific ocean is; but they are united in the imagination, and are at the same time inferior ·in size to the surrounding land·, and so as a matter of course they are regarded as an accession.

Ownership of rivers goes to the owners of their banks; that is what the laws of most nations say, and it strikes us as natural. The exception is such vast rivers as the Rhine and the Danube, which seem to the imagination to be too large to be automatically owned by the owners of the neighbouring fields. Yet even these rivers are regarded as the property of the *nation* through whose dominions they run, because the idea of a nation is big enough to match up to such great rivers. . . .

There are ownership issues that somewhat resemble accession but are really quite different; they are worth discussing. One of them concerns the case where something owned by one person and something owned by another are conjoined in such a way that they can't be separated from one another. The question here is 'Who owns the united mass ·of the two properties taken together·?'. . . . An example would be the situation where someone builds a house on someone else's ground, so that the whole house-and-ground-it-stands-on must belong to one of these two. I contend that it's natural to think of it as belonging to the owner of the *most considerable part* of the whole complex. Granted that the compound object is related to two different persons, and carries our view to both of them at once, still what mostly engages our attention is the most considerable part, which then draws the inferior part along it; and so the whole bears a ·dominant· relation to the owner of that part and is regarded as his property. The only remaining difficulty is to decide what part of the thing should we count as the most considerable part, the part exerting the strongest pull on the imagination.

This quality ·of considerableness· depends on several different factors that have little connection with each other. One part of a compound object may become more considerable than another because it is

- more constant and durable, or
- of greater value, or
- more obvious and remarkable, or
- bigger, or
- more separate and independent in its existence.

It's easy to grasp that with all the different combinations of these and their opposites that there can be, and the further complexities that come from their all being differences of *degree* ·rather than of *kind*·, there are going to be many cases that can't be satisfactorily decided because the reasons on the two sides are balanced. This brings in municipal laws, whose proper business is to fix what the forces of human nature have left undetermined.

what Hume wrote next: The superficies yields to the soil, says the civil law; the writing to the paper; the canvas to the picture.

examples of what he meant: According to the civil law: if I build a house on your ground, it is your house; if I write a poem on your paper, it is your poem; if I paint a picture on your canvas, it is my picture.

Those decisions don't agree well together, and are a proof of the contrariety of the sources from which they are derived.

[The footnote ends with a discussion of a case that the ancients use to worry over: If I make a cup from your metal, is it your cup? If I build a ship using your wood, is it your ship? Hume reports one theorist who answered Yes and Yes, and another who answered

- •Yes because the cup can easily be turned back again into shapeless metal, and
- •No because the ship can't easily be turned back into a stack of lumber.

Hume likes this Yes-No answer and the reason given for it; and remarks that this 'ingenious' reason gets its force from a fact about the imagination, namely that the difference in ease-of-restoration makes a difference in how closely we *imagine* the cup and the ship to be connected with their original owners.]

·END OF THE LONG FOOTNOTE·

(4) Inheritance: The right of inheritance is a very natural one, given the presumed consent of the parent or near relative and the general interests of mankind—interests which require that men's possessions should pass to those who are dearest to them, in order to render them more industrious and frugal. Perhaps these causes are backed up by the influence of relation—the association of ideas—by which we are naturally directed to consider the son after the parent's decease, and ascribe to him a title to his father's possessions. Those goods must become the property of somebody—but of whom? Here it is evident the person's children naturally present themselves to the mind; and being already connected to those possessions by means of their deceased parent, we are apt to connect them still further by the relation of property. There are many parallel instances of this.

4: The transference of property by consent

However useful or even necessary the stability of ownership may be to human society, it has considerable drawbacks. The relation of •fitness or •suitableness ought never to play a part in how properties are distributed among mankind; our handling of ownership issues has to be governed by rules that are more general in their application, and more free from doubt and uncertainty, ·than they could be if *fitness* were the criterion·. Rules that have these virtues include the rule of •present possession when society is first established, and after that the rules of •occupation, •prescription, •accession, and •inheritance. But because these depend very much on chance, they must often produce results that are in conflict with men's needs and desires, so that persons and possessions are often very poorly adjusted to one another. This is a great drawback, which calls for a remedy. To go straight at the problem and allow every man to seize by violence anything that he judges to be *fit* for him would destroy society; so the rules of justice look for something less extreme—something between •rigid stability and •the changeable and uncertain adjustment of the 'take what you think is fit for you' procedure. There is no better unextreme rule than the obvious one saying that what a person owns will never change except when that person consents to give something he owns to someone else. This rule can't have bad effects through causing wars and dissensions,. . . .and it may serve many good purposes in improving the fit between

property and persons. Different parts of the earth produce different commodities; and different men are fitted by nature for different employments, and achieve greater perfection in any one employment when they confine themselves to it alone. All this requires a mutual exchange and commerce; so the transfer of property by consent is based on a law of nature, and so is the stability of property when such a consent is not given.

This much is determined by plain utility and self-interest. [Hume then says that more trivial reasons are involved in various procedures for the transfer of property from one person to another—handing over the keys of a granary, or some soil from the grounds of a manor, or the like. These are mere aids to the imagination, Hume says—needed by some people because their imagination can't get a grip on the sheer fact that the ownership of something has changed. He concludes:] This is a kind of superstitious practice in civil laws and in the laws of nature, resembling the Roman Catholic superstitions in religion. Just as Roman Catholics represent the inconceivable mysteries of the Christian religion, making them more present to the mind by a candle or a gown or a facial expression that is supposed to resemble them, so also lawyers and moralists have come up with similar inventions for the same reason, trying by those means to satisfy themselves concerning the transference of property by consent.

5: The obligation of promises

The rule of morality that commands the keeping of promises is not natural. That will be clear from two propositions that I shall now prove: **(1)** A promise wouldn't be •intelligible before human conventions had established it. **(2)** Even if it were then intelligible, it wouldn't bring with it any moral obligation.

(1) A promise is not intelligible naturally, or antecedent to human conventions; a man who wasn't acquainted with society could never enter into any undertakings with someone else—not even if he and the other could perceive each other's thoughts by intuition! If promises were natural and intelligible, there would have to be some act of the mind that goes with the words 'I promise', and the moral obligation would have to depend on this act of the mind. Well, then, let us scan the faculties of the soul to see which of them is at work when we make promises. ·The search, if done competently, will go like this·:

> The act of the mind expressed by a promise to do A is not a **decision to do A**, for a mere decision never imposes any obligation. Nor is it a **desire to do A**, for we can promise to do something without wanting to do it and even with an openly declared dislike of the prospect of doing it. Neither is it a **willing of A**, for a promise always concerns some •future time, whereas the will has an influence only on •present actions. So it comes down to this: the act of the mind that enters into a promise to do A, and makes it obligatory to do

> A, is neither the deciding, the desiring, or the willing to do A, so it must be **the willing of the obligation to do A** that arises from the promise.

And ·the promising-is-an-act-of-the-mind theorist might congratulate himself on having reached this conclusion because·:

> This isn't just a conclusion reached by philosophical argument; it is also entirely in line with our common ways of thinking and expressing ourselves, when we say that we are *bound by our own consent* and that *the obligation arises from our mere will and pleasure*.

So we are left with only this question: Isn't this supposed act of the mind a manifest absurdity?—an absurdity that no-one could be guilty of if his ideas weren't confused by prejudices and the fallacious use of language? All morality depends on our sentiments; and when any action or quality of the mind pleases us *in a certain way* we say it is 'virtuous', and when the nonperformance of it displeases us *in that same way* we say that we are under an 'obligation' to perform it. A change of the obligation requires a change of the sentiment, and the creation of a new obligation requires some new sentiment to arise. But we can't naturally change our own sentiments, any more than we can change the motion of the planets; and we can't by a single act of our will—i.e. by a promise—make a change in •which actions are agreeable or disagreeable to us, or in •which actions are moral or immoral. [Hume means that a promise is a single act of the will *according to the theory he is now attacking*.] The notion of *willing a new obligation*—i.e. willing a new sentiment of pain or pleasure—is an absurdity, indeed an absurdity that is too gross for men to fall into it naturally. So a promise, looked at naturally—·i.e. without any thoughts of its being embedded in a society·—is entirely unintelligible, and there's no act of the mind belonging to it.[8]

(2) If there *were* any act of the mind belonging to a promise, it couldn't naturally produce any obligation. This follows from what I have just been saying. A promise creates a new obligation. A new obligation involves the arising of new sentiments. The will never creates new sentiments. So no obligation could naturally arise from any promise, even if the mind *could*—absurd as this is—will such an obligation. . . . [Hume's next argument is excessively difficult to follow, but where it comes out is clear enough:] The only motive we have leading us to do what we have promised to do is our sense of duty. If we thought that promises didn't create moral obligations, we wouldn't feel any inclination to keep them. That is not the case with the natural virtues. Even if we had no obligation to relieve the miserable, our humanity would lead us to do this anyway; and when we omit that duty, the immorality of the omission arises from its being a proof that we lack the natural sentiments of humanity. A father knows it to be his duty to take care of his children, but he also has a natural inclination to do this. Without that inclination, no-one could have such an obligation. Well, there's no natural inclination to do what one has promised to do; the only motivation is provided by our sense of our obligation; and this implies that fidelity to one's promises is not a natural virtue, and that promises have no force antecedent to—·and therefore independent of·—human

[8] If morality were discoverable by reason and not by sentiment, it would be even clearer that promises (·understood as acts of the will·) couldn't make any moral difference. Morality ·on this reason-based theory of it· is supposed to consist in *relations*. So every new imposition of morality must arise from some new relation between objects; so the will couldn't produce any change in morals •immediately, but only •by producing a change in the objects. But the moral obligation of a promise is purely an effect of the will, making not the slightest change to any part of the universe; and it follows that ·on this based-upon-reason theory· promises have no natural obligation. . . .

conventions.

If you disagree with this you must give a regular proof that

> •there is a special act of the mind tied to promises; and that •this act of the mind creates an inclination to perform the promised action, distinct from a sense of duty.

I presume that neither of those can possibly be proved, from which I infer that promises are human inventions, founded on the necessities and interests of society.

To discover what these necessities and interests are, we must consider the same qualities of human nature that we have found to be the source of the laws of society already discussed. ·The central fact is this·:

> Because men are naturally selfish, or very limited in their generosity, they aren't easily induced to do anything in the interests of strangers except when they see this as the only way to get some benefit in return.

Now, it frequently happens that these mutual performances—·the giving of benefits in each direction·—can't be completed at the same instant; and then one party has to settle for remaining in uncertainty and depending for his benefit on the other person's gratitude. But men are so corrupt that this—·depending on someone else's gratitude·—gives very little security; and because the benefactor is here supposed to be motivated by self-interest to bring a benefit to the other person, this insecurity •undermines the obligation and •points the way to selfishness, which is the true mother of ingratitude. If we followed the natural course of our passions and inclinations, therefore, we wouldn't perform many actions in the interests of others—

> •few performed in our own interests, because we can't depend on the beneficiaries' gratitude, and •few performed without self-interest, because we are naturally very limited in our kindness and affection.

What we see here is mankind losing the device of exchange-of-benefits, with everyone being thrown back on his own skill and industry for his well-being and subsistence. The invention of •the law of nature regarding the stability of ownership has already made men tolerable to each other [= 'kept men from one anothers' throats']; and •the law regarding the transference by consent of property and ownership has begun to make men advantageous to one another; but these laws of nature, however strictly they are kept to, aren't sufficient to make men as serviceable to each other as they are naturally advantage to someone who owns more than he can use of some kind of goods while needing more than he has of some other kind. The proper remedy for this difficulty is the transference of property, but that's not a complete remedy, because it can only take place with regard to objects that are •present and •individual, not ones that are •absent or •general. One can't transfer the property of a particular house sixty miles away, because the consent can't be accompanied by delivery, which is also needed for a transfer. Nor can one transfer the ownership of 'ten bushels of corn' or 'five barrels of wine' merely by agreeing to this in words, because the quoted phrases are only •general terms, with no direct relation to any •particular heap of corn or barrels of wine.

And there's another point. The commerce of mankind isn't confined to the exchange of *commodities*; it can extend to *services and actions*, which we can also exchange to our mutual interest and advantage. Your corn is ripe today; mine will be ripe tomorrow. It would be profitable for us both if I worked with you today and you helped me tomorrow. I have no kindness for you, and I know that you have as little for me. So I won't take any trouble to further your interests; I

know that if I worked with you in my own interests, expecting a return, I would be disappointed—it would be pointless to depend on your gratitude. So I leave you to labour alone; you leave me to work alone; the weather changes, and we both lose our harvests because of our lack of mutual confidence and security.

All this results from the natural and inherent principles$_c$ and passions of human nature. Because these passions and principles$_c$ are unalterable, you might think that our conduct that depends on them must also be unalterable, in which case it would be pointless for moralists or politicians to interfere with us, trying in the public interest to *change* the usual course of our actions. And, indeed, if the success of their designs depended on their success in correcting the selfishness and ingratitude of men, they would never make any progress unless they were aided by ·God's· Omnipotence, which is the only thing that can re-shape the human mind and change its character in such fundamental respects. All they can claim to do is to give a new direction to our natural passions, and to teach us that we can better satisfy our appetites in an indirect and artificial manner than by giving our passions their heads. In this way I learn to do a service for someone else without having any real kindness towards him, doing this because I foresee that he will do something for me in return. [The next two sentences expand what Hume wrote, in ways that the ·small dots· convention can't easily indicate.] Why will he do that? Because he will expect that on some future occasion I will again be in a position to help him, and will do so if, but only if, I think it will be in my interests to do so; and he will want to maintain this matching-of-services with me or with others. And so it come about that after he has acquired the benefit of my action on his behalf, he is induced to perform his part because he foresees the consequences of refusing.

But although this self-interested commerce of men starts to happen and to predominate in society, it doesn't entirely abolish the more generous and noble intercourse of friendship and friendly help. I may still do something for someone I love. . . .without any prospect of advantage; and that person may return the favour in the same way, not aiming to get anything out of it except recompense for me because of my past services. We need to distinguish those two different sorts of commerce—the ·self·-interested and the disinterested [here and always = 'not *self*-interested']—so a certain form of words was invented for the self-interested case, a form of words by which we bind ourselves to the performance of some action. This form of words constitutes what we call a 'promise', which is the sanction of the ·self·-interested commerce of mankind. [Here and later on Hume uses 'sanction' in the sense of 'consideration which enforces obedience to a rule of conduct'.] When a man says he *promises* to do A, he is in effect expressing a decision to do A, and along with that he is subjecting himself—by using this form of words—to the penalty of never being trusted again if he doesn't do A. Decisions are natural acts of the mind that promises express; but if there were nothing but *that* in a promise it would only declare our former motives, and wouldn't create any new motive or obligation. The new motive is created by the conventions of men, when experience has taught us that human affairs would go much better if certain symbols or signs were instituted by which we could give each other security of our conduct in any particular incident. After these signs are instituted, whoever uses them is immediately bound by his ·self·-interest to do what he has promised to do, and must never expect to be trusted any more if he refuses.

There is nothing high-flown or difficult about the knowledge that is needed for people to be aware that it's in their interests to *make* promises and to *keep* them; this knowledge

is the sort of thing that any human being could have—even one who is savage and uncultivated. One doesn't need much experience of being in the world to perceive all those consequences and advantages. A very short experience of society reveals them to every mortal; and when each individual sees the same self-interest at work in all his fellows, he immediately performs his part of any contract because he's sure that they won't fail in theirs. All of them jointly •enter into a scheme of actions that is calculated to benefit them all, and •agree to be true to their word. All that is needed for the formation of this joint action, this convention, is that everyone should •have a sense of its being in his own interests to keep his promises, and should •express that sense to other members of the society. This immediately causes ·self·-interest to go to work in all of them; and what primarily obliges us to keep our promises is ·self·-interest.

Later on, a sentiment of *morals* goes along with ·self·-interest, and becomes a new obligation on mankind. This sentiment of morality about the keeping of promises comes from the same principles$_c$ as the sentiment of morality about keeping one's hands off other peoples' property. Public interest, upbringing, and the wiles of politicians all have the same effect in both cases. . . .

I want to make some points about the act of will that is supposed to enter into a promise, and to make keeping it obligatory. Obviously, what is supposed to cause the obligation is never the act of the will alone; it has to be expressed in words or signs if it is to impose a tie—·an obligation·—on anyone. After the expression has been brought into the story as subservient to the will, it soon becomes the principal part of the promise; and a man won't be less bound by his promise to do A even if he secretly •points his intention in a different direction and •withholds himself both from deciding to do A and from wanting to be obliged to do A. On most occasions the expression is the whole of the promise, but this isn't always so: someone who says 'I promise to do A' without knowing what this means, and without any intention of binding himself, certainly isn't bound by what the words he has uttered. Even if he knows the meaning of 'I promise to do A', if he says it only as a joke, giving clear indications that he has no serious intention of binding himself, he isn't under any obligation to do A. For an obligation to be created, the words must be a perfect expression of the will, without any contrary signs. [Hume adds that if someone promises to do A intending to deceive us, and we are clever enough to pick up signs of what he is up to, *that* doesn't free him from the obligation to do A. All these details are easy to explain if promising is 'merely a human invention', Hume says, but are inexplicable if the obligation of promises is 'something real and natural, arising from any action of the mind or body'.

[He devotes a further paragraph to comparing promising, in which a moral obligation arises out of a person's will, with the doctrine of transubstantiation, which also supposes that 'a certain form of words, along with a certain intention, changes entirely the nature of an external object'. [Hume refers here to the doctrine that bread and wine are converted, in the ceremony of the Eucharist when it is done properly, into the body and blood of Jesus.] He has shown that promising involves some difficulties that mankind have overcome by adding some complexities (e.g. about jokes, deceits. etc.) to the moral doctrine about promising; equal and even worse difficulties beset the doctrine of transubstantiation, Hume says, but the doctrine goes its simple way, riding roughshod over those problems; the difference being that promising is, while transubstantiation isn't, *important in this life*. As for the after-life, Hume concludes:] Men are always more concerned about the present life than the future; and are apt to think the smallest evil regarding the former is more important than

the greatest regarding the latter.

If someone is *forced* to make a certain promise, the promise isn't binding—we'll agree about that. And that gives further support to the thesis that promises don't *naturally* create obligations, and are mere artificial contrivances for the convenience of society. Think about it! There's no essential difference between •force and •any other motive of hope or fear that might induce us to give our word and lay ourselves under an obligation. A dangerously wounded man who promises a payment to a surgeon in return for curing him is certainly bound—·morally obliged·—to pay up, though this case isn't very different from that of a man who promises a sum of money to a robber. Two cases so alike wouldn't arouse such different moral sentiments—·no obligation in one, full obligation in the other·—if these sentiments weren't based wholly on public interest and convenience.

6: Further thoughts about justice and injustice

We have now gone through the three fundamental laws of nature, the laws of

> the stability of ownership,
> its transference by consent, and
> the keeping of promises.

