

# An Enquiry into the Sources of Morals

David Hume

1751

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[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. Larger omissions are reported within square brackets, in normal-sized type.—Hume’s title for this work is *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. In his day a ‘principle’ was often not a kind of •proposition but rather a •‘source of activity’ or •‘activator’ or the like. On page 3 he calls morality an ‘active principle’, and on page 29 he writes that a certain ‘principle still exerts its active energy’—he isn’t talking about the active energy of a *proposition*! This sense of ‘principle’ is what is meant in the title of this work, which on pages 4, 56 and 65 Hume describes as an enquiry into ‘the origin of morals’.

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**Contents**

<b>Section 1: The general sources of morals</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Section 2: Benevolence</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Section 3: Justice</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Section 4. Political society</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Section 5. Why utility pleases</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Section 6: Qualities useful to ourselves</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Section 7: Qualities immediately agreeable to ourselves</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Section 8. Qualities immediately agreeable to others</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Section 9: Conclusion</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Appendix 1. Moral sentiment (·or feeling·)</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Appendix 2. Self-love</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Appendix 3. Further points about justice</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>Appendix 4. Some verbal disputes</b>	<b>79</b>

Most of the principles and reasonings contained in this volume were published in a work in three volumes, called *A Treatise of Human Nature*, a work which the author had projected before he left college, and which he wrote and published soon after. It wasn't a success, and he came to realize that he had gone to the press too early; so he re-worked the whole thing in the following pieces, in which he hopes to have corrected some faults in his earlier reasoning and more in his writing. [The *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, the *Dissertation on the Passions*, and the present work were published in one volume.] Yet several writers who have honoured the author's philosophy with answers have taken care to aim all their guns at that juvenile work which the author has never acknowledged, and have gloated over victories that they imagined they had won against it. That is dishonest and unfair, and a striking example of the polemical tricks that a bigoted zeal thinks it is entitled to employ. From now on, the author wants the following pieces to be regarded as the only source for his philosophical sentiments and principles. [In Hume's day a 'sentiment' could be •a view/opinion/belief, or a •feeling. Why not replace each occurrence of 'sentiment' by 'belief' or by 'feeling', as is appropriate in the given context? For two reasons. •Hume sometimes seems to make 'sentiment' sprawl across both its meanings. •Some things that many people regard as beliefs are, in Hume's view, really feelings; and with a given occurrence of 'sentiment' it's not always clear how far he means to be showing his hand just there. So in this version 'sentiment' is never replaced. In cases where—as on page 2—it is both sure and important that it means 'feeling', that is indicated by the addition of '•or feeling'.]

## Section 1: The general sources of morals

The disputes that one has with •men who are stubbornly obstinate in their principles are the most tiresome of all; except perhaps for the disputes with •perfectly insincere people who don't really believe the opinions they defend, but engage in the controversy because they enjoy it or because they want to show how much cleverer and more ingenious they are than the rest of mankind. Both kinds of disputant show the same blind adherence to their own arguments, the same contempt for their opponents, and the same emotional intensity in pushing their bad arguments and false doctrines. Neither kind gets through reasoning the views he is defending, so it's no use expecting to be able to move them from falsehood to truth by reasoning; the only

'logic' they'll be moved by is the 'logic' that speaks to the feelings!

Those who have denied the reality of moral distinctions can be classified among the insincere disputants. It simply isn't conceivable that any human being could ever *seriously believe* that all kinds of people and all kinds of behaviour are equally entitled to everyone's affection and regard. Nature will make one man so different from another, and this difference is made so much greater still by upbringing, example and habit, that when we compare the two men we *have to* be aware of how unlike they are. That they are somewhat different couldn't be questioned by the most thorough sceptic or denied by the most confident dogmatist. However numb

a person is with regard to his fellow men, he must often be visited by thoughts of right and wrong; and however firmly wedded he is to his prejudices, he must be aware that the other people are also given to such thoughts. So the only way to •convert an antagonist of this kind—i.e. one who denies that there are moral differences between man and man—is to •leave him to himself! When he finds that nobody is willing to argue with him, he will probably end up—out of sheer boredom—coming over to the side of common sense and reason.

A *serious* controversy has started up recently—one that is worth engaging in—about the general foundation of morals:

- Are morals derived from reason or from sentiment (·or feeling·)?
- Do we get our knowledge of them by a chain of argument and induction, or by an immediate feeling and finer internal sense?
- Should moral opinions (like all sound judgments of truth and falsehood) be the same for every rational intelligent being; or are they (like the perception of beauty and ugliness) based entirely on the particular make-up of the human species?

The ancient philosophers often *assert* that virtue is nothing but •conformity to reason; but their writings generally suggest that they *think* that morals derive their existence from •taste and sentiment. And on the other side, our modern enquirers talk a great deal about the ‘beauty’ of virtue and ‘ugliness’ of vice, ·seeming to imply that their basis is •sentiment or feeling·; but they have commonly tried to account for the virtue/vice distinction by metaphysical •reasonings and by deductions from the most abstract principles of the understanding. There has been so much confusion in these subjects that a really important opposition between two systems. . . .could pass unnoticed—until

recently, that is. The elegant Lord Shaftesbury, who first called this distinction to our attention, and who in general accepted the principles of the ancients, is himself not entirely free from the same confusion.

Admittedly there are plausible arguments on both sides of the question. On the side of the view that moral distinctions are discernible by pure reason there is this line of thought:

Consider the many disputes—in everyday life as well as in philosophy—regarding morals; the long chains of proofs that are often produced on both sides; the examples cited, the authorities appealed to, the analogies employed, the fallacies detected, the inferences drawn, and the various conclusions tailored to fit the principles they are supposed to go with. Where does all this come from if morals aren’t in the domain of reason? Truth is disputable; taste isn’t.

- (1) What exists in the nature of things is the standard of our •judgment.
- (2) What each man feels within himself is the standard of •sentiment ·or feeling·.

[A note on the two sides of the contrast Hume is drawing here. (1) In his time ‘judgment’ could stand for thinking that P, coming to the conclusion that P, believing that P. There was nothing specially moral about the word’s meaning, as there is for us when, for example, we describe someone as ‘judgmental’. (2) This is a place where ‘sentiment’ clearly means ‘feeling’ and not ‘belief’ (see note on page 1). These two points together help to explain why this work could not have been entitled ‘An Enquiry into the Sources of Moral Judgments’.] Propositions in geometry can be proved, systems in physics can be controverted; but the harmony of verse, the tenderness of passion, the brilliancy of wit, must give immediate pleasure. No man *reasons* about someone else’s *beauty*, but we often reason concerning the justice or injustice of

someone's actions. In every criminal trial the prisoner aims **(1)** to disprove the accusations about what he has actually done, and **(2)** to show that even if these actions were real they could be justified as innocent and lawful. Everyone knows that **(1)** is settled by deductions of the understanding; how can we suppose that in settling **(2)** a different faculty of the mind is employed?

On the other side, those who hold that all moral views are matters of sentiment may say things like this:

It is impossible for reason ever to draw moral conclusions. The essence of virtue is that it is *amiable* [here = 'lovable'], the essence of vice is that it is *odious*. Could reason or argumentation tell us which items are to be labelled 'amiable' and which 'odious'—settling in advance that *this* must produce love, and *that* must produce hatred? What reason can we ever give for the facts about what we love and what we hate except the basic structure of the human mind?

The purpose of all moral theorizing is to teach us our duty, and by presenting the ugliness of •vice and the beauty of •virtue to get us into the habit of avoiding •one and embracing •the other. Could we ever expect to achieve *that* through inferences and conclusions of the understanding, which don't in themselves have any hold on our affections and don't set in motion our active powers? Inferences etc. reveal truths; but they can't influence our behaviour because the truths they reveal are indifferent, and don't create either desire or aversion. [Here and in the next paragraph, 'indifferent' means 'not involving any kind of *for* or *against*'.] If •something is honourable, fair, appropriate, noble or generous, it **takes possession of the heart**, and stirs us to embrace and maintain •it. On the other

hand, if something is intelligible, evident, probable or true, that **procures only the cool assent of our understanding**. . . .

If you extinguish all the warm feelings and attitudes in favour of virtue, and all disgust or aversion to vice, thus making people totally indifferent towards these distinctions, the result will be that morality is no longer a *practical* study, having no tendency to regulate our lives and actions.

These arguments (and many more that might be produced) are so plausible that I'm inclined to suspect that the arguments on *both* sides are solid and satisfactory, and that •reason and •sentiment work together in almost all moral judgments and conclusions. •But, if I am right, they enter the picture in different ways. There is the final judgment, which

- pronounces people and actions amiable or odious, praiseworthy or blameable,
- stamps on them the mark of honour or infamy, approval or censure,
- renders morality an active principle, and
- makes virtue our happiness, and vice our misery.

This final moral conclusion depends on some internal sense or feeling that nature has made universal in the whole species; for only a feeling could have an influence such as I have described. But we often find that in order to reach this sentiment •or feeling•, and to pick out accurately the thing the feeling is *about*, we have to •go through much reasoning, •make fine distinctions, •draw sound conclusions, •compare things that are not greatly alike, •examine complicated relations, and •settle various factual matters. Some sorts of beauty, especially natural beauty, command our affection and approval when we first see them; and if something doesn't have this effect, there's no way for

*reasoning* to remedy the situation and make the item in question more in tune with our taste and sentiment. But there are many kinds of beauty, especially in the finer arts, where one has to use much reasoning if one is to have the right feeling; and a wrong liking for a work of art can often be corrected by argument and reflection. There are good reasons to think that moral beauty is of the latter kind, and can't get a suitable influence on the human mind unless it gets help from our intellectual faculties.

But although this question about which of our faculties is at work in morals is challenging and important, I don't need to go into it any further here. What I *do* want to do in this enquiry is to discover the true origin of morals. If I have the good fortune to succeed in that, it won't be hard to see how far either sentiment or reason enters into all our moral judgment. (I'll return to that in Appendix 1.) To achieve my purpose, I'll try to follow a very simple method: I shall analyse the complex of mental qualities that we commonly call 'personal merit'. I shall consider every attribute of mind that makes a man an object either of respect and affection or of hatred and contempt, every habit or sentiment or ability which, if ascribed to any person, implies either praise or blame. . . . Everyone is alert to this difference, so I am pretty sure that I won't ever go seriously wrong in drawing up my lists, putting any item that I am thinking about into the wrong list. All I need do is to look into myself for a moment, and consider whether I would want to have this or that quality ascribed to me, and whether, if it were ascribed to me, that would come from a friend or from an enemy. The very nature of language guides us almost infallibly in

forming a judgment of this kind; every language contains one set of words that are understood as approving, and another set that are understood as disapproving, and a quite casual acquaintance with the idiom enables us to collect and arrange the lists of estimable and of blameable qualities of men, without having to *reason* about what we are doing. The only role of reasoning in this matter is to discover what is in common to the attributes that bring approval, and what is common to all that bring disapproval, and on that basis to reach the foundation of ethics, and find the universal sources from which all blame or approval is ultimately derived. As this is a question of fact, not of abstract theory, the only way we can expect to succeed is by following the experimental method, deriving general maxims from a comparison of particular instances. The other scientific method, in which a general abstract principle is first established and then a variety of inferences and conclusions are drawn from it, may be intrinsically better, but it isn't as well suited to the imperfection of human nature, and is a common source of illusion and error in morals as well as in other subjects. Men are now cured of their passion for *hypotheses* and *systems* in natural philosophy [= 'natural science'], and won't listen to any arguments that aren't derived from experience. It's high time they tried a similar reformation in all moral proceedings, and rejected every system of ethics, however subtle or ingenious, that isn't based on fact and observation. I shall begin my enquiry by considering the social virtues, *benevolence* and *justice*. Getting clear about them will probably give us an opening through which the other virtues can be accounted for.

## Section 2: Benevolence

### Part 1

·HOW BENEVOLENCE IS VALUED·

You may well think that there is no need to *show* that the benevolent or softer affections are estimable, and always attract the approval and good-will of mankind. All languages have equivalents of the words ‘sociable’, ‘good-natured’, ‘humane’, ‘merciful’, ‘grateful’, ‘friendly’, ‘generous’ and ‘beneficent’, and such words always express the highest merit that human nature can attain. When these amiable qualities are accompanied by ·noble· birth and power and distinguished abilities, and display themselves in the good government or useful instruction of mankind, they seem even to raise the possessors of them above the rank of *human* nature, making them somewhat approach the status of *divine*. Great ability, undaunted courage, tremendous success—these may expose a hero or politician to the public’s envy and ill-will; but as soon as ‘humane’ and ‘beneficent’ are added to the praises—when instances are displayed of mercy, gentleness, or friendship—envy itself is silent, or joins in with the general voice of approval and applause.

When Pericles, the great Athenian statesman and general, was on his death-bed, his surrounding friends—thinking he was unconscious—began to express their sorrow by listing their dying patron’s great qualities and successes, his conquests and victories, his unusually long time in power, and his nine trophies erected ·to celebrate victories· over the enemies of the republic. In fact the dying hero was conscious, heard all of this, and joined in: ‘You are forgetting the highest of my praises. While dwelling on those common advantages, in which luck had a principal share, you haven’t observed that no citizen ever wore mourning because of me.’

In men of more ordinary talents and abilities, the social virtues become, if possible, still more essentially needed if a person is to be regarded with approval, because in that case there is no high distinction to compensate for any lack of social virtues, or to preserve the person from our severest hatred as well as contempt. Cicero has written that high ambition and great courage are apt in less perfect characters to degenerate into a turbulent ferocity. What such less perfect people mainly need are the softer and more social virtues, which are good and amiable in anyone who has them.

According to ·the Latin writer· Venal, what is chiefly *good* about someone’s having great ·powers and abilities is that this makes his ·benevolence more extensive, giving him greater opportunities to spread his kindly influence than lesser men have. Let us face it: the only way a man can truly enjoy the advantages of being distinguished in other ways is by doing good. His high position in itself merely exposes him to danger and tempest. His only real privilege is his ability to provide shelter to inferiors who entrust themselves to his cover and protection. But I’m forgetting that it’s not my present business to recommend generosity and benevolence, or to paint in their true colours all the genuine charms of the social virtues. These virtues sufficiently engage every heart when they are first understood, and it’s hard not to break out in praise of them whenever they crop up in discourse or reasoning. But my object here is the theoretical rather than the practical part of morals, so I’ll just say this, expecting everyone to agree: No qualities are more entitled to the general good-will and approval of mankind than beneficence and humanity, friendship and gratitude, natural affection

and public spirit, or anything that comes from a tender sympathy with others and a generous concern for mankind in general. Whenever these appear, they seem to inject themselves, so to speak, into each beholder, causing *him* to have some of these the same favourable and affectionate sentiments. [Throughout this work, Hume uses 'sympathy' in its basic original sense of 'fellow-feeling'. In this sense of the word, I can have sympathy with you in your happiness, or—see 'contagion and sympathy' on page 49—be irritable in sympathy with your bad temper.]

## Part 2

### ·BENEVOLENCE AND UTILITY·

When we are praising a humane and beneficent man, we always emphasize the happiness and satisfaction that society gets from his good works. We are apt to say that he is dear to his parents not only because of the tie of blood but also, and more, because of his pious attachment to them and his dutiful care for them. His children never feel his authority except when it is exerted for their benefit. With him, the ties of love are consolidated by beneficence and friendship. The ties of friendship approach those of love and inclination, because of the spirit in which he does good things for his friends. For his servants and dependents he is a sure resource; and they no longer dread the power of fortune except insofar as it concerns his welfare. From him the hungry receive food, the naked receive clothing, the ignorant or lazy receive skill and work. He is like the sun in being an inferior minister [= 'subordinate agent'] of providence; he cheers, invigorates and sustains the world around him.

If he is confined to private life, his sphere of activity is smaller but his influence is all benign and gentle. If he is exalted into a higher position, mankind and posterity reap the fruit of his labours. These modes of praise are *always*

employed, and with success, when we want to inspire esteem for someone. Can't we infer from this that the utility resulting from the social virtues—the good that is done under their influence—is at least a part of their merit, and is one source of the approval and respect that everyone gives to them? When we recommend even an animal or a plant as useful and beneficial, we applaud and praise it in a manner suited to its nature. Just as, on the other hand, when we think about the harmful influence of any kind of plant or animal, this always creates in us a sentiment or feeling of aversion. The eye is pleased with the view of corn-fields and loaded vine-yards, horses grazing and flocks pasturing; but it avoids the view of briars and brambles that provide shelter for wolves and snakes.

If a machine or piece of furniture or article of clothing or house is well designed for use and convenience, to that extent it is beautiful, and is contemplated with pleasure and approval. With this kind of thing, an experienced eye will detect many excellences that ignorant and uninstructed people would miss. Can anything stronger be said in praise of an occupation—such as merchandising or manufacturing—than to point out the good it does for society? And won't a monk or an inquisitor be enraged if we treat his religious organisation as useless or harmful to mankind?

The historian rejoices in displaying the benefits arising from his labours. The writer of romances does what he can to lessen or deny the bad consequences that are ascribed to the kind of thing he writes.

In general, what praise is implied in the simple epithet 'useful'? What reproach in the contrary!

Cicero in opposition to the Epicureans said: 'Your Gods are not entitled to any worship or adoration, whatever imaginary perfections you endow them with. They are totally useless and inactive. Even the Egyptians, whom you so

much ridicule, never treated any animal as sacred except on account of its utility.'

The sceptics assert that the all religious worship originated from the utility of inanimate objects, such as the sun and moon, to the support and well-being of mankind. (This is an absurd theory of the origin of religion, but its sheer existence supports my thesis about the central place of utility, doing-good, bringing-benefit, to our approval and admiration.) This is also the reason that historians commonly give for the deification of eminent heroes and legislators.

To plant a tree, to cultivate a field, to beget children—these are all meritorious acts, according to the religion of Zoroaster.

·EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE OF FAILURES OF BENEVOLENCE·

In moral judgments, this matter of public utility is always centrally in view; and whenever every-day or philosophical disputes arise concerning the limits of duty, by far the most certain way of settling the disputed question is to ascertain how each side of it relates to the true interests of mankind. If we find that a misreading of the evidence has led us to accept a false opinion about human interests, as soon as further experience and sounder reasoning have given us a more correct view of the facts, we retract our first sentiment and re-adjust the line between moral good and evil. Here are four examples of this kind of shift in moral opinion.

(1) Giving alms to common beggars is naturally praised, because it seems to bring relief to those who are poor and distressed; but when we see that alms-giving encourages idleness and debauchery, we regard that kind of charity as a weakness rather than a virtue. (2) Tyrannicide, i.e. the assassination of usurpers and oppressive rulers, was highly praised in ancient times, because it freed mankind from many of these monsters, and seemed to keep in awe other

rulers who couldn't be reached by the sword or the dagger. But history and experience have since convinced us that this practice makes rulers more suspicious and cruel; so that a Tiberius and a Brutus [two high-minded killers of their rulers], though treated with indulgence because of the prejudices of their times, are now regarded as *not* people to imitate. (3) Generosity in rulers is regarded as a sign of beneficence; but when it has the result that the homely bread of honest and hard-working people is often converted into luxury-foods for wasteful idlers, we soon retract our thoughtless praises. The regrets of a monarch for having lost a day were noble and generous; but if he had intended to spend the day in acts of generosity to his greedy courtiers, it was better lost than misused in that way. (4) Luxury, or a refinement on the pleasures and conveniences of life, has for a long time been regarded as the source of every corruption in government, and the ultimate cause of faction, sedition, civil wars, and the total loss of liberty. [Hume wrote 'the immediate cause' etc.; presumably a slip.] So it was seen by everyone as a vice, and was attacked by all satirists and severe moralists. Those who show (or try to show) that such refinements tend to increase industry, civility and arts are offering new rules for our moral as well as our political sentiments, representing as praise-worthy, or at least as innocent, behaviour that had formerly been regarded as harmful and blameable. [This refers to Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees: Private Vices Public Benefits*.]

Taking all of this together, it seems undeniable that nothing can bestow more merit on any person than his having a very high degree of the sentiment of benevolence; and that at least a part of the merit of this sentiment comes from its probable consequences for the interests of our species and the happiness of human society. When we think about a benevolent person, we carry our view of his character and disposition forward to their good

consequences; and we look with satisfaction and pleasure at anything that has such a benign influence and contributes to such a desirable end. The social virtues are *never* viewed as barren and unfruitful; we *always* think of them along with their beneficial tendencies, seeing their gentle reign over the hearts of men as a cause of the happiness of mankind, the order of society, the harmony of families, the mutual

support of friends.

*How much* of their merit ought we to ascribe to their utility? I'll be better placed to answer that when some other things have been dealt with (Sections 3 and 4). Why do the good consequences of the social virtues have such a command over our esteem and approval? I shall address that in Section 5.

## Section 3: Justice

### Part 1

The proposition that

- Justice is useful to society, and thus at least *part* of its merit must come from that fact

doesn't need to be argued for ·because it is so obviously true·.

Not so the proposition that

- Public utility is the *sole* origin of justice, and thoughts about its beneficial consequences are the *sole* basis for its merit.

This proposition is more challenging and important, so it better deserves to be looked into with care.

·JUSTICE AND ABUNDANCE·

Let's suppose that nature has given the human race such a profuse abundance of all external conveniences that all of us, without any care or industry on our part, can be confident that we are fully supplied with whatever our hungriest appetites can want or our most luxurious imagination can wish or desire. Let us suppose that man is so situated that:

- His natural beauty surpasses all acquired ornaments.
- The perpetual mildness of the seasons makes clothes unnecessary.
- Raw fruit and vegetables provide delicious food.
- The clear fountain provides the richest beverage.
- No hard work is needed—no ploughing, no navigation.
- Music, poetry and meditating are his only business.
- Conversation, fun and friendship are his sole amusement.

It seems clear that in such a happy state every other social virtue would flourish and be increased tenfold; but the cautious, jealous virtue of *justice* would never once have been dreamed of. What point would there be in dividing up goods, when everyone already has more than enough? Why institute *property* when there can't possibly be any harm ·in not doing so·? Why call this object 'mine' when just by stretching out my hand I could get another one that is like it and equally valuable? In this state of affairs, justice would be totally useless; it would be an idle ceremonial, having no place in the list of virtues.

Even in the present needy condition of mankind, we see that wherever any benefit is bestowed by nature in an unlimited abundance, we leave it in common among the whole human race, not dividing it up in terms of right and property. •Water and •air, though more needed than anything else, are not claimed as the property of individuals; and no-one can commit an injustice by the most lavish use and enjoyment of •these blessings. In large fertile countries with few inhabitants, land is seen in the same way. And those who defend the liberty of the seas have as their principal theme the unexhausted use of them in navigation—i.e. the fact that however many ships there are, the world's oceans don't get used up. If the benefits of navigation (such as trade and treasure-finding) were equally inexhaustible, those defenders of the liberty of the seas would never had any opponents, and no nation would ever have claimed a separate, exclusive dominion over some part of the ocean.

It can happen in some countries at some times that there is ownership of water but not of land (see *Genesis* 12 and 21). That happens if there is more land than the inhabitants can use, and water is scarce and hard to find.

•JUSTICE AND BENEVOLENCE•

Here is a second supposition. Let us suppose that the human race, while having the same needs and shortages that it actually has, had a mind that was so enlarged, so full of friendship and generosity, that each man had the utmost concern for every man, feeling no more concern for his own interest than for the interests of his fellows. It seems obvious that this extensive benevolence would cancel the use of justice, and the divisions and barriers of property and obligation would never been thought of. Why should I want a contract or a promise to bind someone else to do me some good, when I know that he already has the strongest inclination to seek my happiness, and would *unprompted*

perform the desired service. ('What if his performing it would cause a greater loss to him than the benefit he would be bringing to you?' In that case he knows that my innate humanity and friendship will cause me to be the first to oppose this imprudent generosity.) Why place boundary-markers between my neighbour's field and mine, when my heart has made no division between my interests and his, and shares all his joys and sorrows with the same force and vivacity as if they were originally my own? [That is, if they had *begun* as my own, rather than *becoming* mine because my neighbour has them and I have a tender heart.] In this supposed state of affairs, every man is a second self to another [Hume presumably meant: 'to every other'], and would trust all his interests to the discretion of every man without jealousy, without partition, and without distinguishing one person from another. The whole human race would constitute a single family in which everything would be held in common, and be used freely, without regard to property; but cautiously too, with as much concern for the needs of each individual as if our own interests were intimately concerned.

Given what the human heart is actually like, it might be hard to find complete examples of such enlarged affections; but we may see approximations to it in *families*; and in any group the stronger the mutual benevolence is among the individuals, the nearer the group comes to the no-need-for-justice condition, until all distinctions of property are in a great measure lost and mixed up among them. The laws presume that the cement of friendship between a married couple is so strong as to abolish all division of possessions; and in many cases it actually is as strong as that. And it's a matter of empirical fact that during the ardour of new enthusiasms when every principle [see note on title page] is heated up into its most extreme form, reformers have frequently tried to abolish property, i.e.

have community of goods; and what has led the imprudent fanatics to change course and restore the ideas of justice and of separate property—the only thing that *could* get them to do this—is their experience of the drawbacks that the no-property system has, because of the selfishness of men (who hid their selfishness during the revolution, or returned to being selfish after the revolutionary fuss had died down). That's a measure of how true it is that the virtue of justice derives its existence entirely from the needed things that it *does* for human interactions and the social state of mankind.

·JUSTICE AND SCARCITY·

To make this truth more obvious, let us reverse the suppositions we have been making, taking everything to the opposite extreme, and seeing what effect that would have in each case. Suppose a society suffers such a lack of all common necessities that even with the utmost frugality and industry most of them will die ·prematurely·, and everyone lives in extreme misery. I think you will readily agree that in such a pressing emergency the strict laws of justice will be suspended, being dislodged by the stronger motives of necessity and self-preservation. When a sailor whose ship is going down is in the water, is it a crime for him to seize whatever he can to keep him afloat, without regard to whose property it is—or *was*? If a besieged city is starving to death, can we imagine that any citizen will see a means of preservation within his reach ·and not take it·, losing his life because of his scrupulous regard for what in *other* situations would be the rules of property and justice? What that virtue is for, and what it tends to produce, is happiness and security through the preservation of order in society; but when a society is on the brink of perishing from extreme necessity, there is no greater evil to be feared from violence and injustice; and every man may now provide for himself by any means that prudence dictates and humanity permits. Even in cases

of need that are less drastic than the one we have been supposing, the government opens granaries without the consent of their owners, on the correct assumption that the authority of the law can stretch that far as long as it does so in a fair way. Well, if any number of men came together without the tie of laws or civil jurisdiction, and suffered a famine, would it be regarded as criminal or injurious to divide up the available food *equally*, if this were done through power and even violence?

·JUSTICE AND MALEVOLENCE·

[A few lines down, Hume is probably using 'contempt' in a less active sense than we give the word today. In this milder sense, to have contempt for something is to regard it as negligible, to treat as of no account—thus many people's 'contempt for order', a soldier's 'contempt' for pain. Most occurrences of 'contempt' in this work do use it in our stronger or more active sense.] Now suppose that a virtuous man has the bad luck to fall into the society of ruffians, far removed from the protection of laws and government; how is he to behave in that miserable situation? He sees

- such ruthless and violent greed prevailing,
- such a disregard for fairness,
- such contempt for ·social· order,
- such stupid blindness to future consequences,

that it is bound to have the most tragic conclusion—death for the majority and total dissolution of this society for the rest. ·The question was: what should he do?· All he can do is to arm himself, no matter *whose* sword or shield it is that he snatches up, so as to provide himself with all possible means of ·self·-defence and security. His personal concern for justice is no longer any use for his own safety or anyone else's, so he must consult the dictates of self-preservation alone, without concern for those who no longer deserve his care and attention.