The peace and security of human society entirely depend on strict obedience to •those three laws; there is no chance of establishing good relations among men when •they are neglected. Society is absolutely necessary for the well-being of men, and these laws are equally necessary for the support of society. Although they restrain the passions of men, they are the real offspring of •those passions—they are just a more artful and more refined way of satisfying •them. Our passions are extremely vigilant and inventive, and the convention for the observance of these rules is obvious. So nature has entrusted this affair entirely to the conduct of men, and hasn't placed in the mind any innate principles$_c$ specially for the purpose of getting us to conform to the three rules; the other ·all-purpose· principles$_c$ and features of our constitution are sufficient for that. To strengthen the case for this even further, I shall pause here and draw from my preceding reasonings three *new* arguments to prove that •those laws, however necessary they may be, are entirely artificial, invented by human beings, and consequently that •justice is an artificial and not a natural virtue.

(1) Consider the common layman's definition of *justice*. Justice is commonly defined as *a constant and perpetual will to give everyone his due*. This definition presupposes •that there are such things as rights and property (·'his *due*'·), independently of justice and antecedent to it; and •that there would have been rights and property even if men had never dreamed of acting justly. I have already briefly indicated the wrongness of this, and now I shall present my views about it more fully and a little more clearly.

This quality that we call 'property'—·the quality of *being owned* or of *being owned by x* for some particular x·—vanishes before our eyes when we try to have a close look at it without bringing in our moral sentiments. (Its disappearance

under scrutiny is something it shares with many of the imaginary qualities of the Aristotelian philosophy!) Obviously *property* doesn't consist in any of the perceptible qualities of the object, for these can continue unchanged while the property changes—·e.g. the snuff-box that changed from being mine to being yours without altering in itself·. So *property* must consist in some relation that the object has to something else. But it's not its relation to any other •external and inanimate objects, because •these too can continue invariably the same while the property changes. So this quality must consist in a relation the object has to ·one or more· thinking and rational beings. But the essence of *property* can't consist in the object's relation to the external physical aspects of such beings, because it could have such relations to brute creatures or even to inanimate objects, though none of these can *own* it. So *property* must consist in some relation that the object has to—some influence that it has upon—the mind and actions of a thinking being. [The next sentence goes beyond what Hume wrote, in ways that the ·small dots· convention can't easily indicate.] It's true that my account of ownership starts with 'occupation' or 'first possession', which *is* a relation the object has to physical aspects of its owner—he has put a fence around it, he has it in his pocket, he wears it daily, or whatever—but it would be wrong to think that x's having (in this sense) first possession of y *is* x's owning y; it is merely the cause of his owning y—he owns y *because* he has first possession of it. Well, now, x has this external relation to y, this 'first possession' relation that connects x's body with y, and the question is *How does this bring it about that x owns y?* The external relation doesn't cause any changes in external objects; its only influence is on *the mind*, which it affects by giving us a sense of duty in keeping our hands off the object in question and restoring it to its first possessor. Actions of that sort are strictly what we call 'justice'; so the nature of property depends on justice, not vice versa.

[Hume now goes on for two more book-pages with further reasons for holding that 'the rules by which *property*, *right*, and *obligation* are determined' are human inventions and not by-products of any natural facts about the world. Then:]

(2) All kinds of vice and virtue gradually shade into each other, and can approach each other by such imperceptible degrees that it is hard if not outright impossible to settle where one ends and the other begins. In contrast with this, rights and obligations and property aren't subject to such insensible gradations: either you fully and perfectly own y or you don't own it at all; either you are entirely obliged to do A or you under no sort of obligation to do A. Civil laws talk of 'perfect dominion' and 'imperfect dominion', but it's easy to see that this arises from a fiction that has no basis in reason, and can't enter into our notions of natural justice and equity. [Hume briefly discusses the relation between a man and something that he *rents*, this apparently being an example of so-called 'imperfect dominion'. Hume says that it is outright ownership that is limited to the period of the rental. There is nothing gradual or imperceptible about what happens to property-rights when, say, a man rents a horse. He continues:] If you accept that justice and injustice are not matters of degree you are accepting that they are not *naturally* virtuous or vicious; because all *natural* qualities run imperceptibly into each other, and often can't be told apart.

Although abstract reasoning and the general maxims of philosophy and law establish that *property*, and *right*, and *obligation* are not matters of degree, we often find it hard to stick to that in our everyday careless way of thinking, where we sometimes *secretly* accept the opposing principle. **(a)** When we consider the origin of property and obligation,

and find that they depend on public utility and sometimes on propensities of the imagination that usually aren't all on one side, we are naturally inclined to imagine that these moral relations *do* admit of an imperceptible gradation. . . . **(b)** But when we really *think* about it, we are forced to acknowledge that all property and obligations are entire, ·with no halfway cases or imperceptible gradations·. An object must be in the possession either of one person or of another (we come to realize); an action must be either performed or not performed; when dilemmas arise, one side has to be chosen and it's often impossible to find any just medium. It is because of **(a)** that in cases of disputed ownership where the conflicting parties put the decision in the hands of a referee, the referee often finds so much equity and justice on both sides that he opts for a middling position, dividing the difference between the parties. In the spirit of **(b)**, civil judges are not at liberty to compromise in this way, and have to give a decisive judgment in favour of some one side; but because of **(a)** they are often at a loss about which side to support, and are forced to proceed on the most frivolous reasons in the world. Half-rights and half-obligations, which seem so natural in everyday life, are perfect absurdities in the civil law- courts, which is why judges often have to take half-arguments for whole ones, so as to bring the affair to a close one way or the other!

(3) If we consider the ordinary course of human actions we'll find that the mind doesn't restrain itself by any general and universal rules, but usually acts as it is determined to by its present motives and inclination. Each action is a •particular individual event, so it must come from •particular principles$_c$, reflecting how we are ·at that •particular moment·—within ourselves and in relation to the rest of the universe. If ·in the ordinary course of our lives· we sometimes extend our motives beyond the particular circumstances that gave rise to them, and form something like general rules for our conduct, it's easy to see that these rules are not perfectly inflexible and allow of many exceptions. Because that is how things go in the ordinary course of human actions—·the everyday unfolding of human •nature·—we can conclude that the laws of justice, being universal and perfectly inflexible, can't be derived from •nature, can't be the **immediate** [bear that word in mind] offspring of any •natural motive or inclination. No action can be morally good or evil unless some natural passion or motive impels us to perform it or deters us from performing it; and obviously any variations that are natural to the passion will also be variations that the morality can undergo. Here are two people disputing over an estate:

- •a rich man who is a fool, a bachelor, and my enemy:
- •a poor man who has good sense and a large family, and is my friend.

Whether I am driven in this affair by a concern for the public interest, or the interests of the involved individuals, or the facts about friendship and enmity, I must be induced to do my best to get the estate awarded to the second man. And no considerations concerning the *right* and *property* of the persons involved could restrain me, if I were driven only by natural motives without any input from facts about how others might behave or about conventions that I am party to. Because

- •all property depends on morality, and
- •all morality depends on the ordinary course of our passions and actions, and
- •these passions and actions are directed solely by particular motives,

it is evident that side-taking conduct ·such as my working to get the estate to my friend· must conform to the strictest morality and can't be a violation of *property*. [Hume means that

that would be the situation if general rules and conventions are left out of the story.] So if men took the liberty of acting with regard to the laws of society in the way they do in every other affair—[namely, acting on their particular passions]—they would usually conduct themselves by *particular* judgments, taking into consideration the characters and circumstances of the persons as well as the general nature of the question. ·So they would, for example, take into account the characters, finances, intellectual levels, and family situations of the two competitors for the estate mentioned above·. And it's easy to see that this would produce an infinite confusion in human society, and that men's greed and partiality would quickly bring disorder into the world if they weren't restrained by some general and inflexible principles$_c$. That confusion is what men were trying to avoid when they established the laws of society and agreed to restrain themselves by those **general** rules—rules that can't be changed by spite or favour, or by particular views of private or public interest. These rules, then, are artificially invented for a certain purpose, and are contrary to the common principles$_c$ of human nature, which adapt themselves to **particular** circumstances and have no stated invariable method of operation. . . .

The upshot of all this is that the distinction between justice and injustice has two different foundations:

(1) interest, when men observe that they can't live in society without restraining themselves by certain rules; and

(2) morality, when this interest is being respected by men's behaviour, and they get pleasure from seeing actions that tend to the peace of society, and unpleasure from ones that are contrary to it.

The first interest **(1)** exists because of the voluntary convention and artifice of men; and to that extent those laws of justice should be regarded as artifacts. Once that interest ·in social harmony· is established and acknowledged, the sense that morality is at stake in the observance of these rules follows naturally and of itself. But it is certainly augmented by new artifacts: public instructions by politicians, and the private upbringing that parents provide, contribute to giving us a sense of honour and duty regarding the strict regulation of our actions relating to the property of others.

7: The origin of government

Nothing is more certain than this: Men are largely governed by ·self·-interest, and when they extend their concern beyond themselves they don't extend it far; in ordinary everyday life they don't usually look further than their nearest friends and acquaintances. It is equally certain that the most effective thing men can do to favour their own interests is to conform their behaviour, strictly and always, to the rules of justice; that's what is needed to preserve society and keep men from falling into the wretched and savage condition that is commonly called 'the state of nature'. There's a great deal at stake in this upholding of society and obeying the rules of justice, and it is obvious that this is so—obvious

even to the most rough and uncultivated members of the human race—so that it's almost impossible for anyone who has had experience of society to be mistaken about this. Now a question arises. Given that

> •men are so sincerely attached to their ·self·-interest, and that •their interest is so greatly at stake in the observance of justice, and that •this interest is so certain and openly acknowledged,

how can any disorder ever arise in society? What principle$_c$ in human nature is powerful enough to overcome such a strong passion, or violent enough to obscure such clear knowledge? In my discussion of the passions I pointed out that men are mightily governed by their imaginations, and that what affection they have towards a given object depends more on the light under which it appears to them than on its real and intrinsic value. [See note on 'affection' on page 252.] What presents itself to them through a strong and lively idea usually prevails above something that lies in a more obscure light; it takes a *great* superiority of value in the latter thing to make up for its disadvantage ·of being less strongly and brightly presented·. Now, anything that is right next to us in space or in time will affect us with a strong and lively idea, so it will have a correspondingly large effect on the will and passions, and will usually operate with more force than any object that lies in a more distant and obscure light. Even if we are fully convinced that the distant object excels the nearby one, we can't get this judgment to govern our actions, and instead yield to the enticements of our passions, which always plead in favour of whatever is nearby.

That's why men so often act in contradiction to their known interests, and in particular why they prefer any trivial *present* advantage to the maintenance of order in society, which so greatly depends on conduct's conformity to justice. The consequences of any unjust act seem to be very remote, and can't outweigh any immediate advantage that the injustice may bring. But their remoteness doesn't make them any less *real*; and because men all have some degree of this weakness ·of preferring what is near to what is better but further away in space or time·, it inevitably happens that violations of justice often occur in society, making relations between men very dangerous and uncertain. You are as apt as I am to prefer what is nearby to what is distant, so you are naturally as much inclined as I am to commit acts of injustice. Your example ·affects me in two ways, both bad: it· •pushes me forward in injustice by imitation, and •it provides me with a new reason for any breach of justice ·that takes my fancy·, by showing me that if I alone restrained myself severely amid the licentious behaviour of others, I would be the innocent dupe of my integrity! So this quality of human nature is very dangerous to society and seems at first glance to be incurable. Any remedy would have to come from the consent of men; and if men can't, unaided, choose remote goods rather than lesser nearby ones, they'll never consent to anything that would oblige them to make such a choice, because that would too obviously contradict their natural principles$_c$ and propensities. Whoever chooses the means, chooses also the end; and if we *can't* prefer what is remote ·to what is near· then we also *can't* submit to anything that would force us to such a method of acting.

[Hume continues with an elegant line of thought presented in extremely compressed form. Its opening thought amounts to this: I have said that our human tendency to prefer a present benefit to a future greater benefit seems *at first sight* to be incurable, and I explained why: If we are so built that we always prefer a present benefit to a greater future one, then you'd think that we are so built that we won't subject ourselves to anything that would force us to choose a future benefit rather than a smaller present benefit. But

when we look deeper, we find that we *do* subject ourselves to just such a choice-compeller; and our willingness to do so, although in one way it •goes against our tendency to give weight to what is far off in time, •is also an example of that very tendency! This fact about ourselves contributes to its own remedy! To see how this happens, consider my frame of mind *now* (at time T_1) when I think about some practical choice that I'll have to make at a time T_2 some distance off into the future. When T_2 comes, I'll be faced with a choice between two options which will *then* present themselves like this:

I have to choose between
(1) doing X now (= at T_2) and getting some benefit B now; and
(2) doing Y now, getting no immediate benefit from that now, but getting later (at time T_3) a benefit much bigger than B.

When I think *now* (= at T_1) about those two options, their tiny differences [Hume writes 'all their minute distinctions'] vanish; from my present standpoint now (= at T_1) the difference between •benefit at T_2 and •benefit at T_3 is negligible, which frees me to think about the T_2 choice purely in terms of *size of benefit*, which means that my *present* preference is for my choosing Y over X when the time comes. Now let Hume take over:] But as I get nearer to T_2, the circumstances that I at first overlooked begin to appear and to influence my conduct and affections. A new inclination to ·prefer· the present good springs up and makes it hard for me to stick to my first purpose and resolution. I may very much regret this natural infirmity, and I may try everything I can think of to free myself from it: study and reflection within myself, the advice of friends, frequent meditation, and repeated resolution. And after finding that these are all ineffective I may embrace with pleasure any other expedient by which I can guard against this weakness by imposing a restraint on myself.

So the only remaining problem is to discover this expedient by which men cure their natural weakness, subjecting themselves to the necessity of obeying the laws of justice and fairness despite their violent inclination to prefer what is near to what is far. Obviously, such a remedy can't be effective unless it corrects this inclination, and it's impossible to change or correct anything material in our nature; so our only way of correcting the propensity is by changing our circumstances and situation so that obedience to obeying the laws of justice becomes our nearest interest and disobedience to them becomes our most remote interest. However, there's no practicable way of doing this for all mankind; it can only be done for a few people, by arranging for it be immediately in *their* interest that justice be preserved, ·which we bring about by *hiring* them to do that job·. These are the people we call civil magistrates, kings and their ministers, governors and rulers. [Of those labels, 'magistrate' is the one we'll see most of. Hume follows the then-customary usage in which 'the magistrate' refers to whoever it is that makes the civil laws and/or enforces obedience to them. In sections 8 and 10 he will use 'the magistracy' to refer to the power or authority of whoever it is that is being called 'the magistrate'] Their personal interests are not closely connected with the welfare of individual members (with perhaps a few exceptions), so they have nothing to gain from any act of injustice; and they have an immediate interest in every enforcement of justice. . . . because they are satisfied with their present condition and with their part in society. So there you have it—the origin of civil government and of society. Men can't radically cure their own or anyone else's narrowness of soul that makes them prefer the present to the remote. They cannot change their natures. All they can do is to change their situation, putting the maintenance of justice in the immediate interest of certain selected people, and putting

the violation of justice in their more remote interest ·or not in their interest at all·. These people are not only induced to obey those rules in their own conduct but also to constrain others to a similar obedience and to enforce the dictates of fairness throughout the whole society. And they may, if they need to, also interest others more immediately in the preservation of justice, creating a number of civil and military officers to assist them in their government.

This way of bringing about justice is not the only advantage of government. Just as violent passion hinders men from •seeing clearly the interest they have in fair behaviour towards others, so also it hinders them from •seeing what is fair in individual cases, giving them a remarkable partiality in their own favour. This trouble is corrected in the same manner as the one I have been discussing. The same people who enforce the laws of justice will also decide all controversies concerning them; and because their interests aren't tangled up with those of many other members of the society, they will decide these controversies more equitably than anyone would in his own case.

By means of these two advantages in the enforcement of justice and decisions regarding it, men acquire a security against each other's weakness and passion as well as against their own, and under the shelter of their governors they begin to enjoy in comfort the pleasures of society and mutual assistance. But government goes further than that in its beneficial influence: not contented with merely protecting men in the conventions they make for their mutual interest, government often obliges them to make such conventions, forcing them to seek their own advantage by working together for some common end or purpose. No quality in human nature causes more fatal errors in our conduct than our preference for whatever is •present to whatever is •distant and remote, which makes us desire objects on the basis of how near they are more than on their intrinsic value. **Two** neighbours may agree to drain a meadow that they own jointly, because it's easy for them to know each other's mind, and each of them must see that if he fails in his part the whole project will fail right there and then. But it is very difficult—indeed it's *impossible*—for **a thousand** people to agree in any such action. It will be hard for them to plan it, and even harder for them to carry it out, because each of them will be looking for an excuse to •free himself from ·his share of· the trouble and expense and to •lay the whole burden on others. Political society easily remedies both these troubles. Magistrates have an immediate interest in the interests of any considerable number of their subjects. They needn't consult anyone else to form a scheme for promoting those ·public· interests. And because •the failure of any one part of the project is connected, though not immediately, with the failure of the whole thing, the magistrates prevent •that failure because its occurrence isn't in their interests—whether remotely or immediately. Thus bridges are built, harbours opened, ramparts raised, canals formed, fleets equipped, and armies disciplined—all by the care of government. Although it is composed of men who have all the human infirmities, government becomes—through one of the finest and most subtle inventions imaginable—a structure that is in some measure exempted from all these infirmities.

8: The source of allegiance

Government is a very beneficial invention, and in some circumstances it is absolutely necessary to mankind; but it isn't necessary in all circumstances—men *can* preserve society for some time without the help of government. It is true that men are always much inclined to prefer present advantages to ones that are distant and remote; and they don't find it easy to resist the temptation of an advantage that they can have immediately at the risk of an evil that lies at a ·temporal· distance from them. But this weakness is less conspicuous when the possessions and pleasures of life are few and of little value, as they always are in the infancy of society. An Indian isn't greatly tempted to deprive another of his hut or to steal his bow, because he is already provided with a hut and bow of his own. As for any differences between one Indian and another that might come from one's having had better luck than the other in hunting and fishing: such differences are only casual and temporary, and won't have much tendency to disturb society. Some philosophers hold that men are utterly incapable of society without government, but I don't agree—far from it. I contend that the first rudiments of government arise from quarrels not among men of the same society but members of different societies. ·My case for this goes in two steps·. **(1)** It doesn't take as much difference in wealth to start a quarrel between societies as it takes to start a quarrel among the members of one society. Men fear nothing from public war and violence but the resistance they meet with; and *that* seems less terrible because they share it in common, and it seems less pernicious in its consequences because it comes from strangers rather than from individual members of their own society, people whom they have to live with and do business with. **(2)** When a society without government gets involves in a •foreign war, that is bound to lead to •civil war. Throw any considerable goods among men and they immediately start quarrelling, with each trying to get possession of what pleases him, without regard to the consequences. When a foreign war is going on, the most considerable of all goods—namely, life and limbs—are at stake; and everyone tries to avoid dangerous ports, seizes the best arms, uses the slightest wounds as an excuse ·for not fighting·; with the result that laws that might be obeyed well enough when men were calm can no longer have any effect now that men are in such a commotion.

We find confirmation for this in the American tribes, where men live in peace and friendship among themselves, with no established government, and never submit to any of their fellows except in time of war, when their captain enjoys a shadow of authority. He loses this after the war is over and peace is established with the neighbouring tribes; but this war-time authority instructs them in the advantages of •government, and teaches them to resort to •it when war or trade or some kind of luck has made their riches and possessions so considerable as to make them forget, in the heat of this or that moment, that the preservation of peace and justice is in their interests. This gives one plausible reason, among others, why •all governments are at first purely monarchical, and why •republics arise only from abuses of monarchy and despotic power. ·Military· camps are the true mothers of cities! A war can't be conducted without some authority in a single person, because in a war things happen suddenly and require quick responses. And it is natural that a civil government taking over from a

military one will have that same kind of one-man authority. I regard this as a more natural explanation than the common one based on patriarchal government—i.e. the authority of a father—which is said to happen first in one family and to accustom its members to being governed by a single person. The state of *society without government* is one of the most natural states of men, and must continue when many families are involved, long after the first generation. The only thing that could force men to quit this state ·and establish government· is an increase of riches and possessions; and all societies on their first formation are so barbarous and uninstructed that many years must elapse before their riches and possessions can increase sufficiently to disturb men in the enjoyment of peace and harmony.

But although men can maintain a small uncultivated society without *government*, they can't possibly maintain a society of any kind without *justice*, i.e. without obeying the three fundamental laws concerning •the stability of ownership, •its transfer by consent, and •the keeping of promises. So these come before government, and are regarded as imposing an obligation before anyone has even *thought of* any duty of allegiance to civil magistrates. Indeed, I'll go even further than that, and say that when •government is *first established* it would be natural to suppose that •its obligation comes from the obligations of those ·three· laws of nature, especially the one about promise-keeping. Once men saw that they *had to* have government if they were to maintain peace and carry out justice, they would naturally come together and choose magistrates, decide what powers they were to have, and promise to obey them. As a promise is supposed to be a bond or security that is already in use and brings with it a moral obligation, it should be regarded as the basic sanction of government, and as the source of the first obligation to obedience. This reasoning seems so natural that it has become the basis for our fashionable system of politics, and is in a way the creed of a contemporary party who have reason to pride themselves on the soundness of their philosophy and on their liberty of thought. They say:

> All men are born free and equal; government and superiority can be established only by consent; the consent men give to the establishing of a government imposes on them a new obligation, unknown to the laws of nature. So men are obliged to obey their magistrates, only because they have promised to do so; and if they hadn't (explicitly or tacitly) given their word to preserve allegiance, that would never have become a part of their moral duty.

But when this conclusion is taken to apply to government in all its ages and situations, it is entirely erroneous. I maintain that although the duty of allegiance was at first grafted onto the obligation to keep promises, and was for some time supported by that obligation, as soon as the advantages of government are fully known and acknowledged, government immediately puts down its own roots and comes to have a basic obligation and authority, independent of all contracts ·and promises·. This is an important matter, which we must examine with care and attention before going on.

For the philosophers who say that justice is •a natural virtue and •antecedent to human conventions, it is reasonable to treat all civil allegiance as a special case of the obligation of a promise, claiming that our own consent is all that binds us to any submission to civil law or government. All government is plainly an invention of men, and the origin of most governments is known in history; so these philosophers, wanting to find the source of our political duties, have to go higher if they want these duties to have any *natural* obligation of morality. So they are quick to maintain that •society is as ancient as the human species,

and that •those three basic laws of nature are as ancient as society. Then, taking advantage of the antiquity and obscure origin of those laws, they deny them to be artificial and voluntary inventions of men, and then seek to graft onto them other duties that are more obviously artificial. But now that we have been undeceived about the status of those three laws, and have found that natural as well as civil justice grows out of human conventions, we shall quickly perceive how useless it is to resolve the one into the other, trying to make the laws of nature a stronger foundation for our political duties than interest and human conventions are; while these laws themselves are built on the very same foundation. On whichever side we turn this subject, we'll soon shall find that these two kinds of duty are exactly on the same footing, and have the same source both of their first invention and of their moral obligation. **(1)** They are designed to remedy similar troubles, and **(2)** get their moral force in the same way, from their remedying those troubles. These are two points that I'll try to prove as clearly as possible.

(1) I have already shown that men invented the three basic laws of nature when they saw that they couldn't survive without society, and found that they couldn't work together in social ways without some restraint on their natural appetites. So the same self-love that •makes men so harmful to one another •starts to go in a new and more satisfactory direction, producing the rules of justice, and •is the first motive for obeying them. But when men have seen that although the rules of justice are sufficient to maintain any society, they can't unaided obey those rules in large and polished societies; so they establish government as a new invention to achieve their ends—keeping the old advantages or getting new ones—by a more strict carrying out of justice. Up to that point, therefore, our •civil duties are connected with our •natural duties in that

> •the former are invented chiefly for the sake of •the latter; and the principal object of •government is to constrain men to observe •the laws of nature.

But the law of nature about the keeping of promises is just one of the group of laws; and strict conformity to it should be seen as an effect of the institution of government, rather than obedience to government being an effect of the obligation to keep promises. The object of our civil duties is to enforce our natural duties, yet the first[9] motive for inventing as well as for performing both is nothing but self- interest; and since we have an interest in obedience to government that is separate from our interest in the keeping of promises, we must also allow of a separate obligation. Obeying the civil magistrate is required for preserving order and harmony in society. Keeping promises is required for creating mutual trust and confidence in the business of everyday life. The ends, as well as the means, are perfectly distinct; and neither is subordinate to the other.

This will be more evident if we bear in mind that men will often bind themselves by promises to do things that it would have been in their interests to do quite apart from those promises—for example, when they have undertaken to do something and then try to give others a fuller security that they'll do it ·by *promising* to do it, thus· adding to •whatever they have already bound themselves to do •a new self- interested motive. That it is in one's interests to keep one's promises—quite apart from the moral obligation a promise creates—is something that holds for everyone, is known by everyone, and is enormously important in everyday life. Other interests may be less widespread and more

[9] First in time, I mean, not first in dignity or force.

doubtful; and we're apt to have a greater suspicion that men may give way to their whim or their passion by acting contrary to •them. That is where promises come naturally into play, and are often required to give fuller satisfaction and security ·to some party to a contract or arrangement·. But any •other interests that share the two striking features of the interest in keeping a promise—namely, being applicable to everyone and being openly acknowledged—will be regarded as on a par with the interest in promise-keeping, and men will begin to have the same confidence in •them. That is exactly how things stand with regard to our civil duties, i.e. our obedience to the magistrate: without that obedience no government could survive and no peace or order could be maintained in large societies where some people have so many possessions and others have so many wants, real or imaginary. So it doesn't take long for our civil duties to detach themselves from our promises and acquire a separate force and influence of their own. The ·self·-interest in both is of the very same kind: it's an interest that everyone has, that everyone proclaims, and that exists at all times and places. There is, then, not the slightest hint of a reason to base one of these on the other, when each has a foundation all of its own. [Hume goes on to say that the very same reasoning shows that •the motivation to keep one's hands off other people's property is not based on •the motivation to keep promises.] [Throughout all of this Hume speaks not of 'motivations' but of 'obligations', but they are 'obligations of interest', which means 'self-interested motivations'. *Moral* obligations have been no part of the topic in this page, but they come into play right now.]

(2) •Promise-keeping and •allegiance to the civil power are distinct not only in the natural obligations of interest but also in the moral obligations of honour and conscience. The ·moral· merit or demerit of •one doesn't depend in the least on that of •the other. In fact, if we consider how closely natural obligations are connected with moral obligations, we'll find this conclusion to be entirely unavoidable. It is always in our interests to obey the magistracy; for us to engage in rebellion there would have to be a great •present advantage that made us overlook the •future interest that we have in the preserving of peace and order in society. But though a present interest can in this way blind us with regard to our own actions, it doesn't blind us with regard to the actions of others; nothing prevents us from seeing *them* in their true colours, as highly prejudicial to the public interest and to our interest in particular. This naturally makes us uneasy when we think about such seditious and disloyal actions, and makes us attach to them the idea of vice and moral ugliness. This uneasiness comes from the same principle$_c$ as our disapproval of all kinds of private injustice, breach of promises in particular. We blame all treachery and breach of promise because

> we think that if promises aren't kept, that will reduce the extent to which people can freely and profitably interact with one another;

and we blame all disloyalty to the magistrates because

> we see that if we don't submit to the government, it won't be possible to maintain justice in the stability of ownership, its transfer by consent, and the keeping of promises.

Because there are two entirely distinct interests here, they must give rise to two equally separate and independent moral obligations. If there were no such thing as a promise, government would still be necessary in all large and civilized societies; and if promises had only their own exclusive obligation, without the separate sanction of government, they wouldn't achieve much in such societies. This draws the line between •our public duties and our •private ones, and shows that the private depend more on the public than

vice versa. Education and the devices of politicians work together to bestow a further morality on loyalty, branding all rebellion with a greater degree of guilt and infamy. . . .

In case those arguments don't strike you as entirely conclusive (as I think they are), I shall appeal to authority: I'll prove that the obligation to submit to government is not derived from any promise of the subjects, using as my premise the fact that everyone thinks so! Don't be surprised that after trying to establish my system on the basis of pure reason, and hardly ever bringing in anyone else's judgments, even those of **philosophers or historians**, I now appeal to popular authority, setting up the sentiments of **the rabble** in opposition to philosophical reasoning, ·e.g. any reasoning that might be used *against* my position·. In this present matter the opinions of men carry with them a special authority and are to a large extent infallible. The distinction of moral good and evil is founded on the pleasure or unpleasure that results from encountering or thinking about the sentiment or character in question; and that pleasure or unpleasure has to be known to the person who feels it; from which it follows that there is just so much virtue or vice in any character as everyone places in it, and that we can't possibly be mistaken about this.[10] Our judgments about the origin of any vice or virtue are not as certain as our judgments concerning whether and to what extent a given item is virtuous or vicious; but that really applies only to •philosophical questions about origins (e.g. 'How did the institution of promising arise in a state of nature?'), whereas our present concern is purely with •plain matter-of-fact questions about origins (e.g. 'Was it I or my father who bound me to pay ten pounds to Smith? was it done out of sheer good-will or because of money that had been lent to me? what did I expect to get out binding myself like this, and what were the circumstances at the time when I did it?'). It's hard to see how we can fall into error about that sort of thing. Similarly, it is certain that there's a moral obligation to submit to government, because everyone thinks there is; so it must be equally certain that this obligation doesn't arise from a promise, because no-one thinks it does—indeed no-one has ever *dreamed* of ascribing our duty of allegiance to that origin. (When I say 'no-one', I ought to say 'no-one whose judgment hasn't been led astray by sticking too closely to some philosophical theory'!)

Neither magistrates nor subjects have formed this idea of our civil duties. We find that magistrates are so far from deriving their authority and our obligation to obey them from the foundation of a promise or original contract that they do their best to conceal from their people—especially from the uneducated man in the street—that that's where the duty of allegiance came from originally. . . . 'Have you ever *consented* to the authority of your rulers, or *promised* to obey them?'—put that question to people and the vast majority of them will think you are very strange, and will reply that *consent* doesn't come into it and that they were born to obedience to their rulers. That's how it comes about that we often see people imagining someone to be their natural ruler though at that time he has lost all power and authority and wouldn't be anyone's *choice* as a ruler; this being something they imagine merely because the person in question is descended from those who ruled at earlier times. . . .although that may have been so long ago that hardly any man alive now could ever have given

[10] This proposition is strictly true with regard to every quality that is determined merely by sentiment. In what sense can we talk either of a *right* or a *wrong* taste in morals, eloquence, or beauty? I shall come to that in due course; but I would remark in the meantime that there's so much uniformity in the *general* sentiments of mankind that such questions are of small importance.

any promise of obedience. Think about these people who have never consented to be governed, and who would regard it as arrogant and impious to try to choose a government: does a government have no authority over them? We find by experience that a government punishes them very freely for what it calls 'treason' and 'rebellion'—this being plain injustice, according to this theory ·that the duty of allegiance rests on the duty to keep one's promises·. You may say 'By living in the territory ruled by that government they do in effect consent to be governed by it'; I reply that this can be right only for people who think that allegiance depends on their choice, and hardly anyone does think so—perhaps nobody does apart from the philosophers I am now arguing against. It never was pleaded as an excuse for a rebel that his first act after he came to years of discretion was to wage war against the sovereign of the state; and that while he was a child he couldn't bind himself by his own consent, and having become a man he showed plainly—by his very first act—that he had no intention of imposing on himself any obligation to obedience!. . . . And another point: ·according to the theory that I am attacking·, a man living under an absolute government would owe it no allegiance because this government by its very nature doesn't depend on consent. But as it's as natural and common a form of government as any, it must give rise to some obligation; and we find that men who are subjects of absolute government do always think so. This is a clear proof that we do not commonly think that our ·duty of· allegiance is derived from our consent or promise . . . .

9: The measures of allegiance

Those political writers who have had recourse to a promise or original contract as the source of our allegiance to government intended to establish a principle that is perfectly just and reasonable, though the reasoning they used to establish it was fallacious and sophistical. They wanted to prove that there are exceptions to our duty to submit to government, because a dreadful tyranny in the rulers is sufficient to free the subjects from all obligations of allegiance. Their view has been this:

> When men enter into society and submit themselves to government by their free and voluntary consent, they must propose to get from this certain advantages that make it worth their while to give up their native liberty. So the magistrate also engages to offer something in return, namely protection and security; and it is only by the hopes he gives them of these advantages that he can ever persuade men to submit to him. But when they meet with tyranny and oppression instead of protection and security, they are freed from their promises. . . .and return to the state of liberty that preceded the institution of government. Men would never be so foolish as to enter into contracts that would work entirely to the benefit of others, with no view of bettering their own condition. Whoever

> plans to get any profit from our submission must undertake—either explicitly or tacitly—to enable us to get some advantage from his authority. He oughtn't to expect that we will continue in obedience if he doesn't do his part.

I repeat: this conclusion is right, though the premises from which it is inferred are erroneous; and I flatter myself that I can reach the same conclusion from more reasonable premises. In my account of our political duties I shan't say anything as sweeping as that

> •men see the advantages of government; that •they institute government with a view to getting those advantages; and that •this institution requires a promise of obedience, which creates a moral obligation that is conditional and ceases to be binding if the other contracting party—·the government side·—doesn't do what it contracted to do.

I see that a promise itself arises entirely from human conventions, and is invented as a way of securing a certain ·self·-interest. So I look for some such interest that is connected with government more immediately ·than through the obligation to keep a promise·—an interest that could have been both •the original motive for instituting government and •the source of our obedience to government. And I have found it: it's our interest in the security and protection that we •enjoy in political society and •can't have when perfectly free and independent. So: because the immediate source of support for government is interest, government can't last longer than the interest does; and when the civil magistrate carries his oppression so far as to make his authority perfectly intolerable, we are no longer bound to submit to it. The cause ceases; the effect must cease also. ·You'll notice that there is nothing here about keeping promises·.

That's a direct and immediate conclusion regarding our *natural* obligation to allegiance. What about *moral* obligation? Well, in this case we can't assert that when the cause ceases the effect must cease also. That's because human nature contains a strong principle$_c$ (I have often mentioned it) that results in men's being mightily addicted to general rules, so that we often carry our maxims beyond the reasons that first induced us to establish them. Where cases are similar in many of their details we are apt to put them on the same footing, ignoring the fact that they differ in the most important respects so that the resemblance is more apparent than real. So it may be thought •that in the case of allegiance our moral obligation to obey won't cease even when its cause—the natural obligation of interest—has ceased, and •that men can be bound by conscience to submit to a tyrannical government, against their own and the public interest. I concede this much to the force of this argument: General rules do commonly extend beyond the principles on which they are based; and we seldom make any exception to them unless it's an exception that has the qualities of a general rule, and is founded on very numerous and common instances. That, I contend, is exactly what is going on here. When men submit to the authority of others it's because they want to get some security against the wickedness and injustice of men who are perpetually carried, by •their unruly passions and •their present and immediate interest, to the violation of all the laws of society. But this imperfection is inherent in human nature, and we know •that men in all their states and conditions must have it, and •that those whom we choose to be rulers don't immediately come to have a superior nature to the rest of mankind because of their superior power and authority! We aren't expecting any change in their •nature; what we expect from them depends on a change in their •situation when they come to have a

more immediate interest in the preservation of order and the carrying-out of justice. . . . But because of the irregularity of human nature we can often expect that the rulers will neglect even this immediate interest, and be swept along by their passions into all the excesses of cruelty and ambition. Our general knowledge of human nature, our observation of the past history of mankind, and our experience of present times—all these causes must induce us to open the door to exceptions, making us conclude that there will be no crime or injustice in our resisting the more violent effects of supreme power.

We can see that this is both the general practice and the principle of mankind, and that no nation that could find any remedy ever yet •endured the cruel ravages of a tyrant or •were blamed for their resistance. Those who took up arms against Dionysius or Nero or Philip II [tyrannical rulers of Syracuse, Rome and Spain respectively] are favoured by everyone who reads their history; it would be a perversion of common sense to condemn them. So it is certain that in all our notions of morals we •never entertain such an absurdity as that of passive obedience [= 'absolute obedience to the government with no possibility of challenging it'] and •always allow for resistance against the more flagrant cases of tyranny and oppression. On any topic •the general opinion of mankind has some authority; on the topic of morals •it is perfectly infallible. And it's not made less so by men's inability to explain clearly the principles on which it is founded. Not many people can conduct this line of reasoning:

> 'Government is a mere human invention for the interest of society. Where the tyranny of the governor removes this interest, it also removes the natural obligation to obedience. The moral obligation is founded on the natural one and therefore must cease when the natural obligation ceases; especially if we can foresee many occasions in which the natural obligation may cease, leading us to form a kind of general rule to govern our conduct in such occurrences.'

This argument is too subtle for plain uneducated people; but everyone has an *implicit* notion of it, and is aware •that he owes obedience to government merely on account of the public interest, and •that human nature is so subject to frailties and passions that it can easily pervert this institution and change his governors into tyrants and public enemies. . . .

10: The objects of allegiance

But although it is sometimes politically and morally sound to resist supreme power, in the ordinary course of human affairs such behaviour is utterly pernicious and criminal. Besides the convulsions that revolutions always bring, such a practice tends directly to [= 'raises the probability of'] the subversion of all government, and the causing of universal anarchy and confusion among mankind. Large civilized societies can't survive without government, and government is entirely useless without exact obedience. In thinking about our situation under the authority of a government we

ought always to weigh the advantages of this against the disadvantages; that will make us more careful about putting into practice the doctrine of resistance. The common •rule requires obedience; •exceptions to it can occur only in cases of grievous tyranny and oppression.