·The rules of justice can also be rightly suspended· in a

politically organized society. When any man commits crimes that make him obnoxious to the public, he is punished by the laws in his goods (·fines·) and in his person (·imprisonment or physical punishment·). This means that the ordinary rules of justice are briefly suspended with regard to him, and it becomes fair to inflict on him, for the benefit of society, things it would be wrong or injurious to inflict on him otherwise. If it weren't for this suspension, punishment would always be wrong.

Think about the rage and violence of a public war—e.g. a war between two countries·. What is it but a suspension of justice among the warring parties, who see that this virtue is now no longer of any *use* or advantage to them? The laws of war, which then take over from the laws of equity and justice, are rules calculated to do good and be useful for men who are in that particular state they are now placed in, ·namely the state of war·. If a •civilized nation is at war with •barbarians who don't even respect any rules of war, the former must also suspend *their* observance of any such rules, because they no longer serve any purpose; and they must make every battle or skirmish as bloody and destructive as possible to ·the barbarians·, whom we may suppose to have been· the first aggressors.

Thus, the rules of equity or justice depend entirely on the particular state and condition in which men are placed; what starts them and keeps them in existence is ·their usefulness·, the utility that comes to the public from their strict and regular observance. If you reverse in any significant way the condition of men—produce extreme abundance or extreme need, endow humans with perfect moderation and humanity or perfect rapacity and malice—you make justice entirely useless, totally destroying its essence and suspending its obligation on mankind. The usual state of human affairs is a medium amidst all these extremes. We are naturally partial

to ourselves and our friends, but are capable of learning the advantage resulting from a more equitable conduct. Few enjoyments are given us ·directly· from the open and liberal hand of nature; but by skill and hard work we can extract them in great abundance. That is why the ideas of property become necessary in all civil society; it is why justice is useful to the public; and that is the sole source of its merit and moral obligation.

·THE 'GOLDEN AGE'·

These conclusions are so natural and obvious that even the poets have noticed them, in their descriptions of the happiness of 'the golden age' celebrated by ancient Greek poets. According to those pleasant fictions,

- The seasons in that first period of nature were so temperate that men didn't need clothes or houses to guard against the violence of heat and cold.
- The rivers flowed with wine and milk.
- The oaks yielded honey.
- Nature *spontaneously* produced her greatest delicacies.

And that wasn't the best of it. In that happy age, not only were tempests removed from nature, but the more violent ·inner· tempests that now cause such uproar and create such confusion were unknown to human breasts. Avarice, ambition, cruelty, selfishness, were never heard of. The only states of mind that anyone had were cordial affection, compassion and sympathy. Even the carefully correct distinction of 'mine' and 'thine' was banished from the human scene, and took with it the very notions of property and obligation, justice and injustice.

## ·THE ‘STATE OF NATURE’·

This •poetic fiction of the golden age is in some ways comparable with the •philosophical fiction of the state of nature; except that the former is represented as the most charming and peaceable condition that can possibly be imagined, whereas the latter is depicted as a state of mutual war and violence accompanied by extreme need. At the outset, we are told, mankind’s ignorance and savage nature were so prevalent that they couldn’t trust one another; each had to depend on himself, and his own force or cunning, for protection and security. No law was heard of; no rule of justice known; no rights of ownership respected; the only measure of right was *power*, and a perpetual war of all against all was the result of men’s untamed selfishness and barbarity.<sup>1</sup>

Whether such a condition of human nature could exist, and whether if it did it could for long deserve to be called a *state*, is doubtful. Men are necessarily born into a family-society, at least, and are brought up by their parents to observe some rules of conduct and behaviour. But it can’t be denied that if such a state of mutual war and violence *were* ever real, it would inevitably involve the suspension of all laws of justice because they couldn’t do any possible good.

The more we look into human life from different angles, and the newer and more unusual the lights are in which we survey it, the more we’ll be convinced that this account of the virtue of justice is realistic and satisfactory.

## ·JUSTICE AND THE LESSER BREEDS·

•Here is a supposition of a quite different kind from the earlier ones•. Suppose this to be the case:

Mixed in among mankind are creatures of a different species, which, though rational, are so much weaker in body and mind than human beings are that they can’t stand up to us and can never, however greatly provoked, make us feel the effects of their resentment.

If this came true, I think that •we would be bound by the laws of humanity to treat these creatures gently, but •we wouldn’t strictly speaking lie under any restraint of justice with regard to them, and •they couldn’t have any property or other rights in relation to us •though they might have them in relation to one another•. Our relationships with them couldn’t be called ‘society’, a label that implies some degree of equality; what there would be instead is absolute command on one side and servile obedience on the other. If we want something, they must immediately hand it over. The only basis there is for them to own anything is our permitting them to. The

<sup>1</sup> This fiction of a state of nature as a state of war wasn’t first invented by Hobbes, as is commonly imagined. Plato tries to refute a hypothesis very like it in *Republic*, Books 2-4, whereas Cicero treats it as common knowledge and certainly correct: ‘You can’t *not* know that in the natural course of events, before there was any natural or civil law fully laid down, men wandered in disorderly rabbles over the countryside, and owned only what they could seize and keep, through wounds and bloodshed, by their own personal strength. This led the best and wisest men, having considered what men are naturally like and how far they can be taught anything, to •bring together in one place those who had previously been scattered abroad, and to •lead them out of their savage way of life into one in which there was justice and gentleness. The next step was to form the constitutions, devised for human use, that we call “commonwealths”. Then there were •larger• collections of men that came to be called “states”. And then men built walls around sets of houses that we now call “cities”, and divine and human laws began to be recognised. The biggest single difference between **(1)** this manner of life, polished by civilization, and **(2)** the savage one •that came first• is the fact that **(1)** law is the ruling principle of the one whereas **(2)** violence dominates the other. If we don’t want to be guided by law, we must settle for violence. And if we want to put an end to violence, we’ll have to allow law to prevail—i.e. to allow courts of justice to prevail, because they contain within themselves all law and justice. If we turn against courts of justice, or they are destroyed or suspended, violence will take over. *Everyone* sees this.’ Cicero, *Pro Sestio* 42. [This was a small episode in a very long defence speech to the Roman Senate, which was sitting as a court of law. Cicero’s client was acquitted.]

only barrier they have to our lawless will—lawless, that is, in relation to *them*—is our compassion and kindness. We'll never suffer any inconvenience from the exercise of our power over them, a power that is so firmly established in nature; so the restraints of justice and property would be totally useless for us and would therefore never have a place in this unequal relationship.

This is clearly how men are situated in relation to animals. (Are they *rational*? I'll leave that for others to determine!) The great superiority of civilized Europeans over barbarous Indians tempted us to think we related to them as we do to the animals, and led us to throw off all restraints of justice, and even of humanity, in our treatment of them. In many nations, females are reduced to a similar slavery, and are denied any rights of property in relation to their lordly masters. But although the males when they combine forces have, in all countries, enough bodily force to maintain this severe tyranny, their fair companions have so much subtlety, skill and charm that they are commonly able to break up the confederacy among the males and then share with them all the rights and privileges of society.

Now look at another sequence of suppositions. (1) Suppose the human species were so built by nature that each individual had *within himself* everything needed for his own preservation and for the propagation of his kind, and that all society and all interactions between man and man were cut off by the primary intention of the supreme creator. It seems obvious that such a solitary being would be no more capable of justice or injustice than he would be of social discourse and conversation. If mutual respect and forbearance didn't *achieve* anything, they would never guide the behaviour of any reasonable man. The headlong rush of the emotions wouldn't be checked by any reflection on future consequences. And, as each man would love himself alone

and depend only on himself and his own activity for safety and happiness, he would always do his very best to claim preference over every other being, because he wouldn't be linked to any of them by any ties of nature or of self-interest. (2) Now vary this last supposition of the solitariness of every human being by supposing that the conjunction of the sexes is established in nature. That immediately gives rise to *families*; particular rules will be found to be necessary if it is to survive, so these will be immediately accepted as applying *within* each family though not as between any family and people outside it. (3) Now suppose that a number of families unite to form a single society that has no links with any others: in that case, the rules preserving peace and order will extend themselves right out to the boundaries of society; at any distance beyond those boundaries they will have no force because they won't do any good. (4) But then (finally) suppose that many distinct societies interact with one another for mutual convenience and advantage; then the boundaries of justice still extend still wider, in proportion to the breadth of men's views and the strength of their inter-connections. History, experience and reason sufficiently instruct us in this natural development of human sentiments, and in the gradual broadening of our views about the scope of justice, in proportion as we come to know more about the *utility* of that virtue.

## Part 2

If we examine the particular laws by which justice is directed and property determined, we'll still reach the same conclusion. The only object of all these laws and regulations is the good of mankind. It's not just that the peace and interest of society requires that there be an institution of individual ownership; the actual rules by which we sort out the details

of what is mine and what is yours are themselves devised to serve, as well as possible, the further interests of society.

Let us suppose that a creature who has reason but no experience of human nature is mulling over the question of what rules of justice or property would best promote public interest, and establish peace and security among mankind. His most obvious thought would be this:

Give the largest possessions to those with the most virtue; and give everyone a power of doing good that is proportional to his wanting to do good.

This rule might be appropriate—might lead to the best results—in a perfect theocracy in which everything happens through the particular volitions of an infinitely intelligent being. But if mere mankind adopted such a law, it couldn't be cleanly applied because merit is so uncertain; the immediate result would be the total dissolution of society. (Why is merit uncertain? Because it is naturally obscure, and also because each individual over-rates his own merit.) Fanatics may think they are entitled to help themselves to others' property because *dominion is based on grace and saints alone inherit the earth*; but the law of the land rightly treats these high-flying theorists as being on a par with common robbers, and teaches them by the severest discipline that a rule that seems in theory to be advantageous to society may be found in practice to be totally harmful and destructive.

History tells us that there were **religious fanatics** of this kind in England during the civil wars, though the obvious tendency towards chaos of these principles probably created so much horror in people that these dangerous would-be reformers felt compelled to renounce or at least conceal their views. Perhaps the *levellers*, who wanted all property to be distributed equally, were a kind of **political fanatics**, an off-shoot of the religious ones. They were more open about their views than the saints-alone-inherit-the-earth people,

because their views seemed more capable of being put into practice, as well as being more useful to human society.

There are indeed several sound things to be said in defence of the levellers. (1) Nature is so generous towards mankind that if all her gifts were evenly divided among our species, and improved by skill and work, every individual would enjoy all the necessities and most of the comforts of life, and wouldn't be liable to any misfortunes except ones deriving from physical illness. (2) Whenever we depart from this equality, we rob the poor of more satisfaction than we add to the rich; the slight gratification of a frivolous vanity in one individual often costs more than bread to many families and even provinces. (3) The rule of equality, as well as being potentially very useful, isn't altogether impracticable. It has actually been followed, at least partially, in some republics; especially that of Sparta, where it is said to have been accompanied by the most beneficial consequences. And then there were the Agrarian laws, so often pushed for in Rome and actually carried out in many Greek cities; those laws all came from a general idea of the good consequences [the utility] of the levelling principle.

But historians tell us—and common sense agrees—that however attractive these ideas of perfect equality may be, they are basically *not* practicable; and if they could be and were put into practice, their consequences would be extremely harmful to human society. However equally possessions are divided up, men's different degrees of skill, care and industry will immediately break the equality. And if you try to avoid this by putting constraints on skill, care and industry, you'll reduce society to extreme poverty; instead of preventing want and beggary in a few people, you'll be making it unavoidable for the whole community! Also, to spot any inequality the moment it shows up there would have to be a rigorous monitoring system, and to punish

and correct it there would have to be a very severe penal system. That much authority would be sure to degenerate into tyranny, and to be exercised in unfair ways. But—more to the point—nobody could possibly *have* such authority in a society such as the levellers want. Perfect equality of possessions would destroy all subordination, thereby greatly weakening the authority of officers of the law; as well as levelling out property, it would pretty well level out power.

What we can conclude from all this is that in order to establish laws for the regulation of property we must

- be acquainted with the nature and situation of man;
- not be taken in by misleading facts about what *seems* to be the case; and
- search for the rules that are over-all the most useful and beneficial.

To get this right one doesn't need to look very deeply into the human condition or to have a very broad experience of it; but one does need to avoid being too selfish on the one hand or too uncritically egalitarian on the other.

As an example of how basically easy it is to get the right answers: *Anyone* can see that something produced or improved by a man's skill or labour ought to be permanently *his* (social benefit: encouraging such useful habits and accomplishments). That his property ought to be inherited by his children and relations (social purpose: the same). That he can consent to make it the property of someone else (social purpose: creating the commerce and other interactions that are so beneficial to human society). And that all contracts and promises ought to be carefully fulfilled (social purpose: to secure the mutual trust and confidence that does so much to promote the general interest of mankind). In each case, I am talking about the social purpose of having that rule about property, not of acting in that way in an individual case.

Study the writers on the 'laws of nature' and you'll find that, whatever principles they set out with, they are sure to end up with the one I have been defending. They all give as the ultimate reason for every rule that they lay down the convenience and necessities of mankind. That is the most convincing kind of support to have—the support of someone who is trying to *oppose* one's views.

Indeed, what other reason *could* writers ever give for holding that *this is mine* and *that is yours*; since nature, left to itself, surely never made any such distinction? The things labelled 'mine' and 'yours' are in themselves quite *other* than us; they are totally separated from us; and nothing but the general interests of society can form the connection.

It can happen that the interests of society require that there be *some* rule of justice in a particular kind of case, but don't pick any particular rule out of several that are all equally beneficial. When that happens, the slightest analogies are laid hold of as a basis for selecting one rule over the others, because there would be perpetual conflicts if no selection were made and several rules were regarded as being in force. That's why your sheerly possessing—being the *first* to possess—something is supposed to make it yours, if no-one else has any prior claim to it. Many of the reasonings of lawyers are of this analogical nature, and depend on very slight connections of the imagination. [What 'analogy' is at work in the first-possession rule? In Hume's time 'analogy' often meant merely 'similarity'; and his thought here seems to be that having x physically under your control is superficially *like* legitimately owning x.]

Does anyone hesitate, in extraordinary cases, to violate all respect for the private property of individuals and sacrifice to public interest a distinction that was established in the first place for the sake of that interest? *The safety of the people* is the supreme law: All other more special laws are subordinate to it, and dependent on it. And if in

the *common* course of things those laws are followed and respected, that is only because the public safety and interest *commonly* demand that society be governed in a way that is even-handed and fair.

Sometimes both •utility and •analogy fail, and leave the laws of justice in total uncertainty. We need to have a rule according to which your having been in possession of something for a long time makes you the rightful owner of it, and we get that far through reasoning about •utility and •analogy; but sheer reasoning won't take us any further, i.e. it won't determine how many days, months or years constitute a 'long time' is for purposes of this rule. In this case, *civil laws* have to do what is not done by *the natural code*; they assign different values of 'long time' for different kinds of things that can be owned, depending on the different utilities

that the legislator is concerned about. [Hume's actual words here are 'according to the different utilities proposed by the legislator'. This has been announced as a case where 'utility and analogy fail'; perhaps he means that here the rules are settled on the basis not of *facts* about utility but rather of *what a legislator thinks* about utility]. . . .

All questions of property fall under the authority of civil laws, which extend, restrain, modify and alter the rules of natural justice, according to the *convenience* of each community in particular. The laws do or should constantly reflect the constitution of government, the manners, the climate, the religion, the commerce and the situation of each society. A recent learned and able author has pursued this subject at great length, and has grown from these seeds a complete philosophy of politics, with many ingenious and brilliant thoughts and some substance.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I am referring to •Montesquieu•, the author of *L'esprit des loix* (•which appeared in 1748, three years before the present work•). This illustrious writer starts off from a different theory •from mine•, taking all *right* to be based on certain relations (*rappports*). [He means that according to Montesquieu all moral truths can be deduced from objective facts about how things relate to one another.] In my opinion this is a system that will never be reconciled with true philosophy. Malebranche seems to have been the first proponent of this abstract theory of morals, which was afterwards adopted by Cudworth, Clarke and others. Because it leaves out all sentiment •or •feeling•, and claims to base everything on •reason, it has had plenty of followers in this philosophic age. (See my Section 1 and Appendix 1.) With regard to justice—our present topic—the case against this theory seems short and conclusive:

- Property depends on civil laws.
- The sole purpose of civil laws is to secure the interests of society. Therefore
- The interests of society is the sole foundation of property and justice.

[Hume says that each premise 'is allowed' and that the conclusion 'must be allowed'; presumably he means in each case 'allowed by Montesquieu'.] Not to mention the fact that the interests of society provide the whole basis for our being obliged to obey the civil law. •Two further considerations•: **(1)** It sometimes happens that the way the civil law handles something clashes with our ideas of justice. Cases where this happens are not •objections to my theory; they are •confirmations of it. When a •civil law is so perverse that it goes against all the interests of society, it loses all its authority, and then men judge by the ideas of •natural justice, which are in line with those interests. **(2)** Sometimes the civil laws (for good reasons) require that a certain kind of performance involve a ceremony or a special form; when that is lacking, •the civil law says that from a legal point of view the performance hasn't happened•. This decree of the law runs contrary to our usual ideas of justice, •and those ideas remain at work in a case like this•: someone who takes advantage of such legal technicalities is usually regarded as dishonest. Thus, the interests of society require that contracts be fulfilled, and this is as basic as you can get in both natural and civil justice; but the omission of a trivial detail—•e.g. the contract's being dated as well as signed•—will often invalidate a contract as a matter of public law; but it won't invalidate it in the 'court' of conscience. In a case of this sort we take it that the judge is •withdrawing his power of enforcing the right •that was meant to arise from the contract•, not •declaring that there isn't such a right. . . .

*What is a man's property?* Anything that it is lawful for him and only him to use. *What rule do we have for picking out these objects?* Here we must have resort to statutes, customs, precedents, analogies, and a hundred other things—some of them constant and inflexible, others variable and arbitrary [= 'matters of choice']. But what they are all rooted in is the interests and happiness of human society. If we leave that out of account, nothing could appear more whimsical, unnatural and even superstitious than most of the laws of justice and of property.

•JUSTICE AND SUPERSTITION•

It is a very easy task to ridicule simple-minded superstitions, and expose the folly of special attitudes to foods, days, places, postures, clothing. All you need do is to consider all the qualities and relations of the objects in question, and discover no adequate cause for the affection or antipathy, veneration or horror, that have such a great influence over a large part of mankind. A Syrian would starve rather than taste pigeon; an Egyptian won't come near bacon; but when these foods are examined by the senses of sight, smell or taste, or studied through the sciences of chemistry, medicine or physics, no difference is ever found between them and any other kind of meat; no factual basis is ever found for the religious passion. A fowl on Thursday is lawful food; on Friday it's abominable. Eggs in this house and in this diocese are permitted during Lent; just down the road eating them is a damnable sin. Yesterday there was nothing religious about this plot of land or this building; today the mumbling of certain words has made it holy and sacred. When a philosopher points these things out, it's safe to say that he won't make any difference to anyone. The facts are so obvious that everyone must have noticed them at first sight. When they *don't* prevail, that isn't because people don't know the facts or have misunderstood them somehow; it's because

of people's upbringing, prejudice and passion.

Someone who doesn't look carefully enough, or who is thinking at too a high a level of generality, might come to think that a similar superstition is involved in all the sentiments [see note on page 1] of justice; and that if we take the focus of justice—namely, what we call *property*—and subject it to the same scrutiny of sense and science, we won't find, however hard we look, any foundation for the distinctions drawn by moral sentiment. It is lawful for me to eat fruit from this tree, but it would be a crime for me to take fruit of the same kind from a tree a few yards away. If I had been dressed like this an hour ago, I would have deserved the severest punishment; but a man has pronounced a few magical syllables and thereby made it proper for me to be clothed in this way. If this house were in the neighbouring territory, it would have been immoral for me to live in it; but because it is built on this side of the river it is subject to a different municipal law, and I incur no blame or censure by coming to own it. It may be thought, then, •that the kind of reasoning that so successfully exposes superstition can also be applied to justice, and •that it's no more possible with justice than with superstition to pick out the precise features of the object that are the basis for the sentiment.

But there's this solid difference: •superstition is frivolous, useless and burdensome, whereas •justice is absolutely necessary for the well-being of mankind and the existence of society. When we set this fact aside (we couldn't *overlook* it—it's too obvious for that), it has to be agreed that all respects for right and property seem to be entirely without foundation, as much so as the grossest and most vulgar superstition.

•Why does that man's making certain sounds implying consent change the nature of my actions with regard to this object?

•Why does the reciting of a liturgy by a priest, dressed in a certain way and holding his body in a certain way, make a heap of brick and timber forever sacred?

If the interests of society weren't involved in any way, the former question would be an unanswerable as the latter.<sup>3</sup>

These reflections don't weaken the obligations of justice, or take anything away from the most sacred attention to *property*. On the contrary, such sentiments get new force from my reasoning. What stronger foundation can be

desired—or even *conceived*—for any duty than to observe that •if it isn't established human society or even human nature will collapse, and that •our nature and society will arrive at still greater degrees of happiness and perfection to the extent that the duty in question is regarded as inviolable?

•JUSTICE AS AN INSTINCT•

The dilemma seems obvious: Justice obviously tends to promote public utility and to support civil society. The

<sup>3</sup> Obviously, the will or consent alone never transfers property or creates the obligation of a promise. . . . For the will to impose an obligation on any man, it must be expressed by words or signs. The words initially come in as subservient to the will, but before long they become the principal part of the promise; and a man who secretly •intends not to keep his promise and •withholds the assent of his mind, isn't any less bound by the promise. But though in most cases the expression is the whole promise, it isn't always so. **(1)** Someone who uttered the words without knowing their meaning wouldn't have made a binding promise. **(2)** Someone who knows what the words mean and utters them only as a joke, giving clear signs that he has no serious intention of binding himself, wouldn't be obliged to keep the promise. **(3)** But for this to hold good, the 'clear signs' mustn't be ones that we cleverly detect while the man is trying to deceive us. For him not to be bound by a verbal promise he must give signs *different from signs of deceit* that he doesn't intend to keep the promise. All these contradictions are easily accounted for if justice arises entirely from its public utility [= 'its usefulness to society']; they'll never be explained on any other basis.

[In the next sentence: a 'casuist' is someone who applies general moral and religious doctrines to particular cases; a 'relaxed' casuist is one who cuts corners and stretches points in doing this.] It is remarkable that the moral decisions of the Jesuits and other relaxed casuists were usually made in the course of dealing with subtleties of reasoning such as I have been pointing out. . . . Why has the indignation of mankind risen so high against these casuists? It can only be because everyone sees that if the practices the casuists were trying to rule out were authorized, *human society couldn't survive*; and that morals should always be handled with a view to •public interest rather than to •the demands of high-level fine-grained philosophical theories of morals. Any sensible person can have the thought: *If the secret direction of the intention can invalidate a contract, where is our security?* But someone coming at this from an abstract metaphysical point of view might think that where an intention was supposed to be requisite, if it really wasn't there then no consequence ought to follow—no obligation would be imposed. The •casuistical subtleties may not be greater than the •subtleties of lawyers that I have hinted at above; but they meet with very different receptions from the world because the •former are pernicious while the •latter are innocent and even necessary. The Roman Catholic church teaches that

**(1)** Any sacrament can be invalidated by the frame of mind of the officiating priest.

This position comes from rigorously following through the •seeming• consequences of the obvious truth that empty words alone, without any meaning or intention in the speaker, can never have any effect. The analogous position in civil laws would be that

**(2)** Any civil contract can be nullified by the frame of mind of one of the parties to it.

What is at stake in **(1)** is the eternal salvation of thousands of people, •whereas what's at stake in **(2)** is merely the upsetting of civil society•. So why do we *not* follow the church's lead in **(1)** by accepting **(2)** regarding civil contracts? Our rejection of **(2)** comes entirely from our sense of the danger and inconvenience that would ensue from accepting it! This gives us a clear example of the fact that however positive, arrogant and dogmatic any superstition may appear to be, it can never *thoroughly* convince anyone that •its threats are real, or get anyone to give •them any weight at all when balanced against the common incidents of life that we learn from daily observation and empirical thinking.

sentiment of justice could be **(1)** derived from our reflecting on that tendency. The only alternative is that the sentiment of justice—like

- hunger, thirst, and other appetites, and like
- resentment, love of life, attachment to offspring, and other passions,

—**(2)** arises from a simple basic instinct in the human constitution, implanted there by nature for similar salutary purposes. If **(2)** is the case, it follows that *property*—which is what *justice* is about—is marked off by a simple basic instinct, and is not ascertained by any argument or reflection. But who ever heard of such an instinct? ‘Perhaps we have it but it hasn’t yet been discovered.’ That is obviously wrong; this is *not* a subject in which new discoveries can be made. We would have as much chance of discovering in the human body a new *sense* that no-one had noticed before!

And there’s another point. It looks like a very simple proposition to say that *nature distinguishes property through an instinctive sentiment*; but in reality we’ll find that there would have to be ten thousand different instincts, many of them concerned with objects having great fine-grained intricacy. For when a definition of *property* is required, the *ownership* relation is found to break down into possession acquired by occupation, by industry, by prescription, by inheritance, by contract, and so on. Is it believable that nature, through a basic instinct, instructs us in all these methods of acquisition?

Also, the words ‘inheritance’ and ‘contract’ stand for ideas that are infinitely complicated; a hundred volumes of laws and a thousand volumes of commentators haven’t been found sufficient to define them exactly. Does nature, whose instincts in men are all simple, embrace such complicated and artificial objects? And (·this being a different point·) does nature create a rational creature without trusting anything

to the operation of his reason?

Even if all those difficulties were overcome, the ‘basic instinct’ theory of justice still wouldn’t be satisfactory. Man-made laws can certainly transfer property. Must we say that it is by *another* basic instinct that we acknowledge the authority of kings and senates, and mark all the boundaries of their jurisdiction? Judges, too, even when their sentence is wrong and illegal, must be allowed for the sake of peace and order to have decisive authority, and ultimately to determine who owns what. Do we have basic innate ideas of magistrates and chancellors and juries? Isn’t it *obvious* that all these institutions arise merely from the necessities of human society?

All birds of the same species build their •nests alike at every time and in every country; that’s the force of instinct at work. Men build their •houses differently at different times and in different places; that shows the influence of reason and custom. A similar inference can be drawn from a comparison of •the sexual instinct with •the institution of property. ·That is, the contrast between •the sameness of the nests of any one species of birds and •the variety among human houses is comparable with the contrast between •the sameness of ·human· sexual feelings and conduct around the world and across the ages and •the variety among systems of civil laws·.

Now, it has to be admitted that systems of civil law, despite their variety, are pretty much the same in their general outlines—because what they are meant to achieve and mainly *do* achieve is pretty much the same. Similarly, all houses have a roof and walls, windows and chimneys, though they are varied in their shape, lay-out and materials. But the common features of houses clearly point to the conveniences of human life, and equally clearly so do the common features of systems of civil law. It’s really clear with

both that the source of all this is reason and reflection on human needs, rather than a basic instinct.

I needn't mention the variations that all the rules of property receive from the finer turns and connections of the imagination, and from the subtleties and abstractions of law-topics and reasonings. This can't possibly be reconciled with the notion of basic instincts.

·SNAP JUDGMENTS ABOUT INJUSTICE·

Here is something that will create a doubt about the theory of justice that I have been defending. Our upbringing and acquired habits have the effect that when we blame something as an injustice we aren't always conscious of any immediate reflection on its bad consequences. When something is very familiar to us, its familiarity makes us apt to overlook it; and what we have very frequently done for certain reasons we are apt to go on doing, mechanically, without recalling every time the thoughts that first led us to this. The considerations of human convenience—or rather necessity—that lead to our having the notion of justice are so universal, and everywhere point so much to the same rules of justice, that the habit of condemning unjust acts and institutions takes place in all societies, and we have to think about it a little to ascertain its true origin. Not that the origin is notably obscure: even in ordinary everyday life

we often resort to the principle of public utility, saying to ourselves or others—'What would become of the world if *that* kind of behaviour were rampant? How could society survive under such disorders?'. . . .