Well, then: given that blind submission is commonly due to magistracy, the next question is: 'To whom is it due? Whom are we to regard as our lawful magistrates?' In approaching this question, let us remember what I have already shown regarding the origin of government and political society. When men experience the impossibility of preserving any steady order in a society where everyone is his own master, violating or obeying the laws of society according to his present interest or pleasure, they naturally run into the invention of *government*, and do their best to deprive themselves of any power to transgress the laws of society. So government arises from the voluntary convention of men; and it's obvious that the same convention that •establishes government will also •settle which persons are to do the governing, and will remove all doubt and ambiguity about that. And promises come into this: the authority of the magistrate does at first stand on the foundation of the subjects' promise to obey. . . . So the very promise that binds them to obedience also ties them down to a particular person—·the person *to* whom they have made their promise·—making him the object of their allegiance.

But when government has been established on this basis for some considerable time, and the separate interest that we have in obeying it has produced a separate sentiment of morality, the case is entirely altered: a promise can't *now* settle who is to be the particular magistrate, because a promise is no longer considered to be the basis of government. We naturally think of ourselves as born to submission, and imagine that such- and-such particular persons have a *right* to command, as we on our part have an *obligation* to obey. These notions of right and obligation are derived from nothing but the *advantage* we get from government, which makes us •unwilling to practise resistance ourselves and •displeased with anyone else who practises it. [Hume now argues at length for one point: Government

•was first started by a promise

but then over the long haul it

•is maintained by the subjects' advantages from it.

The question of which particular persons were to be the governors

•was first settled by a promise,

but over the long haul it

•is *not* settled by facts about the subjects' advantages.

If we always tried to settle 'Who is to govern?' by asking 'Which governor would be best for us?', there would be perpetual confusion and conflict. Hume compares this with the situation regarding the stability of ownership. A rule about this was established because there is so much advantage to us in ownership's being stable; but we would get into a terrible mess if we tried at each moment to redistribute property in such a way as to maximize advantage; we need to act by general rules about property. It's true that if we do that, we'll find that 'Who owns what?' is often answered in terms of factors that seem pretty trivial; but this won't make us take ownership less seriously. Hume continues:] It is the same case with government. This invention is enormously advantageous to society, so it serves our interests enough to make us embrace it with ardour and alacrity, even though, later on, we have to regulate and direct our devotion to government by considerations that aren't *as* important, and to choose our magistrates without having in view any particular advantage from the choice. ·I shall discuss five of these considerations·.

(1) I shall start with the basis for the right of magistracy that gives authority to all—*all*—the most established governments of the world, namely: **long possession** in any one form of government, or succession of monarchs. If we work back to the first origin of every nation, we'll certainly find that almost every race of kings and almost every form of a commonwealth was initially launched through usurpation and rebellion, having an entitlement to govern that was *worse than* doubtful and uncertain! It's only the passage of time that gives solidity to their right; operating gradually on men's minds, time reconciles them to any authority, making it seem just and reasonable. Custom increases the influence that our sentiments have on us. . . . When we have long been accustomed to obeying some set of men, our general •instinct or tendency to suppose that we are morally obliged to be loyal to the government easily takes this •direction, choosing *that* set of men for its objects. It is ·self·-interest that gives the general •instinct; but it is custom that gives the particular •direction.

A given length of time can affect our minds in one way with regard to one object and in another with regard to another, and such differences can affect our sentiments of morality. We naturally judge everything by comparison; when we are considering the fate of kingdoms and republics we think in terms of a long extent of time, a small duration hasn't as much influence on our sentiments about a government as it has when we consider any other object. Someone may think he acquires a right to a horse or a suit of clothes in a very short time; but a century is hardly long enough to establish any new government and remove all its subjects' scruples about it. And another point: It doesn't take as long for a ruler to become entitled to any *additional* power he may usurp as it does to give him a right to a power that he gained all of by usurpation. The kings of France haven't had absolute power for more than two reigns; yet talking to Frenchmen of their liberties would strike them as wild. If we consider what I have said about accession [page 264] we'll easily account for this phenomenon.

(2) When no form of government has been established by long possession, **present possession** makes up for that and can be regarded as the second source of all public authority. Right to authority is nothing but the constant possession of authority, maintained by the laws of society and the interests of mankind; and it is utterly natural. . . .

what Hume wrote next: . . . to join this constant possession to the present one, according to the principles above mentioned.

what he may have meant: . . . to think of this present possession as just the latest stage in a long-term possession, and therefore to think of it as legitimate; this being like the way of thinking I mentioned recently, where a long-established king takes some *extra* bit of territory by force or trickery, and is very soon thought of as entitled to it. Private property was not thought of in this way, but that was because this way of thinking was outweighed by very strong considerations of interest: treat present-actual-possession as giving an entitlement to **private** property (we could see) and there will be no such thing as restitution and every violence will be authorized and protected. That consideration may seem to have force also with regard to **public** authority, but it is opposed by a contrary interest, namely our interest in the preservation of peace and the avoiding of all changes which, though they may be easily produced in private affairs, are unavoidably accompanied by bloodshed and confusion where the public is interested.

We can't account for the right of the present possessor by any accepted system of ethics; but if that leads you to deny that right absolutely because it isn't authorized by morality,

you'll be justly thought to be maintaining a very extravagant paradox that clashes with the common sense and judgment of mankind. No maxim is more fitting to prudence and to morals than to submit quietly to the government that we find established in the country where we happen to live, without enquiring too curiously into its origin. Few governments can stand being examined rigorously on that score. How many kingdoms are there at present in the world, and how many more do we find in history, whose governors have no better foundation for their authority than that of present possession? [Hume elaborates on this point, citing all the governments of Rome down the centuries, most of which were first established by 'the sword'.]

(3) The right of **conquest** may be considered as a third source of the entitlement of sovereigns. This right is very like the right of present possession, but has rather more force than that because it is backed up by •the notions of glory and honour that we ascribe to •conquerors, rather than •the sentiments of hatred and detestation that are directed at •usurpers. Men naturally favour those they love; so they are more apt to regard as legitimate a successful use of violence by one sovereign against another than the successful rebellion of a subject against his sovereign.[11]

(4) When the sovereign who *founded* a monarchy dies, the right to rule isn't settled by •long possession or •present possession or •conquest; and in cases like this the right of **inheritance** naturally takes over their legitimising role, and men are commonly induced to place the son of their late monarch on the throne and to regard him as having inherited his father's authority. There are three reasons that lead men to prefer the son of their late monarch to any other person: •the presumed consent of the father, •the imitation of inheritance as it works in the private sphere, and •the state's interest in choosing the person who is most powerful and has the most numerous followers.[12]

Those reasons have some weight; but I'm convinced that to anyone who looks at the matter impartially it will appear that the considerations of interest are reinforced by some principles$_c$ of the imagination. The royal authority seems to be •connected with the young prince even in his father's lifetime, and still more after his death, by a natural transition of the mind, so that men find it utterly natural to complete this •connection by a new relation, putting him actually in possession of what seems so naturally to belong to him.

There is confirmation for this in a strange-seeming phenomenon: in elective monarchies the right of inheritance is not endorsed by the laws or by settled custom, and yet its influence is so natural that the subjects can't •get it out of their minds and •regard the son of their deceased monarch as just one of many possible candidates for the throne. [The Denmark of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* has an elective monarchy. The King dies and Prince Hamlet speaks of his uncle—who has seized the throne—as having come 'between the election and my hopes'.] So it comes about that in some elective monarchies the choice commonly falls on some member of the royal family; and in others they are all excluded, on the grounds that otherwise

[11] I'm not saying that present possession or conquest are *sufficient* to entitle someone to govern a territory that has long been held by someone else with a backing of positive law; but only that they have *some* force, and can tip the balance when the other claims are equal, and may even be enough sometimes to sanctify the weaker claim. *How much* force present possession and conquest have is difficult to determine. I believe all moderate men will agree that they have great force in all disputes concerning the rights of monarchs.

[12] I am not talking about succession as it occurs in hereditary monarchies where •custom has fixed the right of succession; what happens there falls under the principle of long possession, which I explained earlier. ·What I am discussing is the succession that it is *natural* for men to accept when there isn't any •custom to guide them·.

they would be too likely to be chosen, and might then replace the elective system by a hereditary one. . . .

You might want to claim this:

> 'The sole source of *all* the right of inheritance is •what men think will be advantageous to them. Men gladly take advantage of *any* rule by which they can fix the successor of their late sovereign, and prevent the anarchy and confusion that comes with all new elections.'

I agree that •this motive may contribute something to what happens. but I contend that this motive couldn't operate at all unless some other principle$_c$ were at work. It's in a nation's interests that the succession to the crown should be fixed one way or other; but as for the question of *how* it should be fixed—the nation's interests aren't involved in that in any way; so that if blood-relatedness didn't have an effect independent of the public interest it would never have been thought of if there weren't a positive law ·commanding that a deceased king be succeeded by his eldest son, or the like·. And such positive laws *have* been established in many countries, which would be impossible if blood-relatedness didn't naturally exert a pull on the imagination. [A 'positive law' is a law laid down by one or more thinking beings—a human person or government, or God. The contrast is with 'natural laws', which are grounded in the natures of things and aren't ordained by anyone.]

(5) The fifth source of authority is: **positive laws**, where the legislature establishes a certain form of government and succession of monarchs. At first sight you might think this:

> 'This must be a special case of one of the other sources. The positive law must be laid down by a legislative power, and *that* must have been established by •original contract, •long possession, •present possession, •conquest, or •inheritance; so the positive law must get its force from some of those principles$_c$.'

But although a positive law can get its force only from these principles$_c$, it doesn't get from them all the force that they had in the first place; rather, it loses considerably in the transition, as one might naturally expect. Suppose that a government is established for many centuries on a certain system of laws, forms, and methods of succession, and that the legislative power established by this long succession suddenly changes the whole system of government and introduces a new constitution in place of it. I don't think that many of the subjects will think themselves bound to accept this alteration; rather, they'll think they are still at liberty to return to the time-honoured form of government (unless the new form looks very likely to be for the public good). That is what generates the notion of *fundamental* laws, which are supposed to be unchangeable by the will of the sovereign. . . . How far these fundamental laws extend is not—and couldn't possibly be—settled in any government. There is such a gradual slope from the most important laws to the most trivial, and from the most ancient laws to the most modern, that there's no way of setting bounds to the legislative power, fixing how far it may innovate in the basic workings of government. *That* is the work of imagination and passion more than of reason.

Whoever considers the history of the various nations of the world—their revolutions, conquests, growth and shrinkage, the way their particular governments are established and the successive right ·to govern· transmitted from one person to another—will soon learn to treat very lightly all disputes about the rights of rulers. He'll soon be convinced that a strict adherence to any general rules about this, and any rigid loyalty to particular persons and families—loyalty on which some people set such a high value—are 'virtues' not of reason but of bigotry and superstition. The study of history confirms the reasonings of true philosophy on this topic.

Philosophy shows us the basic qualities of human nature, which teaches us to regard the controversies in politics as undecidable in most cases and as entirely subordinate to the interests of peace and liberty. Where the public good does not clearly demand a change, it is certain that a combination of all those entitlements—•original contract, •long possession, •present possession, •inheritance, and •positive laws—forms the strongest entitlement to sovereignty, and is rightly regarded as sacred and inviolable. But when these entitlements are mingled and to some extent opposed, they often create problems that are less capable of solution by the arguments of lawyers and philosophers than by the swords of the soldiery! [Hume illustrates this with a concrete example drawn from Roman history: the tangle of considerations concerning who would have been the most legitimate successor to the emperor Tiberius. He sums up:] Whatever principles we may claim to use in answering such questions, I'm afraid we shall never be able to satisfy an impartial enquirer who doesn't take sides in political controversies, and will be satisfied with nothing but sound reason and philosophy.

At this point an English reader may want to ask about the famous revolution that has had such mighty consequences and had such a happy influence on our constitution. [This refers to the 'bloodless revolution' of 1688, in which James II was driven out and replaced by William of Orange, not the earlier bloody revolution that cost Charles I his life.] I have already remarked that when there is enormous tyranny and oppression it is lawful to take arms even against the supreme power: government is merely something that people invented for mutual advantage and security, so when it stops having that tendency there is no longer any natural or moral obligation to obey it. But although this •general principle is authorized by common sense and by the practice of all ages, neither laws nor (even) philosophy can establish any •particular rules that would tell us when resistance is lawful, and decide all controversies that may arise about that. [Hume goes on to say that the general right to rebel that he has defended applies not only to absolute monarchies and the like but also to 'mixed governments' such as 'limited monarchies' where the power is legally divided between the king and the parliament. He adds that forceful resistance to a chief magistrate may be legitimised not only by his •doing things that are extremely harmful to the people in general but also by his •trying to 'encroach on the other parts of the constitution, and extend his power beyond the legal bounds'. [The 'parts of the •constitution' referred to here are the parts of the •mixed government. Hume is thinking of a king's attempt to encroach on the powers of parliament.] He expresses this last point in terms of the right of any part of the mixed government to defend itself against the other parts, and he expresses this through a charming metaphor. There would have been no point in creating *matter*, Hume says, unless it were given a power of resistance: without that, the different portions of matter could run together, and the whole material world could be crammed into a single point. Well, it is equally absurd to suppose that a government has distinct parts that haven't the power to resist 'invaders', including other parts of the same government.]. . . .

It's no part of my present purpose to show that these general principles are applicable to the late revolution, and that all the rights and privileges that ought to be sacred to a free nation were at that time threatened with the utmost danger. I prefer to leave this controverted subject—if it really does admit of controversy—and instead to indulge myself in some philosophical reflections that naturally arise from that important event. ·There are two main points that I want to make·.

(1) If the lords and commons—·i.e. the two houses of parliament·—in our constitution were to •depose the reigning king or •exclude from the succession to him the prince who by laws and settled custom ought to succeed, doing this without any reason from public interest, no-one would think their proceedings were legal or think himself bound to accept them. But if a king forfeits his legal right to rule by his unjust practices or his attempts to get a tyrannical and despotic power, then not only does it become morally lawful and suitable to the nature of political society to dethrone him, but also we are inclined to think that the remaining members of the constitution have a right to exclude his next heir—·e.g. his oldest son·—and to choose whom they please for his successor. This comes from a very special quality of our thought and imagination. When a king forfeits his authority, his heir ought naturally to be in the same situation as he would have been in if the king had died (unless he has been involved in the king's tyranny, in which case he forfeits his right to the throne also). But though this may seem reasonable, it's easy for us to go along with the contrary opinion. In a governmental system like ours, deposing a king is an act that goes beyond all common authority—a taking on, for public good, of a power that ordinarily doesn't belong to any member of the constitution. When so much public good is so obviously at stake that the act is justified, it is a license—·a going beyond the normal boundaries of authority·—that we approve of; and this naturally leads us to attribute to the parliament a right to use further licences. Once •the old boundaries of the laws have been crossed with our approval, we're not apt to be so strict in confining ourselves precisely within •their limits. The mind *naturally* continues with any course of ·mental· action that it has begun; after the first act of any kind that we perform, we're usually ready to go on in the same way without worrying much about our duty. Thus at the revolution, no-one who thought the deposition of the father to be justifiable thought they had to let him be succeeded by his infant son; and yet if that unhappy monarch had died innocent at that time, and had his son happened to be overseas somewhere, it's certain that a regency would have been appointed until he came of age and could be restored to his dominions. ·This readiness to *carry on* with a line of thought once we have begun it is· a minor property of the imagination that has an effect on peoples' judgments; and the laws and the parliament show wisdom in taking advantage of such properties and choosing the magistrates in a hereditary line or not, depending on what the common people will most naturally regard as having rightful authority.

(2) Though the accession of the Prince of Orange to the throne ·in 1688· might at first give rise to many disputes about whether he had a right to be there, his right ought not to appear doubtful *now*, having acquired sufficient authority from the three monarchs who have followed with the same entitlement to the throne. This way of thinking seems at first sight to be utterly unreasonable, but in fact it is utterly usual! Monarchs often seem to acquire a right from their successors, as well as from their ancestors; and a king who could rightly be regarded as an usurper during his lifetime will be regarded by posterity as a lawful monarch, just because he has had the good fortune to settle his family on the throne, entirely changing the previous form of government. Julius Caesar is regarded as the first Roman emperor; whereas Sylla and Marius, whose entitlement to rule was really the same as his, are treated as tyrants and usurpers. Time and custom give authority to all forms of government, and all successions of monarchs; and the power that was initially based on injustice and violence comes in time to be legal and obligatory. And the mind doesn't leave it at that. Rather, it retraces its

footsteps and transfers to their predecessors and ancestors the right that it naturally ascribes to the posterity, because they are all inter-related and are united in the imagination. The present king of France makes Hugh Capet [from whom he is directly descended, and whose 10th-century occupation of the French throne was a result of political manoeuvring] a more lawful monarch than Cromwell. And the established liberty of the Dutch *now* makes a strong case for their stubborn resistance to ·Spain's· Philip II ·nearly two hundred years ago·.

11: The laws of nations

When civil government has been established over the greatest part of mankind, and different societies have been formed next door to one another, a new set of duties arises among the neighbouring states, suitable to the nature of the dealings that they have with one another. Writers on politics tell us that in every kind of inter-relations ·between states·, a state [Hume: 'a body politic'] is to be considered as a single person; and there is some truth in that: different nations are like private persons in that •they need one anothers' help, and •their selfishness and ambition are perpetual sources of war and discord. But nations are very different from individual persons in other respects, and it's not surprising that they regulate themselves by different maxims, giving rise to a new set of rules that we call 'the laws of nations'. These include rules about the sacredness of the persons of ambassadors, the declaration of war, abstaining from poisoned arms, and other such duties that are clearly fitted to the kinds of dealings that different societies—but not different individuals—have with one another.

These laws of nations are *added* to the laws of nature; they don't *abolish* them! It's safe to say that the three fundamental rules of ·personal· justice—the stability of ownership, its transference by consent, and the keeping of promises—are duties of monarchs as well as of their subjects. The same interests produce the same effect in both cases. Where ownership has no stability, there must be perpetual war. Where property is not transferred by consent, there can be no commerce. Where promises are not kept, there can be no leagues or alliances. So the advantages of peace, commerce, and mutual help make us extend to different •kingdoms the same notions of justice that hold for •individuals.

A widely accepted **maxim** says that there's a system of morals for •monarchs that is much less constraining than the system that ought to govern •private persons. Few politicians are willing to *say* this, but it has been authorized by what they have *done* down through the centuries. This isn't meant to imply that the duties and obligations of monarchs have a lesser *extent* than those of private persons—e.g. no-one will say that the most solemn treaties ought to have no force among monarchs! Monarchs *do* form treaties among themselves, so they must they expect some advantage from their being carried out; and the prospect of such an advantage for the future must motivate them to perform their part of the treaty, and must establish that law of nature. So the

political **maxim** must mean that although the morality of monarchs has the same •extent as that of private persons it doesn't have the same •force, and can be transgressed from more trivial motives ·than would be needed to excuse such transgressions by private persons·. Some philosophers will be shocked by this proposition; but it can easily be defended on the principles I have used to explain the origin of justice and equity.

When men have learned from experience that they can't survive without society, and that society can't be maintained while they give free rein to their appetites, their own urgent ·self·-interest quickly restrains their actions and gives them an obligation to observe the rules that we call the 'laws of justice'. This obligation of interest isn't the end of the matter. [Re 'obligation of interest': see the note on page 282.] We approve of actions that tend to the peace of society, and disapprove of ones that tend to its disturbance; and so the obligation of •interest gives rise—by the necessary course of the passions and sentiments—to the moral obligation of •duty. The same natural obligation of interest occurs among independent kingdoms, and gives rise to the same morality; so that no-one, however morally corrupt he is, will approve of a monarch who voluntarily and of his own accord breaks a promise or violates a treaty. But ·there's a difference·: although peaceful inter-relations among states are advantageous, and even sometimes necessary, they are not as necessary or as advantageous as they are among individuals, who simply can't survive without them. Thus the natural obligation to justice is not as strong among states as it is among individuals, so the moral obligation that arises from it must also be weaker; and when a monarch or minister deceives another, we have to judge him less fiercely than we would judge a private gentleman who breaks his word of honour.

You may want to ask: '*How much* stronger is individual morality than state morality?' This can't be answered precisely; we can't say in numerical terms how the strengths of the two moralities compare with one another. It is safe to say that people *get* the relative strengths without any art or study—just as happens with many other matters. The practice of the world teaches us more about the strengths of our obligations than does the subtlest philosophy ever invented. And this is convincing evidence that all men have an implicit notion of the basis for the moral rules concerning natural and civil justice, and are aware that they arise merely from human conventions and from the interest we have in the preservation of peace and order. If the basis were anything else, the lessening of the interest would never produce a relaxation of the morality. . . .

12: Chastity and modesty

[This section contains Book III's first (and almost its only) occurrences of the word 'women'. Throughout most of the work Hume uses 'men' as equivalent to 'people' or 'human beings'; but here 'men' are contrasted with 'women'.]

If you are not yet fully convinced of this theory about the laws of nature and nations, it will be because you think this:

> The general interests of society don't provide a sufficient explanation of the universal approval (or blame) that follows the observance (or transgression) of those laws.

To remove such worries as thoroughly as I can, I shall now consider another set of duties, namely the modesty and chastity that belong to the fair sex. I am sure that these virtues will be found to be still more conspicuous instances of the operation of the principles$_c$ that I have been emphasizing.

Some philosophers attack the 'female virtues' with great vigour, and think they have gone very far in detecting popular errors when they show •that there is no basis in nature for all the exterior modesty that we require in how the fair sex speak, dress, and behave. I think I can spare myself the trouble of arguing for something as obvious as •that, and proceed immediately to examine how such notions *do* arise—from upbringing, from the voluntary conventions of men, and from the interests of society.

Whoever considers •the length and feebleness of human infancy and •the concern that both sexes naturally have for their offspring will easily see that there must be a union of male and female for bringing up the young, and that this union must be of considerable duration. But men won't impose this restraint on themselves, cheerfully undergoing all the fatigues and expenses to which it subjects them, unless they believe that •the children are their own, and that •in lavishing love and tenderness on them they aren't giving it to a wrong object. Now, if we examine the structure of the human body we shall find that it's very difficult to be entirely sure about this. In the copulation of the sexes the principle$_c$ of generation goes from the man to the woman; so there can easily be an error about which man it was, while it's impossible to have any question about which woman. This trivial anatomical fact creates the vast difference between the upbringing and duties of the two sexes.

If a philosopher examined this matter *a priori* he would reason like this:

> 'Men are induced to work to maintain and bring up their children by the conviction that they really *are* their own; so they must have some assurance about this. They can't get it solely by imposing on their wives severe punishments for any lapse in conjugal fidelity; because such public punishments can't be inflicted without legal proof, which is hard to find in these cases. What restraint, then, , shall we impose on women in order to outweigh their strong temptation to be unfaithful? The only possible restraint, it seems, is the punishment of a bad reputation. This has a mighty influence on the human mind, and we inflict it on the basis of surmises and conjectures and bits of evidence that would never be accepted in a criminal court. Therefore, in order to restrain the female sex appropriately we must attach a special intensity of shame to their infidelity, above what arises merely from its wrongness, and we must correspondingly praise their chastity.'

But although this is a very strong motive to fidelity, our philosopher would quickly discover that it on its own wouldn't be sufficient for that purpose. ·His thought would continue as follows·:

> 'All human creatures, especially of the female sex, are apt to overlook distant motives in favour of present temptations; the temptation is here the strongest imaginable; it creeps up on a woman without her realising that it is doing so; and she easily finds—or optimistically thinks she *will* find—certain means for securing her reputation and preventing all the pernicious consequences of her pleasures. So there has to be something more than ·the risk of· infamy resulting from such licentious behaviour. Specifically, there has to be some prior resistance or dread that can prevent the temptations from getting started, giving the female sex a dislike for all expressions and postures and liberties that have an immediate relation to sexual enjoyment.'

That is how our theorizing philosopher would reason; but I'm convinced that if he didn't have a perfect knowledge of human nature he would be apt to regard his reasonings as merely fanciful theory-spinning, and would regard •the infamy that comes with infidelity and •resistance to all its approaches as principles$_c$ that are to be *wished for* rather than *hoped for* in the world. He would think

> 'What means are there for persuading mankind that marital infidelity is worse than any other kind of wrong conduct, when it is obviously more excusable ·than the others· because the temptation is so great? And what could create a resistance to the approaches of a pleasure to which nature has given such a strong propensity, and a propensity that *must* eventually have its way if the species is to survive?'

But theoretical reasonings that •philosophers take so much trouble to create are often formed by •the world naturally and without reflection; and difficulties that seem insurmountable in theory are easily overcome in practice. Those who have an interest in the fidelity of women *naturally* disapprove of their infidelity and of everything that might lead to it. Those whose interests are not bound up with this are carried along with the stream. Education takes possession of the malleable minds of the fair sex in their infancy. And once a general rule of this kind is established, men are apt to extend it beyond the matters that first gave rise to it. Thus bachelors, however debauched, can't help being shocked by any instance of lewdness or impudence in women. And although all these maxims clearly arise from concerns about generation, women who are past child-bearing have no more privilege in this respect than those who are in the flower of their youth and beauty. Men must have an unconscious notion that all those ideas of modesty and decency are concerned with generation; because they don't impose the same laws with the same force on the male sex, to which the concern about generation doesn't apply. ·The general attitude to female chastity doesn't *slide across* and generate a similar attitude to chastity among males, because· males constitute a very large class who are obviously different from females, so that there's a clear line to be drawn here. It's not like that with the different ages of women, ·where none of the lines are clear, and drift is therefore possible·. So although we know that these notions are based on the public interest, the general rule carries us beyond the original reason for insisting on female chastity and makes us extend the notions of modesty over the whole female sex, from their earliest infancy to their most extreme old age and infirmity.

We shall see later that the valuing of courage in men is like the ·valuing of· chastity of women in •having a foundation in

nature while also •deriving much of its merit from artifice.

As for the obligations that the male sex have regarding chastity, we may observe that according to the general notions of the world they are less strong than the obligations of women, by about the same amount as the obligations of the law of nations are less strong than those of the law of nature. It is contrary to the interests of civil society that men should be entirely free to indulge their sexual appetites; this interest is weaker than in the case of the female sex, so the moral obligation arising from it must be proportionately weaker. For evidence of this, look at how men of all nations have acted and felt down through the ages.

Part iii: The other virtues and vices

1: The origin of the natural virtues and vices

We now start to examine the virtues and vices that are entirely natural, not depending in any way on the artifice and contrivance of men. This is the last part of my system of morals.

The chief spring or actuating principle$_c$ of the human mind is pleasure or pain; when these sensations are removed from our thought and feeling, that leaves us to a large extent incapable of passion or action, of desire or volition. The most immediate effects of pleasure and pain are the mind's motions towards or away from things, which can generate

> volition, desire and aversion, joy and grief, hope and fear,

depending on what changes there are in *how* pleasure or pain come into the picture—whether as probable or improbable, certain or uncertain, or as considered as out of our power for the present moment. But when the objects that cause pleasure or pain come to be related to ourselves or others, they still arouse desire or aversion, grief or joy, but they *also* cause the indirect passions of pride or humility, love or hatred, which in this case have a double relation of impressions and ideas to the pain or pleasure. [To unpack this condensed sentence, see II.i.5.]

I have already remarked that moral distinctions depend entirely on certain specific sentiments of pain and pleasure, and that •any mental quality in ourselves or others that gives us satisfaction when we observe it or think about it is automatically virtuous, while •everything of this kind that gives us uneasiness is vicious. Now,

> •every quality in ourselves that gives pleasure always causes pride, and •every quality in others that gives pleasure always causes love.

Furthermore,

> •every quality in ourselves that produces uneasiness causes humility, and •every quality in others that produces uneasiness causes hatred.

It follows from all this that so far as our mental qualities are concerned,

> •virtue is equivalent to the power of producing love or pride, and •vice is equivalent to the power of producing humility or hatred.

So we must always judge one through the other, designating as 'virtuous' any quality of the mind that causes love or pride, and as 'vicious' any mental quality that causes hatred or humility.

An *action* can count as either virtuous or vicious only when considered as a sign of some quality or character-trait. It must depend on durable principles$_c$ in that mind—ones that extend over all the person's conduct and are part of his character. Actions themselves, when they don't come from any *constant* principle$_c$ in the person, have no influence on love or hatred, pride or humility, which is why they are never considered in morality.

This thought is self-evident, and should be attended to as something of the utmost importance in our present subject. In our enquiries concerning the origin of morals we should never consider any single action but only the •quality or •character from which the action proceeded. •These are

the only items durable enough to affect our sentiments concerning the person. A person's actions are indeed better indications of his character than what he says, or even what he wants and feels; but it is only to the extent that they *are* such indications that they bring love or hatred, praise or blame.

To discover the true origin of morals, and of the love or hatred that arises from mental qualities, we must explore at greater depth some of the principles$_c$ that I have already examined and explained.

Let us start by considering again the nature and force of *sympathy*. The minds of all men are similar in their feelings and operations; any affection [= 'feeling'] that anyone has could be had by anyone else. When ·violin· strings have the same tension, the vibration of one communicates itself to the others; and in the same way all the affections easily pass from one person to another, and create corresponding movements ·of mind and body· in every human creature. When I see the effects of passion in someone's voice and gestures, my mind immediately passes from these effects to their causes, and forms an idea of the passion that is so lively that it soon *becomes* the passion. Similarly, when I see the causes of an emotion, my mind is conveyed to the effects, and comes to have such an emotion. If I were present at any of the more terrible operations of surgery, the preparation of the instruments, the laying out of the bandages, the heating of the irons, along with all the signs of anxiety and concern in the patient and assistants, would have a great effect on my mind, arousing the strongest sentiments of pity and terror—before the operation had even begun! No-one's passion is *immediately* displayed to the mind of someone else. All that our senses shows us are a passion's •causes or effects; from •these we infer the passion; and consequently •these arouse our sympathy.

Our sense of beauty depends to a large extent on this principle$_c$. Any object with a tendency to produce pleasure in its possessor is regarded as beautiful; just as any object that tends to produce pain is disagreeable and ugly. Thus,

- •the convenience of a house,
- •the fertility of a field,
- •the strength of a horse,
- •the capacity, soundness and speed of a vessel,

form the principal beauty of these various objects. The object called 'beautiful' in these cases pleases us only by its tendency to produce a certain effect. That effect is the pleasure or advantage of some other person. Now, the only way the pleasure of a stranger, someone we don't know, can bring pleasure to us is through *sympathy*. So it's sympathy that is responsible for the beauty that we find in everything that is useful. Think about it and you'll easily see how large a part of beauty consists in usefulness. Wherever an object has a tendency to give its owner pleasure. . . ., it is sure to please the spectator through a delicate sympathy with the owner. Most of the works of •art [here = 'things made through human skill'] are regarded as beautiful in proportion to their usefulness to us, and even many of the products of •nature derive their beauty from that source. In most cases a thing's handsomeness or beauty is not an intrinsic quality of it but rather a relative quality, which pleases purely by its tendency to produce an end that is agreeable.

Our moral sentiments often come from the same principle$_c$ as our sentiments of beauty. No virtue is more esteemed than justice, and no vice more detested than injustice; and no qualities contribute more to a character's being lovable or odious. Now, what makes •justice a moral virtue is its tendency to produce good for mankind; indeed, justice is nothing but an artifact that was made for that purpose. The same may be said of •allegiance, of •the laws of nations,

•of modesty, and of •good manners. [That last phrase means 'good behaviour' *generally*, not restricted to the relatively minor range of conduct that defines 'manners' in our present sense of the word. When on page 310 Hume wants to talk about something more like manners in our sense of that word, he speaks of 'good-breeding'.] All these are mere human constructs that were made in the interests of society. And since they have, always and everywhere, brought with them a very strong moral sentiment, we must allow that •thinking about the tendency of a given character or mental quality is sufficient to give us •the sentiments of approval and blame. [When Hume speaks of a thing's 'tendency'—not its tendency *to do* such-and-such—he means 'the facts about what the thing causes or is apt to cause'.] Now, we couldn't like something because it is apt to produce x unless we liked x; in our present case x = the good of society; and what makes us favour the good of society—setting aside cases involving our own interests or those of our friends—is sympathy. It follows that sympathy is the source of our esteem for all the artificial virtues.

Thus it appears •that sympathy is a very powerful principle$_c$ in human nature, •that it has a great influence on our sense of beauty, and •that it produces our moral sentiments regarding all the artificial virtues. This creates a presumption that sympathy also gives rise to many of the other virtues, and that qualities get our approval because of their tendency to produce good for mankind. And we should become certain that this is so when we find that

- •most of the qualities that we *naturally* approve of do in fact have that tendency, making the person fit to be member of society, while
- •the qualities that we *naturally* disapprove of have a contrary tendency, making the person dangerous or disagreeable to have any dealings with.

·Why should we become *certain* of this·? Because after we find that such tendencies have force enough to produce the strongest moral sentiment, it would unreasonable for us in these cases to look for any other cause of approval or blame. ·Why·? Because it is an unbreakable rule in philosophy ·and science· that where any particular cause is sufficient for an effect we ought to be satisfied with it, and ought not to multiply causes without necessity. [Hume is here echoing the famous Occam's Razor: 'Entities should not be multiplied more than is necessary'.] We have had the good fortune to find cases of the artificial virtues where a quality's tendency to produce the good of society is the sole cause of our approval ·of it·, with not a hint of input from any other principle$_c$. From that we learn the power of that principle$_c$; and where that principle$_c$ *could* be operating and the quality approved of really *is* beneficial to society, a true philosopher won't require any other principle$_c$—·any cause other than the belief that the item in question is apt to produce good for society·—to account for any approval and esteem, even the strongest.

No-one can doubt that many of the natural virtues have this tendency to produce good for society. Meekness, beneficence, charity, generosity, clemency, moderation, fairness, loom largest among the moral qualities, and are commonly called 'social virtues' to mark their tendency to produce good for society. This goes so far that some philosophers have claimed that *all* moral distinctions arise from artifice and education. ·Perhaps they were encouraged in this when they saw· skillful politicians using the notions of *honour* and *shame* in an attempt to restrain men's turbulent passions and make them operate for the public good. But this theory of morality is not consistent with experience. ·There are two things wrong with it·. **(1)** There are virtues and vices other than the ones that have this tendency to produce profit or loss for the public. **(2)** If men didn't have a natural sentiment of approval and blame, there would be nothing for

the politicians to arouse, and such words as 'praiseworthy' 'blameworthy' and 'odious' would mean nothing to us; they would be like words in a foreign language that was perfectly unknown to us. . . . Although this system is erroneous, however, it can teach us that •moral distinctions arise in a great measure from the tendency of qualities and characters to further the interests of society, and that •our concern for those interests is what makes us approve or disapprove of them. But it is only from *sympathy* that we have this extensive concern for society, so *sympathy* is the principle$_c$ that takes us so far out of ourselves as to give us the same pleasure or uneasiness in the characters of others as if they had a tendency to produce profit or loss for ourselves.

Justice differs from the natural virtues in only one way, namely:

> •The good that results from the natural virtues arises from every single act, and is the object of some natural passion; whereas •a single act of justice, considered in itself, may well be contrary to the public good.

The advantageousness of justice comes not from this or that individual just act but from mankind's agreeing in a general scheme or system of action ·that produces good for society·. When I bring help to someone who is in distress, what moves me to action is my natural humaneness; and to the extent that I really do help him, to that extent I have promoted the happiness of my fellow-creatures. But look at the questions that come before any court of law! Taking each case on its own, the *humane* thing to do would go against the laws of justice as often as it would conform to them. Judges take from a poor man to give to a rich; they make industrious people work on behalf of dissolute people; and they put into the hands of vicious people the means of harming both themselves and others. The whole system of law and justice, however, is advantageous to the society; and it was *this* advantage that men wanted to secure through the voluntary conventions that established the system. Once it has been established by these ·•artificial· conventions, it is •naturally accompanied by a strong moral sentiment, which can only come from our sympathy with the interests of society. That's all the explanation we need of the esteem that is given to natural virtues that have a tendency to produce good for the public.

[Hume now offers a paragraph making the point that his theory of sympathy as the basis of morality is 'much more probable' for the natural virtues than for the artificial virtues. [He seems to mean 'much more prima facie plausible'.] That is because 'the imagination is more affected by what is particular than by what is general'; so that we are more stirred by a single act of generosity, beneficence etc. which itself does good to one or more particular people, than by a single instance of justice that may have nothing going for it except its belonging to an advantageous system.] Before I go on, I must comment on two remarkable facts that may seem to be objections to my theory of morality. ·I shall state them as objections·:

> **(1)** When any quality or character has a tendency to do good for mankind, we are pleased with it and approve of it because it presents a lively idea of pleasure, an idea that affects us by sympathy and is itself a kind of pleasure. But this sympathy is very variable, so you might think that our moral sentiments vary in the same way. We sympathize more with persons who are close than with ones who are far away; more with people we know than with strangers; more with our countrymen than with foreigners. But despite this variation of our sympathy, we give the same approval to the same moral qualities in China as in England. They appear equally virtuous, and equally

good candidates for the esteem of a judicious spectator.
The sympathy varies without a variation in our esteem.
So our esteem doesn't come from sympathy.