From all this we seem to have learned something about the force that I have been highlighting—the force of thoughts about public interest and utility—namely how strongly it affects our levels of admiration or moral approval. The sole basis for the virtue of justice is that justice is necessary for the support of society; and since no moral excellence is more highly esteemed than justice is, we can conclude that this matter of *usefulness* has, generally, the strongest energy and most complete command over our sentiments. So it must be the source of a considerable part of the merit ascribed to humanity, benevolence, friendship, public spirit, and other social virtues of that sort, just as it is the sole source of our moral approval of fidelity, justice, veracity, integrity and those other estimable and useful qualities and forces. In saying this I am relying on the principle:

When any force has been found to have a great strength and energy in one instance, credit it with having a similar energy in all similar instances.

This is entirely agreeable to the rules of philosophy [here = 'empirical science'], and even of common sense; and it is indeed Newton's chief rule of scientific method.

## Section 4. Political society

If everyone were •intelligent and wise enough to perceive at all times how strongly his interests are served by the observance [meaning *his* observance] of justice and equity, and were •strong-minded enough to keep steadily focussed on his over-all *long-term* interests rather than being diverted by the enticements of *present* pleasure and advantage, there would never have been any such thing as government or political society. In the situation as I have described it, each man would have lived in entire peace and harmony with everyone else—doing this in the exercise of his natural liberty, ·with no constraints from governmental laws·. What need is there for man-made laws, when unaided natural justice is a sufficient restraint? If nothing ever goes wrong, why have judges? Why curtail our natural freedom when *all* our uses of it are found to be innocent and beneficial? Obviously, if there no way for government to be in the least useful, it wouldn't exist; the whole basis for the duty of allegiance ·to the government of one's country· is the good that government does for society by preserving peace and order among mankind.

### ·LAWS OF NATIONS·

When a number of political societies are formed, and they maintain a thick web of interactions amongst themselves, it is immediately found that a new set of rules would be useful in that situation; so such rules come into existence, under the title 'laws of nations'. Examples include

- Ambassadors are not to be harmed in any way.
- Poisoned weapons are not to be used.
- A soldier in battle is not to be immediately killed if he surrenders.

These rules and others of that kind are plainly calculated for the advantage of states and kingdoms in their inter-relations.

The rules of justice that apply among •individuals are not entirely suspended among •political societies. All rulers claim to respect the rights of other rulers, and no doubt *some* of them can say this without hypocrisy. Alliances and treaties are constantly being made between independent states, and this would be a mere waste of parchment if it hadn't been found that treaties etc. have *some* influence and authority. But here is the difference between kingdoms and individuals. •Human nature can't possibly survive without the association of individuals; and that association can exist only if some respect is paid to the laws of equity and justice. Disorder, confusion, the war of all against all, are the inevitable upshot of such licentious conduct ·as would occur if equity and justice had no place·. •Nations, on the other hand, can survive without having relations with one another. They can even survive, to some extent, under a general war. Though respect for justice is useful among states, it isn't as necessary ·or useful· there as it is among individuals; and corresponding to that lessened usefulness is a lessened degree of moral obligation. All politicians and most philosophers will allow that in particular emergencies 'reasons of state' may justify dispensing with the rules of justice, ·unilaterally· invalidating some treaty or alliance the strict observance of which would be very harmful to either of the contracting parties. But it is generally agreed that nothing less than the most extreme necessity can justify individuals in a breach of promise or an invasion of the properties of others.

In a confederated commonwealth, such as the ancient Achaean republic ·in Greece·, or today's Swiss Cantons and United Provinces [= the Netherlands], the league has a

special utility, and so the conditions of union have a special sacredness and authority, and a violation of them would be regarded as being *at least* as criminal as any private injury or injustice.

·CHASTITY·

The long and helpless infancy of a human being requires that the parents work together for the care of their young, and this collaboration requires the virtue of chastity, i.e. fidelity to the marriage bed. You'll agree that if chastity weren't useful in that way it would never have been thought of as a virtue.<sup>4</sup>

Sexual infidelity in marriage is much more harmful in women than in men. That's why the laws of chastity are much stricter over the female sex than over the male.

These rules are all connected with procreation; yet they are supposed to apply to women who are past child-bearing as much as to those in the flower of their youth and beauty. General rules are often extended beyond their original source, and this is true in all matters of taste and sentiment. [The \*starred passage\* expands what Hume wrote in ways that the ·small dots· convention can't easily indicate.] \*It is agreed that our ideas about personal beauty arise very much from ideas of utility. An example might be this: we see a hump-back as ugly, basically because we think of such a hump as an obstacle to activity, to doing well in life—the opposite of useful. Now consider this story that has come out of France: during a stock-market surge in Paris, a hump-backed fellow went every day to the street where the stock-brokers gather, and was well paid for letting them use his hump as a desk on

which to sign their contracts. So *his* hump was thoroughly useful. But would the money that he made in this way turn him into a handsome fellow? No. The imagination is influenced by associations of ideas; and even if a given association initially arose from the judgment—such as the association of *hump-backed* with *ugly*, mediated by the judgment that humped backs are not useful—it isn't easily altered by particular exceptions that we come across. That could explain our hostility to sexual infidelity in women who are past child-bearing age.\* There is also something else we can add: if older women were free to be unchaste, their example would be harmful to the younger ones; if women could always look forward to a time when they would be at liberty to indulge themselves in this way, it would be natural for them to bring that time closer, i.e. not to wait, and to think more lightly of this whole duty that is in fact so much needed by society.

·INCEST·

Members of a single family living together have such frequent opportunities for licence of this kind [Hume's exact phrase] that nothing could preserve purity of manners if marriage or any sexual relationship were allowed between people who are closely related to one another. Incest, therefore, being especially harmful in its effects, is regarded as especially wicked and morally ugly. ·And some of the details of the anti-incest morality can also be explained in terms of consequences, as I shall now show·.

Why did the laws of Athens allow a man to marry a half-sister (**1**) who had the same father as he did, but not

<sup>4</sup> Plato's only answer to objections raised against the community of women that is established in his imaginary commonwealth is this: 'It was a good saying, and still is, that what is useful is fair, what is useless is ugly' (*Republic* 5 457). There can't be any doubt about this where *public* usefulness is concerned—and that was Plato's topic. Indeed, what other point is there to all the ideas of chastity and modesty? Phaedrus writes: 'Unless what we do is useful, the glory of it is nil'. Plutarch writes: 'Nothing that is harmful is beautiful.' The Stoics thought the same. [Hume quotes Sextus Empiricus as reporting this about the Stoics. He quotes Phaedrus in Latin, Sextus in Greek, and Plato and Plutarch in both.]

a half-sister **(2)** who had the same mother? Plainly for this reason: The manners of the Athenians were so reserved that a man was never allowed to approach the women's part of any house, even the house of a close relative, except when he was paying a visit to his own mother. His step-mother and her children—including the half-sister **(1)**—were as much shut up from him as the women of any other family, so that there was as little danger of any unlawful sexual relations between him and them as between him and any other women; whereas a half-sister **(2)** with whom he shared a mother would be someone he had grown up with and seen countless times. For a similar reason, uncles and nieces were allowed to marry at Athens. But the permitted-in-Athens marriages that I have mentioned were not permitted in Rome, where relations between the sexes were more open. Public utility is the cause of all these variations.

·OTHER KINDS OF IMMORAL CONDUCT·

If something that doesn't do a man credit escapes his lips in private conversation, or if he says it in a private letter, it is highly blameworthy to repeat it to anyone else. The free and social interactions of minds would be seriously inhibited if such rules of trustworthiness were not established.

Even in passing on gossip from which we can't foresee any harm resulting, it is regarded as a piece of indiscretion, if not of immorality, to tell whom we got the story from. As these stories are passed from hand to hand they are altered in various ways; and they often reach the persons concerned—the persons they are *about*—and produce animosities and quarrels among people whose intentions were entirely innocent and inoffensive.

To pry into secrets, to open or even read the letters of others, to spy on their words and looks and actions—what practices are more trouble-making in society? What habits, therefore, are more blameable?

This principle [see note on title page] of the well-being of society is also the basis for most of the laws of good *manners*—a kind of lesser morality that aims at the ease of company and conversation. Too much ceremony is blamed; so is too little; and anything that promotes ease, without an indecent familiarity, is useful and praiseworthy.

It is commendable to be constant in one's friendships, attachments and familiarities, and this is needed to support trust and good relations in society. But in places where people come together casually in some pursuit of health and pleasure, public convenience doesn't require such constancy; it is customary to encourage unreserved conversation in such contexts by granting the privilege of then dropping one's casual acquaintance, without this being a breach of civility or good manners.

·THE MORALITY OF LESSER 'SOCIETIES'·

Even in societies with utterly immoral foundations, ones that are the most destructive to the interests of the general society, there have to be certain rules that the members are constrained to observe by a sort of false honour as well as by private self-interest. Robbers and pirates, it has often been remarked, couldn't maintain their harmful confederacy if they didn't establish a new distributive justice among themselves, calling into force among themselves the laws of equity they have violated with the rest of mankind.

*I hate a drinking companion*, says the Greek proverb, *who never forgets*. The follies of the last drinking spree should be buried in eternal oblivion, so as to give full scope to the follies of the next one! . . .

In any society or club that exists for the purpose of playing some game, there have to be laws governing how the game is played; and these laws are different for different games. The basis for such societies is admittedly frivolous, and the laws are to a great extent (though not entirely)

capricious and arbitrary. That creates an important difference between these laws and the rules of justice, fidelity and loyalty; because the latter are required for there to be general societies of men, which are absolutely requisite for the survival of the species. . . . So there is only a very limited likeness between the rules of games and the moral rules of society at large; all we can learn from it, probably, is that rules are necessary whenever men have *any* kind of relations with each other.

They can't even pass each other on the road without rules. Waggoners, coachmen and mounted couriers have principles governing who gives way to whom, and these are mainly

based on mutual ease and convenience. But some of them are arbitrary, or at least dependent on a kind of capricious analogy like many of the reasonings of lawyers.<sup>5</sup>. . . .

And it goes even further than that: men can't even *murder* each other without rules and maxims and an idea of justice and honour. War has its laws as well as peace; and even the kind of war-for-amusement that is carried on among wrestlers, boxers and gladiators is regulated by fixed principles. The people concerned have some interests in common, and thus a shared notion of what is useful; and from this there inevitably arises a standard of right and wrong among them.

## Section 5. Why utility pleases

### Part 1

We praise the social virtues because of their utility'—that's such a natural thought that one would expect to meet with it everywhere in moral writers, as the main basis for their reasoning and enquiry. In ordinary everyday life the utility of conduct is always appealed to, and we can't think of any greater eulogy to give to any man than •to display his usefulness to the public, and •list the services he has done

for mankind and society. Even our praise for the regularity and elegance of an inanimate form is conditional on those features' not destroying the thing's fitness for any useful purpose. And what a satisfactory apology we can make for any disproportion or seeming ugliness, if we can show that the feature in question was needed for the intended use! A ship appears more beautiful to an artist, or to anyone moderately skilled in navigation, if its prow is wider

<sup>5</sup> One such rule is:

- The lighter machine must yield to the heavier, and •in machines of the same kind the empty one must yield to the one that is loaded.

This rule is based on *convenience*. Then there is this rule:

- Those who are going *to* the capital city have precedence over those who are coming *from* it.

This seems to be based on some idea of dignity of the great city, and of the preference for the future over the past (•which, if it is correct, brings this rule under the heading of 'arbitrary and capricious'.)

than its stern than it would if it were built with precise geometrical regularity. . . . If a building's doors and windows were exact squares, it would hurt the eye just because of that squareness, which is ill-adapted to the shape of a human being, for whose use the building was intended.

So it's not surprising that a man whose habits and conduct are harmful to society, and dangerous or harmful to everyone who has any connection with him, should for that reason be an object of disapproval, communicating to every spectator the strongest sentiment or ·feeling· of disgust and hatred.<sup>6</sup>

And yet these effects of usefulness or its contrary have not loomed large in philosophers' systems of ethics, and they have looked elsewhere for explanations of the origin of moral good and evil. Why? Perhaps it's because they found it hard to *account for* our attitude to usefulness. But if we have had experience that confirms the existence of a principle [see note on title page], we shouldn't reject it just because we can't give a satisfactory account of its origin, or show it to be a special case of some more general principle. As for our present topic, if we would just think about it for a little while we would find it easy enough to account for the influence that utility has ·on our feelings·, and to deduce it from ·more general· principles that are the best known, the most thoroughly recognized, in human nature.

·MORALITY'S BASIS IS NATURE, NOT INDOCTRINATION·

Ancient and modern sceptics have inferred from •the appar-

ent usefulness of the social virtues that •all moral distinctions arise from cultural influence, and that •they were first invented and then encouraged by the skill of politicians, so as to make men manageable and to subdue the natural ferocity and selfishness which had made them unfit for society. It's true that this principle of instruction and upbringing has a powerful influence, so that it can often **(1)** make the sentiments of approval or dislike greater or smaller than they would have been if left to nature; and sometimes it can even **(2)** create a new sentiment of approval or dislike, one that owes nothing to any natural principle—which is what happens in all superstitious practices and observances. But surely no thoughtful enquirer would think that *all* moral affection or dislike arises from this origin. If nature hadn't made *any* such distinction, based on the original constitution of the mind, language would not have contained the words 'honourable' and 'shameful', 'lovely' and 'odious', 'noble' and 'despicable'; and if politicians had invented these terms they could never have made them intelligible to anyone. So this paradox of •the sceptics is just very superficial. It isn't hard to fend off the nit-picking of •that sect in the context of politics and morals; it would be good if we deal with them as well in the context of the theoretical and less intelligible sciences of logic and metaphysics! So we have to acknowledge that the social virtues have a *natural* beauty and amiableness, which right from the outset—before any instruction or cultural input—attracts the respect and

<sup>6</sup> We oughtn't to think that because an inanimate object (·a chair, say·) can be useful as well as a man, it ought to qualify for the label 'virtuous' as a man can. The sentiments aroused by utility are very different in the two cases. In the case of the man, the feelings are mixed with affection, respect, approval and so on, but not in the case of the chair. Similarly, the chair may have good colour and proportions, just as a human figure can. But can we ever be in love with the chair? There are many passions and sentiments of which thinking rational beings are the only proper objects, this being settled by the basic constitution of human nature; and if qualities that would arouse love and affection in a human being were transferred to an inanimate object, they wouldn't arouse the same sentiments. . . . A very small variation in the object, even when the same qualities are preserved, will destroy a sentiment. Thus, the beauty for which a man loves a woman, if transferred to a man, would not arouse an amorous passion except in cases where nature is extremely perverted.

affection of mankind. And because the chief source of the merit of these virtues is their public utility, it follows that the end that they tend to promote must be in some way agreeable to us, taking hold of some natural affection. Public utility must please—either for self-interested reasons or from more generous motives.

·THE SELF-INTEREST THEORY OF MORALITY·

It has often been maintained that because •every man has a strong connection with society, and sees that he can't possibly survive in isolation, he •favours all the habits or principles that promote order in society and give him the quiet possession of this priceless blessing, However much we value our own happiness and welfare, we must to that extent applaud the practice of justice and humanity, which is our only way of maintaining the social confederacy and getting for every man the advantages of mutual protection and assistance. This derivation of morals from a concern for one's own interests is an obvious thought, and it hasn't arisen wholly from the irresponsible teasing attacks of the sceptics. To mention no others, Polybius—one of the gravest and most judicious writers of antiquity, as well as one of the most moral—has traced all our sentiments of virtue to this selfish origin. (This is in Book 6, chapter 6, of his *Histories*.)<sup>7</sup> But though the solid practical sense of that author, and his dislike of vain subtleties, give him considerable authority on the present subject, this isn't something to be settled by •authority, and the voice of •nature and •experience seems plainly to oppose the selfish theory.

We often praise virtuous actions that were performed long ago and far away, where the utmost subtlety of imagination couldn't discover any appearance of self-interest, or find any way of connecting our present happiness and security with events so widely separated from us.

When an adversary does something generous, brave, noble, we approve his action even if we know that its consequences will go *against* our particular interests.

In any case where •private advantage goes along with our general •affection for virtue, we easily see and acknowledge the mixture of these distinct sentiments, which feel different and have different influences on the mind. We are perhaps quicker to praise generous humane actions that further our own interests; but those interests come nowhere near to explaining the •topics of praise that we insist on [probably meaning 'the •general principles that govern our most intensely felt praise']. And we can try to bring other people over to our sentiments without trying to convince them that *they* get any advantage from the actions that we are presenting for their approval and applause.

If you •describe the model of a praiseworthy character, consisting of all the most lovable moral virtues; and •give examples in which these virtues display themselves in an extraordinary manner; you will easily elicit esteem and approval from all your audience, without their even *asking* when and where this noble person lived. Yet 'when and where' are absolutely crucial to self-love, i.e. the concern for one's own individual happiness. ·Here's an example of what

<sup>7</sup> Undutifulness to parents is disapproved of by every person 'who reflects on what he sees and, comparing the future with the past, expresses his indignation at this ill-treatment to which he foresees that he also may some day be exposed'. Ingratitude is disapproved of for a similar reason (though Polybius seems here to mix in something more generous): 'Each person is bound to be shocked by ingratitude; through sympathy with the resentment of his neighbour, and from the thought that he may at some time suffer in the same way. And from that arises in the mind of every man a certain sense of the nature and force of duty.' Perhaps he meant only that our sympathy or humanity is more enlivened by our considering the similarity of our case with that of the person suffering; which is a good point.

I mean·:

There was a statesman who, in the shock and contest of party-political conflict, managed through his eloquence to get an able adversary banished. He secretly followed the adversary, offering him •money for his support during his exile and •consolation in his misfortunes. ‘Alas!’ cried the banished statesman, ‘how I regret leaving my •friends in this city, where even •enemies are so generous!’ . . .

We give this conduct the praise and approval that it deserves; and we don’t retract these sentiments when we learn that all this happened in Athens about two thousand years ago, and that the men involved were Eschines and Demosthenes. . . . When pressed by these facts and arguments, a defender of the self-interest theory of morality might say:

We transport ourselves by the force of imagination into distant times and places, and think about the advantage that we *would* have reaped from these characters if we *had been* contemporaries and had been involved in the situation.

This is a dodge, and a weak one at that. It is not conceivable how a *real* sentiment or passion could arise in us from what we know to be an *imaginary* interest; especially when our real interest is still kept in view, and is often acknowledged to be entirely distinct from the imaginary one and sometimes even opposite to it.

A man who is brought to the brink of a precipice can’t look down without trembling; and the sentiment of imaginary danger drives him, in opposition to his belief that he is really safe. This may look like a real example of something I have said to be ‘inconceivable’, but it isn’t really, because **(1)** it has a special feature·:

In this case the imagination is helped by the presence of a striking object—the cliff-face and the sheer drop·;

and also because **(2)** ·it is really a different phenomenon·:

Even the ‘striking object’ won’t have this effect unless it is, for this man, somewhat unusual and unfamiliar. Custom soon reconciles us to heights and precipices, and wears off these false and delusive terrors.

In our estimates of characters and conduct, the reverse is the case: the oftener we engage in careful scrutiny of morals, the *more* delicate is the feeling we acquire of the most minute differences between vice and virtue. Indeed, in everyday life we so *often* express all kinds of moral determinations that nothing of this kind could be new or unusual to us. And no false views or prejudices could hold their ground against experience that is so common and familiar. What mainly forms associations of ideas is experience, so that no association could possibly be established and survive in direct opposition to experience.

Usefulness is agreeable, and elicits our approval. This is a matter of fact, confirmed by daily observation. But, *useful*? For what? For somebody’s interest, surely. Whose interest then? Not only our own; for our approval frequently extends beyond our own interests. So it must be the interests of those who benefit from the character or action we approve of; from which we can conclude that the welfare of those people, however far away they are in time or space, is not a matter of total indifference to us. By opening up this principle [see note on title page] we shall discover one great source of moral distinctions.

## Part 2

Self-love is such a busily energetic drive in human nature, and the interest of each individual is usually so closely connected with that of the community, that there was an excuse for the philosophers who thought that all our concern

for the public might ultimately come down to a concern for our own happiness and preservation. Here's how they arrived at that thought. They saw every moment instances of approval or blame, satisfaction or displeasure, towards characters and actions. They called the objects of these sentiments 'virtues' or 'vices'. They saw that virtues tended to increase the happiness of mankind, and that vices tended to increase mankind's misery. They asked themselves 'Could it be that we have any *general* concern for society, or any *disinterested* [= 'not *self*-interested'] resentment of the harm that comes to others?' And they found it simpler to regard all these sentiments as special cases of self-love, and discovered an excuse (at least) for this unifying move in the fact that the interests of any individual are so often closely linked to the interests of the public.

Despite this frequent mixing of interests, however, it is easy to perform what natural scientists—following Bacon—call a 'crucial experiment', one that points out the right way in any doubt or ambiguity. We have found cases where someone's private interest was different from—even contrary to—the public interest, and where nevertheless the *moral* sentiment stayed steady, despite this divergence of interests. And whenever these distinct interests are seen to coincide, we always find a noticeable increase in the sentiment, a warmer affection for virtue, a more intense detestation of vice—feelings that are properly called 'gratitude' and 'revenge'. Under pressure from these examples we have to reject the theory that accounts for every moral sentiment in terms of

self-love. We must make room for a more publicaffection, and allow that we have some concern for the interests of society, considered just in itself. Usefulness is only a tendency to lead to a certain result; and it is a contradiction in terms to say 'I am pleased with x as a means to y, though y itself is something I am not concerned with'. Thus, if usefulness is a source of moral sentiment, and if this usefulness is not always thought of in terms of 'useful to *me*', it follows that anything that contributes to the happiness of society recommends itself *directly* to our approval and good-will. Here is a drive within us that accounts in great part for the origin of morality. Why should we look for abstruse and remote systems when such an obvious and natural one lies ready to hand?<sup>8</sup>

·SYMPATHY· [see note on page 6]

Is it hard for us to understand the force of humanity and benevolence? Or to take in that the very look of happiness, joy and prosperity gives pleasure; the very look of pain, suffering and sorrow communicates uneasiness? The Latin poet Horace said that the human countenance borrows smiles or tears from the human countenance—'Human faces laugh with those who laugh, and weep with those who weep'. If you reduce a person to solitude, he will lose almost all enjoyment, because his emotions aren't helped along by corresponding emotions in his fellow-creatures. (I said '*almost* all' because he might still have intellectual pleasures, e.g. from solving a mathematical problem, and sensual

<sup>8</sup> We needn't push our researches so far as to ask 'Why do we have humanity, i.e. a fellow-feeling with others?' It's enough that we experience this as a force in human nature. Our examination of causes must stop somewhere; and in every science there are some general principles [= 'drives'] that we can't hope to show to be special cases of something even more general. No man is absolutely indifferent to the happiness and misery of others. The first has a natural tendency to give pleasure; the second, pain. You can find this in yourself—so can anyone. It's not likely that these principles can be resolved into simpler and more universal ones, whatever attempts may have been made to do that. And even if it were possible, that wouldn't be part of my present topic. For present purposes we can safely treat these principles as basic, and be well satisfied if we can make all their consequences sufficiently plain and clear! That is, we can ignore any questions about what led to them and focus on what comes from them.

pleasures, ·e.g. feeling warm and well fed·.) Even when the signs of sorrow and mourning are arbitrary [= 'conventional, or at any rate ·not natural'], they still make us sad; and the ·natural symptoms, tears and cries and groans, never fail to create compassion and uneasiness in other people's minds. And if the *effects* of misery affect us in such a lively manner, can we be supposed to be entirely unfeeling or indifferent towards its *causes* when a malicious or treacherous character and conduct are presented to us?

Suppose we enter a convenient, warm, well-designed apartment. We have to get pleasure just from seeing it, because it presents us with the pleasing ideas of ease, satisfaction and enjoyment. The hospitable, good-humoured, humane landlord appears, and this event must surely make the whole even more attractive; and we can't easily forbear reflecting with pleasure on the satisfaction that everyone gets from their dealings with him.

His whole family show their happiness by the freedom, ease, confidence and calm enjoyment expressed in their faces. I have a pleasing sympathy in the prospect of so much joy, and can't think of the source of it without having the most agreeable emotions.

He tells me that an oppressive and powerful neighbour tried to dispossess him of his inheritance, and for years disturbed all his innocent and social pleasures. I feel an immediate indignation arise in me against such violence and injury.

He adds that it isn't surprising that a private wrong should come from a man who has enslaved provinces, depopulated cities, and made the battle-field and the scaffold stream with human blood. I am struck with horror at the prospect of so much misery, and am driven by the strongest hostility towards its author.

Wherever we go, whatever we think or talk about, just about everything presents us with a view of human happiness or misery, and arouses in us a sympathetic surge of pleasure or uneasiness. In our serious occupations, and in our careless amusements, this principle still exerts its active energy.

·SYMPATHY AND THE ARTS·

A man who enters a theatre is immediately impressed by the view of so many people sharing in one common pastime; and he experiences, just from the look of them, a heightening of his disposition to have every sentiment ·or feeling· that his fellow-creatures have.

He notices that the actors are energised by the appearance of a full house, and raised to a level of enthusiasm that they can't command when they are calm and alone.

If the play is skillfully written, every emotion ·represented· on the stage is communicated to the spectators, as though by magic. The spectators weep, tremble, resent, rejoice, and are inflamed with all the variety of passions that drive the characters in the drama.

When an event in the play goes against our wishes and interrupts the happiness of our favourite characters, we are conscious of feeling anxiety and concern. If their sufferings come from the treachery, cruelty or tyranny of an enemy, we experience intense resentment against the enemy. It is regarded as *contrary to the rules of art* to represent a calamity in a cool and indifferent manner. A distant friend or a confidant who has nothing immediately at stake in the catastrophe ought, if possible, to be avoided by the playwright, because such a character might communicate a similar indifference to the audience. . . .

Few species of poetry are more entertaining than the *pastoral*, and we are all aware that the chief source of its

pleasure arises from the images of a gentle and tender tranquillity that it represents in its characters, communicating a similar sentiment to the reader. The Italian poet Sannazaro in his *Piscatory Eclogues* shifted the scene from gentle pleasant meadows to the sea-shore; this let him present the ocean, the most magnificent object in nature, but it is agreed that it was a wrong choice. The idea of the toil, labour and danger suffered by the fishermen is painful to the reader because of the unavoidable sympathy that accompanies every conception of human happiness or misery.

... No passion, when well represented, can be entirely indifferent to us; because every man has within him at least the seeds and first principles [see note on title page] of every passion. It's poetry's business to bring every affection near to us by lively imagery and representation, making it look like truth and reality; which is a certain proof that wherever reality itself is found, our minds are disposed to be strongly affected by it.

Any recent event that affects the fate of states, provinces or many individuals is extremely interesting even to those whose welfare is not directly involved. News of such an event is quickly spread, eagerly heard, and enquired into with attention and concern. On such an occasion the interest of society appears to be to some extent the interest of each individual. The imagination is sure to be affected, though the passions that are aroused may not always be strong and steady enough to have much influence on behaviour.

Reading a history book seems like a calm entertainment; but it wouldn't entertain at all if the reader didn't have feelings corresponding to those that the historian describes.

It's hard to read Thucydides or Guicciardin attentively while one describes trivial clashes between small cities of Greece, and the other describes the harmless wars between Pisa and Florence. Not many people are involved, and the

interest is small, so these passages don't fill our imagination or bring our feelings into play. But the deep distress of the large Athenian army that attacked Syracuse, and the danger that constituted such a strong threat to Venice—these arouse compassion; these move terror and anxiety.

We can become convinced of the cruel depravity of the Roman emperors Nero and Tiberius by the cool uninvolved style of Suetonius as well as by the masterly writings of Tacitus. But what a difference in our feelings! Suetonius coldly relates the facts; whereas Tacitus sets before our eyes the venerable figures of Soranus and Thræsea—two of Nero's innocent victims—who faced their fate bravely, and were moved only by the melting sorrows of their friends and families. What sympathy then touches every human heart! What indignation against the tyrant whose ungrounded fear or unprovoked malice gave rise to such detestable barbarity!