[Hume replies that attempts to base morality on reason or on 'comparison of ideas' are dead. Any credible theory of morality must base it on sentiments—i.e. feelings—of pleasure or disgust that we get from seeing or thinking about particular qualities or characters. Now, any such feelings —whether or not sympathy has anything to do with them—are very variable. So **if** the above objection has force against the theory that sympathy lies at the root of everything in morality,] it must have equal force against every other theory. But really it has no force at all; and here is why. There is a continual fluctuation in how we are situated in relation to people and to things; a man who is a long way away now may in a little time become a familiar acquaintance. Besides, each particular man has his own unique set of relations to others; if he had to consider characters and persons only as they appear from this unique point of view, he couldn't possibly have a reasonable conversation with anyone else. [Although he doesn't say so in this sentence, Hume evidently holds that in those circumstances conversation would be impossible because there would be so many conflicts between one person's judgments and the other's.] In order to prevent those continual contradictions and arrive at a more stable judgment of things, we settle on some steady and general points of view, and always think in terms of *them*, whatever our present situation may be. Similarly, external beauty is determined by pleasure; and a beautiful face can't give as much pleasure when seen from twenty paces away as when it is brought closer. But we don't say that 'it appears to us less beautiful' from that distance, because we know what effect it will have at that distance, and by reflecting on that we correct its momentary appearance.

Our sentiments of blame or praise vary according to how we relate to the person blamed or praised and according to our present frame of mind. But we ignore these variations in our •general decisions, and apply the terms expressing our liking or dislike in the way we would if we remained in one point of view.

[When Hume speaks of our •'general decisions', he isn't talking about
(i) general moral views as distinct from moral views about particular cases;
but rather about
(ii) a general way of viewing particular cases.
It seems that (ii) amounts to
(iii) judging a particular case by applying our general moral views to it rather than consulting our present feelings about it.
Three or four further instances of 'general' in this section (and one on page 243) are of this kind; its occurrence in the phrase 'general rules' is not one of them.]

Experience soon teaches us this method of correcting our sentiments, or (when the sentiments are more stubborn and unalterable) of correcting our language. . . . Such corrections are common with regard to all the senses; and indeed we couldn't possibly make any use of language, or report our sentiments to one another, if we didn't correct the momentary appearances of things and overlook our present situation.

So we blame or praise a person on the basis of the influence of his character and qualities on those with whom he has dealings. We don't consider whether the people he affects are acquaintances of ours or strangers, compatriots or foreigners. Indeed, even when *we* are among the people affected, we set that fact aside in our general judgments; we don't *blame* a man for opposing us in one of our claims when his own interests are particularly concerned. We make allowance for a certain degree of selfishness in men, because we know it to be inseparable from human nature, built into us all. By these thoughts we correct the sentiments of blame that so naturally arise whenever we meet with opposition.

But these corrective devices are not entirely effective, and our passions seldom correspond exactly to the theory I have been presenting. It rarely happens that men heartily love what lies at a distance from them and can't bring any benefit to them in particular; and it equally rarely happens that •someone can pardon someone else for opposing •his interests, however justifiable that opposition may be by the general rules of morality. I shall have to settle for saying

> that reason requires such impartial conduct, that we can't often bring ourselves to it, and that our passions don't readily follow the decisions of our judgment.

You will easily understand what I mean by this if you bear in mind what I said earlier concerning the reason that can oppose our passion—which we found to be nothing but a general calm determination of the passions, based on thinking about things as though from a distance. When we judge people merely on the basis of how their characters are likely to affect our own or our friends' interests, we find so many contradictions to our sentiments in society and conversation [those eight words are Hume's], and such an uncertainty from the constant changes of our situation, that we look for some other, less variable, standard of merit and demerit. Being thus loosened from our first viewpoint, the most serviceable replacement for it that we can find is sympathy with those who have any dealings with the person we consider. This sympathy is much less lively than what we have when our own interests or those of our particular friends are involved; and it has less influence on our love and hatred; but it fits our calm and general principles just as well, and is said to have an equal authority over our 'reason', and to command our judgment and opinion. We blame a bad action that we read of in history just as much as we blame one performed in our neighbourhood yesterday; and what that means is that we know from reflection that •the historical action *would* arouse ·in us· sentiments of disapproval as strong as those aroused by the recent-nearby action if •it related to us in the same way.

I now come to the second noteworthy fact that I said I would discuss; ·and I shall state this too as an objection·:

> **(2)** If someone has a character the natural tendency of which is beneficial to society, we judge him to be virtuous, and are delighted by the thought of his having such a character, even if particular events have prevented it from operating and have made it impossible for him to be serviceable to his friends and country. Virtue in rags is still virtue; and the love that it arouses accompanies a man into a dungeon or desert, where the virtue can no longer be expressed in action and is lost to all the world. That is an objection to the present system [i.e. to Hume's theory of the moral sentiments]. Our sympathy gives us an interest in the good of mankind; and if sympathy were the source of our esteem for virtue, that sentiment of approval couldn't occur except when the virtue actually attained its end and was beneficial to mankind. Where it fails of its end, it is only an incomplete •means, and therefore can't acquire any merit from that •end. The goodness of •an end can give merit to •means to it only if the means are complete, and actually produce the end.

My answer is this: If an object is, in all its parts, fitted to attain some agreeable end, it naturally gives us pleasure and is judged to be beautiful even if it isn't completely effectual because of something lacking in the external circumstances. It is sufficient ·for our judgment of beauty· if everything is complete in the object itself. [Hume gives examples: a splendidly designed house that we know won't ever be occupied; a beautiful landscape in a place where no-one lives; a handsome man who will never be allowed out of

prison. Then:] Our imagination is associated with a set of passions on which our sentiments of beauty largely depend. These passions are moved by ideas that •aren't as lively and strong as the ideas that constitute *belief* and •don't imply the real existence of their objects. When a character is in every respect fitted to be beneficial to society, our imagination passes easily from the cause to the effect, ignoring the fact that some of the circumstances needed to make the cause a complete one are missing. General rules create a kind of probability that influences the judgment sometimes and the imagination always.

[In this paragraph 'fortune' means something like 'luck', the way things *happen* to turn out.] It's true that when the cause is complete, and a good •disposition is accompanied by good •fortune which makes it really beneficial to society, the spectator's pleasure is stronger and is accompanied by a more lively sympathy. We are more affected by it; yet we don't say that it is more virtuous or that we esteem it more. We know that an alteration of •fortune may make the benevolent •disposition entirely powerless, which leads us to separate the •fortune from the •disposition as much as we can. This is the same as what happens when we correct the different sentiments of virtue that come from differences in how closely or remotely we relate to the person whose virtue is in question. Our passions don't always follow our corrections; but these corrections serve well enough to regulate our abstract notions, and they are all we go by when we pronounce in general concerning the degrees of vice and virtue. . . . All this makes it easy for us to remove any contradiction there may seem to be between the •extensive sympathy on which our sentiments of virtue depend and •the limited generosity that is natural to men. (I have often mentioned this limited generosity, and have argued [see page 256] that it is what brings the notions of *justice* and *property* into play.) My sympathy with someone else may give me the sentiment of pain and disapproval when I see something that has a tendency to give him uneasiness, even if I am not willing to sacrifice any of my own interests, or thwart any of my passions, for his satisfaction. A house may displease me by being poorly planned from the point of view of its owner's convenience, yet I may refuse to give a shilling towards the rebuilding of it. For sentiments to control our passions they must touch the heart, but to influence our taste they needn't reach further than the imagination. When a building seems clumsy and tottering to the eye, it is ugly and disagreeable even if we are perfectly sure of the solidity of its workmanship. What causes this sentiment of disapproval—·this judgment of ugliness·—is a kind of fear, but it's not the passion ·of fear· that we feel when have to stand under a wall that we think really is tottering and insecure. . . .

Most of the qualities that are attributed to great men when their praises are sung can be divided into two kinds—•those that make the man perform his part in society, and •those that make him serviceable to himself, enabling him to promote his own interests. The prudence, temperance, frugality, industry, assiduity, enterprise and dexterity of great men are celebrated, as well as their generosity and humaneness. Of the qualities that might disable a man from making a figure in life, the one we treat most leniently is *indolence*: we think of this as not depriving the person of his skills and abilities, but only suspending his exercise of them; and it does this without any inconvenience to the person himself, because it comes to some extent from his own choice. But we do count extreme indolence as a fault, and a very great one; and a man's friends will never acknowledge him to be subject to it unless they are using this to defend his character against accusations of more significant flaws. 'He could cut a fine figure', they say, 'if only he put his mind to

it. His understanding is sound, his conception quick, and his memory tenacious; but he hates business and doesn't care about his fortune.' And sometimes a man will say such things about himself, with the air of someone confessing a fault, but really *boasting*—because he thinks that this incapacity for business implies much more noble qualities, such as a philosophical spirit, a fine taste, a delicate wit, or a liking for pleasure and society. But take any quality that *doesn't* indicate any other good qualities, and that does incapacitate a man always for business and is destructive to his interests—e.g. a blundering understanding, a wrong judgment of everything in life, inconstancy and irresolution, or a lack of skill in the management of men and business. These are all agreed to be *imperfections* in a man's character, and many men would rather •admit to the greatest crimes than •be suspected of being in any degree subject to them.

When we are engaged in philosophical researches it's very satisfactory when we find that •different circumstances produce different varieties of the same ·basic· phenomenon, and that •we can discover what is common to all of them; this gives extra support to any hypothesis that we use in this discovery. Even if nothing was regarded as virtuous except what was beneficial to society, I'm convinced that my explanation of the moral sense ought still to be accepted, because the evidence for it would be good enough; but the evidence gets better when we find other kinds of virtue that can't be explained except on my hypothesis. Here is a man who is not remarkably defective in his social qualities, but what principally counts in his favour is his dexterity in business, by which he has extricated himself from great difficulties and conducted the most sensitive affairs with notable skill and prudence. I find an esteem for him immediately arising in me; his company is a satisfaction to me; and without knowing anything more about him I would rather do a service to him than to someone whose character is in every other respect equal but is lacking in this man's practical dexterity. In this case, the qualities that please me are all considered as useful to the man who has them, and as having a tendency to promote his interests. They are regarded only as means to an end, and please me in proportion to their fitness for that end. So the end must be agreeable to me. But what makes it agreeable? The person is a stranger, my interests are in no way connected with him, and I have no obligations towards him. His happiness doesn't concern me and more than the happiness of every human, and indeed of every sentient creature, which is to say that it affects me only by sympathy. Whenever I discover his happiness and good, whether in its causes or effects, my sympathy draws me so deeply into it that it gives me an actual emotion. The appearance of qualities that have a tendency to promote it have an agreeable effect on my imagination, and command my love and esteem.

This theory may serve to explain why the same qualities, in all cases, produce both pride and love, humility and hatred; and why any man who regards himself as virtuous or vicious, accomplished or despicable, is regarded in the same way by others. **(i)** A person in whom we discover any passion or habit that is basically inconvenient only to himself always becomes disagreeable to us merely because of it; just as, on the other hand, **(ii)** someone whose character is dangerous and disagreeable only to others can't be satisfied with himself as long as he is aware of that disadvantage. And we find this not only with characters and conduct but also with the most minute circumstances. **(i)** When someone else has a violent cough, that makes us uneasy even though in itself it doesn't affect us in the least. **(ii)** A man will be humiliated if you tell him that his breath stinks, although obviously this is no annoyance to himself. Our imagination easily changes its

viewpoint; and by surveying ourselves as we appear to others, or considering others as they feel to themselves, we enter into sentiments that are in no way *ours* and which can't be of any concern to us unless sympathy comes into play. We sometimes carry this sympathy so far that we are displeased with a quality ·of ours· that is advantageous for us, merely because it displeases others and makes us disagreeable in their eyes; even if we can never have any *interest* in making ourselves agreeable to them.

Philosophers have advanced many systems of morality down the centuries; but when we look into them closely we find that basically there are just two that merit our attention. Moral good and evil are certainly distinguished by our sentiments, not by reason; but these sentiments can arise either from **(1)** how people's characters and passions strike us, considered just in themselves, or from **(2)** our reflections on what they tend to do for the happiness of mankind and of particular persons. [In that sentence, 'how characters etc. strike us' replaces Hume's 'the mere species or appearance of characters etc.'. That uses 'species' as a mediaeval technical term belonging to an Aristotelian theory of sense-perception. Hume doesn't use 'species' in that sense anywhere else in the *Treatise* except on page 321 below, where this version replaces it by 'the mere look of the thing'.] My opinion is that both these causes are intermixed in our moral judgments, just as they are in our judgments about most kinds of external beauty; though I also think that **(2)** reflections on the likely consequences of actions have by far the greatest influence, and settle where our duty lies in all the major practical questions. Still, in some less important cases our approval comes from **(1)** immediate taste or sentiment. Wit, and a certain easy and disengaged behaviour, are qualities immediately agreeable to others, and command their love and esteem. Some of these qualities produce satisfaction in others through particular principles$_c$ in human nature that can't be accounted for because they are basic [Hume: 'original']; others are special cases of more general principles$_c$. I can show this best by getting further into details.

Just as some qualities get their merit from being *immediately agreeable* to •others, without having any tendency to produce results that serve the interests of the public, so also some are called virtuous because they are *immediately agreeable* to •the person who has them. Each of the mind's passions and operations has a particular feeling, which must be either agreeable or disagreeable. The first is virtuous, the second vicious. This particular feeling constitutes the very nature of the passion, so it's not something we need to *explain*.

But however directly the vice/virtue distinction may seem to flow from the immediate pleasure or uneasiness that particular qualities cause to ourselves or others, it's easy to see that it also has a considerable dependence on the principle$_c$ of *sympathy* that I have so often insisted on. •We approve of a person who has qualities that are immediately agreeable to those he has any dealings with, even if we ourselves never got any pleasure from them. •We also approve of someone who has qualities that are immediately agreeable to himself, even if they are of no service to anyone else. To account for •these two facts we must appeal to the force of sympathy.

Now for a general overview of the theory of morality that I am defending. A quality of the mind is called 'virtuous' if the very thought of it gives pleasure, and every quality that produces pain is called 'vicious'. This pleasure and this pain different sources. We get pleasure from the thought of a character that is

(1) naturally fitted to be useful to others, or

(2) naturally fitted to be useful to the person himself, or

(3) agreeable to others, or

(4) agreeable to the person himself.

It may be surprising that amidst all these interests and pleasures—·of 'the person himself' and of 'others'·—we should forget *our own*, which concern us so much on every other occasion. But we'll stop being surprised when we consider this:

> Because no two persons' pleasures and interests are the same, men could never agree in their sentiments and judgments unless ·each of them dethroned his own viewpoint and· they chose some *one* point of view from which they could *all* survey their object, so that it could appear the same to all of them.

What common viewpoint will it be? Well, in judging characters the only interest or pleasure that appears the same to every spectator is •that of the person himself whose character is being examined or •that of persons who are connected with him in some way. Such interests and pleasures touch us more faintly than our own do, but because they are more constant and universal they counterbalance our own pleasures and interests—·not just in theory but· even in practice. They are the only standard of virtue and morality that we recognise in theorising about morality; they are the only source of the particular feeling or sentiment that moral distinctions depend on.

As for the good or ill desert—·the rewards or punishments·—of virtue or vice: this is an obvious consequence of the sentiments of pleasure or uneasiness. These sentiments produce love or hatred; and it's a basic fact about the human constitution that love and hatred are accompanied by benevolence and anger, i.e. with a desire to make happy the person we love, and to make miserable the one we hate. I discuss this more fully elsewhere [in *Treatise* II].

2: Greatness of mind

It is time now to illustrate this general theory of morals by applying it to particular instances of virtue or vice, showing how the merit or demerit of each of them arises from the four sources listed above. Let us start by examining the passions of pride and humility, and consider the vice that lies in having too much of one of them and the virtue that consists in having them in the right proportions. An excessive pride or overweening conceit is always regarded as vicious and is hated by everyone, whereas modesty—i.e. a proper sense of one's own weakness—is regarded as virtuous and procures everyone's good-will. Of the four sources of moral distinctions, this is to be ascribed to **(3)** others' finding a quality to be agreeable or disagreeable—finding this *immediately*, without thinking about the tendency [see note on page 300] of that quality.

In order to show this, I have to bring in two principles$_c$ that are very conspicuous in human nature.

(i) The first is the *sympathy* and *passing on of sentiments and passions* that I have talked about. Human souls correspond to one another very closely and intimately; as soon as

someone approaches me, he spreads all his opinions onto me, drawing along my judgment to a greater or lesser extent. My sympathy with him often stops short of entirely changing my sentiments and way of thinking, but it is usually strong enough to •disturb the easy flow of my thought, and •give authority to the opinion that is recommended to me by his assent and approval. It makes no difference what the topic is that he and I are thinking about. Whether we are making judgments about someone who is of no concern to either of us, or about my own character, my sympathy gives equal force to his decision; and even his sentiments regarding his own merit make me consider him in the same light in which he regards himself.

This principle$_c$ of sympathy is so powerful and penetrating that it plays a part in most of our sentiments and passions, and is often at work when there's an appearance of its contrary! Whenever someone opposes me in something that I care a lot about, arousing my passion by contradicting me, I have *some* sympathy with him, nor does my •commotion proceed from any other origin. [This means: 'and it's only because of this element of sympathy that I am so upset'. Hume presumably thinks that if I had no sympathy for your opposition to my project I wouldn't get into a turmoil about it, but would just hate you steadily and calmly.] We find here an obvious conflict or collision between opposite principles$_c$ and passions. On the one side, there is the passion or sentiment that is natural to me; and it is observable that the stronger this passion is, the greater is the •commotion. There must also be some passion or sentiment on the other side, and there's nothing that this passion can come from except sympathy. Other people's sentiments can't affect us except by becoming to some extent our own; and then they operate on us, opposing some of our passions and increasing others, just as they would have done if their basic source had been our own temperament and disposition. While they remain concealed in the minds of others, they *can't* have any influence on us; and even when they are known, if our knowledge of them consisted only in our having *ideas of* them, that still wouldn't enable them to affect us. Why not? Because our ·idea-having faculty, i.e.· our imagination or ·power of· conception, is so accustomed to objects of all different kinds that a mere *idea* ·of something· contrary to our sentiments and inclinations wouldn't be able to stir us up.

(ii) The second principle$_c$ I shall take notice of is that of *comparison*, i.e. the mechanism [not Hume's word] through which our judgment concerning one object varies according to how the object compares with some other object that we choose to compare it with. We judge objects more by comparison than by their intrinsic worth and value, and regard things as mean [= 'not much good'] when they are contrasted with better things of the same kind. The most obvious thing to compare things with is *oneself*, which is why we make that comparison constantly, letting it influence most of our passions. This kind of comparison is directly contrary to sympathy in its operation, as I remarked when discussing compassion and malice:

> 'In every kind of comparison of one object x with another object y, y makes us get from x a sensation contrary to the one we get from x when we consider it individually and non-comparatively.' 'The direct survey of someone else's pleasure naturally gives us pleasure, and therefore produces unpleasure when compared with our own. His unpleasure considered in itself is unpleasant to us, but it augments the idea we have of our own happiness and so gives us pleasure.' (II.ii.8).