If we shift from plays and history-books, and look at real-life events that we observe for ourselves, powerful concern is aroused, and how much stronger it often is than the narrow attachments of self-love and self-interest! •Popular uprisings, •party zeal, •devoted obedience to leaders of groups—these are some of the most visible effects (though not the most commendable!) of this social sympathy in human nature.

Our feelings are somewhat engaged by anything that carries an image of human sentiment and affection, even when the subject is fairly trivial.

When a person stutters, we sympathize with this trivial uneasiness and suffer for him. And it is a rule in criticism that every combination of syllables or letters that is hard to pronounce sounds harsh and disagreeable to the ear, apparently because of a sort of sympathy. Indeed, when we skim a book with our eye, we notice such unharmonious composition because we still imagine that someone is reading it aloud to us and having a hard time pronouncing these

jarring sounds. So delicate is our sympathy!

·BEAUTY, UTILITY, SYMPATHY·

Relaxed and unconstrained postures and motions are always beautiful. An air of health and vigour is agreeable. •Clothes that warm us without burdening the body—that cover us without imprisoning the limbs—are well-designed. The feelings of the affected person have a role in all our judgments of beauty, communicate to the spectator similar touches of pain or pleasure.<sup>9</sup> So it's not surprising that we can't make judgments about the characters and conduct of men without considering the likely consequences of their actions, and the happiness or misery they bring to society. What association of ideas could operate if the sympathy principle were totally inactive?<sup>10</sup>

·SYMPATHY AND MORALITY·

If a man isn't affected by images of human •happiness or •misery—because he is emotionally cold or narrowly selfish—he must be equally indifferent to the images of •virtue and •vice. And on the other hand we always find that a warm concern for the interests of our species is accompanied by a delicate feeling for all moral distinctions—a strong •resentment of harm done to men, a lively •approval of

their faring well. People can be seen to differ a great deal in this respect; but no-one is so entirely indifferent to the interests of his fellow-creatures that he doesn't have *any* sense of actions as being morally good or bad because of the results they tend to produce. If someone is confronted by two candidates for his moral judgment, •one that is beneficial and •another that is harmful to his species or community, it's not *possible* that he won't prefer the beneficial one (however coolly) and ascribe to it some measure of merit (however small). It is not possible if he *wears a human heart* [Hume's exact phrase]. Let us suppose someone who is ever so selfish, with his own private interests occupying ever so much of his attention; even this man, in cases where his own interests are not affected, must inevitably feel *some* leaning towards the good of mankind as the goal to choose other things being equal. . . . We surely •take into consideration the happiness and misery of others when we are weighing the various motives for action, and •incline to the happiness side when no private concerns draw us to seek our own advantage by harming our fellow-creatures. And if the principles of humanity are capable in many instances of influencing our actions, they must always have some authority over our sentiments [see note on page 1], and give us a general approval

<sup>9</sup> 'The horse whose flanks are slim is handsomer—and faster. The athlete whose muscles have been well developed by exercise is better to look at—and more likely to win. Outward appearance is never separated from usefulness. Everyone with any sense knows this.' Quintilian, *Institutes* Book 8 ch. 3.

<sup>10</sup> How much good we expect to flow from someone's conduct depends in part on how high his social rank is, and on the quality of the relationships—in private life, in business, in politics etc.—into which he has entered. If he falls short of our expectations, we blame him for not being more useful; and we blame him much more severely if anything positively bad has arisen from his behaviour. When there's a clash of interests between two countries, we judge the merits of a statesman by how much good or bad has resulted *for his own country* from his actions and advice, without regard to their adverse effect on its enemies and rivals. His fellow-citizens are central to our thoughts when we are determining his •moral• character. Nature has implanted in everyone a greater affection for his own country •than for any other•, so we never expect any regard to distant nations when a competition arises. •Another quite different reason for attending primarily to what the statesman achieves for his own country depends not on its being *his own* but on its being *just one country*•. We're aware that the interests of *mankind in general* are better promoted when every man attends to the good of •his own community than they would be if everyone acted on the basis of a loose indeterminate view about the good of •the species. The latter motivation doesn't provide one with a suitably limited object on which to exert oneself; so no good can be expected to come from it.

of what is useful to society, and disapproval of what is dangerous or harmful. The strength of these sentiments in this or that kind of case may be the subject of controversy; but there can't be a viable theory or system that denies their existence.

A creature who is absolutely malicious and spiteful (if there is such a thing in nature) must be worse than merely *indifferent* to the images of vice and virtue. All his sentiments must be inverted, and be directly opposite to the sentiments that prevail in the human species. Anything that contributes to the good of mankind will run contrary to the constant direction of his wishes and desires, and must therefore produce uneasiness and disapproval in him; and on the other hand anything that is a source of disorder and misery in society must for the same reason be regarded by him with pleasure and satisfaction. Timon of Athens was called 'the manhater', probably more because of his depression than because of inveterate malice. One day he embraced Alcibiades with great fondness, saying 'Go on, my boy! Acquire the confidence of the people, then one day I foresee that you'll be the cause of great calamities to them.' (This story is from Plutarch.) If the Manicheans were right in their view that the universe is a battlefield between two principles or gods, one good one and the other evil, these two gods would have to have totally opposite sentiments concerning human actions as well as concerning everything else. Every case of justice and humanity that pleased one of the gods, because of its tendency to do good, would displease the other. All mankind so far resemble the good principle that our natural philanthropy inclines us always to give the happiness of society preference over its misery, and consequently to prefer

virtue to its opposite—except at times when self-interest or revenge or envy has perverted our disposition. It may be that absolute, unprovoked, disinterested malice never finds a place in any human breast; but if it does, it must there pervert all the sentiments of morals as well as the feelings of humanity. If Nero's cruelty had been entirely voluntary, rather than being an effect of constant fear and resentment, it's obvious that his steady and uniform approval would have gone to the cruel, treacherous, self-serving Tigellinus rather than to his two noble advisors Seneca and Burrhus.

A statesman or patriot who serves our own country in our own time will always have a more passionate respect paid to him than one whose beneficial influence operated long ago or in distant countries. That's because the good resulting from the generous humanity of the latter person, being less closely connected with us, is less brightly lit for us and affects us with a less lively sympathy. We may agree that their merit is equally great, although our sentiments are not raised to the same height by both. In a case like this, our judgment corrects the inequalities of our internal emotions and perceptions; just as it preserves us from being misled by the various images presented to our external senses. When the distance from us of an object is doubled, it then throws on the eye a picture half the size of the previous one; but we imagine that it looks the same size in both situations, because we know that its image would expand if we walked towards it, and that this expansion would come not from the object itself but from our position in relation to it. Indeed, without such a correction of appearances—both in internal and external sentiment—we could never think or talk steadily about anything, while our fluctuating situations continually

<sup>11</sup> For a similar reason, our moral determinations or general judgments are based on the tendencies or expectable consequences of actions and characters, not on the actual consequences that they happen to have. Though in our real feeling or sentiment we can't help taking a more favourable view of

varied the things we were talking about, throwing them into such different and contrary lights and positions.<sup>11</sup>

The more we converse with other people and the larger the set of social inter-relations that we maintain, the more familiar we'll become with these general preferences and distinctions, without which we could hardly speak intelligibly to each other. Every man's self-interest is special to himself, and the aversions and desires arising from it can't be supposed to mean as much to anyone else. So general language, which is formed for •general use, has to be moulded on some more •general views; its way of using words expressive of praise or blame have to be made to fit sentiments arising from the •general interests of the community. Granted that in most men these sentiments aren't as strong as the ones concerning private good, still, everyone's feelings—even those of the most depraved and selfish people—must make *some* distinction between what is generally beneficial and what isn't, attaching the notion of *good* to •generally• beneficent conduct and the notion of *evil* to the contrary. Let's admit that

•sympathy is much fainter than our concern for

ourselves, and that

•sympathy with persons far away is much fainter than sympathy with persons nearby.

But for precisely this reason we must, in our calm thinking and speaking about the characters of men, neglect all those differences—•setting aside self/other, near/far, and then/now—•and make our sentiments more public and social. And it's not just that we ourselves often change our situation in one of these respects; in addition to that, we're constantly meeting up with people whose situation is different from ours, people we could never talk with if we remained constantly in the position and point of view that is special to ourselves. So the interplay of sentiments in society and conversation makes us form some general unchanging standard by which we may approve or disapprove of characters and conduct. The heart doesn't entirely adopt those general notions, or regulate all its love and hatred by the universal abstract •moral• differences of vice and virtue, without regard to whether something affects oneself or one's near and dear. Still, these •abstract• moral differences have a lot of influence, and serve well enough for discourse at least,

•someone whose position joined to his virtue makes him really useful to society

than of

•someone who exercises the social virtues only in good intentions and benevolent affections, •because his social position doesn't enable him to do any actual good for society.

It isn't hard—and it is necessary—for us to separate each person's •character from •how things happen to work out for him; and having made this separation we judge these two persons to be morally on a par and give them the same general praise. Our judgment corrects the appearance, or tries to; but it can't entirely prevail over sentiment. Why is this peach-tree said to be better than that one, if not because it produces more or better fruit? And wouldn't we give the same praise to it even if snails or vermin had destroyed the peaches before they were ripe? In morals too, isn't *the tree known by the fruit*? And can't we easily distinguish nature from accident with the man as well as with the tree?

<sup>12</sup> Nature has wisely ordained that private connections should commonly prevail over universal views and considerations; otherwise our affections and actions would be dissipated and lost, for lack of a proper *limited* object. Thus, a small benefit done to ourselves or our near friends arouses more lively sentiments of love and approval than a great benefit done to a distant commonwealth. But still we •know to correct these inequalities by

which means that they serve all our purposes in company, in the pulpit, on the stage, and in the schools.<sup>12</sup>

Thus, in whatever light we take this subject, the merit ascribed to the social virtues still appears to be uniform, and arises chiefly from the concern that the natural sentiment of benevolence gets us to have for the interests of mankind and society. If we consider these drives that are built into the human make-up, as we encounter them in daily experience and observation, we must *a priori* conclude that a creature such as man *can't* be totally indifferent to the well-being or ill-being of his fellow-creatures, and *must* be disposed to pronounce straight off—in a case where nothing gives him any particular bias—that what promotes their happiness is good and what tends to their misery is bad, saying this without any qualifications or ifs or buts. [Strictly, an *a priori* belief owes nothing to experience, whereas this one, Hume says, rests on 'daily experience and observation'. But when on this page he speaks of looking at the matter *a posteriori* (the standard opposite of *a priori*), it seems that the distinction he is making is between **(1)** views about morality that are based on the **prior** facts about human nature from **(2)** views about morality that are based on facts about the consequences of morality, the facts that are **posterior** to it.] Here then are the faint rudiments or outlines, at least, of a *general* distinction between actions; and to the extent that any individual person's humanity intensifies •his connection with those who are injured or benefited and •the liveliness of his conception of their misery or happiness, his consequent censure or approval will become correspondingly more vigorous. A generous action barely mentioned in an old history book or a minor magazine needn't communicate any strong feelings of applause and admiration. When virtue is placed at such a distance, it's like a star: to the eye of reason it appears as

luminous as the sun at noon [i.e. as a matter of theory we think it is that bright], but it's so far away that it doesn't affect the senses with either light or heat. Bring this virtue nearer, by our acquaintance or connection with the people involved or even just by an eloquent description of the case, and then our hearts are immediately caught, our sympathy enlivened, and our cool approval converted into the warmest sentiments of friendship and respect. These seem to be necessary and certain consequences of the general principles of [= 'drives in'] human nature as revealed in common life and practice.

Now let us run all this in the opposite direction. Consider the matter *a posteriori*, thinking about consequences. Doesn't the merit of social virtue come in large measure from the feelings of humanity that such virtue produces in the spectators? It seems to be a plain matter of *fact* •that the utility of something—of *anything*—is a source of praise and approval; that utility is

- constantly appealed to in all moral decisions about the merit or demerit of actions;
- the only source of the high respect paid to justice, fidelity, honour, allegiance, chastity;
- inseparable from all the other social virtues—humanity, generosity, charity, friendliness, mildness, affability, gentleness, mercy and moderation; and, in short,
- a foundation for the chief part of morals, the part concerning mankind as a whole.

It appears also that in our general approval of characters and conduct, the useful tendency of the social virtues doesn't move us through self-interest, but has a much more universal and extensive influence. It appears that a tendency to public good and to the promoting of peace, harmony and

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thinking about them, and •retain a general standard of vice and virtue based chiefly on general usefulness. These corrections are like the ones we perform in processing what comes to us through our senses.

order in society always engages us on the side of the social virtues by working on the benevolent forces in the human make-up. And it appears, as an additional confirmation, that these drives of humanity and sympathy enter so deeply into all our sentiments, and have such a powerful influence, that they can arouse the strongest censure and applause. My present theory is the simple result of all these inferences, each of which seems to be based on uniform experience and observation.

If you aren't sure whether there's anything in our nature giving us •humanity or •a concern for others, think about this:

•We see in countless cases that anything tending to promote the interests of society is very highly approved of •by people in general•.

That should teach you that we have a drive to benevolence,

and that it is strong; because nothing could possibly please us as a means to an end if we didn't care in the least about the end. On the other hand, if you aren't sure whether there is implanted in our nature anything making us engage in moral blame and approval, think about this:

•We see in countless cases the influence of humane-ness.

From that you should infer that everything that promotes the interests of society must communicate pleasure, and what is harmful must give uneasiness. But when these different lines of thought come together in establishing the same conclusion, don't they put that conclusion beyond the reach of any doubt or denial?

But I hope to provide further confirmation for this theory when I present other sentiments of admiration and respect that come from the same source or from ones like it.

## Section 6: Qualities useful to ourselves

### Part 1

It seems clear that when we examine a quality or habit that someone has, if it shows up as being in any respect bad for the person in question, or if it incapacitates him for business and action, we immediately blame it, and count it among his faults and imperfections. Laziness, negligence, lack of order and method, obstinacy, fickleness, rashness, credulity—no-one ever regarded any of these qualities as neutral features of someone's character, let alone praised them as accomplishments or virtues! Their downside imme-

diately strikes our eye, and gives us the sentiment of pain and disapproval.

It's generally agreed that no quality is absolutely either blameable or praiseworthy; •i.e. there's no quality that is blameable whenever it occurs, and none that is praiseworthy whenever it occurs•. The moral status of a given instance of a quality depends on the *degree* to which the quality is present in it. The Aristotelians say that what makes something virtuous is its being appropriately between two extremes; •but that isn't seriously in conflict with my view, because• this *between* position is chiefly determined by usefulness.

Take the example of *speed* in business: if someone isn't fast enough, he'll make no progress in any project; if he goes too fast, he'll act precipitately and won't co-ordinate his doings properly with those of other people. That's the sort of reasoning we use in deciding what is the proper and commendable 'middle' in all moral and prudential contexts; and we never lose sight of the advantages that result from any character or habit. These advantages are enjoyed by the person who *has* the character ·or habit· we are judging; so whatever it is that makes the view of them agreeable to us, the spectators, and prompts our admiration and approval, it can't be self-love. [The \*starred\* passage expands what Hume wrote in ways that the ·small dots· convention can't easily indicate; it adds nothing to the content.] \*Someone might think that it's our self-love that is at work, co-operating with our imagination, thus:

- (1) Our imagination turns us into the other person, makes us imagine that we are him and are getting for *ourselves* the benefit of the valuable qualities that really belong to him.
- (2) Then imagination immediately whips us back into ourselves, and makes us love and esteem the person while seeing him as different from us.

But this can't be right. Our imagination lacks (1) the strength to perform the first operation, and (2) the speed to perform the second.\* Views and sentiments that are so opposite to

known truth and to each other could never be held at the same time by the same person. So we can rule out the suspicion that what look like expressions of benevolence are really selfish. What drives our feelings is something quite different, something that gives us a concern for the well-being of the person we are thinking about. When his natural talents and acquired abilities give us the prospect of his rising higher, advancing in his career, acquiring renown, having prosperous success, steadily mastering the mishaps that fate sends his way, and carrying out great or advantageous undertakings, we are impressed by these agreeable images and feel arising in us a satisfaction and respect towards him. The ideas of happiness, joy, triumph and prosperity are connected with every detail of his character, and spread through our minds a pleasing sentiment of sympathy and humanity.<sup>13</sup>

Try this supposition: A person whose fundamental nature is such that he has no kind of concern for his fellow-creatures, and regards the ·choice between· happiness and misery for all sentient beings with utter indifference—even more so than the choice between two colours for a curtain, when he can hardly tell them apart. If he were asked to choose between the prosperity of nations and their ruin, he would stand like the famous philosophical ass—equidistant from two indistinguishable bales of hay—irresolute and undetermined between equal motives; or rather, like the

<sup>13</sup> We can go so far as to say that there is no human creature to whom the appearance of happiness doesn't give pleasure, and the appearance of misery doesn't give uneasiness (setting aside cases where envy or revenge enter the picture). This seems inseparable from our make-up and constitution. But it's only the more generous minds that are prompted by this to try hard to procure the good of others, and to have a real passion for their welfare. With men of narrow and ungenerous spirits, the sympathy I have been speaking of is nothing more than a slight feeling of the imagination, which serves only to •arouse sentiments of satisfaction or censure, and to •affect what kinds of adjectives they will apply to the person. A clutching miser, for instance, praises industry and frugality extremely highly, even in others, and ranks them above all the other virtues. He knows the good that results from them, and feels that sort of happiness—the 'good will come of this' sort of happiness—with a livelier sympathy than ·he would get from thinking about· any other virtue. Yet it may be that he wouldn't part with a shilling to make the fortune of the industrious man whom he praises so highly.

same ass between two pieces of wood or of marble, with no inclination or leaning to either side. I think it must be granted that the person I have supposed, being absolutely unconcerned for the public good of a community or the private utility of others, would look on every quality, however harmful or beneficial to society or to the person who has it, with the same indifference as he would look on the most common and uninteresting object.

But if instead of this imagined monster we suppose a *man* to form a judgment or make a decision in the case—i.e. the choice between the prosperity of nations and their ruin—there is for him a plain basis for preference, other things being equal; and even if his choice is cool, his heart selfish, and the people concerned remote from him, there must still be for him a choice or distinction between what is useful and what is harmful. Now this useful/harmful distinction is the same in all its parts as the moral distinction whose basis has been so often and so fruitlessly searched for. The sentiment of morals and the sentiment of humanity are favoured by the same endowments of the mind, down to the finest detail; a temperament that is given to intense feelings of either of these kinds will also be given to intense feelings of the other kind. And when the objects come closer or are more closely connected, that enlivens each sentiment to the same degree. By all the rules of science, therefore, we must conclude that these sentiments are basically the same; since in every tiny detail they are governed by the same laws and moved by the same objects.

Why do scientists infer with the greatest certainty that the moon is kept in its orbit by the same force of gravity that makes bodies fall near the surface of the earth? Because when these effects are calculated, they are found to be similar and equal. Shouldn't this argument be as convincing in moral theories as in natural ones? [This occurrence of 'moral'

means 'having to do with human behaviour'. Hume's question is not 'Shouldn't this be as convincing in ethics as it is in empirical science?' and is more like 'Shouldn't this be as convincing in psychology as it is in physics?']

There's no need for me to produce lengthy detailed evidence that any quality that is useful to its possessor is approved of, and that any that's harmful to its possessor is censured. The least reflection on what we experience in everyday life will be sufficient. I'll just provide a few instances, in order to remove all doubt and hesitation—if I can.

·DISCRETION·

The quality that is most needed for carrying out any useful enterprise is *discretion*—being careful in our interrelations with others, attending properly to our own character and to theirs, weighing each detail of the project we are undertaking, and employing the surest and safest means for achieving any end or purpose. To people like Oliver Cromwell and the French churchman and politician and schemer Cardinal de Retz, discretion may appear to be 'an alderman-like virtue' [= 'a virtue suitable for a conscientious town councillor'], as Jonathan Swift calls it; it might really be a fault or imperfection in *them*, being incompatible with the vast projects to which their courage and ambition prompted them. But in ordinary everyday life no virtue is more needed, not just to succeed but to avoid spectacular failure. For someone who lacks discretion, his having many other virtues and strengths may be fatal to him. . . .

If it weren't *too* perfect for human nature, I would say that the best character is that which is not swayed by moods of any kind, but alternately employs enterprise and caution depending on which is useful for the particular purpose intended. That is the kind of excellence that an historian attributes to Marshal Turenne in his service to Louis XIV.:

The boldness of his military enterprises increased, campaign by campaign, until he reached the age and stage at which, knowing all about war from long experience, he could advance with greater firmness and security along the well-known road. Machiavelli remarks, 'about two military leaders in ancient Rome', that

Fabius was cautious and Scipio enterprising; each succeeded because when he had command the state of affairs in Rome was right for his talents; but both would have failed if the situations had been reversed.

It is good to be in a situation that suits one's frame of mind, but a more excellent person is the one who can suit his frame of mind to any situation.

·INDUSTRIOUSNESS·

What need is there to praise hard work, and to extol its advantages in the acquisition of power and riches? The tortoise, according to the fable, by sheer perseverance won the race against the much faster hare. When a man's time is well husbanded, it is like a cultivated field: a few acres of it produce more useful stuff than do extensive provinces that have the richest soil but are over-run with weeds and brambles. ['Husbanded' means 'managed', with a suggestion of the management of a farm.]

·FRUGALITY AND PRODIGALITY ·

[A prodigal is someone who spends extravagantly. The standard label for Jesus's 'parable of the prodigal son' refers not to the son's 'leaving home and then returning but to his 'wasting his substance in riotous living'.] But there's not much chance of succeeding in life, or even of surviving in tolerable conditions, unless one is reasonably frugal. For someone who is not frugal, the heap of his money, instead of increasing, decreases day by day. This leaves him intensely unhappy, because if he couldn't keep his expenses within the confines of a 'large income he

certainly won't be able to live contentedly on a 'small one! Plato writes that the souls of men who are inflamed with impure appetites, when they lose the body that was their only source of satisfaction, 'hover about the earth, 'haunt the places where their bodies are burning, and 'hanker to recover their lost organs of sensation (*Phaedo* 80c-81e). It is like that with worthless prodigals who have spent their fortune in wild debauches. They still have the organs of sensation, because they aren't dead yet; but they have lost the financial means to gratify their appetites, and so they gatecrash well-provided dinners and parties of pleasure, hated even by the dissolute and despised even by fools.

At one extreme of frugality—or, more accurately, of the scale that has frugality near the mid-point—is *miserliness*. This is rightly censured for two reasons: it deprives a man of all use of his riches, and it gets in the way of hospitality and every social enjoyment. At the other end of the scale is *prodigality*, which is commonly more hurtful to the man himself. Which of these extremes is regarded as worse than the other depends on the temperament of the person who is doing the judging. . . .

·VIRTUES WITH COMPLEX MORAL SOURCES·

Qualities often get their merit from complicated sources. *Honesty*, *fidelity* and *truthfulness* are praised because of their immediate tendency to promote the interests of society; but once they have been established on this foundation, these virtues are also regarded as advantageous to the person who has them, and as the source of the trust and confidence that a man must have if he is to get any respect in life. Someone who lacks these three virtues is found to be contemptible because he forgets the duty he owes to himself, and odious because he forgets the duty he owes to society.

This consideration may be one chief source of the intense blame attaching to unchastity in a woman. The greatest

respect that women can get comes from their fidelity; and a woman who fails in this becomes cheap and vulgar, loses her rank, and is exposed to every insult. The smallest failure in this respect is enough to blast her character. She has so many opportunities for secretly indulging her sexual appetites that the only way we can be sure of her is for her to have absolute modesty and reserve; and once the wall has been breached, it can hardly ever be fully repaired. If a **man** behaves with **cowardice** on one occasion, brave conduct on a later occasion will restore his reputation. But if a **woman** once behaves in a **dissolute** fashion, what can she then do to make us sure that she has formed better resolutions and has enough self-control to act on them?

It's agreed that men are equal in their desire, but few succeed in achieving it. One large cause of this is the lack of the *strength of mind* needed to enable a man to resist the temptation of present ease or pleasure, and carry him forward in the search of profit and enjoyment further on in the future. When we look in a general way on the objects of our likes and dislikes, we decide on certain rules of conduct and certain measures of preference for one kind of object over another. These decisions result from our calm passions and inclinations—for what else could declare any object to be desirable or undesirable? And yet they are often said, in a natural misuse of words, to be decisions reached by pure reason and reflection. But when some of these objects

•come nearer to us in time or in space, or •acquire the advantage of being seen in a more flattering light or from a more favourable angle, which catch the heart or imagination,

our general resolutions are frequently defeated, a small enjoyment is preferred, and lasting shame and sorrow are brought down on us. And however much wit and eloquence poets expend in celebrating present pleasure, and rejecting all

long-distance views of fame, health or fortune, it is *obvious* that this practice of favouring the present at the expense of the future is the source of all dissoluteness and disorder, all repentance and misery. A man with a strong and determined mind sticks to his general resolutions, and isn't seduced by the allurements of pleasure or terrified by threats of pain; but keeps his eye steadily on the distant pursuits by which he ensures *both* his happiness *and* his honour.

A certain degree of *self-satisfaction* is an advantage, equally for the fool and for the wise man. But there is no other character-trait, and no other aspect of life, where the fool and the wise man are on an equal footing. Business, books, conversation—a fool is totally unfit for all of these, and remains a useless burden on the earth except for the possibly useful coarse drudgery that he is condemned to by his position in life. That's why we find that men are extremely protective of *this* aspect of their character; there are many examples of men openly and fully declaring their own profligacy and treachery, but there are no examples of men placidly accepting that they are regarded as ignorant and stupid, let alone examples of men loudly declaring their ignorance and stupidity. . . . No affectionate connection is strong enough to survive the disgust arising from this character, i.e. from the belief that some person that one has dealings with is stupid and ignorant. (Actually, there is one exception to what I have just said. It is the affection of parents for their offspring, which is the strongest and most indissoluble bond in nature.) Love itself, which can survive treachery, ingratitude, malice and infidelity, is immediately extinguished by stupidity when it is perceived and acknowledged; the passion of love is not diminished by ugliness and old age more than it is by stupidity. That is a measure of how dreadful we find the ideas of an utter incapacity for any project or undertaking, and of continued

error and misconduct in life.

Think about the questions that can be asked about which of two kinds of understanding is more excellent:

- Quickness or slowness on the uptake? The ability to penetrate far into a subject straight off with no ability to do anything through study, or the opposite character, which has to work everything out through hard concentrated work?
- A clear head or a richly inventive one?
- Profundity of thought or sureness of judgment?

Obviously, we can't answer any of these questions without considering which qualities equip a man best for the world, and carry him furthest in anything he undertakes.

If •refined sense and •exalted sense aren't as useful as •common sense, their rarity and novelty and the nobleness of their objects compensate somewhat for this and make •them the admiration of mankind. In the same way, gold is less serviceable than iron, but is much more valuable than iron because of its scarcity.

•MEMORY•

The defects of judgment can't be made up for by any skills or inventions; but defects of memory can often be made up for in business and in scholarship, by being methodical and hard-working, and by thoroughness in writing everything down. We hardly ever hear 'a short memory' given as a reason for a man's failure in any undertaking. But in ancient times, when no man could rise to prominence without a talent for speaking, and when the audience were too delicate to put up with such crude, undigested harangues as today's impromptu orators offer to public assemblies, the faculty of memory was of the utmost consequence and was accordingly much more valued than it is these days. Almost every great genius who is mentioned in antiquity is celebrated for this talent; and Cicero includes it in his list of the sublime

qualities of Caesar himself: 'He had talent, intelligence, memory, writing skill, attentiveness, reflective judgment, diligence.'

Particular customs and manners make a difference to how useful a personal quality is; they also make a difference to its merit. Particular situations and events have to some extent the same influence. Someone who has the talents and accomplishments that suit his social position and his profession will always be more admired than someone to whom the luck of the draw has assigned a social place that is wrong for him. The private or selfish virtues are in this respect •more arbitrary than the public and social ones. In other respects they may be •less liable to doubt and controversy.

In recent years in Great Britain, men in active life have spouted so much about their public spirit, and theoreticians and scholars have gone on so much about benevolence, that men of the world are apt, without any bad intention, to reveal a sullen incredulity about those moral endowments, and even sometimes to deny that they exist at all. (They have been encouraged in this attitude by the fact that many *false* claims to public spirit or benevolence have been detected.) This seems to me to resemble something that happened in the ancient world: the perpetual cant of the stoics and cynics concerning virtue, their splendid claims to virtue and its small part in their lives made people disgusted •with virtue as well as with them•; and Lucian, a very moral writer (except for being licentious with regard to pleasure), couldn't write about the much-boasted-of virtue without betraying symptoms of bad temper and irony. [Hume has a footnote here, quoting (in Greek) some of Lucian's turns of phrase.] But surely this peevish fault-finding, wherever it comes from, can never be taken so far as to make us deny the existence of every species of merit, and all distinctions of manners

and behaviour. There are character-traits whose very names force one to agree that they have merit—‘discretion’, ‘caution’, ‘enterprise’, ‘industry’, ‘assiduity’, ‘frugality’, ‘economy’, ‘good sense’, ‘prudence’, ‘discernment’; and besides these there are many others to which the most determined scepticism can’t for a moment refuse the tribute of praise and approval. Temperance, sobriety, patience, constancy, perseverance, forethought, considerateness, the ability to keep secrets, orderliness, persuasiveness in speech, presence of mind, quickness of conception, ease of expression—these and a thousand more of the same kind won’t ever be denied by anyone to be excellencies and perfections. Their merit consists in their tendency to serve the person who has them, with no grand claims to public and social merit, and that makes us less grudging in admitting their claims, and we readily put them on the list of praiseworthy qualities. Although we aren’t aware of this at the time, by granting the merit of those characteristics we have paved the way for all the other moral excellences, so that we can’t consistently hesitate any longer about the existence and moral status of disinterested benevolence, patriotism and humanity.

We have before us now **(1)** the self-regarding virtues that I listed earlier, and **(2)** the social virtues of justice and beneficence. You might at first glance think it would be easier to represent **(1)** theoretically as disguised self-love than to represent **(2)** in that way; but the truth turns out to be the exact opposite! To make a case for **(2)**’s being disguised self-love, we need only say that whatever conduct promotes the good of the community is loved, praised and admired by the community because of the good it brings to the community and thus to every member of it. In fact, what’s being talked about here is not *self-love* but *gratitude*, and the distinction between these is pretty obvious; still, a superficial reasoner might overlook it; so those who

are sceptical about **(2)** justice and benevolence have *some* ground to stand on, at least for a moment. In contrast with that, qualities **(1)** that tend only to the advantage of the person who has them, without any reference to us or to the community, are nevertheless admired and valued by us and the community. What theory or system is there that will account for *this* sentiment in terms of self-love, deriving it from that favourite origin? It seems that we *have to* admit that the happiness and misery of others are not matters of entire indifference to us; and that the view of happiness, whether in its causes or its effects, gives us a secret joy and satisfaction comparable with (to take a humdrum example) the satisfaction of seeing sunshine on a well cultivated field; while the appearance of misery affects us in the kind of way in which a dark rain-cloud or a barren landscape throws a melancholy damp over our imagination. And once *this* concession has been made, the difficulty is over; we can hope that, from here on, a natural unforced interpretation of the phenomena of human life will prevail among all those who work on moral theory.

## Part 2

I have been discussing the way our sentiments of respect and esteem for a person arise from his **(1)** qualities of mind. It would be a good idea now to examine how these sentiments of ours are influenced by **(2)** a person’s bodily endowments and by **(3)** whatever advantages he has—e.g. inherited wealth—through the luck of the draw. Our aim will be to see whether these phenomena strengthen or weaken my theory. It will naturally be expected—and it was supposed by all the ancient moralists—that **(2)** physical beauty will be similar in some respects to **(1)** beauty of the mind; and that every kind of esteem we have for a man will have something

similar in its origin, whether it arises from his **(1)** mental endowments or from **(3)** his exterior circumstances.

One considerable source of beauty in any animal, obviously, is the advantage it gets from the particular structure of its body—the advantage in the particular way of life that nature has destined the animal for. The best proportions of a horse as described by Xenophon and Virgil are the same ones that are accepted today by our modern horse-dealers, because they have the same foundation, namely experience of what is detrimental or useful in the animal.

Broad shoulders, a lank belly, firm joints, tapering legs—all these are beautiful in *our* species because they are signs of force and vigour. Ideas of usefulness and its opposite, though they don't entirely settle what is handsome or ugly, are clearly the source of a considerable part of our approval or dislike.

In ancient times, bodily strength and dexterity were much more esteemed and valued than they are today, because back then they were much more useful and important in war than they are today. We obviously find this in Homer and the poets; but even the ancient historians mention *bodily strength* among the accomplishments of the heroes they write about. Even the Theban general Epaminondas, whom the

historians acknowledge to be the greatest hero, statesman and general of all the Greeks, was praised for his physical strength.<sup>14</sup>

[He gives another example, Pompey as described by Sallust. Then:] This is like what I said about memory: physical strength, like memory, was more importantly useful in ancient times than it is now.

Sexual impotence brings down on a person derision and contempt, from women as well as men. That's because of how very *unuseful* impotence is: the unfortunate sufferer from it is seen as being deprived of an important kind of pleasure and at the same time disabled from giving such pleasure to others. If a woman is barren, that is held against her because barrenness is a kind of *inutility* [= 'a way of *not* being useful'], but our reaction to barrenness is not as intense as our reaction to impotence; and my theory makes very obvious the reason for this, namely that the disadvantages coming from barrenness are less extensive than those that come from impotence.

There is no rule in painting or sculpture more indispensable than that of balancing the figures, and placing them with the greatest exactness on their proper centre of gravity. A figure that isn't balanced properly is ugly, because it gives

<sup>14</sup> To grasp the idea of perfect merit that prevailed in those times, look at what Diodorus Siculus wrote about Epaminondas: 'In other illustrious men you'll observe that each possessed some one shining quality that was the foundation of his fame. But in Epaminondas all the virtues are found united—bodily strength, eloquence of expression, vigour of mind, lack of interest in riches, gentleness of disposition, and—the main thing—courage and conduct in war.'

<sup>15</sup> All men are equally liable to pain and disease and sickness; and may again recover health and ease. Because these circumstances don't distinguish one man from another, they aren't a source of pride or humility, respect or contempt. But comparing our own species to superior ones—such as the angels that theologians tell us about—is a very humbling practice, reminding us that we are all so liable to diseases and infirmities while the angels aren't; and theologians accordingly go on about this in an attempt to lower our self-satisfaction and vanity.

**Hume's next sentence:** They would have more success, if the common bent of our thoughts were not perpetually turned to compare ourselves with others.

**He may have meant:** They would have more success in this if we weren't already familiar with that contrast because we have often compared ourselves with others, including angels.

us the disagreeable ideas of *fall*, *harm* and *pain*.<sup>15</sup>

A disposition or cast of mind that qualifies a man to rise in the world and advance his fortune is entitled to •esteem and •respect, as I have already explained. So it can naturally be supposed that the actual possession of riches and authority will have a considerable influence over •these sentiments.

If we look for an hypothesis through which we can explain people's respect for the rich and powerful, the only satisfactory one we'll find is the theory that this respect comes from the spectator's enjoyment of the images he gets of prosperity, happiness, ease, plenty, authority, and the gratification of every appetite. There are other theories, of course, but they don't do the job. For example, some philosophers make so much of self-love that they consider it to be the source of every sentiment, but it is clearly inadequate for this purpose. In the absence of any good-will or friendship, it is hard to see what could be our basis for hoping for advantage from the riches of others; yet we naturally respect the rich, even before they reveal any such favourable disposition towards us.

We have these same sentiments even when we are so far out of the person's sphere of activity that we can't even think that he *could* do us any good. In all civilized nations a prisoner of war is treated with a respect appropriate to his social level, and obviously a man's riches go a long way towards settling what his social status is. If •birth and •rank come into this also, that provides yet another argument *for* my thesis. When we call someone 'a man of birth', what do we mean but that he is descended from a long succession of rich and powerful ancestors, so that

we esteem him because of his connection with people we esteem? Thus, his ancestors are respected partly because of their riches, although we can't expect anything from them, because they are dead.

I don't have to go so far as prisoners of war or the dead to find examples of this disinterested [= 'not *self*-interested'] respect for riches. Look carefully at things that happen all the time in ordinary life and conversation. Let's suppose that a man who is reasonably well off is introduced to a company of strangers: he naturally treats them with different degrees of respect, depending on what he is told about their different fortunes and conditions; yet he can't possibly think he will get any monetary advantage from any of them, and perhaps wouldn't accept it even if he *could*. When a traveller is admitted into company, he always meets with a degree of civility that is proportional to what his attendants and his gear indicate about how rich he is. In short, the different social rankings of men are to a large extent regulated by riches, and that holds for superiors as well as inferiors, for strangers as well as people we know.

Why do we want riches for ourselves? Because they are a means of gratifying our present or possible future appetites. Why does someone's being rich create esteem for him in others? What I have been saying seems to force us to the conclusion that the same answer holds: it's because riches are a means of gratifying appetites. This indeed is their very nature or essence: they are directly connected with the commodities, conveniences and pleasures of life. When that connection is broken—as with an IOU from a bankrupt banker, or gold on a desert island—'riches' aren't riches any

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**Or he may have meant:** They'd have more success in this if we paid attention to their contrast between ourselves and angels, rather than busily comparing ourselves with other people.

The infirmities of old age are upsetting because we can compare ourselves with the young. . . .

more. When we approach a man who is, as we say, 'at his ease' [or today, perhaps, 'in comfortable circumstances'], we are presented with the pleasing ideas of abundance, satisfaction, cleanliness, warmth; a cheerful house, elegant furniture, good servants, and whatever is desirable in food, drink and clothing. When a poor man appears, on the other hand, our imagination is immediately struck by disagreeable images of want, poverty, drudgery, dirty furniture, coarse or ragged clothes, disgusting food and nasty drink. What else do we mean by saying that one is 'rich', the other 'poor'? And as respect ·in one case· and contempt ·in the other· is the natural consequence of those different situations in life, it is easy to see that these facts throw light on, and help to confirm, the theory I have presented regarding all moral distinctions.<sup>16</sup>

Consider a man who has cured himself of all ridiculous assumptions and is fully, sincerely, and steadily convinced—from experience as well as from philosophy—that the difference of fortune makes less difference in happiness than most people think. This man won't measure out degrees of esteem according to the incomes of the people he knows. He may *outwardly* defer to the great lord more than to the

peasant, because riches are the most convenient (because the most fixed and determinate) source of distinction. But his *inner* sentiments are governed by men's personal characters rather than by the accidental and whimsical favours of fortune.

In most countries of Europe, the chief source of distinction is *family*, i.e. hereditary wealth marked with titles and symbols from the king. In England more respect is paid to *present* opulence and plenty. Each practice has its advantages and disadvantages. The disadvantage of respecting birth is that inactive, spiritless minds remain in haughty idleness, and dream of nothing but pedigrees and genealogies; the advantage is that those who have energies and ambition put them to work in the search for honour and authority, reputation and favour. The disadvantage of focussing respect on riches is that this encourages corruption, bribery, plundering; the advantage is that it encourages arts, manufactures, commerce and agriculture. The 'family' prejudice is more favourable to military virtue, so that it's more suited to monarchies. The 'riches' prejudice is the chief spur to hard work, so that it agrees better with a republican government. . . .

<sup>16</sup> There's something extraordinary and seemingly inexplicable in the way our emotions behave when we consider the fortune and circumstances of others. Very often someone else's advancement and **prosperity** produces •envy, which has a strong mixture of •hatred, and arises chiefly from comparing ourselves with the other person. Yet at the very same time, or at least rapidly alternating with the envy, we may feel the passion of •respect, which is a kind of •affection or •good-will, with a mixture of •humility. On the other hand, the **misfortunes** of our fellows often cause •pity, which has in it a strong mixture of •good-will. This sentiment of pity is closely related to •contempt, which is a kind of •dislike with •pride mixed in. I point out these facts just as interesting to think about for those who are studying the human condition. For my present purposes, all I need is the fact that power and riches commonly cause respect, and poverty and meanness cause contempt, though in particular contexts the emotions of envy and of pity may enter the picture.

## Section 7: Qualities immediately agreeable to ourselves

### ·CHEERFULNESS·

Have you ever spent an evening with sad, serious people, and seen what happened when a good-humoured and lively person joined the group? How quickly the conversation came to life and cheerfulness diffused itself over everyone's face, talk, and behaviour? If so, you'll have no trouble agreeing that cheerfulness carries great merit with it and naturally draws in the good-will of mankind. Indeed, no other quality more readily communicates itself to all around; because no other has a greater propensity to display itself in cheerful talk and pleasant entertainment. The flame spreads through the whole circle, and the most sullen and gloomy are often ignited by it. I have trouble agreeing with the Latin poet Horace that 'the melancholy hate the merry'; because it has always been my experience that when the jollity is moderate and decent, serious people are all the more delighted because it dissipates the gloom that usually oppresses them, and gives them an unusual enjoyment.

The power of cheerfulness to communicate itself and to draw approval shows us that there is another set of mental qualities which, without being useful or tending to produce further good for the community or for the person who has the quality, give satisfaction to the beholders and procure friendship and respect. Having one of these qualities *feels good*; other people enter into the same mood and catch the sentiment by a contagion or natural sympathy; and as we can't help loving whatever gives us pleasure, a kindly emotion

arises towards the person who gives so much satisfaction. As between a cheerful person and a melancholy, dejected, sullen, anxious person, the former is more enlivening to be with, his presence gives us more serene contentment and enjoyment, and we find it more agreeable to enter into his feelings and disposition. That explains our affection and approval for the cheerful person, and our aversion and disgust towards the gloomy one.<sup>17</sup>

Few men would envy the character that Caesar attributes to Cassius in Shakespeare's famous play:

He loves no play,  
As thou dost, Anthony: he hears no music:  
Seldom he smiles; and smiles in such a sort,  
As if he mocked himself, and scorned his spirit  
That could be moved to smile at any thing.

Just before this, Caesar has said that 'Such men are dangerous', and so they commonly are; but also they can never become agreeable to others, or contribute to social entertainment, because they have so little enjoyment within themselves. In all civilized nations a liking for pleasure, if accompanied by temperance and decency, has always been regarded as a considerable merit, even in the greatest men; and in those of inferior rank and character it is needed even more. The French writer Saint-Évremond gives an attractive picture of this aspect of his frame of mind: 'I love virtue without austerity, Pleasure without effeminacy, Life without fearing its end.'

<sup>17</sup> Everyone is from time to time affected with all the disagreeable passions—fear, anger, dejection, grief, melancholy, anxiety, and so on. But to the extent that these are natural and universal, they make no difference between one man and another, and can never be the object of blame. It's only when a person's temperament gives him a *general tendency* to have one or more of these disagreeable passions that they disfigure his character, creating a sentiment of disapproval in the spectator by making him uneasy.

## •SUBLIMITY•

[In this next paragraph: ‘disdain of slavery’ means ‘proud refusal to knuckle under to anyone’. Your disdain of slavery is your attitude to *your* being subject to someone else; you may not dislike the idea of *my* being subjected to someone else. Also, both here and further on, ‘slavery’ covers all sorts of knuckling-under, including ones that aren’t as extreme as ‘slavery’ in our literal sense of the word.] Who is not struck with any notable instance of greatness of mind or dignity of character? with elevation of sentiment, disdain of slavery, and the noble pride and spirit that arises from conscious virtue? Longinus writes that •sublimity is often nothing but the echo or image of magnanimity ·i.e. greatness of mind·; and when someone manifests •this quality, even if he doesn’t utter a word, he arouses our applause and admiration. An example of this is the famous silence of Ajax in the *Odyssey*, a silence that expresses a nobler disdain and more resolute indignation than any language can convey. . . .

‘Go!’ cries Alexander to his soldiers who had refused to follow him to India, ‘Go and tell your countrymen that you left Alexander completing the conquest of the world.’ The Prince of Condé, who always admired this passage, commented: ‘Alexander, abandoned by his soldiers among barbarians, not yet fully subdued, felt in himself such a dignity and right of empire that he couldn’t believe it possible that anyone would refuse to obey him. It made no difference to him whether he was in Europe or in Asia, among Greeks or among Persians, wherever he found men he expected to find subjects.’

In Corneille’s tragedy *Médée*, a friend advises Medea to be cautious and submissive, lists the distresses of that unfortunate heroine, and asks her ‘What do you have to

support yourself against your many implacable enemies?’ She replies: ‘Myself! Myself, I say, and that is enough.’ Boileau rightly recommends this passage as an instance of true sublimity.

When Phocion, the modest gentle Phocion, was being led to execution, he turned to one of his fellow-sufferers who was lamenting his own hard fate, and said: ‘Isn’t it glory enough for you that you die with Phocion?’ (This is from Plutarch’s *Lives*, ‘Phocion’.)

Contrast that with the picture Tacitus draws of Vitellius: no longer Emperor, prolonging his period of shame because of his wretched love of life, handed over to the merciless rabble; tossed, punched and kicked around; forced by a dagger held under his chin to raise his head and expose himself to everyone’s abuse. What abject infamy! What low humiliation! Yet even here, says Tacitus, he showed some symptoms of a mind not wholly degenerate. To a tribune who insulted him he said ‘I am still your Emperor’.<sup>18</sup>

[This paragraph uses ‘mean’ in a sense that was current in Hume’s time but not today. A beggar asks whiningly ‘Can you spare a dime?’ and I say ‘No’. My answer may show that I am ‘mean’ in our sense; the beggar’s question shows that he is ‘mean’ in Hume’s sense.] In our ordinary everyday dealings with one another, we never excuse a total lack of •spirit and •dignity of character, i.e. of •a proper sense of what is due to one’s self. This vice constitutes what we properly call ‘meanness’, when a man

- submits to the basest slavery [see note above] in order to gain his ends,
- fawns on those who mistreat him, or
- degrades himself by intimacies and familiarities with

<sup>18</sup> Tacitus, *Histories*, 3:84-5. He starts this narration thus: ‘As he was led away with his clothing all tattered, a dreadful spectacle, many cursed him and no-one wept. The ugliness of his exit had driven out compassion.’ To get a proper sense of this way of thinking, he have to make allowance for the ancient maxim: Everyone has a right to dispose of his life, and after anyone’s life becomes dishonorable he has not only a •right but a •duty to part with it.

undeserving inferiors.

The first two of these are somewhat connected with one another, but not with the third, which is an entirely different way of shamefully letting oneself down. A certain degree of noble-minded pride or self-value is so much needed for a worthwhile life that when someone's mind lacks it we find that upsetting in the same way as we are upset by someone's lacking a nose or an eye.<sup>19</sup>

·COURAGE·

The usefulness of courage, both to the public and to the person who has it, is an obvious foundation of merit. But if you think about it you'll see that this quality has a special shine on it that comes not from its consequences but wholly from itself and from the noble elevation that always accompanies it. The figure of courage as depicted by painters and poets displays in each feature a sublimity and daring confidence that catches the eye, draws the affections, and through sympathy spreads a similar sublimity of feeling over every spectator.

In a speech by the Athenian orator and politician Demosthenes, defending his administration and justifying the obstinate love of liberty with which he had inspired the Athenians, he represented Philip of Macedon in these glowing colours:

I beheld Philip, the very Philip with whom you have been fighting, pursuing empire and dominion while exposing himself to every wound—his eye gored, his neck twisted, his arm and thigh pierced—whatever part of his body fortune should seize on, he cheerfully

gave it up, provided that he could live in honour and renown with what remained. Shall it be said that he, born in Pella, a place that used to be mean and ignoble, was inspired with such high ambition and thirst for fame while you, who are Athenians . . .

. . . and on he went. These praises arouse the most lively admiration; and we can see that the view the orator presents doesn't bring in anything about the future advantageous consequences of Philip's valour; it doesn't go beyond the hero himself,

[Hume now gives three examples of peoples who valued courage more highly than civilised people would in modern times. The ancient Romans called courage 'virtue', thereby rating it higher than any other moral qualities. The Suevi, as reported by Tacitus, went in for elaborate hair-styling, not for romantic purposes but to frighten their enemies. The Scythians, as reported by Herodotus, admired most the warriors who had the largest decorative cloths made from their enemies' scalps. He continues:] That shows how greatly, among the Scythians as well as many other nations, bravery in war destroyed the sentiments of humanity, which is surely a much more useful and attractive virtue.

We can see indeed that in all the uncultivated nations that haven't yet had a full experience of the advantages that come with beneficence, justice, and the social virtues, courage is regarded as the predominant excellence, the one that is most celebrated by poets, recommended by parents and instructors, and admired by people in general. The ethics of Homer are in this respect very different from those

<sup>19</sup> The absence of a virtue can often be a vice, and sometimes one of the worst sort. Meanness is one example of that; ingratitude is another. Where we expect a beauty, the disappointment gives us an uneasy sensation and produces a real ugliness. And abjectness of character—i.e. meanness—is disgusting and contemptible in another way also. Where a man has no sense of value *in himself*, we aren't likely to rate him any higher. And if someone who crouches to his superiors is insolent to his inferiors (as often happens), the second kind of behaviour doesn't cancel out the first; it adds to it, making the man still more odious through the addition of a further vice. (See Section 8.)

of Fénelon, his elegant modern imitator. They were well suited to an age in which—as reported by Thucydides—one hero could ask another ‘Are you a robber?’, without giving offence. Not so long ago similar ethics prevailed also in many barbarous parts of Ireland, if we can believe the poet Edmund Spenser’s judicious account of the state of affairs in that kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

·TRANQUILLITY·

Belonging to the same class of virtues as courage is the undisturbed philosophical tranquillity that enables one to rise above pain, sorrow, anxiety, and each assault of bad luck. Conscious of his own virtue, say the philosophers, the tranquil sage elevates himself above every chance happening, and from his secure place in the temple of wisdom he looks down on inferior mortals engaged in pursuit of honours, riches, reputation and every frivolous enjoyment. No doubt a full-strength version of this attitude is far too magnificent for human nature. But the attitude carries with it a grandeur that seizes the spectator and arouses his admiration. And the nearer we can come in practice to this sublime tranquillity and even-mindedness (not to be confused with the insensibility produced by stupor!), the more secure enjoyment we shall attain within ourselves and the more greatness of mind we shall reveal to the world. This philosophical tranquillity may indeed be considered as just one form of magnanimity [= ‘greatness of mind’].

Look at Socrates!—his perpetual serenity and contentment amidst the greatest poverty and domestic troubles, his resolute contempt [see note on page 10] for riches, and his magnanimous care for preserving liberty, while refusing all help from his friends and disciples, so as to avoid even

the very mild dependence that consisted of being obliged to someone. Who doesn’t admire him? . . .

Among the ancients, the philosophical heroes as well as the military and patriotic ones have a grandeur and force of sentiment that astonishes our narrow minds—we quickly reject it as extravagant and supernatural. But then suppose the ancients had an accurate representation of us—and especially of the degree of humanity, clemency, order, tranquillity, and other social virtues that we have achieved in the administration of government in modern times. They would have had good reason to regard our way of doing things as romantic and incredible! That is how nature—or rather culture—has handled the uneven distribution of excellences and virtues in those different ages.

·BENEVOLENCE·

I have already explained the merit that benevolence has because of its usefulness, its tendency to promote the good of mankind; and that’s certainly the source of a considerable part of everyone’s esteem for it. But that is not the only thing that makes benevolence attractive to us. The softness and tenderness of this sentiment, its engaging endearments, its fond expressions, its delicate attentions, and all the flow of mutual confidence and concern that enters into a warm attachment of love and friendship—these feelings are delightful *in themselves*, so they are bound to communicate themselves to the spectators, and melt them into the same fondness and delicacy. A tear naturally starts in our eye when we see a warm sentiment of this kind, our breast heaves, our heart is agitated, and every humane tender activator in our make-up is set in motion and gives us the

<sup>20</sup> He writes: ‘It is a common custom among their gentlemen’s sons that as soon as they are able to use their weapons they immediately round up three or four stragglers or foot-soldiers and wander idly around the country with them, stealing only food; until eventually the young gentleman runs up against real resistance and has to cope with it; and once this is known he is regarded as a man of worth in whom there is courage.’

purest and most satisfactory enjoyment.

When poets describe the Elysian fields, whose blessed inhabitants have no need of each others' assistance, they still represent them as maintaining constant exchanges of love and friendship, and soothe our minds with the pleasing image of these soft and gentle passions. . . .

Who would want to live amidst perpetual wrangling, scolding and mutual reproaches? The roughness and harshness of those emotions disturb and displease us; we suffer by contagion and sympathy [see note on page 6]; and we can't remain indifferent spectators, even if we are certain that the angry passions we are observing won't have any harmful consequences.

Here is proof positive that benevolence doesn't get all its merit from its usefulness. We sometimes gently blame someone for being 'too good'; we say this if he exceeds his part in society and takes his care for others beyond the proper bounds. Similarly, we say that someone is 'too high-spirited', 'too daring', 'too unconcerned about fortune'—these being reproaches that really, basically, imply more admiration than many speeches of praise do. Being accustomed to score the merit and demerit of characters chiefly by their useful or harmful tendencies, we can't help applying the *language* of blame when we encounter a sentiment that is so intense as to be harmful; but it can happen at the same time that the sentiment's noble elevation, or its lovable tenderness, so grips the heart that it increases our friendship and concern for the person.<sup>21</sup>

•SOME OTHER EXAMPLES•

The amours and attachments of Henry IV of France, during the civil wars between Protestants and Catholics, frequently

hurt his interests and the cause he was fighting for; but many people—the young, the amorous, and perhaps others who can sympathize with the tender passions—will agree that this was a weakness in him while also admitting that it's what chiefly endears that hero to them and interests them in his fortunes.

The excessive bravery and resolute inflexibility of Charles XII ruined his own country and made trouble for all his neighbours; but those personal characteristics of his have such splendour and greatness in their appearance that they strike us with admiration. We might even to some extent *approve* of them if it weren't for the fact that they sometimes reveal clear symptoms of madness.

The Athenians claimed to have invented •agriculture and laws, and they always valued themselves extremely because of the benefit these two inventions brought to the whole race of mankind. They also boasted, and with reason, of their •war-like enterprises, particularly against the innumerable fleets and armies of Persians that invaded Greece during the reigns of Darius and Xerxes. As for the usefulness of these two achievements, one peaceful and the other military, there's simply no comparison; and yet we find that the orators who have written so elaborately in praise of that famous city have chiefly triumphed in displaying its warlike achievements. Lysias, Thucydides, Plato and Isocrates all reveal that same preference or bias. This attitude to military glory, though it is condemned by calm reason and reflection, seems to be very natural in the mind of man.

We can see that the great charm of poetry consists in lively pictures that it draws of the sublime passions (magnanimity, courage, disdain of fortune) or of the tender affections (love and friendship), which warm the heart and spread through

<sup>21</sup> Someone may be blamed for an excess of cheerfulness; but this could hardly happen if it weren't for the fact that dissolute mirth without no proper cause or subject is a sure mark of folly, which makes it disgusting.

it similar sentiments and emotions. In fact we find that **(1)** *all* kinds of passion, even disagreeable kinds like grief and anger, convey satisfaction when aroused by poetry; but **(2)** •the more elevated or softer affections have a special influence, and bring pleasure from more than one cause or source. Not to mention that •they alone interest us in the fortune of the persons represented, or create in us any esteem and affection for their character. [Hume says that **(1)** involves a mechanism of nature that it isn't easy to explain. His own attempt to explain it is his essay 'Tragedy'.]