So the principles$_c$ of •sympathy and of •comparison with ourselves are directly contrary to one another. Can we form

general rules to govern which of them should prevail in this or that case—apart from the temperament of the particular person? If I am safely on land, and want to get some pleasure from this fact, I must •think about the miserable condition of those who are at sea in a storm, and must •try to make this idea as strong and lively as possible, so as to make myself conscious of my own good fortune. But however hard I work at this, the comparison won't be as effective as it would be if I were down at the shore and *saw* a ship at a distance tossed by a tempest and in danger every moment of being wrecked on a rock or sand-bank. Now suppose that my idea ·of the endangered ship· becomes still more lively. Suppose the ship is driven so near to me that I can clearly see the horror on the faces of the seamen and passengers, hear their wailing cries, see dearest friends give their last adieu or embrace with a resolve to perish in each other's arms; no man has a heart so savage that he could get any pleasure from such a scene, or prevent himself from being filled with the tenderest compassion and sympathy. So it's obvious that there is a **medium** in these matters: if the idea is too faint it has no influence through comparison; if it is too strong it operates on us entirely through sympathy, which is the opposite of comparison. Because sympathy is the conversion of an *idea* into an *impression*, it requires more force and vivacity in the idea than is needed for comparison.

It's easy to apply all this to the present subject. When we are in the presence of a great man, or one whose abilities and intellect are far above ours, we sink very much in our own eyes; and this humility is a considerable ingredient in the respect that we pay our superiors—or so I argued in II.ii.10 when discussing respect. Sometimes even envy and hatred arise from the comparison, but in most men it goes no further than respect and esteem. Because sympathy has such a powerful influence on the human mind, it causes •pride to have an effect rather like that of •merit; and by making us enter into ·and share· the proud man's elevated feelings about himself presents the comparison that is so humiliating and disagreeable. Our judgment doesn't go the whole way with him in the flattering •idea of himself that he enjoys, but still it is shaken up enough to admit into our minds the •idea it presents and to give it a greater influence than would be had by the loose conceptions of the imagination. A man who idly passed the time by forming a notion of a person of a merit very much superior to his own wouldn't be humiliated by that fiction; but when we are confronted by a man who really is—we think—of inferior merit, if we see him as having any extraordinary degree of pride and self-conceit, his firm belief in his own merit takes hold of our imagination and diminishes us in our own eyes, just as though he *had* all the good qualities that he so liberally attributes to himself. Our idea is here precisely in the **medium** that is required for it to operate on us through comparison. If our idea were accompanied by belief, and the person seemed ·to us· to *have* the merit that he claims to have, that would have a contrary effect and would operate on us through sympathy. The influence of that principle$_c$—·i.e. of sympathy·—would then be superior to that of comparison, contrary to what happens where the person's merit seems to be below his pretensions.

From these results it follows rigorously that pride—i.e. an overweening conceit of ourselves—must be a vice, because it causes uneasiness in all men and constantly presents them with a disagreeable comparison. It's a commonplace in philosophy and even in everyday life and conversation that •what makes us dislike so much the pride of other people is our own pride, and that •we can't bear vanity ·in others· only because we are vain. Cheerful people naturally keep company with others who are cheerful; amorous people

keep company with others who are amorous; but the proud can't bear the proud! They seek instead the company of those who are of an opposite disposition, ·i.e. those who are humble·. . . .

But although it is vicious and disagreeable for us to have an arrogantly exaggerated idea of our own merit, it is utterly praiseworthy for us to regard ourselves as valuable if we really do have valuable qualities. A quality can be a source of virtue in us not only through being •agreeable to others but also through its being •useful and advantageous to us; and certainly nothing is more useful to us in the conduct of life than a proper level of pride, •making us aware of our own merit and •giving us confidence and assurance in all our projects and enterprises. Whatever abilities someone has, they are entirely useless to him if he isn't acquainted with them and doesn't make plans that are suitable to them. We *always* need to know our own force; and if it were allowable to err about this, it would be more advantageous to overrate our merit than to form ideas of it that don't do it justice. Fortune commonly favours the bold and enterprising; and nothing inspires us with more boldness than a good opinion of ourselves. . . .

Thus, self-satisfaction and vanity may be not only •allowable but •required in a character. However, there can be no doubt that good-breeding [see note on page 300] and decency require us to avoid all signs and expressions that tend directly to show that we are satisfied with ourselves. We have—we *all* have—a wonderful partiality for ourselves, and if we were always to give vent to our self-satisfaction we would make one another extremely indignant—not only by the immediate presence of such a disagreeable a subject of comparison, but also by the conflicts of our judgments. And so, just as

> •we establish the laws of nature so as to secure ownership in society and prevent conflicts among opposing self-interests,

so also

> •we establish the rules of good-breeding so as to prevent conflicts among different men's pride, and make conversation agreeable and inoffensive.

Nothing is more disagreeable than a man's arrogant too-high opinion about himself. Almost everyone has a strong propensity to this vice; and no-one can within himself sharply distinguish that vice from ·the neighbouring· virtue, because that would require him to be certain that his estimation of his own merit is well founded. For these ·two· reasons, *all* direct expressions of personal pride are condemned, including those of men of sense and merit. They aren't allowed to do themselves justice openly in •words, any more than other people are; and it is regarded as virtue in them if they even show a reserve and secret doubt in doing themselves justice in their own •thoughts. The absurd propensity that most men have to over-value themselves has given us such a prejudice against self-applause that we are apt to condemn it by a general rule wherever we meet with it; we have difficulty in exempting men of sense from the rule, even in their most secret thoughts. It can't be denied that *some* disguise of one's self-estimate is absolutely needed; and that if we are secretly proud of ourselves we must. . . .have the appearance of modesty and mutual deference in all our conduct and behaviour. We must *always* be ready •to prefer others to ourselves, and •to treat even our equals with a kind of deference—acting as the lowest and least in any company where we are not very much distinguished above the rest. If we observe these rules in our *conduct*, men will have more indulgence for our secret *sentiments* when we reveal them in an oblique manner.

I don't think that anyone who has had any experience

of living in society and can penetrate into the inward sentiments of men will assert that the humility required of us by good-breeding and decency concerns anything more than our outward behaviour, or that a thorough sincerity about this is regarded as a real part of our duty. [The insincerity that Hume is permitting here consists in **(i)** thinking of yourself as a high-grade specimen while **(ii)** speaking and acting as though you regarded yourself as something much lower. The demand for 'thorough sincerity' that he says we don't make would be a demand that your thoughts about yourself match your modest behaviour, not that your behaviour match your proud thoughts!] On the contrary, we can see that •a genuine and hearty pride or self-esteem, if it is justified and well concealed, is essential to the character of a man of honour; and that •this quality of the mind is absolutely required for someone to get the admiration and approval of mankind. . . .

When we turn to history we find that all the great actions and sentiments that have become the admiration of mankind are based on nothing but pride and self-esteem. [Hume illustrates that with the example of Alexander the Great. Then:] In general we can see that anything that we call heroic virtue, and admire as an example of high-mindedness or greatness of mind, •has as a major ingredient a steady and well-established pride and self-esteem or even •consists of nothing but that. [That sentence contains Hume's only use of 'greatness of mind' in the body of this section. He will go on to speak of 'magnanimity', which comes from Latin meaning 'greatness of mind', but he seems to think of magnanimity as just one component in greatness of mind.] Courage, intrepidity, ambition, love of glory, magnanimity, and all the other shining virtues of that kind, clearly have a strong mixture of self-esteem in them, and get much of their merit from that. And so we find that many religious activists decry those virtues as purely 'pagan' and 'natural', and point us to the excellence of the Christian religion, which counts humility among the virtues and corrects the judgment of the world—even of philosophers, who usually admire all the efforts of pride and ambition. I'm not discussing whether this virtue of humility has been rightly understood. I am content with the concession that the world naturally esteems a well-regulated pride, which secretly energizes our conduct without breaking out into improper expressions of vanity that might offend the vanity of others.

The merit of pride or self-esteem has two sources: **(1)** its utility, by which it capacitates us for getting things done, and **(2)** its agreeableness to ourselves, by which it gives us an immediate satisfaction. When it goes beyond its just bounds, pride loses the first advantage, and even becomes prejudicial; which is why we condemn extravagant pride and ambition even when it is regulated by the rules of good-breeding and politeness. But such an extravagant passion is still agreeable to the person who has it, giving him an elevated and sublime sensation; and our sympathy with that sensation reduces the intensity of our blame for it because of its dangerous influence on his conduct and behaviour. And so we find that someone's having excessive courage and magnanimity, especially in threatening and dangerous situations, •contributes greatly to his counting as a *hero* and being admired by posterity, while it also •ruins his affairs and leads him into dangers and difficulties that he would never have encountered otherwise.

Most people greatly admire heroism, i.e. military glory, considering it as the most sublime kind of merit. Coolly reflective men are not so sanguine [Hume's word] in their praises of it. The infinite confusions and disorder that military heroism has caused in the world greatly reduce its merit in their eyes. When they want to oppose the common view of •heroism, they depict the evils that •this supposed virtue has produced in human society, the subversion of

empires, the devastation of provinces, the destruction of cities. While we are thinking about *these* we're more inclined to hate heroic ambition than to admire it. But when we fix our view on the individual person who is the author of all this mischief, there's something so dazzling in his character. . . .that we can't refuse it our admiration. The pain that we get from its tendency to harm society is overpowered by a stronger and more immediate sympathy.

Thus, my account of the merit or demerit of different degrees of pride or self-esteem can serve as a strong argument for my over-all theory, by showing how the principles$_c$ that I explained earlier create all the variations of our judgments concerning pride. This reasoning doesn't just show that the vice/virtue distinction arises from the four principles$_c$ of the advantage and of the pleasure of the person himself and of others [page 306] it can also give strong support to some of the more detailed applications of that hypothesis.

No-one who thinks hard about this matter will hesitate to agree that any piece of ill-breeding, or any expression of pride and haughtiness, is displeasing to us merely because it shocks our own pride and leads us by sympathy into a comparison that causes the disagreeable passion of humility. Now, insolence of this kind is blamed even in someone who has always been civil to ourselves in particular—indeed, to someone whose name is known to us only from history-books—so our disapproval of it must come from our sympathy with others, and from the thought that such a character is highly displeasing and odious to everyone who has any conversation or other dealings with the person who has it. We sympathize with those people in their uneasiness; and as their uneasiness proceeds in part from a sympathy with the person who insults them, we see here a double rebound of the sympathy, which is a principle$_c$ very like the one I called attention to in II.ii.5.

3: Goodness and benevolence

Having thus explained the origin of the •praise and approval that greets everything we call *great* in human affections, I now proceed to give an account of their •goodness, showing what the origin is of their merit.

When experience has made us reasonably well-informed about human affairs, and has taught us how their scope relates to the scope of the human passions, we see that men's generosity is very limited, seldom extending beyond their friends and family and never extending beyond their native country. When we know this about the nature of man, we don't expect any impossibilities from him; and when we want to form a judgment of someone's moral character we confine our view to the narrow circle in which he moves. If the natural tendency of his passions leads him to be useful within his sphere, we approve of his character and love him as a person, through our sympathy with the sentiments of those who are more closely connected with him. In making judgments of this kind we soon have to forget our own interests, because ·if we don't· we'll perpetually be running into contradictions—in speech and other behaviour—with

people whose situations and interests are different from ours. For our sentiments about a person to harmonize with those of other people, we must all adopt a single point of view, namely the person's influence on those who have some immediate connection or dealings with him. And although the help or harm he brings to them is often very remote from ourselves, sometimes it is very near to us and is of great concern to us, because of our sympathy. We readily extend this concern to •other cases that resemble the given one; and when •these are very remote, our sympathy is correspondingly weaker and our praise or blame fainter and more hesitant. This is like what happens in our judgments concerning external bodies. When objects move away from us they seem to shrink; but although our basic standard for judging objects is how they appear to our senses, we don't say that they actually shrink as they move away; rather, we correct the appearance by thinking ·about the effects of distance on apparent size·, and thus arrive at a more constant and established judgment about them. Similarly, although sympathy is much fainter than our concern for ourselves, and our sympathy with distant persons is much fainter than our sympathy with persons who are nearby, we neglect all these differences when we are forming calm judgments about the characters of men. [Hume now says again that if each person x judges the character of a person y purely from the standpoint of how y's character affects x, it would often be impossible for x to discuss y's character with a third person z, because x will relate to y differently from how z relates to him. And Hume adds a further point: how x relates to y is liable to change through time, so that x's basis for judging x's character may in fact be not a single viewpoint but a sequence of different viewpoints.]

So the interplay of sentiments in society and conversation requires us to form some general fixed unalterable standard by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and manners. The heart doesn't always go along with those general notions, or let them regulate its love and hatred, but they are sufficient for discourse—serving all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the stage, and in the schools.

From these principles we can easily account for the merit that is commonly ascribed to generosity, humaneness, compassion, gratitude, friendship, fidelity, zeal, disinterestedness, liberality, and all those other qualities that make up a good and benevolent character. If a man tends to have the tender passions, that makes him agreeable and useful in all the parts of life, and steers all his other qualities, which otherwise might do harm to society, in the right direction. Courage and ambition, when not regulated by benevolence, are fit only to make someone a tyrant or a public robber. Similarly with good judgment and versatility and all the qualities of that kind. In themselves they are neither good for society nor bad for it, and which kind of influence they have will depend on whether and how they are directed by these other passions.

Something else that may be a considerable reason why we praise all the passions that include love, and blame all those in which hatred is a considerable ingredient, is the fact that love is immediately agreeable, and hatred immediately disagreeable, to the person who has it. We are infinitely touched by a tender sentiment, as well as by a great one. The very thought of such a sentiment brings tears to our eyes, and we can't help feeling the same tenderness towards the person whose sentiment it is. All this seems to me good evidence that in those cases our approval has a different origin from the prospect of utility and advantage, either to ourselves or others. And I should add that men naturally and unreflectively approve of a character that is most like their own. When a man with a mild disposition and

tender affections forms a notion of 'the most perfect virtue' he includes in the mix a greater amount of benevolence and humaneness than does a brave and enterprising man, who naturally thinks of the most accomplished character as consisting in a certain elevation of mind. This must come from men's having an immediate sympathy with characters similar to their own. . . .

Nothing touches a humane man more than any instance of extraordinary delicacy in love or friendship, where a person is attentive to the smallest concerns of his friend, and is willing to sacrifice to them his own most considerable interests. Such delicacies have little influence on society, because they make us regard the greatest trifles [those eight words are Hume's]; but their very smallness makes them all the more engaging, and they show the highest merit in anyone who is capable of them. The passions are so contagious that they easily pass from one person to another, and produce corresponding feelings in all human breasts. When I encounter a really striking example of friendship, my heart catches the same passion—and is warmed by the same sentiments—that display themselves before me. Such agreeable feelings must give me an affection towards everyone who arouses them. This is the case with everything that is agreeable in any person. The transition from pleasure to love is ·always· easy; but in our present case the transition is especially easy, because the agreeable sentiment that is aroused by sympathy is love itself, so that all that's needed is to change the object.

That's why there is a special merit in benevolence in all its shapes and appearances. It's why even the weaknesses of benevolence are virtuous and lovable, so that someone whose grief over the loss of a friend is excessive will still be esteemed on that account. His tenderness bestows a merit on his melancholy, and also bestows a pleasure.

All the angry passions are disagreeable, but it doesn't follow that they are all vicious. Our human nature entitles us to a certain licence in this respect, because anger and hatred are passions that are built into our constitution. Sometimes a person's lack of anger and hatred is ·not a virtue in him but rather· evidence of his feebleness. And where anger and hatred appear only in low intensity, we don't merely excuse them because they are natural but even applaud them because they are less intense than they would be in most people ·in those circumstances·.

Where these angry passions are strong enough to generate cruelty they are the most detested of all vices. All our pity and concern for the miserable sufferers of this cruelty turns against the person guilty of it, producing in us a stronger hatred than we are aware of on any other occasion.

Even when the vice of inhumanity is not as intense as that extreme, our sentiments concerning it are greatly influenced by our thoughts of the harm that results from it. This brings up a general point:If we find in someone any quality that makes him have an adverse effect on those who live and have dealings with him, we always count this as a fault or blemish, without any further examination. On the other hand, when we list a person's good qualities we always mention the parts of his character that make him a safe companion, an easy friend, a gentle master, an agreeable husband, or an indulgent father. We consider him with all his relationships with others, and love or hate him according to how he affects those who have any direct dealings with him. And it is a most certain rule that

what Hume wrote next: if there be no relation of life in which I could not wish to stand to a particular person, his character must so far be allowed to be perfect. If he be as little wanting to himself as to others, his character is entirely perfect.

what he meant: if I would be willing to relate in *any* such ways to a person—e.g. as a companion, a friend, a pupil, a son—that shows that his character is *perfect in its relations to other people*. And if he is as kind and decent to himself as he is to others, his character is *entirely perfect*.

This is the ultimate test of merit and virtue.

4: Natural abilities

All systems of ethics distinguish •natural abilities from •moral virtues, placing the former on a level with bodily endowments and supposing them to have no merit or moral worth. If you think about it you'll see that a dispute about it would be merely about words, and that although •these qualities are not of exactly the same kind they are alike in the ways that matter most. They are both mental qualities, are equally able to give pleasure, and so have an equal tendency to procure the love and esteem of mankind. Nearly everyone is as touchy and concerned about his •good sense and knowledge as about his •honour and courage, and much more than he is about his •temperance and sobriety. Men are even afraid of being thought to be good-natured, in case that is taken to show that they are stupid; they often boast of more debauches than they have really taken part in, to give themselves airs of fire and spirit. In short,

> •the figure a man makes in the world,
> •the reception he meets with in company,
> •the esteem he gets from those who know him

—all these advantages depend almost as much on his good sense and judgment as on any other part of his character. Suppose a man has the best intentions in the world, and is the furthest from all injustice and violence, he still won't be able to get much respect unless he has at least a moderate share of abilities and understanding. . . .

Even if we won't call natural abilities 'virtues', we have to accept that •they procure the love and esteem of mankind, that •they give a new lustre to the other virtues, and that •someone who has them is much more entitled to our good-will and help than one who is entirely without them. [Hume in fact *does* call them 'virtues'. In four places in this section he contrasts natural abilities with 'the other virtues', and in the next section he calls them 'the natural virtues'.] You may want to claim that the sentiment of approval that those natural abilities produce . . . .is somewhat different from the sentiment that accompanies the other virtues. But I don't think that this is a sufficient reason for excluding them from the catalogue of 'virtues'.

> *Each* of the virtues—even benevolence, justice, gratitude, integrity—arouses its own special sentiment or feeling in the spectator. The characters of Caesar and Cato, as drawn by ·the Roman historian· Sallust, are both *virtuous* in the strictest sense of the word, but in different ways, and the sentiments they cause in us are different also. Caesar produces love, Cato produces esteem; Caesar is lovable, Cato

> is awe-inspiring; we could wish to *meet* Caesar and have him as a friend, whereas we would be ambitious to *be* Cato!