And can it possibly be doubted that the poet's ability to move the passions. . . is a very considerable merit? And that enhanced by its extreme rarity, it can exalt the person who has it above every character of the age in which he lives? The prudence, skill, steadiness, and benign government of •the

Roman Emperor • Augustus, adorned with all the splendour of his noble birth and imperial crown, are not enough to bring his fame up to the level of Virgil's, though the fame of Virgil is supported by nothing but the divine beauties of his poetical genius. . . .

I have presented examples of the various species of merit that are valued for the immediate pleasure they give to the person who has them. This sentiment of approval isn't in any way based on usefulness, or future beneficial consequences; yet it is similar in kind to the other sentiment, the one that *does* arise from thoughts about public or private usefulness. What the two have in common is that they both arise from social sympathy or fellow-feeling with human happiness or misery; and the way this keeps turning up in all the parts of my theory can fairly be regarded as a confirmation of it.

## Section 8. Qualities immediately agreeable to others

It is the nature—indeed the *definition*—of *virtue* that it is a quality of the mind agreeable to or approved of by every-one who considers or contemplates it. But some qualities produce pleasure because they are useful to society, or useful or agreeable to the person himself; others produce it more immediately, and it is to these others that I now turn.

### •COMPANIONABLE VIRTUES•

Here are two parallel developments: **(1)** In society at large, the mutual shocks and oppositions of interest and self-love have constrained mankind to establish the laws of justice so as to preserve the advantages of mutual assistance and

protection. **(2)** In smaller private gatherings, the contrarities of men's pride and self-conceit have introduced the rules of good manners, so as to help the exchange of ideas and keep conversation going. Among well-bred people,

- mutual deference is affected,
- contempt of others is disguised,
- authority is concealed,
- attention is given to each in his turn,

and an easy conversation is maintained, without speaking heatedly, or interruption, or eagerness for victory, and without any airs of superiority. Such conduct is immediately agreeable to others independently of any thoughts of utility or

beneficial tendencies: they draw affection, promote esteem, and enhance the merit of the behavior.

Many of the forms of breeding are arbitrary and casual, but what they *express* is always the same. A Spaniard goes out of his own house before his guest, to signify that he leaves the guest in charge. In other countries the owner of the house walks out last, as a common mark of deference and respect.

But a man won't be perfectly good company unless he has •wit and •ingenuity as well as good manners. It may be hard to define 'wit', but it's surely easy enough to learn that wit is a quality immediately agreeable to others, and that on its first appearance it communicates a lively joy and satisfaction to everyone who has any comprehension of it. [In Hume's day, 'wit' covered more than it does for us today. For something to qualify as an example of 'wit' in his sense, it needs to be clever, imaginative, in some way precise; it doesn't have to be funny.] The most profound metaphysics might be employed in explaining the various kinds of wit; and many of its species that we now class as 'wit' on the sole testimony of taste and sentiment [= 'simply because that's what they *feel* like'] might turn out to be special cases of something more general. But all I need for present purposes is that wit does affect taste and sentiment, and that because it gives immediate enjoyment it is a sure source of approval and affection.

In countries where men pass most of their time in conversation and visits and assemblies, these *companionable* qualities are highly valued and constitute a large part of personal merit. In countries where men live a more domestic life, and either are employed in business or pass the time in a narrower circle of acquaintance, respect is paid mainly to more solid personal qualities. I have often observed that the first questions the French ask regarding a stranger are 'Is he well-mannered? Does he have wit?' In our own

country the chief praise bestowed is always that someone is 'a good-natured, sensible fellow'.

In conversation, the lively ·to-and-fro· spirit of dialogue is agreeable, even to those who don't want to take part; which is why the teller of long stories and the pompous conversational lecturer are very little approved of. But most men *do* want to take part in the conversation, and take a very dim view of the loquacity that deprives them of a right that they are naturally so protective of.

On social occasions we often encounter liars who tell stories about marvels. Their usual intention is to please and entertain, and really they are harmless; but men are most delighted with what they think is true, so these liars are utterly mistaken about the means of pleasing, and incur universal blame. We are less hostile to lying or fiction when it occurs in humorous stories, because in that context it really is agreeable and entertaining, and truth is not important.

Endowments that seem immediately agreeable and have a merit distinct from their usefulness include •eloquence, •intellectual excellence of all kinds, and even •good sense and sound reasoning when they occur in a high degree and are employed on subjects that are worthy and suitably challenging. And these noble talents of the human mind get additional value from their rarity, because rarity greatly increases the price of everything.

·VALUING ONESELF·

'Modesty' can be understood in different senses, even if we set aside chastity, which I have already discussed. [Hume identifies and sets aside four things that he says can be called 'modesty'—perhaps they could then, but not now. Then:] But its most usual meaning is in contrast to impudence and arrogance, and expresses

•diffidence about one's own judgment, and due attention and respect for others.

Especially in young men, this quality is a sure sign of good sense; and it's also a certain means for a young man to increase his endowments by keeping him always wanting to improve himself and keeping his ears open to instruction on how to do it. And this kind of modesty has a further charm to every spectator: it flatters the spectator's vanity by presenting the appearance of a teachable pupil who listens attentively and respectfully to every word he utters.

Men have in general a much greater tendency to overvalue than to undervalue themselves, notwithstanding Aristotle's opinion.<sup>22</sup> This makes us more hostile to someone's overvaluing himself, and causes us to regard with a special indulgence any tendency towards modesty and diffidence about one's abilities, because we don't think that anyone's undervaluing himself risks going to such an extreme that it constitutes a vice. Analogously: in countries where people tend towards obesity, personal beauty is associated with a much greater degree of slenderness than it is in countries where the most usual defect is thinness. Being so often struck with examples of one kind of ugliness, people think they can never keep at too great a distance from it, and want always to lean to the opposite side.

Similarly, if the door were opened to self-praise, and we followed Montaigne's maxim that one should not shrink from saying 'I have sense, I have learning', 'I have courage' or '... beauty' or '... wit' if one thinks it is true, we all know that such a flood of insolence would break in on us that it would make society wholly intolerable. That is why custom has established it as a rule in public gatherings that men should not indulge themselves in self-praise, or indeed say *anything* much about themselves; and it is only among intimate friends or very mature people that a man is allowed

to do himself justice. Nobody finds fault with the Prince of Orange for his reply to someone who asked him 'Who do you think is the first general of the age?', to which he replied 'The Marquis of Spinola is the second'. Notice that the Prince's implied self-praise is better implied than if he had directly and openly expressed it.

Only a very superficial thinker would imagine that all instances of mutual deference are to be understood as being meant seriously and literally, and that there is something admirable about being ignorant of one's own merits and accomplishments! We look with favour on a small bias towards modesty even in the internal sentiment, especially in young people, and on a strong bias in the outward behaviour; but this doesn't exclude a noble pride and spirit that may openly display itself in its full extent when one is being attacked or oppressed in any way. The 'noble obstinacy' of Socrates, as Cicero calls it, has been highly celebrated down through the centuries; and when joined to the usual modesty of his behaviour it forms a shining character. Iphicrates, the Athenian, being accused of betraying the interests of his country, asked his accuser 'Would you have been guilty of that crime in those circumstances?' 'By no means!' replied the other. 'Well then,' cried the hero, 'can you imagine that Iphicrates would be guilty?' In short, a noble spiritedness and self-value is a great excellence when it

- is well founded,
- is decently disguised,
- is courageously supported under distress and calumny, and
- seems to derive its merit from the noble elevation of its sentiment, or its immediate agreeableness to its possessor.

<sup>22</sup> [In a footnote Hume cites Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. He is presumably thinking of the description in 1125<sup>a</sup> of 'unduly humble' men. Their fault is worse than that of unduly proud men, Aristotle says, and is commoner.]

In people with ordinary characters we approve of a bias towards modesty, which is a quality immediately agreeable to others. ·So we have two virtues—(1) a noble sense of one's own value and (2) modesty.· When (1) is excessive, the resultant vice—insolence or haughtiness—is immediately disagreeable to others; when (2) is excessive, the resultant vice is immediately disagreeable to the person himself. That's how we settle the boundaries of these duties.

A desire for fame, reputation, or *standing* in society is so far from being blameable that it seems inseparable from virtue, intellectual power and creativeness, and a noble disposition. Society expects and demands that we attend even to trivial matters in order to please others, so it's no surprise to find a man in company •dressed more elegantly and •conversing more pleasantly than when he is at home with his own family. Well, then, what is *vanity*, which is rightly regarded as a fault or imperfection? A man's vanity seems to consist chiefly in

- immoderately displaying his advantages, honours, and accomplishments, and

- openly and pushily demanding praise and admiration, to such an extent that he offends others and encroaches too far on *their* vanity and ambition, which they have kept secret. It's also a sure symptom of the lack of the true dignity and high-mindedness that is such a great ornament in any character. Why that impatient desire for applause, as if you weren't rightly entitled to it and couldn't reasonably expect that you would always get it? Why so anxious to tell us about the great people you have been associating with, the compliments that have been paid to you, the honours and distinctions you have received, as if these were not matters of course that we could easily have imagined without your telling us about them?

·'CLEAN AND DECENT'·

*Decency*, or acting appropriately to one's age, sex, character, and station in the world is one of the qualities that are immediately agreeable to others and therefore are praised and approved. •Effeminate behaviour in a man, •a rough manner in a woman—these are ugly because they are unsuitable to each character and different from the qualities we expect in the sexes. It's as if a tragedy were full of fine comic bits, or a comedy were full of tragic scenes. The disproportions hurt the eye, and convey to the spectators a disagreeable sentiment that is the source of blame and disapproval. . . .

*Cleanliness* deserves a place among the virtues, because our cleanliness naturally makes us agreeable to others, and is a considerable source of love and affection. No-one will deny that someone's neglecting to keep himself clean is a fault; and what makes this *a fault* —i.e. a minor vice—must be the uneasy sensation it gives to others. So this seemingly trivial matter clearly reveals the origin of moral distinctions, about which the learned have involved themselves in such mazes of perplexity and error.

·'I KNOW NOT WHAT'·

In addition to all the agreeable qualities the origin of whose beauty we can to some extent explain and account for, there is something else—something mysterious and inexplicable—which conveys an immediate satisfaction to the spectator although he has no idea of why. There is a •manner, a grace, an ease, a genteelness, an I-know-not-what, that some men possess more of than others; it's very different from external beauty and comeliness, yet it catches our affection almost as suddenly and powerfully ·as beauty does·. And though this •manner is chiefly talked about in connection with sexual passion, where the concealed magic is easily explained, surely much of it carries weight in *all* our valuing

of characters, and forms a considerable part of personal merit. So this class of accomplishments must be trusted entirely to the blind but sure testimony of taste and sentiment, ·i.e. must be handled entirely through our feelings, with no guidance from any theoretical considerations·. And it must be considered as a part of ethics, left by nature to baffle all the pride of philosophy and make her aware of how narrow her scope is and how meagre her possessions.

We approve of someone because of his wit, politeness,

modesty, decency, or any agreeable quality that he possesses, even if we have never met him and so have never derived any benefit from these accomplishments of his. We do have an •idea of the effect they must have on those who *are* acquainted with him; that has an agreeable influence on our imagination, and gives us the sentiment of approval. All our judgments concerning people's manners and characters have this •idea as one of their sources.

## Section 9: Conclusion

### Part 1

You could reasonably find it surprising that at this late stage in history anyone should think it necessary to argue elaborately for the thesis that

Personal merit consists entirely in the possession of mental qualities that are •useful or •agreeable to the person himself or to other people.

You might have thought that this principle must have occurred even to the first rough and ready enquirers into morals, and have been accepted as self-evident without any argument or disputation. Whatever is valuable in any way so naturally classes itself as either •useful or •agreeable—in Latin· as *utile* or *dulce*—that it's hard to think why we should ever seek further, or consider the question as a matter of intricate research or inquiry. And if a quality that someone has is useful or agreeable, it must be useful or agreeable *to* or *for* someone—either the person himself or other people.

Out of this a complete delineation or description of merit seems to emerge as naturally as a shadow is cast by the sun or an image is reflected on water. If the ground on which the shadow is cast is smooth and level, if the water-surface from which the image is reflected is calm, an accurate figure is immediately presented ·naturally·; nobody has to work at it! Why has such a simple and obvious theory so long have escaped the most elaborate examination? It seems reasonable to suppose that it's because systems and hypotheses have perverted our natural understanding, ·like wind ruffling the surface of the water and spoiling the reflection·.

Anyway, whatever has happened in philosophy, in ordinary everyday life these principles are still *implicitly* maintained. Whenever we applaud or censure any human behaviour, we never allude to anything else—·i.e. anything except facts about what is useful/agreeable to him/others·. If we observe men in every interaction of business or pleasure, in every discourse and conversation, we won't find

them having any difficulty about this subject ·of the basis for praise and blame·—except in the philosophy departments! Think about how *natural* the following conversation is:

- First speaker: You are very fortunate that you have given your daughter to Cleanthes. He's a man of honour and humanity. Everyone who has any dealings with him is sure of fair and kind treatment. (·Qualities useful to others·.)
- Second speaker: I congratulate you also on the promising expectations of this son-in-law. His hard work studying the laws, and his quick mind and knowledge (impressive in one so young) both of men and of business, promise that he is due for great honours and advancement. (·Qualities useful to the person himself·.)
- Third speaker: You surprise me when you speak of how hard Cleanthes works at his business. When I met him recently in a very cheerful group, he was the very life and soul of our conversation: I have never before encountered anyone with so much wit along with good manners, so much gallantry without affectation, so much non-trivial knowledge so genteelly delivered. (·Qualities immediately agreeable to others·.)
- Fourth speaker: You would admire him still more if you knew him better. The cheerfulness that you might notice in him isn't something he switches on when he is in company; it runs through the whole tenor of his life, and keeps a perpetual serenity on his face and tranquillity in his soul. He has met with severe trials, misfortunes and even dangers, and his greatness of mind enabled him to rise above them. (·Qualities immediately agreeable to the person himself·.)
- Then I join in: The picture of Cleanthes that you have just presented is a picture of accomplished merit. . . .

A philosopher might select this character as a model of perfect virtue.

In common life, •every quality that is useful or agreeable to ourselves or to others is regarded as a part of personal merit, and •nothing else will be so regarded as long as men are judging things by their natural, unprejudiced reason, without the delusive glosses of superstition and false religion. Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification [= 'physically hurting oneself'], self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues—why are they everywhere rejected by men of sense? It's because they serve no purpose of any kind: they don't advance a man's fortune in the world or make him a more valuable member of society; they don't qualify him for the entertainment of others or make him better able to enjoy himself. What we see is just the opposite: they interfere with all those desirable ends; they stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the imagination and sour the temper. So we are right to transfer them to the opposite column, putting them in the list of vices; and no superstition has enough force among men of the world to pervert entirely these natural sentiments ·relating to what is useful/agreeable to oneself/others·. A gloomy, hare-brained fanatic may after his death have a place in the calendar ·of saints·, but while he is alive he'll scarcely ever be admitted into intimacy and society except by those who are as delirious and dismal as he is.

It seems like a good feature of my theory that it doesn't get into the vulgar dispute about the *degrees* of benevolence or self-love that prevail in human nature, ·i.e. the dispute that sprawls across the territory between those who hold that •human beings are very benevolent and not very selfish and those who hold that •they are very selfish and not very benevolent. That dispute isn't likely ever to be settled, for two reasons: because •men who have taken part in it are not

easily convinced, and because •the phenomena that can be produced on either side are so scattered, so uncertain, and open to so many interpretations, that it's scarcely possible to command a clear view of them as a totality, or draw from them any determinate inference or conclusion. All I need for my present purpose is agreement—and surely it would be the greatest absurdity *not* to agree—that there is in our make-up *some* benevolence, however little; *some* spark of friendship for human kind; *some* particle of the •dove worked into our constitution along with the elements of the •wolf and the •serpent. However weak these generous sentiments •or feelings• are, even if they don't have enough force to move a hand or a finger, they must still direct the decisions of our mind, and produce—other things being equal—a cool preference for what is useful and serviceable to mankind as against what is harmful and dangerous. This immediately gives rise to a moral distinction, a general sentiment of blame and approval, a (perhaps very faint) preference •for states of affairs of one kind and •against ones of another kind. As for the thinkers who so earnestly maintain that mankind are predominantly selfish—they won't be scandalized by hearing of the weak sentiments of virtue implanted in our nature. On the contrary, those philosophers are as ready to maintain the one tenet as the other; and their wish to mock mankind (for that, not corruption, seems to be what drives them) naturally gives rise to both opinions, which are closely linked and can hardly be separated.

[One of the 'tenets' is the thesis that human beings are predominantly selfish. What is the other?

(a) That human beings in general have *some* sentiment of benevolence? or

(b) That human beings in general have *a very weak* sentiment of benevolence?

All Hume has laid a foundation for is (a), but the last two sentences of the paragraph require (b). He has moved across by going from (a) 'However

weak these generous sentiments are . . . ' to (b) ' . . . by hearing of the weak sentiments of virtue implanted in our nature' .]

Avarice, ambition, vanity, and all the passions that are commonly though wrongly classified as kinds of self-love, are excluded from my theory concerning the origin of morals, not because they are too weak but because they aren't in the right way *directional*. •Let me explain•. The notion of *morals* implies

some sentiment that *all mankind have*,

a sentiment that produces general approval—approval by everyone or nearly everyone—for the very same objects. It also implies

some sentiment that *is aimed at all mankind*,

a sentiment that leads us to •applaud or •censure the actions and conduct of people, *any* people, even ones who are far away, according to whether they •do or •don't conform to the rule of right that is established. The only thing in the human make-up that satisfies these two requirements is the sentiment of humanity that I am emphasizing here—(1) everyone has it, and (2) we have it towards everyone•. The other passions produce in everyone many strong sentiments of desire and aversion, affection and hatred; but they can't be the basis for any general system and established theory of blame or approval, because they satisfy neither (1) nor (2).

When a man refers to someone else as 'my enemy', 'my rival', 'my antagonist', 'my adversary', he is understood to be speaking the language of self-love; he is expressing sentiments that are specifically *his*, and arise from *his* particular circumstances and situation. But when he characterizes someone as 'vicious' or 'odious' or 'depraved', he is speaking a different language, and expressing sentiments that he expects to be shared by all who hear him. In this second case, therefore, he must depart from his private and particular situation and choose a point of view that is common to him

and the others; he must

**what Hume wrote next:** move some universal principle of the human frame, and touch a string to which all mankind have an accord and symphony.

**what he meant:** set moving some action-generator that is built into the human constitution, and pluck a string that is tuned to a note that will resonate with all mankind.

If what he means to express is that this man has qualities whose tendency is harmful to society, then he has done what is needed for this to be proper moral speech. That is, he has chosen a common point of view and has touched the principle of humanity that is found in some degree in everyone. For as long as the human heart is made out of the same elements as at present, it won't ever be wholly indifferent to public good, or entirely unaffected by the likely consequences of characters and manners. This feeling of humanity may not generally be credited with as much strength as *vanity* or *ambition*, but because it is common to all men it is the only possible basis for morals, i.e. of any *general system* of blame or praise. Your ambition is not mine, and something that would satisfy yours wouldn't satisfy mine; but your humanity is mine and is everyone's—the same things arouse this passion in all human creatures. [In this context, 'humanity' refers not to the •property of being human but rather to the •feeling of benevolence towards all human beings.]

And the sentiments that arise from humanity are not only **(1)** the same in all human creatures, and produce in them the same approval or censure; but they are also **(2)** *directed at* all human creatures, so that there's no-one whose conduct or character isn't open to being censured or approved by everyone. In contrast with that, the passions that are standardly called 'selfish' **(1)** produce different sentiments in each individual according to his particular situation;

and also **(2)** contemplate most of mankind with the utmost indifference and unconcern. Whoever has a high regard and esteem for me flatters my vanity; whoever expresses contempt embarrasses and displeases me; but these feelings connect me with only a small part of mankind—the majority of mankind can't be targets of such feelings because they don't even know my name. But if you present me with an account of tyrannical, insolent or barbarous behaviour in any country at any time, that quickly carries my thoughts to the harmful consequences of such conduct, and I feel the sentiment of repugnance and displeasure towards it. No-one can be so remote from me that his character and conduct are wholly indifferent to me: I will always be drawn to whatever is beneficial to society or to the person himself. And every quality or action of every human being must in this way be put into some class—given some label—that expresses general censure or applause.

What more can we ask, therefore, to •distinguish the sentiments that depend on humanity from the ones connected with any other passion, or to •explain to us why the former and not the latter are the origin of morals? Whatever conduct gets *my* approval by touching my humanity procures also the applause of *all mankind* by affecting the same principle in them; whereas what serves my greed or ambition pleases these passions in me alone and has no effect on the avarice and ambition of the rest of mankind. There is no conduct in any man, provided it has a beneficial tendency, that isn't agreeable to my humanity, however remote from me the man is; but if a man is remote enough from me not to thwart or help my greed and ambition, *those* passions of mine pay no attention to him. When we have such a large and obvious distinction between two kinds of sentiment, language is bound to follow its contours and to invent a set of terms specifically to express sentiments of one of the two

kinds—specifically, the universal sentiments of censure or approval that arise from humanity, i.e. from views of general usefulness and its opposite. And so

- virtue and vice become known;
- morals are recognized;
- certain general ideas of human conduct are formed;
- on these ideas we base rules of conduct that men are expected to measure up to;
- we judge that *this* action conforms to our abstract rule, while *that* one doesn't.

And the particular sentiments of self-love are often controlled and limited by such universal principles or rules.<sup>23</sup>

From instances of popular tumults, seditions, factions, panics, and all passions that are shared with a multitude, we can learn the influence of society in arousing and supporting any emotion; and from the same source we can also learn that the most ungovernable disorders grow from the slightest and most frivolous causes. The Athenian ruler Solon dealt harshly with people who didn't take sides in a civil war; but I don't think many people would get into trouble in *that* way

if their feelings and ways of talking were allowed to count in their favour! In a civil war no selfishness, and hardly any philosophy, has sufficient force to keep one entirely cool and indifferent; someone who in that situation didn't catch fire from the common blaze would have to be more than a man—or less than a man! So it's no wonder that moral sentiments are found to have such influence in life, although they come from sources that may at first sight appear somewhat small and delicate. But remember that these principles are social and universal; they form, in a manner, the *party* of mankind against vice or disorder, mankind's common enemy. And because the benevolent concern for others is spread in a greater or lesser degree through all men, and is the same in all, it crops up more often in discourse, is cherished by society and conversation; and that has the effect that the blame and approval that depend on it are roused from the lethargy into which they are probably lulled in solitary and uncultivated nature. [Hume is referring to a theoretical state of nature in which men are solitary and primitive; he isn't necessarily assuming that there is or ever was such a

<sup>23</sup> It seems certain, both from reason and from experience, that a rough untaught savage regulates his love and hatred chiefly by the ideas of benefit to *him* and harm to *him*, and has only a faint conception of a *general* rule or system of behaviour. His attitude to the man who stands against him in battle ('the enemy', for short) is this:

He hates the enemy heartily, not only for the present moment (which is almost unavoidable) but for ever after; and he won't settle for anything less than extreme punishment and vengeance for the enemy.

Now consider how we, accustomed to society and to taking broader views, regard someone ('the enemy' again) who opposes us in battle:

We bear in mind that •the enemy is serving his own country and community; that •any man in the same situation would do the same, and that includes *us*; and that •it is best for human society in general if men do conform to such maxims •as that a man should fight for his country when called upon. And with the help of these suppositions and views we somewhat correct our rougher and narrower positions •which are like those of the savage.

And though much of our friendship and enmity is still governed by private considerations of benefit and harm, we at least pay a certain homage to the general rules that we are accustomed to respecting. I mean the homage of perverting our adversary's conduct by imputing malice or injustice to him, so as to give vent to passions arising from self-love and private interest. When the heart is full of rage it is never short of pretences of this nature. . . .

state.] Other passions are •selfish and •private; and that has the result that the •social and •public benevolent concern often overpowers them and takes command of our emotional state, even when the other passions were stronger at their outset.

Another spring of our constitution that adds a lot of force to moral sentiments is the love of fame, which rules with such uncontrolled authority in all generous minds, and is often the grand object of all their designs and undertakings. [A person with a 'generous' mind, in the sense in which Hume meant that word, is someone whose aims and aspirations have scope and grandeur, whose thoughts are broad and deep and sweeping, whose ambitions are not hemmed in by caution. We don't have any one word that captures it. Some uses of the word earlier in this work may also carry that meaning, though they could all be understood in the sense that 'generous' has today.] By our continual and earnest pursuit of a character, a name, a reputation in the world, we frequently review our own conduct and consider how it appears in the eyes of people who come in contact with us. This constant habit of surveying our own reflection, so to speak, •keeps alive all the sentiments of right and wrong, and •creates in people with noble natures a certain reverence not only for others but for *themselves*—and this is the surest guardian of every virtue. The animal conveniences and pleasures sink gradually in their value, while every inward beauty and moral grace is carefully acquired, and the mind comes to be equipped with every perfection that can adorn or embellish a rational creature.

Here is the most perfect morality we know; here is displayed the force of many sympathies. Our moral sentiment is itself a feeling chiefly of that nature [those are Hume's exact eleven words], and our concern for being in good standing with •other people seems to arise only from our concern for being in good standing with •ourselves; wanting to be on good

terms with ourselves, we find that our shaky judgment has to be propped up by the corresponding approval of mankind.

Suppose for purposes of argument that all these reasonings of mine are false. I shall now adopt the following stance:

- I was simply wrong when I said that the sentiments of humanity and sympathy were the source of our pleasure in thoughts or prospects of utility.
- I have to find some *other* explanation of our applause for things—whether inanimate, animate, or rational—that have a tendency to promote the welfare and advantage of mankind.

It sounds absurd to suppose that an object is approved of because of its tendency produce a certain end, while the end itself is a matter of total indifference; but let us swallow this absurdity, in order to see where it takes us. The description or definition that I have given of *personal merit* is still evidently true and authoritative: it must still be conceded that every quality of the mind that is useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others communicates pleasure to the spectator, commands his esteem, and is accepted under the honourable labels 'virtue' and 'merit'. **(1)** Why are justice, fidelity, honour, truthfulness, faithfulness and chastity held in such high esteem? Isn't it because of their tendency to promote the good of society? Isn't that tendency inseparable from humanity, benevolence, gentleness, generosity, gratitude, moderation, tenderness, friendship, and all the other social virtues? **(2)** Can it possibly be doubted that industry, discretion, frugality, order, perseverance, forethought, judgment, and this whole class of virtues and accomplishments that it would take many pages to list—can it be doubted (I repeat) that the tendency of these qualities to promote the interests and happiness of the person who has them is the whole basis for their merit? Compare

- a mind that supports a perpetual serenity and cheerfulness, a noble dignity and undaunted spirit, a tender affection and good-will to everyone within reach, with
- a mind that is dejected with melancholy, tormented with anxiety, irritated with rage, or sunk into the most abject baseness and degeneracy.

(3) Who can dispute that the former has more enjoyment within itself, and is also a more animating and joy-giving spectacle to others? (4) As for the qualities that are immediately agreeable to others: they speak sufficiently for themselves; and if you have never perceived the charms of a humorous wit or flowing affability, of a delicate modesty or decent genteelness of speech and manner, you must be *very* unfortunate either in the temperament you have or in the company you keep.

I'm aware that nothing can be more unphilosophical than to be positive or dogmatic on any subject; and that even excessive scepticism (supposing it could be maintained) wouldn't be more destructive of all sound reasoning and inquiry than dogmatism is. I'm convinced that where men are the most sure and arrogant is generally where they are the most mistaken. It's because they have given passion a free rein, without the proper deliberation and suspension of judgment that are their only protection against the grossest absurdities. But I must confess that my four-item list puts the matter in so strong a light that I can't at present be more assured of any truth that I have learned from reasoning and argument than I am that personal merit consists entirely in the •usefulness or •agreeableness of qualities to •the person who has them or •to other people who interact with him. But I remind myself that although

- the size and shape of the earth have been measured and described,
- the motions of the tides have been explained,

- the order and system of the heavenly bodies have been brought under their proper laws, and
- infinity itself has been reduced to calculation,

men are still arguing about the foundation of their moral duties. When I think about *that*, I fall back from dogmatism into diffidence and scepticism, and suspect that any hypothesis as obvious as mine would, *if it were true*, have received long ago the unanimous vote of mankind.

## Part 2

Having explained the moral approval that comes with merit or virtue, my only remaining task is briefly to consider how if at all our interests create an obligation to conform to morality. The question is this:

'For any man who has any concern for his own happiness and welfare, the best course of action is for him to perform every moral duty.' True or false?

If the answer 'True' can be clearly derived from my theory, I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that I have advanced principles that don't just (I hope) •stand the test of reasoning and inquiry but also •may contribute to the amendment of men's lives and their improvement in morality and social virtue. Let me reflect for a moment on the relation between 'true' and 'salutary'. The philosophical truth of a proposition never depends on its tendency to promote the interests of society; but a proposition that has the opposite tendency, though it may be *true*, perhaps ought not to be made *public*. Only a very nasty man would •publicly deliver a theory—even a perfectly true one—that he has to admit will lead to conduct that is dangerous and harmful. Why explore the corners of nature that spread nastiness all around? Why dig up the disease-carrying stuff from the pit in which it is buried? The skill of your researches may be admired, but your system will

be detested; and mankind will agree that if they can't refute it they can at least bury it in eternal silence and oblivion. And they can do that; because •truths that are *harmful* to society (if there are any) will be overcome by •falsehoods that are salutary and *helpful*.

But no philosophical truths could be more advantageous to society than the ones I have presented here. They represent virtue in all her genuine and most engaging charms, and make us approach her with ease, familiarity, and affection. She loses the dismal dress that she has been covered with by many theologians and some philosophers, so that all we see is virtue in all her gentleness, humanity, beneficence and kindly politeness—even sometimes her play, frolic and gaiety. She doesn't talk to us of useless austerities and rigours, suffering and self-denial. She declares that her sole purpose is to make her devotees and all mankind cheerful and happy during every instant of their existence, if possible; and she never willingly parts with any pleasure except to get ample compensation at some other period in the person's life. The only trouble that she requires us to take is that of accurate calculation, which we sometimes need if we are to maintain a steady preference for the greater happiness. And if she is approached by would-be moralists who are enemies to joy and pleasure, she either rejects them as hypocrites and deceivers or, if she admits them to her circle, she ranks them among the least favoured of her devotees.

Enough of metaphors! What hopes can we ever have of drawing mankind into a way of life that we admit to be full of austerity and rigour? What theory of morals can ever serve any useful purpose unless it can show in detail that all the duties that it recommends are also the true interest of each individual? The unique advantage of my system seems to be that it furnishes a proper basis for that result.

There's presumably no need to *argue* that the virtues that are immediately useful or agreeable to the person who has them are desirable from the point of view of self-interest. Moralists can spare themselves all the trouble they often take in *recommending* these duties. What's the point of collecting arguments to show that temperance is advantageous and that the excesses of pleasure are harmful, when it's obvious •that these excesses are only called 'excesses' because they are hurtful, and •that if the unlimited use of rum (for example) did no more harm to one's health or the faculties of one's mind and body than the use of air or water, it wouldn't be a whit more vicious or blameable?

There also seems to be no need to argue that the companionable virtues of good manners and wit, decency and genteelness, are more desirable than the contrary qualities. Our vanity alone, without any other consideration, is a sufficient motive to make us want to have these accomplishments. No man was ever willingly lacking in them. All our failures here proceed from bad upbringing, lack of abilities, or a perverse and rigid disposition. 'Do I want my company to be wanted, admired, followed, rather than hated, despised, avoided?' Can anyone seriously *deliberate* about this? Just as no enjoyment is sincere without some reference to company and society, so no society can be agreeable—or even tolerable—when a man feels that his presence in it is unwelcome, and discovers all around him symptoms of disgust and aversion.

But why shouldn't all this hold just as well for the greater society or get-together of mankind, as well as for particular clubs and gatherings? I have been arguing for this:

•The limited endowments of ingenuity and politeness are desirable from the point of view of happiness and self-interest.

Why, if we are sure of that, would we doubt this?—

•The enlarged virtues of humanity, generosity and beneficence are desirable from the point of view of happiness and self-interest.

Are we afraid that •those social affections will interfere with private utility to a greater extent and in a more immediate way than any other pursuits, so that •they can't be gratified without some important sacrifice of honour and advantage? If so, we aren't well informed about the nature of the human passions, and are more influenced by verbal distinctions than by real differences.

Whatever contradiction may be commonly thought to exist between **selfish** sentiments or dispositions and **social** ones, there's really no more conflict between those two than there is between **selfish** and **ambitious**, **selfish** and **revengeful**, **selfish** and **vain**.

**what Hume wrote next:** It is requisite that there be an original propensity of some kind, in order to be a basis to self-love, by giving a relish to the objects of its pursuit; and none more fit for this purpose than benevolence or humanity.

**what he seems to have meant:** A person's self-love or selfishness is active only when he selfishly pursues his goals; but he can't *have* any such goals unless he has—lying deeper within him than his self-love—some sort of leaning or liking or preference for something-or-other. And the best candidate for that role is benevolence or humanity, i.e. a leaning or liking for the welfare of mankind.

The goods that the world brings us are spent in one gratification or another: the miser who accumulates his annual income and lends it out at interest has really spent it in the gratification of his greed. And it would be hard to show why a man loses more by a generous action than by any other method of expense, since the most he can achieve by the most elaborate selfishness is the gratification of some liking.

Suppose that you have full power to model your own disposition: now deliberate about what appetite or desire you would choose to be the basis for your happiness and enjoyment, ·the 'leaning or liking' referred to above·. (You'll want to have *some* appetite or desire; a life without passion would be altogether insipid and tiresome.) You'll have noticed that *every* liking, when gratified by success, gives a satisfaction proportional to the force and violence of the liking; that's an advantage that *every* liking has, ·so it doesn't favour benevolence over any of its rivals. But it has other advantages that do select it out of the herd·. The immediate feeling of benevolence and friendship, humanity and kindness is sweet, smooth, tender and agreeable, come what may. These virtues are also accompanied by a pleasing awareness or memory: while we retain the pleasant thought of having done our part for mankind and society, that keeps us on good terms with ourselves as well as with others. If we devote ourselves to trying to satisfy our greed and ambition, we may have 'successes' that all men will resent; but we can be almost sure of their good-will and good wishes so long as we persevere in the paths of virtue, and devote ourselves to generous plans and purposes. What other passion is there that brings together so many advantages—an agreeable sentiment, a pleasing consciousness, a good reputation? But men are pretty much convinced of these truths without help from me; and when they are deficient in their duty, not *wanting* to be generous, friendly and humane, it's because they don't *feel that they are* generous, friendly or humane.

Treating vice with the utmost fairness and making all possible concessions to it, we must acknowledge that there is never the slightest pretext—from the point of view of self-interest—for preferring it to virtue; except perhaps in the case of justice, where a man may often seem to be a loser by his integrity. It is agreed that no society could

survive without a respect for *property*; but because of the imperfect way in which human affairs are conducted, it could happen in a particular case that a sensible knave thinks that a dishonest or treacherous act will make a considerable addition to his fortune without greatly weakening the bonds that hold society together. [The phrase 'sensible knave' is a kind of technical term in the writings of Hume and of many who have come after him. It refers to a bad man who gives some thought to what he is doing.] The thesis that honesty is the best policy—meaning 'best' from the self-interested point of view—is a good general rule, but there are many exceptions to it; and it might be thought that the wisest person is the one who obeys the general rule except for taking advantage of all the exceptions. I must confess that if someone thinks that this line of thought needs an answer, it won't be easy to find one that will convince him. If his heart doesn't rebel against such harmful maxims, if he doesn't shrink from the thought of villainy or baseness, he has indeed lost a considerable motive to virtue; and we may expect that his behaviour will fit in with his doctrine ·that he should be honest except where it is better *for him* to be dishonest·. But in all openly honest natures, the dislike for treachery and roguery is too strong to be counter-balanced by any views of ·personal· profit or monetary advantage. Inward peace of mind, consciousness of integrity, a satisfactory review of our own conduct—these are all very much required for happiness, and will be cherished and cultivated by every honest man who feels the importance of them.

Such a person will also have the frequent satisfaction of seeing knaves, with all their supposed cunning and abilities, betrayed by their own maxims. A knave who *intends* only to cheat with moderation and secrecy will come across a tempting opportunity ·to go further·; nature is frail, and he'll fall into the snare from which he can never extricate himself without a total loss of reputation, and the forfeiture of all future trust and confidence with mankind.

But even if a knave is ever so secret and successful, an honest man, if he has the slightest touch of philosophy or even just common observation and reflection, will discover that the knave is in the last analysis the greatest dupe, having sacrificed the priceless enjoyment of a good character—at least in his own eyes—in return for the acquisition of worthless toys and trinkets. So little is needed to supply the necessities of nature! And from the point of view of pleasure, there is no comparison between

- the feverish, empty amusements of luxury and big spending, and
- the unbought satisfaction of conversation, society, study, even health and the common beauties of nature, but above all the peaceful reflection on one's own conduct.

These natural pleasures, indeed, are really priceless—it costs nothing to get them, and the enjoyment of them is above all price.

## Appendix 1. Moral sentiment (·or feeling·)

If my theory is accepted, that will make it easy for us to answer the question with which I began—the one about whether our morality arises from reason or from sentiment (·or feeling·) or from both. I postponed answering that question because I thought it might involve us in intricate speculations that are unfit for moral discourses; but now I come back to it, and examine how far either reason or sentiment enters into all decisions of praise or censure.

One principal basis for moral praise lies in the usefulness of the quality or action being praised; so obviously *reason* must play a considerable part in all decisions of this kind. Why? Because only reason can instruct us about the tendency [= 'causal properties'] of qualities and actions, and point out their beneficial consequences to society and to the person who has them or does them. There is often a great deal of controversy about this: doubts may arise; conflicting interests may come into it; and one of the options has to be chosen, on the basis of fine details and a small difference in utility. This is especially noticeable with questions about justice—which is what it's natural to expect, given the kind of utility that this virtue involves (more about that in Appendix 3). If every individual instance of justice were useful to society in the way that every individual instance of benevolence is, this would simplify things and not involve much controversy. But ·that is *not* how things stand·. It often happens that a single instance of justice is harmful in its first and immediate consequences, and brings advantage to society only through the observance of the general rule ·of which it is an instance·, so that the advantage requires that many people will act in accordance with that rule; which means that the case—the weighing

up of pros and cons·—becomes more intricate and involved. The many

- details about how society works,
- consequences of any ·general· practice, and
- interests that may come into it

—these are often doubtful, and subject to great discussion and inquiry. The object of civil laws is to settle all the questions about justice: the debates among lay-people, the thoughts of politicians, the precedents of history and public records, are all directed to the same purpose. And in many cases a very precise reason or judgment is needed for the right solution to be found, when there are such intricate doubts arising from obscure or opposite utilities.

But although reason—when it's in good shape and properly used—is all we need for learning about the harmful or useful tendency of qualities and actions, it's not enough on its own to produce any moral blame or approval. Utility is only a tendency to produce a certain end; if that end were totally indifferent to us, we would feel the same indifference towards the means. To get a *preference* for the useful as against the harmful tendencies, some kind of *sentiment* has to be at work. The •sentiment in question can't be anything but a •feeling for the happiness of mankind, and a resentment of their misery; since happiness and misery are the different ends that virtue and vice have a tendency to promote. In these contexts, then, •reason instructs us in the various tendencies of actions, and •humanity makes a distinction in favour of the ones that are useful and beneficial.

This partition between the faculties of •understanding and of •sentiment in all moral decisions seems clear from the

theory about the origin of morals that I have been defending in this work. But let us suppose that my theory is false, and start looking for some other satisfactory theory; and I'm willing to risk the claim that we won't find one as long as we suppose reason to be the sole source of morals. In support of this, consider the five following points.

(1) A false hypothesis can easily maintain some appearance of truth as long as it •is stated only in general terms, •uses undefined terms, and •employs comparisons instead of instances. This is conspicuously the case with the philosophy that regards *reason* as the sole source of moral distinctions, with no input from sentiment. However plausible this theory may be in *general* declamations and discourses, when it is applied to any particular instance it can't even be rendered intelligible, let alone be shown to be true. Examine the crime of ingratitude, for instance. [In this context Hume is using 'crime' for any episode of morally wrong conduct or thought or feeling; it has no special link with the criminal law of the state.] This occurs whenever we observe on one side

•good-will, expressed and known, together with help given,

and on the other

•ill-will or indifference, and harm done or at least no help given.

Anatomize all these facts—analyse them as finely as you like—and try *through your reason alone* to discover what there is that's bad or blameworthy about this conduct. You'll never come to any issue or conclusion.

Reason makes judgments concerning •matters of fact and •relations. Let's start by asking, in a case of ingratitude, where is the •matter of fact that we are calling a crime? Point it out; determine the time when it occurred; describe its essence or nature; explain the sense or faculty to which it was revealed. The ingratitude resides in the mind of the

person who is ungrateful. So he must feel it, be conscious of it. But there's nothing there except the frame of mind of •ill-will or absolute •indifference. You can't say that •these, all by themselves, always and in all circumstances, are crimes. No, they are crimes only when we direct them towards people who have previously expressed and displayed good-will towards us. So we can infer that the crime of ingratitude is not any particular individual fact; it arises from a complex of circumstances which, when observed by a spectator, arouses in him the sentiment of blame—this being something that happens because of the particular structure and texture of his mind.

You may say:

What you have just said is false. Something's being a crime doesn't indeed consist in a particular •fact that we are assured of by reason; but it does consist in certain moral •relations that reason discovers, just as we discover by reason the truths of geometry or algebra.

But what relations are you talking about? In the case described, I see first •good-will and help in one person, then •ill-will and harm in the other. Between these there is a relation of contrariety. Does the crime consist in that relation? But suppose a person bore me ill-will or did me harm, and I in return was indifferent towards him, or gave him help. Here is the same relation of contrariety, and yet my conduct is often highly praiseworthy. Twist and turn this matter as much as you will, you can never base morality on *relations*; you have to bring in the decisions of *sentiment*.

When someone says that *two and three are equal to half of ten*, I understand this relation of equality perfectly. I have the thought that if ten is divided into two parts, of which one has as many units as the other; and if either of these parts is compared with two added to three, it will contain as

many units as that compound number. But when you invite me to compare this with moral relations, I admit that I'm altogether at a loss to understand you. A moral action—a crime such as ingratitude—is a complex object. Does the morality consist in the relation of its parts to each other? How? In what way? *Specify* the relation—be more particular and explicit in your propositions—and you'll easily see their falsehood.

You reply: 'No! The morality consists in the relation of •actions to •the rule of right, and they are labelled "good" or "bad" according to whether they do or don't conform to that rule.' In that case, what *is* this rule of right? What does it consist in? How do we discover it? 'By reason', you say, 'which examines the moral relations of actions.' So •moral relations are determined by relating actions to •a rule, and •that rule is determined by considering the •moral relations of objects. Isn't this fine reasoning?

'All this is metaphysics,' you say. 'That is enough to make it very likely that what you say is false.' I reply: Yes, we are certainly involved in metaphysics; but it all comes from you—from your advancing an obscure hypothesis that can never •be made intelligible or •fitted to any particular instance or example. My hypothesis is plain: it says that morality is determined by sentiment •or feeling•. It defines *virtue* as *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approval*; and it defines *vice* as *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the unpleasing sentiment of disapproval*. I then proceed to examine a plain matter of fact, namely, what actions have this influence. I consider the features shared by all the actions we call 'virtuous', and the features shared by all that we call 'vicious' or 'wrong'; and try to extract from some general truths about these sentiments •of approval and disapproval•. If you call *this* metaphysics, and find

anything in it obscure, you should conclude that you don't have the right sort of mind for the systematic study of human behaviour.

(2) Think about someone who is deliberating about whether, in a particular emergency, he should help •his brother or •his benefactor—he can't help both•.

In order to settle where his duty lies—which of the two he has a great obligation to—he must consider •the relations *brother of* and *benefactor of*, and all •the facts about what his brother and his benefactor are like and how they are situated.

Now compare that with this:

In order to determine the proportion of lines in a triangle, one must examine •the nature of that triangle and the •relation its different parts have to each other.

The two procedures look similar, but basically they are enormously different. Someone engaged in theoretical reasoning about triangles or circles considers the various **known and given inter-relations** of the parts of these figures, and from them he infers some •previously• *unknown* relation which follows from the known ones. But to engage in moral deliberation, we must be already be acquainted with all the •relevant• objects, and **all their inter-relations**, and from putting all this together we fix our •choice •of what to do• or our •approval •of what someone has done•. (•For example, to deliberate about whether to help my brother or my benefactor, I must know the facts about each, and about **all** the relevant relations I have to each•.) There's no new fact to be ascertained, no new relation to be discovered. All the details of the case are supposed to be laid before us before we assign blame or approval. If any relevant fact about the situation is still unknown or doubtful, we must first use our intellectual faculties to get it settled, suspending all moral decision or sentiment [Hume's exact five-word phrase] until that has been

done. Was *x* an aggressor against *y*? Until we get *that* settled, how can we determine whether *y*'s killing of *x* was criminal or innocent? But when every detailed fact and every relation is known, there's nothing left for the understanding to do, no question for it to work on. The approval or blame that ensues can't be the ·intellectual· work of the ·faculty of· judgment, but the work of the heart; it's not a •speculative [= 'theoretical'] proposition or assertion, but an •active feeling or sentiment. In the activities of the understanding we infer something new and ·previously· unknown from facts and relations that are known. In moral decisions, all the facts and relations must be known already; and the mind goes from its •contemplation of all of this to •feeling some new impression of affection or disgust, admiration or contempt, approval or blame.

Hence the great difference between a •mistake about what action is right and a •mistake about what the facts are; and hence also the reason why the •former kind of mistake is commonly criminal and the •latter is not. When Oedipus killed Laius, he didn't know that Laius was his father; facts about the situation that weren't his fault led to his having false beliefs about the action he performed. But when Nero killed ·his mother· Agrippina, all the relations between himself and her and all the factual details were already known to him; but in his savage heart the motive of revenge or fear or self-interest prevailed over the sentiments of duty and humanity. And when we express our detestation of him, . . . it's not because we see any relations that he didn't see; rather, our upright frame of mind causes us to feel sentiments against which he had become hardened by flattery and a long history of enormous crimes. So all moral determinations consist in these sentiments, and not in a discovery of relations of any kind. Before we can form any decision of this kind, all the facts about the action and its

circumstances must already be known. And then all we have to do is to *feel* some sentiment of blame or approval, on the basis of which we pronounce the action criminal or virtuous.

(3) The truth of my theory will become still more evident if we compare •moral beauty with •natural beauty, which so closely resembles it in many respects. All natural beauty depends on the proportions, relations and positions of parts; but it would be absurd to infer from this that the perception of beauty, like that of truth in geometrical problems, •consists wholly in the perception of relations and •is performed entirely by the understanding or intellectual faculties. In all the sciences, our mind investigates unknown relations of things on the basis of relations that are known; but in all decisions of taste or external beauty *all* the relations are already obvious to the eye, and we move from them to feeling a sentiment of satisfaction or disgust, depending •on what the object in question is like and •on the state of our sense-organs.

Euclid has fully explained all the qualities of the circle, but none of his theorems says a word about its beauty. The reason is clear. Beauty is not a quality of the circle—it is nowhere to be found in any part of the line whose parts are equidistant from a common centre. A circle's beauty is only the *effect* that it produces in the mind, which is built in such a way as to be liable to have such sentiments. You'd be wasting your time if you looked for beauty *in* the circle, trying through your senses or through mathematical reasoning to detect it in the properties of that figure.

Attend to ·the architects· Palladio and Perrault when they explain all the parts and proportions of a pillar. They talk of the 'cornice' and 'frieze' and 'base' and 'entablature' etc., and describe and locate each of these parts of the pillar. But if you asked them to describe and locate the pillar's beauty, they would immediately reply that the beauty isn't in any

of the pillar's parts, but results from the whole thing when that complex figure is presented to an intelligent mind that is liable to have those finer sensations [Hume's word]. Until such a spectator turns up, there is nothing but a figure of such and such dimensions and proportions; it's from the spectator's sentiments—and only from them—that the elegance and beauty of the pillar arises.

Now attend to the orator Cicero when he depicts the crimes of the corrupt politician Verres or the seditious conspirator Catiline. You must admit that the moral baseness results—like the beauty of the pillar—from the contemplation of the whole, when presented to someone whose organs have a particular structure and formation. The orator may paint rage, insolence, barbarity on one side, and meekness, suffering, sorrow and innocence on the other; but if you don't feel indignation or compassion arise in you from this complex of facts, it wouldn't do you any good to ask the orator:

- What is the crime or villainy that you were so vehemently attacking?
- When did it come into existence, and who was its subject?
- Now (a few months later) that every disposition and thought of all the people involved is totally altered or annihilated, what has become of the crime?

The abstract hypothesis of morals—i.e. the theory that moral conclusions are established by reason—can't give a satisfactory answer to any of these questions. Eventually we have to admit that the crime or immorality, rather than being a particular fact or relation that can be investigated by the understanding, arises entirely from the sentiment of disapproval that we unavoidably feel when we learn about barbarity or treachery. (What makes this feeling 'unavoidable' is the structure of human nature.)

(4) Inanimate objects can relate to each other in all the ways that moral agents can; but they can't be the object of love or hatred, and so they aren't capable of merit or iniquity. [Hume here uses 'inanimate' in one of its old senses, to mean 'non-breathing' = (roughly) 'non-animal'.] A young tree that over-tops and destroys its parent stands in all the same relations as Nero did when he murdered his mother; and if morality consisted merely in relations, the young tree would no doubt be equally criminal.

(5) It seems clear that the ultimate ends of human actions can't, in any single case, be accounted for by reason, and submit themselves entirely to the sentiments and affections of mankind, without depending in any way on our intellectual faculties. Here's an example, to help you grasp the idea of an *ultimate end*. Ask a man 'Why do you take exercise?' and he will answer 'Because I want to keep my health'. Ask him 'Why do you want health?' and he will readily reply 'Because sickness is painful'. If you now push on, and ask him 'Why do you hate pain?', he can't possibly answer. This is an *ultimate end*, and is never regarded as a special case of something more general.

He might give to the question 'Why do you want health?' a different answer, namely 'Because I need it to do my job'. If you ask 'Why do you care about that?', he will answer 'Because I want to earn money'. If you demand why, he will say that money is the instrument of pleasure. And beyond this it would be absurd to ask for a reason. There can't possibly be a progress *ad infinitum*, with each desire being based on a reason that consists in a desire for something *else*. Something must be desirable •on its own account, •because of its immediate fit with human sentiment and affection.

Now, virtue is an *end*; it is desirable on its own account, without fee or reward, purely for the immediate satisfaction

it gives; so there has to be some sentiment that it triggers, some internal taste or feeling—or whatever you want to call it—that distinguishes moral good from moral evil, embracing the one and rejecting the other.

So we can easily establish •the domain and the role of reason and •the domain and role of taste ·or feeling·. The former provides knowledge of truth and falsehood; the latter yields the sentiment of beauty and ugliness, vice and virtue. Reason discovers objects as they really are in nature, not adding or taking away anything; whereas feeling or taste produces something, adds something. It gilds or paints natural objects with colours borrowed from internal sentiment, and so it (in a way) creates something new. Reason is cool and disengaged, so it isn't a motive to action. Its only link with action is that it *directs* the impulse it received from appetite or inclination, showing us the *means* to attaining happiness or avoiding misery. Taste

·or feeling, far from being cool·, gives pleasure or pain; so it constitutes happiness or misery and therefore acts as a motive to action. It is indeed the first spring or impulse—the initial *starter*—for desire and volition. From factual details and relations that are known or supposed, reason leads us to the discovery of truths that were concealed and unknown; after *all* the factual details and relations are laid before us, taste or feeling makes us feel a new sentiment of blame or approval. The standard of reason, being founded on the nature of things, is eternal and inflexible—not even the will of the Supreme Being can alter it. The standard of taste or feeling ·presumably *could* be altered by God if he chose to alter it. It· arises from the eternal make-up and constitution of animals; so it is ultimately derived from the Supreme Will that •gave each ·species of· animal its special nature and •arranged the various classes and orders of existence.

## Appendix 2. Self-love

There's a principle, said to be accepted by many people, that is utterly incompatible with all virtue or moral sentiment. It can't come from anything but the most depraved disposition ·in the person who maintains it·, and in its turn it tends still further to encourage that depravity. The principle is this:

All •benevolence is mere hypocrisy, •friendship a cheat, •public spirit a farce, •fidelity a snare to procure trust and confidence. Basically all of us pursue only our private interest, but we wear •these fair disguises so as to put others off their guard and make them

even more vulnerable to our tricks and schemes. It's easy to imagine what kind of *heart* a man must have if he believes this, and feels no internal sentiment that contradicts this harmful theory; and to imagine his level of affection and benevolence towards a species that he paints in such revolting colours and supposes to be so unlikely to return the affection or be grateful for any good that is done for them. Or if someone's acceptance of this principle doesn't come entirely from a corrupted heart, he must have been led by the most careless and rushed examination ·of the human

scene. It could happen like this: a superficial reasoner observes many false pretences among mankind; he doesn't feel within himself any strong resistance to *his* acting in such a way; so he rushes to the general conclusion •that the whole species is equally corrupted; and •that men, unlike all other animals—indeed, unlike all other *things*—can't be distinguished from one another as better or worse, not even *slightly* better or worse, because under their various disguises and appearances they are all, from the evaluative point of view, the same.

Another somewhat similar principle has been much insisted on by philosophers, and has been the foundation of many a system. It is this:

Whatever affection one may feel or imagine one feels for others, there aren't and can't be any disinterested [= 'not *self*-interested'] feelings; the most generous friendship, however sincere, is a version of self-love; even when we appear to be deeply engaged in schemes for the liberty and happiness of mankind, all we are really seeking (though we may not be aware of this) is our own gratification. By a turn of imagination or a refinement of reflection or an enthusiasm of passion we *seem* to do things in the interests of others, and imagine that we are free of all selfish considerations; but *basically* the most generous patriot and the most niggardly miser, the bravest hero and the feeblest coward, are equally concerned with their own happiness and welfare in everything that they do.

This looks like a damage-causing opinion, which might lead you to think that anyone who announces it as *his* opinion can't possibly feel the true sentiments of benevolence, or have any regard for genuine virtue. But that conclusion turns out to be false. Probity and honour were no strangers to Epicurus and his followers. Atticus and Horace seem to have

had by nature, and to have developed through reflection, dispositions that were as generous and friendly as any those of disciples of the sterner schools. And among the moderns, Hobbes and Locke maintained the selfish theory of morals yet lived irreproachable lives; and Hobbes was not in a position to have the defects of his philosophy made up for by the restraints of religion.

An Epicurean or a Hobbesian freely agrees that there is such a thing as a friendship in the world, without hypocrisy or disguise; though he may attempt through a philosophical chemistry •to analyse this passion into elements that belong to some other passion, and •to explain every affection as a case of self-love that is twisted and moulded by a particular turn of imagination into a variety of appearances. People's imaginations differ in ways that affect how the basic passion is redirected, so that even according to this 'selfish' theory men's characters can differ widely—with one man being virtuous and humane, another vicious and meanly self-interested. I admire the man whose self-love is somehow so directed as to give him a concern for others and render him useful to society; I hate or despise the one who has no regard for anything but his own gratifications and enjoyments. It's no use your suggesting that these seemingly opposite characters are basically the same, their only difference coming from a very inconsiderable turn of thought. Each character appears to me to be in practice pretty stable, even if it does rest on a minor fact about how the person's imagination works. And I don't find in this context, any more than I do in others, that the natural sentiments arising from the general appearances of things are easily destroyed by subtle reflections on the fine details of the origins of these appearances. Doesn't the lively, cheerful colour of someone's face give me satisfaction and pleasure, even if I learn from science that differences in complexions *all* arise from tiny differences of thickness in

tiny parts of the skin, making differences in which colours of the spectrum are absorbed and which are reflected?