In the same way the approval that natural abilities are greeted with can feel somewhat different from the approval produced by the other virtues, without putting them into an entirely different species. Notice also that the natural abilities don't all produce the same kind of approval, any more than the other virtues do. Good sense and creative intelligence generate esteem; wit and humour arouse love.[13]

Those who attach great importance to the distinction between •natural abilities and •moral virtues may say that natural abilities are entirely involuntary, and so have no merit attached to them because they don't depend on liberty and free will. ·I have three things to say in reply to this·. **(1)** Many of the qualities that all moralists (especially the ancients) bring under the label 'moral virtues' are just as involuntary and necessary as the qualities of judgment and imagination. Virtues of this kind include constancy, fortitude, magnanimity and—in short—all the qualities that make someone a great man. Something similar can be said of the other virtues: it is almost impossible for the mind to change its character to any significant extent, or to cure itself of a passionate or angry temperament if these are natural to it. The more intense these blameworthy qualities are, the •more vicious they become, and yet the •less voluntary! **(2)** Tell me *why* virtue and vice can't be involuntary in the way that beauty and ugliness can be. The moral distinction between virtue and vice arises from the natural distinction between pain and pleasure; we call a quality or character vicious or virtuous according to the feelings we get from considering it. I don't think anyone will say that a quality can't cause pain or pleasure to the person who considers it unless it is perfectly voluntary in the person whose quality it is! **(3)** As for free will: I have shown that it doesn't come into men's actions any more than it does into their qualities. ·There is a place here for the notion of involuntariness, but it's no help to the people I am arguing against·. The inference from 'That item was voluntary' to 'That item was free' is not valid; our actions are more voluntary than our judgments, but they aren't any freer.

But although this distinction between voluntary and involuntary doesn't *justify* the distinction between natural abilities and moral virtues, it does give us a plausible reason why moralists have *invented* that distinction. Men have noticed that although natural abilities and moral qualities are mostly on the same footing, there is this difference between them:

> •Natural abilities can hardly ever be changed by any skill or hard work ·or in any other way·, whereas •moral virtues—or at least the actions that come from them—*can* be changed by the motives of rewards and punishment, praise and blame.

So legislators and preachers and moralists have mainly worked on regulating these voluntary actions, trying to provide additional motives for being virtuous in those ways. They knew that it would be pointless to punish a man for folly, or exhort him to be prudent and wise, though the same punishments and exhortations might have a considerable

[13] Love and esteem are basically the same passion, arising from similar causes; both are produced by qualities that are agreeable and give pleasure. But when •this pleasure is severe and serious, or •its object is great and makes a strong impression, or •it produces some level of humility and awe—in all those cases the passion arising from the pleasure is better called 'esteem' than 'love'. Benevolence goes with both, but is more strongly connected with love.

influence when applied to justice and injustice. But men don't, in their everyday life and talk, keep in mind questions about what can or can't be altered; they just naturally praise or blame whatever pleases or displeases them, and consider •prudence as a virtue along with •benevolence, and •high intelligence as a virtue along with •justice. Indeed, we find that almost all moralists fall into this same way of thinking (the only exceptions being ones whose judgment has been perverted by their strict adherence to some theory). The ancient moralists, especially, had no qualms about putting •prudence at the head of the cardinal •virtues. There is a sentiment of esteem and approval that can be aroused in some degree by *any* capacity of the mind in its perfect state and condition; and it is the business of philosophers to account for this sentiment. As for the question of what qualities are entitled to the label 'virtue': that's for grammarians to examine, and when they work on it they may find it harder than they had expected.

The principal reason why natural abilities are esteemed is that they tend to be useful to the person who has them. No plan can be successfully carried through unless it is done with prudence and discretion; the goodness of our intentions is never enough on its own to procure a good outcome to our enterprises. Men are superior to beasts primarily because of the superiority of their reason; and differences in level of reason are what create such infinite differences between one man and another. All the advantages of art are due to human reason, and the most considerable part of these advantages must fall to the share of those who are prudent and sagacious, except when someone has unusually good luck.

Suppose the question is raised as to which is more valuable—

•quick apprehension **or** slow apprehension?

•someone who can take something in at a glance but can't get any further with careful study **or** someone who always has to work things out laboriously?

•a clear head **or** fertility in coming up with ideas?

•profound genius **or** sure judgment?

—in short what character or kind of mind is better than another? Obviously we can't answer any of these questions without considering which qualities fit a man best for the world and carries him furthest in any of his undertakings.

There are many other mental qualities whose merit has the same origin. Industry, perseverance, patience, activity, vigilance, application, constancy—along with other virtues of that kind (you can easily add to the list)—are regarded as valuable purely because of the help they give in the conduct of life. Similarly with temperance, frugality, economy, resolution; just as (on the other side)

> prodigality [i.e. extravagance with money],
> luxury, [i.e. extreme and self-indulgent sensuality]
> irresolution, [i.e. indecisiveness about what to do]
> uncertainty [i.e. indecisiveness about what to believe]

are vicious merely because they draw ruin down on us and incapacitate us for business and action.

(2) Wisdom and good sense are valued because they are useful to the person who has them, and **(3)** wit and eloquence are valued because they are immediately agreeable to others. **(4)** Good humour is loved and esteemed because it is immediately agreeable to the person himself. [Those numbers match the ones given on page 306.] Hume doesn't here illustrate **(1)** usefulness to others. It is obvious that the conversation of a man of wit is very satisfactory, and that a cheerful good-humoured companion diffuses joy over the whole company through their sympathy with his gaiety. Because these qualities are agreeable, they naturally create love and esteem, and so they qualify as 'virtues'. . . .

[Hume adds some remarks about the virtuousness of •writing or speaking in an interesting way, •being personally clean, and •having various qualities in degrees that are appropriate to one's age. In the middle of this he writes:] Besides all the qualities that make a person lovely or valuable, there is also a certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* of *agreeable* and *handsome* that contributes to that same effect. In this case, as well as in the case of wit and eloquence, we must resort to a certain •sense that acts without reflection and pays no attention to the tendencies of various qualities and characters—·i.e. to that they are likely to cause·. Some moralists invoke this •sense to account for all the sentiments of virtue. That's a very plausible theory, which can't be dislodged by any rival unless one looks in detail into the facts. When we find that •almost all the virtues *do* have such particular tendencies, and also find that these tendencies can, unaided, lead to a strong sentiment of approval, we can't doubt any longer that qualities are approved of in proportion to the advantage that results from them.

The mental faculty that matters least to a person's character, and has the least to do with virtue or vice through all its great variety of degrees, is *memory*. We usually take no notice of its variations, or mention them in praise or dispraise of any person. (Except at the extremes: a memory so stupendously good that it surprises us, or so bad that it harms the person's judgment.) It is so far from being a virtue to have a good memory that men generally put up a pretence of complaining of a bad one! They do this when trying to persuade everyone that what they say is entirely original, sacrificing their memory so as to praise their inventiveness and judgment! And yet if we consider the matter in the abstract it's not easy to find any reason why the capacity for •recalling past ideas with truth and clearness shouldn't have as much merit in it as the capacity for •ordering our present ideas so as to form true propositions and opinions. The ·twofold· reason for the difference has to be this:

> **(i)** memory is exercised without any sensation of pleasure or pain, and **(ii)** in the practical concerns of life it doesn't make much difference how good one's memory is unless it is extremely good or extremely bad.

Whereas, on the other hand:

> **(ii)** The slightest difference in quality of judgment can make a notable difference in the upshot, and **(i)** whenever judgment is exercised at a very high level there is extraordinary delight and satisfaction.

Our sympathy with this **(ii)** utility and **(i)** pleasure gives merit to the understanding; and the absence of such sympathy makes us think of memory as a faculty on which blame and praise get no grip.

Before I leave this subject of natural abilities, I must remark that one source of the esteem and affection that comes to them may be the importance and weight that they bestow on the person who has them. ·If someone has a high level of natural ability·, he becomes of greater consequence in life; his decisions and actions affect more of his fellow-creatures; his friendship and his enmity are important. And it's easy to see that someone who is elevated in this way above the rest of mankind must arouse in us the sentiments of esteem and approval. Anything that is important engages our attention, fixes our thought, and is thought about with satisfaction. ·Here is another example of the same principle$_c$ at work·:

> The histories of kingdoms are more interesting than domestic stories; the histories of great empires more than those of small cities and principalities; and the histories of wars and revolutions more than those of peace and order. In reading of them, we encounter

> people who suffer, and we sympathize with the various sentiments that their fortunes give them. The mind is occupied by the multitude of the objects, and by the strong passions that display themselves; and this occupation or agitation of the mind is commonly agreeable and amusing.

The same theory accounts for the esteem and regard we pay to men of extraordinary parts and abilities. The good and ill of multitudes are connected with their actions. Whatever they undertake is important, and challenges our attention. Nothing relating to them is to be overlooked and despised. And where any person can arouse these sentiments, he soon acquires our esteem, unless other circumstances of his character render him odious and disagreeable.

5. Further thoughts about the natural virtues

In my discussion of the passions I pointed out that pride and humility, love and hatred, are aroused by any advantages or disadvantages of the mind, body, or fortune; and that these advantages and disadvantages create those passions by producing a separate impression of pain or pleasure. The pain or pleasure arising from the general survey or view of any action or quality of the mind constitutes its vice or virtue, and gives rise to our approval or blame, which is merely a fainter and less noticeable love or hatred. I have assigned four different sources of this pain and pleasure [see page 306]; and I now bring in a further fact, which strengthens the case for my theory. It is that the advantages or disadvantages of the body, and of fortune, produce pain or pleasure from the very same principles$_c$. The tendency of anything to be useful to the person who has it or to others, or to convey pleasure to him or to others—any of these convey an immediate pleasure to the person who thinks about the item in question, and commands his love and approval.

Let us begin with advantages of the body. I start with a phenomenon that might appear somewhat trivial and ludicrous, if anything could be trivial that strengthened a conclusion of such importance, or ludicrous that was employed in philosophical reasoning. It is generally known that anyone that we would call 'a good women's man'—because he has shown this by his amorous exploits, or because his physical constitution indicates extraordinary vigour of that kind—will be well received by the fair sex, and will naturally draw the affections even of women whose virtue prevents them from having any thought of some day giving employment to those talents of his. It's clear that the real source of the love and esteem that such a man meets with among the females is ·their view of· his *ability* to give enjoyment; and those who love and esteem him while having no chance of receiving that enjoyment themselves must be moved by their sympathy with anyone who does have a love-relationship with him. . . .

Another source of the pleasure we get from thinking about bodily advantages is their usefulness to the person who has them. A considerable part of the beauty of men and of other animals consists in a bodily form that we find by experience •to go with strength and agility and •to fit the creature for any

action or exercise. Broad shoulders, a flat belly, firm joints, taper legs —all these are beautiful in our species because they are signs of force and vigour; and because these are advantages that we naturally sympathize with, they convey to the spectator a share of the satisfaction that they give to the person who has them.

That was about the ways in which a quality of the body may be •useful. Then there is the immediate •pleasure it can give. The beauty of a man's body comes from his appearing to be not merely strong and agile but also healthy; ·not merely useful to himself and others, but also pleasant to himself·. And someone's looking sickly is always disagreeable, because of the idea of pain and uneasiness that it conveys to us. [The remainder of this paragraph is basically clear enough, but it's difficult because it is so compressed. In it Hume says that each of us is pleased with the appearance of his own face, regarding himself as fairly handsome; but, he says,

> **(i)** this pleasure comes to us largely through our sympathy with the pleasure that others get from seeing our face.

He also writes that

> **(ii)** our handsomeness doesn't 'give us any satisfaction' unless we 'in some measure set ourselves at a distance'.

Perhaps he intends **(ii)** merely as an abstract way of formulating **(i)**. But it may be that he means **(ii)** as saying that we don't enjoy our own handsomeness if we stand very close to the mirror in which we survey ourselves; in which case he is presumably offering **(ii)** as evidence that supports **(i)**.] To what extent do the advantages of *fortune* produce esteem and approval from the principles$_c$ that I have been talking about? You can get the answer to that by thinking back over the arguments about this that I presented ·in II.ii.5·. I remarked ·there· that our approval of people who have the advantages of fortune could have any of three different causes:

> **(1)** the immediate pleasure that a rich man gives us by the view of the beautiful clothes, carriages, gardens, or houses that he owns [this is 3 in the list on page 306];
>
> **(2)** the advantage that we hope to get from him by his generosity and liberality [1 in the list];
>
> **(3)** the pleasure and advantage that the man himself gets from his possessions and that produce an agreeable sympathy in us [2 and 4 in the list].

Whether we ascribe our esteem of the rich and great to one or all of these causes, we can clearly see the traces of the principles$_c$ that give rise to the sense of vice and virtue. I think that most people will at first sight be inclined to ascribe our esteem of the rich to **(2)** self-interest and the prospect of advantage; but ·that can't be right, because· our esteem or deference extends beyond any prospect of advantage to ourselves. Clearly, then, the sentiment in question must come from sympathy with people who have an immediate connection with—in the form of a dependence on—the person we esteem and respect. We consider him as a person capable of contributing to the happiness or enjoyment of his fellow-creatures, whose sentiments with regard to him we naturally embrace. And this consideration will serve to justify my preference ·in II.ii.5· for the third principle$_c$ over the other two, ascribing our esteem for the rich to our sympathy with **(3)** the pleasure and advantage that they themselves get from their possessions. [The 'consideration' in question doesn't occur anywhere in the list of possible causes displayed above. Why should it for **(3)**? The only answer Hume offers is in the next sentence, which is given here verbatim.] For as even the other two principles$_c$ cannot operate to a due extent, or account for all the phenomena, without having recourse to a sympathy of one kind or other, it is much more natural to choose the sympathy that is immediate and direct than that which is

remote and indirect. . . .

Perhaps this is the place to call attention to the flexibility of our sentiments—how easily and variously they are altered by the facts about what they are aimed at—their objects. All the sentiments of approval that accompany any particular species of objects have a great resemblance to each other, even when they are derived from different sources; and, on the other hand, sentiments directed to different objects *feel* different even if they come from the same source. Thus, the beauty of all visible objects causes a pleasure pretty much the same, though sometimes it comes from •the mere look of the thing and sometimes from •sympathy and an idea of its utility. Similarly, when we survey the actions and characters of men without our own interests being involved, the pleasure or pain we get from the survey is pretty much of the same kind, even if there's a great diversity in its causes. And on the other side: a convenient house and a virtuous character don't cause the same *feeling* of approval, although the source of our approval, namely sympathy and an idea of their utility, is the same in both cases. There's something quite inexplicable in this variation of our feelings, but our experience presents it to us with regard to all our passions and sentiments.

6: Conclusion of this Book

I hope I have provided everything that is needed for a detailed proof of this system of ethics. We are certain that **sympathy** is a very powerful principle$_c$ in human nature. We are also certain that **it** has a great influence on our sense of beauty—when we regard external objects and also when we make moral judgments. We find that **it** has enough force to give us—acting alone, with no input from any other principle$_c$—the strongest sentiments of approval, e.g. in the cases of justice, allegiance, chastity, and good manners [see note on page 300]. We can see that everything needed for **its** operation are found in most of the virtues, which for the most part bring good to society or to the person who has them. If we set all these cases side by side we won't doubt that sympathy is the chief source of moral distinctions; especially when we realize that any objection to the 'sympathy' theory in one case will also hold against it in all the others. It's perfectly clear that justice is approved of purely because it has a tendency to produce public good; and the public good matters to us only to the extent that our sympathy gives us a concern for it. We can presume that this holds for all the other virtues that have a similar tendency to serve the public good. All their merit must come from our sympathy with the people who get some advantage from them; just as the virtues that tend to procure the good of the person who has them get their merit from our sympathy with *him*.

Most people will freely grant that the useful qualities of the mind are virtuous *because* they are useful. This way of thinking is so natural, and comes up so often, that few will hesitate to admit it. And once that has been admitted, the force of sympathy must necessarily be acknowledged.

- •Virtue is ·here being· considered as means to an end.
- •Means to an end are valued only to the extent that the end is valued.
- •The happiness of strangers—·'the end'·—affects us only through sympathy.

So it is to that principle$_c$, *sympathy*, that we must ascribe the sentiment of approval that arises from the survey of all the virtues that are useful to society or to the virtuous person. These constitute the most considerable part of morality.

My theory of morality contains many things that might make you *like* it—if it were proper to bribe your assent or try to win you over by anything but solid argument! All lovers of virtue (and that is all of us, in theory, however much we back-slide in practice) will surely be pleased to see moral distinctions derived from such a noble source, one that gives us a sound notion of both the •generosity and the •capacity of human nature. One doesn't need much knowledge of human affairs to see that a sense of morals is a principle$_c$ inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful things in the human constitution. But this ·moral· sense must become even stronger when, thinking about itself, it approves of the principles$_c$ from which it is derived, finding in its own origin nothing that isn't great and good. Those who hold that the sense of morals comes from basic instincts of the human mind can defend the cause of virtue with sufficient authority, but they don't have the advantage possessed by those who account for the moral sense by an extensive sympathy with mankind. According to this latter theory, we have to approve not only of

> virtue

but also of

> the sense of virtue;

and not only that but also

> the principles$_c$ from which that sense is derived.

So that nothing comes into the account, from any direction, except what is praiseworthy and good.

This carries over to justice and the other virtues of that kind. Though justice is artificial, the sense of its morality is natural. What makes any act of justice beneficial to society is its bringing men together in a *system* of conduct. And once justice has that tendency, we *naturally* approve of it. If we didn't, no combining or convening could possibly produce that sentiment of approval in us.

Most of the inventions of men are subject to change. They depend on mood and whim. They are fashionable for a while, and then are forgotten. You may be thinking that if justice is granted to be a human invention then it too must be flimsy and impermanent in that way; but the cases are quite different. The interest on which justice is founded is the greatest imaginable, and extends to all times and places. It couldn't possibly be served by any other invention. It is obvious, and reveals itself at the very first formation of society. These facts jointly make the rules of justice steadfast and unchangeable—as unchangeable as human nature, anyway. If they rested on basic instincts, could *that* give them any greater stability? This same theory can help us to form a sound notion of the happiness of virtue as well as of its dignity, and can draw every principle$_c$ of our nature into caring about, embracing, and cherishing that noble quality. Everyone feels his pursuit of •knowledge and ability gathering speed when he considers that, besides the advantage that immediately result from •these acquisitions, they also give him a new lustre in the eyes of mankind, and draw esteem and approval from everyone. And no-one can think that any advantages of fortune would outweigh ·the disadvantage of· a breach of •the social virtues, however small, when he bears in mind that how other people regard his character entirely depends on his strict observance of

those virtues. And so does his peace and *inward* satisfaction, because no mind can bear to look at itself if it hasn't been relating as it should to mankind and society. But I shan't go on about this. Such reflections require a separate work, very different from the basic conceptions of this present one. An anatomist ought never to try to copy the painter, as though in his minute dissections and portraitures of the smaller parts of the human body he could give his figures any graceful and engaging attitude or expression!. . . . But an anatomist is admirably fitted to give advice to a painter; indeed, it is hardly possible to excel in painting without the assistance of the anatomist. We must have an exact knowledge of the parts, their positions, and their connections, before we can draw with any elegance or correctness. And thus the most abstract speculations concerning human nature, however cold and unentertaining, become subservient to practical morality; and they can render this latter science more correct in its precepts, and more persuasive in its exhortations.