So the question concerning the universal or partial selfishness of man doesn't make as much real difference to morality and conduct as it is usually thought to do. Still, it is •certainly of consequence in the theoretical study of human nature, and is •a proper object of curiosity and enquiry. So it may be worthwhile to offer a few thoughts about it here.<sup>24</sup>

The most obvious objection to the 'selfish hypothesis' is this: because it is contrary to common feeling and our natural untutored thoughts, and is therefore an extraordinary paradox, it couldn't be established without the highest stretch of philosophy [= 'without support from lengthy, elaborate, and difficult philosophical argument']. To the most casual observer there appear to be such dispositions as **(1)** benevolence and generosity, such affections as love, friendship, compassion and gratitude. The causes, effects, objects and operations of these sentiments are marked by common language and observation, and are plainly distinguished from the causes etc. of **(2)** the selfish passions. This is the *obvious appearance* of things, and we should just accept it unless and until some hypothesis is discovered that can penetrate deep enough into human nature to show that **(1)** the former affections are nothing but special cases of **(2)** the latter. No-one has yet succeeded in doing that, though many have tried—apparently because of the love of *simplicity* that has been the source of much false reasoning in philosophy. I shan't here go into details about that. Many able philosophers have shown up

the failures of these ·simplifying· theories. The view that I'll be taking for granted is one that I think the slightest reflection will make obvious to every impartial enquirer. [In this paragraph, 'philosophy' and 'philosopher' probably also cover science and scientists.]

Anyway, the nature of the subject creates the strongest presumption that no better system will *ever* be invented that will •explain the benevolent feelings as arising from the selfish ones, and thus •reduce all the various emotions of the human mind to a perfect simplicity. The situation in this area of philosophy is quite different from the situation in physics. Many an hypothesis in natural science has appeared false at first and then after more accurate scrutiny found to be solid and satisfactory. This happens so often that a judicious and witty philosopher [Fontenelle] has gone so far as to say that if there's more than one way in which a phenomenon could be produced, there's a general presumption that it is produced by the least obvious and familiar of them! But the presumption always lies on the other side in all enquiries into the origin of our passions and of the internal operations of the human mind. ·In *that* context· the simplest and most obvious causal story about any given phenomenon is probably the true one. When a philosopher in setting out his system has to avail himself of some very intricate and refined reflections, and to suppose them to be essential to the production of some passion or emotion, *beware!* In such a case we have reason to be alertly on our guard against a false theory. Our affections can't be affected by refined activities of

<sup>24</sup> Benevolence naturally divides into two kinds—•general and •particular. My general benevolence towards someone occurs when I'm not his friend, am not connected with him, and am not one of his admirers, but feel a general sympathy with him, being sorry about his pains and rejoicing with him over his pleasures. My particular benevolence towards someone is based on my thinking that he is virtuous, or on help that he has given me, or on some special connection between us. There's no denying that both these sentiments are real aspects of human nature; the question of whether they are really subtle versions of self-love is •interesting to study rather than •practically important. In the course of this inquiry I shall often have occasion to refer to general benevolence, or humanity, or sympathy; and my general experience leads me to assume without further argument that it is real.

reason or imagination; what we always find is that a vigorous exertion of the faculties of reason or imagination brings affections [= feelings] to a halt. (This is bound to happen, because of the narrow capacity of the human mind.) It's true that quite often our predominant motive or intention is concealed from ourselves when it's mixed in with other motives which the mind (from vanity or self-conceit) wants to think are more prevalent; but such concealment of one's own motives from oneself has *never* happened because of the abstruseness and intricacy of the motive. A man who has lost a friend and patron may be flattering himself when he thinks that all his grief arises from generous sentiments with no admixture of self-interested considerations; but when a man grieves for a valuable friend whose patron and protector he was—i.e. when the benefits have been flowing in the opposite direction—how can we think that his passionate tenderness arises from some metaphysical relation to a self-interest that he doesn't actually *have*? We may as well imagine that tiny wheels and springs, like those of a watch, are what make a loaded wagon move, as account for the origin of passion from such abstruse reflections.

Animals are found to be capable of kindness to their own species and to ours, and there's no suspicion that this involves disguise or play-acting. Are we to account for all *their* sentiments too in terms of refined versions of self-interest? And if we admit a disinterested benevolence in the lower species, by what rule of analogy can we refuse it in the higher?

Love between the sexes generates a satisfaction and good-will that are quite different from the gratification of an appetite. In all sentient beings, tenderness towards their offspring is commonly able to outweigh the strongest motives neglect of self-love, and doesn't in any way arise from self-love. Consider this case: a fond mother loses her health

through the hard work of nursing her sick child; the child dies; and the mother languishes and dies of grief. Remember that the child's death frees her from the slavery of caring for it around the clock. What self-interest could possibly be at work here?

Isn't gratitude an affection of the human breast, or is 'gratitude' merely a word, with no meaning or reality? Don't we get more satisfaction from one man's company than from another's? Don't we want our friend to have a happy life, even if •absence or •death prevent us from having any part in it? And in most cases, even while we are •alive and •present, what gives us any part in our friend's good fortune other than affection and respect for him?

These and a thousand other examples are signs of a general benevolence in human nature in situations where no real self-interest binds us to the object. And it's hard to see how a •real passion or emotion can arise from an 'interest' that the person knows and admits to be •imaginary. No satisfactory hypothesis of this kind *has been* discovered so far, and there isn't the least probability that one *will* be found, however hard men work at it.

And there's another point. If you think about it properly you'll see that as between these two hypotheses—

(1) There is disinterested benevolence, distinct from self-love

(2) All friendship and humanity is a version of self-love—the one that is *really* simpler is not (2) but (1). It's true that (2) postulates only one basic feeling, while (1) postulates at least two; but (1) leads to a simpler over-all theory than (2) does because it fits better into the analogy of nature. In the rest of this paragraph I shall present an important very general thesis, and then fit (1)-type benevolence in with it. Everyone agrees that there are bodily wants or appetites that necessarily precede all sensual enjoyment, and lead

us immediately to try to *get* whatever it is that the appetite is an appetite *for*. For example, hunger and thirst have eating and drinking as the ends they aim for; and from the gratification of these primary appetites arises a pleasure that may become the object of another sort of desire or inclination that is secondary and self-interested.

[Hume's point in that very condensed sentence is this: **Primary appetite:** I am very hungry, which leads me to reach up to pick an apple off a tree. This isn't *self-interested* conduct, because the hunger leads to the action *immediately* rather than through any such thought as 'It will suit my purposes very well if I pick that apple'. But in general when I am hungry and then eat, I get pleasure from this; and so. . . **Secondary desire:** at a time when I'm not hungry I want to ensure that I will always have enough to eat, and this want and the actions it leads to *are* self-interested, because they do involve a thought about my own interests.]

Similarly, there are mental passions (·as distinct from physical appetites·) by which we are driven *immediately* to seek particular objectives—fame, power, vengeance—without any thought about what is in our interests; and when these objectives are attained a pleasing enjoyment ensues as a consequence of our getting what we wanted. For us to ·reap any pleasure from getting fame, or to ·pursue fame from motives of self-love and desire for happiness, nature must have given us a *basic* inclination to go after fame—·basic in the sense that it isn't a special case of some more general desire or inclination·. (Why is this so? It's an upshot of the way the human mind is structured.) If I have no vanity I get no pleasure from praise; if I lack ambition, power gives me no enjoyment; if I'm not angry, the punishment of an adversary is totally indifferent to me [see note on page 3]. In each of these cases there's a passion that points *immediately* to the objective, and makes ·the achieving of· it a part of our good or happiness; and then there are other, secondary passions that arise afterwards and ·lead us to· pursue the

same objective as a ·part of our happiness, once it has been made to be ·such by our basic affections. If there were no appetite of any kind in advance of—and more basic than—self-love, there would be hardly anything for self-love to *do*, because we would have felt few pains or pleasures and no intense ones, and so there would be little misery or happiness for us to avoid or to pursue.

Well, it's easy to see that the same thing may be the case with benevolence and friendship. The following individual case would be part of general story:

Because of the basic way I am built, I feel a desire for *your* happiness or good; because of that affection of mine, ·your good becomes ·my own good; and then I pursue your good from the combined motives of benevolence and self-enjoyment.

·The basic passions and propensity that resemble our primary physical appetites are further removed from self-interest than I have so far indicated. I have made the point that they don't *come from* self-interest, aren't *versions* of it; but now I add that sometimes they run *against* self-interest. We all know that someone's desire for revenge may be so strong that he seeks revenge while knowing that he is neglecting every consideration of ease, interest and safety; like some vindictive animals he infuses his very soul into the wounds he gives his enemy. [Hume here has a footnote, quoting (in Latin) Horace writing about the bee that leaves its sting in the body of its enemy and dies as a consequence, and Seneca writing about someone's neglecting his own welfare in his eagerness to harm an enemy.] What a malignant philosophy it would be that didn't allow to ·humanity and ·friendship the same privileges that are indisputably granted to the darker passions of ·enmity and ·resentment!. . . Such a philosophy may be a good foundation for paradoxical wit and teasing, but it's a very bad one for any serious argument or reasoning.

### Appendix 3. Further points about justice

In this Appendix I plan to give some further details about the origin and nature of justice, and to mark some differences between it and the other virtues.

The social virtues of humanity and benevolence exert their influence *immediately*, by a *direct* tendency or instinct that is focussed mainly on whatever it is that has aroused the feeling in question; They don't bring in any theory or system, or any thought about the consequences of the behaviour they lead to—consequences from other people going along with the behaviour, imitating it, taking it as an example. A parent rushes to help his child, swept along by the natural sympathy that drives him, and doesn't give him a space in which to reflect on how the rest of mankind feel or behave in similar circumstances. [See note on 'sympathy' on page 6.] A generous man cheerfully takes up an opportunity to do something for his friend because at that moment he feels himself to be governed by beneficent affections; he isn't concerned with whether anyone else in the universe ever was driven by such noble motives, or ever will be influenced by his behaviour now to act in similar ways. In every such case, the social passions of a person x aim at a single individual objective, and pursue the safety or happiness of the loved and admired person—of that person and no-one else. All x wants is just that, with no thought of further consequences. And, in a corresponding way, the good his beneficence does arouses the moral sentiment of approval in others without *their* thinking about further consequences of x's behaviour itself or of its being a model for how other members of society might act. So far from the behaviour's being valuable only because others might follow suit, the truth is almost the opposite. If the generous friend or disinterested patriot were

the only person engaged in beneficence of this sort, that would *enhance* his value in our eyes; the rarity and novelty of his conduct would *add* to the things we praised him for.

The case is not the same with the social virtues of justice and fidelity. They are highly useful—or indeed absolutely necessary—to the well-being of mankind; but the benefit they bring is not a consequence of every individual single act; rather, it arises from the whole scheme or system accepted by the whole society or anyway most of it. General peace and order are products of justice or the *general* practice of not taking things that belong to others; but it often happens that a *particular* case of respecting the *particular* right of one *individual* citizen is, considered in itself, harmful in its consequences. In a case of that sort the result of the individual act is directly opposite to that of the whole system of actions; the individual act may be extremely harmful although the general system of which it is a part is enormously advantageous. When a bad man inherits riches from a parent, this can lead to mischief—that's an individual case where right of inheritance is harmful. Its benefit comes only from the rule's being generally obeyed, and it is sufficient [here = 'morally acceptable, over-all'] if that benefit outweighs all the bad consequences in some particular cases. . . .

The happiness and prosperity of mankind that arises from the social virtue of **benevolence** and its varieties can be compared to a **wall** that is built by many hands: each stone that is put in place helps the wall to rise, and its over-all increase in size depends on the diligence and care of each workman. The happiness that arises from the social virtue of **justice** and its varieties is comparable to the building of a stone **arch**, where each individual stone

would fall to the ground if left to itself, and the whole arch is supported purely by the mutual assistance and combination of its parts. [This splendid comparison of Hume's depends on knowing how a stone arch works. For help with that, go to <http://www.technologystudent.com/struct1/arch1.htm>.]

All the laws of nature that regulate property, as well as all civil laws that do so, are *general*; they fix on certain essential circumstances of the case, and ignore •the characters, situations, and inter-relations of the people concerned, as well as •any particular consequences that may result from applying these laws in any particular case that comes up. If a beneficent man has acquired all his possessions through a mistake and without having a good legal title to them, these laws don't hesitate to make him pass the whole lot over to the man who *is* legally entitled to them, even if he is a selfish miser who has already heaped up immense stores of superfluous riches. The interests of society as a whole require that property should be regulated by inflexible general rules; the rules that are adopted are the ones that best serve the end of public utility; but it's impossible for them to prevent all particular hardships, or make beneficial consequences result from every individual application of a rule. It is sufficient if the whole plan or scheme is necessary for the support of civil society, and if the over-all good greatly outweighs the bad aspects of particular cases. •Don't think it would have been easy to devise rules that didn't work badly in special cases•. Even the general laws of the universe, though planned by •God's• infinite wisdom, can't exclude all evil or inconvenience from some particular events.

Some have maintained that justice arises from human conventions, and depends on the voluntary choice, consent, or working-together of mankind. If in this context 'convention' means what is usually means, namely *a promise*, nothing could be more absurd than this thesis. The keeping

of promises is itself a considerable *part* of justice—surely we aren't bound to keep our word because we have given our word to keep it! But if on the other hand 'convention' is being used here to refer to

a sense of common interest that each man feels in himself and notices in his fellow-men as well, a sense that carries him and them into a general plan of actions that has public utility as a consequence,

then I have to agree that justice *does* arise from human 'conventions' in *this* sense. Given the obvious fact that the particular consequences of a particular act of justice may be harmful not only to some individuals but to the public in general, it follows that anyone who aims always to act justly must have an eye to the whole plan or system, and must expect his fellow-humans to act in the same way in the same circumstances. If he took into account nothing but the consequences of each •individual• act of his own, his benevolence and humanity—as well as his self-love—might often have him behaving in ways very different from what the strict rules of right and justice prescribe.

Thus, two men pull the oars of a boat by common convention for common interest, without any promise or contract; thus gold and silver are made the measures of exchange; thus speech and words and language are fixed by human convention and agreement. When two or more people behave in a way that is advantageous to all of them if they all perform their part in it, but loses all advantage if only one performs, their conduct must arise from a 'convention' in the second of the above senses. There's no other possible source for it; no other motive for any one of them to participate in that scheme of conduct. (This theory about the origin of property, and thus the origin of justice is pretty much the same as one hinted at and adopted by Grotius in his *Laws of War and Peace*. [Hume quotes at some length from this Latin

work; the passage doesn't add any philosophical content to what is already before us.])

The word 'natural' is taken in so many senses, and is so loose in its meaning, that it seems pointless to argue about whether justice is 'natural'. If these are natural to man:

self-love,  
benevolence,  
reason,  
forethought,

then we can also describe

justice,  
order,  
fidelity,  
property,  
society

as 'natural' too. **(1)** Men's wants and needs lead them to combine; and **(2)** their understanding and experience tell them that this combination won't work if each man governs himself by no rule and isn't affected by the thought that this or that thing *belongs* to someone else. And from these **(1)** passions and **(2)** reflections taken together, as soon as we observe similar passions and reflections in other people, the sentiment of justice inevitably comes to have some place, large or small, in the make-up of every individual of the human species. That's what has happened down through the centuries. In as intelligent an animal as man, anything that necessarily arises from the use of his intellectual faculties can fairly be regarded as natural.<sup>25</sup>

Among all civilized nations there has been a constant attempt to separate the institution of property from every kind of bias and favouritism, and to base legal decisions about property on general views and considerations that apply equally to every member of society. There are at least two reasons for this. •Nothing could be more dangerous than for judges to be accustomed to allowing their decisions to reflect—however slightly—their own private friendship or enmity. •If men thought that the only reason why they lost a legal case was the judge's personal bias, they would be apt to become extremely hostile to the whole legal system. That is why, in cases where natural reason doesn't yield any fixed view of public utility that could settle a controversy about property, man-made laws are often created to do what natural reason doesn't do, and to govern procedure of all courts of law. Quite often man-made laws don't do the job either; and then precedents are called for; and an earlier decision—even one for which there was no sufficient reason—is rightly treated as a sufficient reason for a new decision. When direct laws *and* precedents fail, imperfect and indirect reasons are brought to the rescue, and the case in dispute is brought under them by analogical reasonings and comparisons, likenesses and correspondences, which are often more fanciful than real. It is pretty safe to say that •general jurisprudence [usually = 'legal theory', but here probably = 'legal practice'] is unlike all the sciences in this respect, and •that in many of its more fine-grained questions there can't properly be said to be truth or falsehood on either side.

<sup>25</sup> 'Natural' can be opposed •to 'unusual', •to 'miraculous' or •to 'artificial'. In the first two of those senses, justice and property are undoubtedly 'natural'. Perhaps they can't strictly be called 'natural' in the third sense—i.e. meaning 'not artificial'—because justice and property do presuppose reason, forethought and design, which means that they are really artificial. . . . If men hadn't lived in society, property would never have been known, and neither justice nor injustice would have existed. But society among human creatures would have been impossible without reason and forethought. Lower animals that unite into something like societies are guided by instinct, which serves them in place of reason. But all these disputes are merely verbal.

If one pleader bring the case under some earlier law or precedent by means of a refined analogy or comparison, his opponent won't be at a loss to find an analogy or comparison that goes the opposite way, and the judge's choice between these is often based more on taste and imagination than on any solid argument. The general objective of all courts of law is public utility, and this also requires a stable rule in all controversies; but when there is an *impasse* created by several equally plausible rules, some very slight turn of thought settles the decision in favour of one of the parties.

·START OF A VERY LONG FOOTNOTE·

The origin of justice and property is society's absolute need for *some* steady and constant scheme under which individual people *possess* things. It usually doesn't matter much what possessions are assigned to this or that person, and rules governing that, though they are to be strictly adhered to, are often based on very frivolous views and considerations. Here are five examples of relatively specialised property-rules, in the last two of which our imagination is at work in ways that could fairly be called 'frivolous'.

**(1)** If a number of independent people came together to form a society, the most obvious rule for them to agree on as a basis for property would be that everyone is to have a right of possession in any property that he owns or has the use of *now*. A person's becoming in this way the legal owner of something *x* would be based on a real relation that already existed between himself and *x*.

**(2)** For a similar reason, someone's having been the *first* to occupy or use something is treated as a basis for his having it as his property. This differs from **(1)** only in not being tied to the imagined situation in which the society and its laws are being devised. So it still has **(1)**'s feature of being based on an antecedent real relation between the person and the property.

**(3)** When a man puts work in on something that previously didn't belong to anyone—e.g. cutting down and shaping a tree, cultivating a field, or the like—the alterations he produces causes •one relation between him and the object, and this naturally draws us into establishing •a second relation between them, by ruling that the object is his legal property. There is also a public-utility reason for this ruling, namely that it encourages hard work.

Those are two reasons for ruling that labour creates property in the manner I have described. There may be a third. Perhaps private humanity towards the man joins in with the other two reasons, and make us want to leave him in possession of something that he has acquired by his sweat and labour, something that he has thought and hoped he could go on using. Private humanity certainly can't be the origin of justice, because justice often goes against it; but when society's needs have established rules of property, *some* rules may arise from private humanity and reluctance to bring hardship upon someone.

**(4)** I'm much inclined to think that the right of *inheritance* depends greatly on connections of the imagination, and that the reason why property is transferred to a man after the death of his father (say) is the fairly frivolous thought that the man's •relation to his father somehow gives birth to a •relation between him and the property. It's true that hard work is more encouraged by the transference of ownership to children or near relatives, but this has force only in developed societies, whereas the right of inheritance is recognized even among the greatest barbarians.

**(5)** Acquisition of property by *accession* can only be explained in terms of the relations and connections of the imaginations. [‘Accession: *Law*. Artificial improvement or natural growth of a property.’ Shorter OED.] To explain this I need first to say something about the ownership of rivers.

The laws of most nations *and* the natural turn of our thoughts dictate that rivers are owned by the owners of their banks, except for such vast rivers as the Rhine or the Danube, which seem too wide to come to be owned through ownership of the neighbouring fields. But even these big rivers are regarded as belonging to the nation through whose territory they run, because we think of a nation as being *big enough* to match up to such rivers in our imagination.

Civil laws say that the accessions that are made to land bordering upon rivers follow the land, .i.e. are owned by the owners of the land, provided that the accessions were made very gradually and imperceptibly .by the river's depositing of silt or the like. This gradualness helps the imagination to tie the new land to the old land.

When a considerable portion of land is suddenly washed away from one bank and swept across to the other, it becomes the property of the person who owns the land on that other side after it has united with his land and the trees and plants have spread their roots into both his old land and this new bit. *After* that, and not *before*. It is only after that uniting by soil and roots that our thought—strictly speaking, our imagination—sufficiently joins them.

In short, we must always distinguish •the need for a system of permanent property-rights from •the rules that determine who owns what. The need is obvious, strong, and invincible; the specific rules may depend on lighter and less serious views about public utility, on the sentiment of private

humanity and aversion to bringing hardship on people, on man-made laws, on precedents, analogies, and very fine connections and turns of the imagination.

·END OF THE VERY LONG FOOTNOTE·

Before leaving this subject I should remark that *after* the laws of justice have been fixed by considerations of •general utility, we pay a great deal of attention to the harm that comes to •individuals through any violation of those laws. Such individual harms play a large part in how strongly we *blame* an unjust action. By the laws of society, this coat or this horse is mine, and *ought* to stay in my possession: I'm relying on being able to go on enjoying it, and when you take it from me you disappoint my expectations, and doubly displease me and offend every bystander. It is a public wrong because it violates the general rules of ownership; and it is a private harm because in it an individual is injured. The private consideration wouldn't have any place in this if the .laws violated by the. public wrong hadn't first been established; for without those laws the distinction between *mine* and *thine* wouldn't be known in society. But unquestionably our concern for general good is intensified by our concern for particular good. Something that harms the community without harming any individual is often more lightly thought of. But when the greatest public wrong also involves a considerable private wrong, it's not surprising that the highest disapproval attends such wicked behaviour.

## Appendix 4. Some verbal disputes

Nothing is more usual than for philosophers to trespass on the territory of grammarians, and engage in disputes about words while thinking they are handling controversies of the deepest importance and concern. I was trying to keep out of frivolous and endless arguments of that sort when I used the utmost caution in stating the objective of my present enquiry, and set out simply to collect

- a list of the mental qualities that are the object of love or esteem, and form a part of personal merit, and
- a catalogue of the qualities that are the objects of censure or reproach, and detract from the character of the person who has them;

adding some thoughts about the origins of these sentiments of praise or blame. I avoided the terms ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’ on every occasion when there might be some difficulty about them—difficulty arising from the fact that some of the qualities on my first list are usually called ‘talents’ rather than ‘virtues’, and that some of the items on my second list are often called ‘defects’ rather than ‘vices’. You might expect me now, before ending this moral enquiry, to draw sharp lines between virtues and talents, and between vices and defects, and to explain the rationales and the origins of those lines. Well, I am not going to! An exploration of those lines would end up being a merely grammatical enquiry. But I shall offer four reflections, which will contain all that I intend to say on this subject.

(1) I don’t find that in English or any other modern language the boundaries are exactly fixed between virtues and talents, vices and defects, or that a precise definition can be given of the one as distinguished from the other. We might try this:

- The only admirable qualities that count as ‘virtues’ are ones that are •voluntary.

But think about such qualities as *courage*, *equanimity*, *patience*, *self-control*, which almost every language classifies as ‘virtues’ although they depend little if at all on our •choice. Or we might try this:

- It’s only the qualities that prompt us to act our part in society that are entitled to be called ‘virtues’.

Those are indeed the most valuable qualities; but they are commonly called ‘the social virtues’, and that adjective presupposes that some virtues are not social. A third try:

- Intellectual endowments don’t count as ‘virtues’, only moral endowments do, because they are the only ones that lead to action.

But many of the qualities that are usually called ‘intellectual virtues’—e.g. *prudence*, *penetration*, *discernment*, *discretion*—also have a considerable influence on conduct. Or we might try this:

- Qualities of *the heart*—meaning ones the exercise of which is accompanied by a feeling or sentiment—are the genuine virtues, whereas qualities of *the head* are not.

But that won’t do either, because industry, frugality, temperance, perseverance, and many other praiseworthy powers or habits are generally called ‘virtues’, and the exercise of them doesn’t involve any immediate sentiment in the person concerned. . . . In the middle of this welter of suggestions and refutations, it is fortunate that the question can’t possibly be of any importance because it is purely verbal. A moral and philosophical discourse needn’t enter into all these whims of language, which are so variable in different dialects and even

in the same dialect at different times. Still, I'll offer a view about the matter. It seems to me that although everyone agrees that there are virtues of many different kinds, what we chiefly have in mind when we call a man 'virtuous' or 'a man of virtue' are his social qualities, which are indeed the most valuable. All the same, an honest good-natured man *wouldn't* get that honourable label if he were notably lacking in any of the non-social virtues such as courage, temperance, economy, industry, understanding, dignity of mind. Who would ever say, except as a joke, 'He is a man of great virtue, but a complete blockhead?'

**(2)** It's not surprising that languages aren't very precise in marking off virtues from talents and vices from defects, because how we feel about them is not very different. The sentiment of conscious worth, the self-satisfaction that comes from a review of one's own conduct and character; . . . arises from the endowments of courage and ability, industry and ingenuity, as well as from other mental excellences. And, on the other side, who isn't deeply embarrassed when he thinks back on his own folly and clumsiness of behaviour, feeling a secret sting whenever his memory brings back any past episode in which he behaved with stupidity or bad manners? Time never erases the cruel ideas that a man has of his own foolish conduct, or of hostility he has brought on himself through his own cowardice or impudence. They still haunt his solitary hours, damp his most aspiring thoughts, and show him, even to himself, in the most contemptible and odious colours imaginable.

What are we more anxious to conceal from others, and not have exposed by jeering and satire, than such blunders, infirmities and meannesses? And what are we chiefly vain about? Isn't it our bravery or learning, our wit or breeding, our eloquence or skill in speaking, our taste or abilities? We display these with care, if not with ostentation; and

we commonly show more ambition to excel in them than even in the social virtues themselves, though the social virtues are really of much greater excellence. Good-nature and (especially) honesty are so indispensably required for society that, although any violation of these duties [Hume's word] brings the greatest blame, no special praise is given to common instances of them of the sort that seem essential for the support of human society. That, I think, is why, although men are often very free in praising the qualities of their heart, they are shy about commending the endowments of their head; because the virtues of the head, being thought to be more rare and extraordinary, are experienced as more usual objects of pride and self-conceit, so that when someone boasts of having them we strongly suspect that pride and self-conceit are at work in him.

It's hard to tell whether you hurt a man's character more by calling him a knave or by calling him a coward, or to tell whether a beastly glutton or drunkard is as odious and contemptible as a meanly selfish miser. Suppose I could choose my character—specifically, choosing between having

**(1)** a friendly, humane heart, and

**(2)** extensive genius and courage and all the other virtues of Demosthenes and Philip combined.

*For my own happiness and self-satisfaction* I would choose **(1)**; but *for the world's view of me* I would choose **(2)**, expecting to get much more general applause and admiration from that than from **(1)**. The figure that a man cuts in life, the reception he meets with in company, the admiration he gets from those who know him—all these advantages depend as much on his good sense and judgment as on any other part of his character. A man who has the best intentions in the world, and is utterly removed from all injustice and violence, still won't get much respect from the world unless he has at least a moderate share of intellectual competence.

So what is there here for us to dispute about? If **(2)** sense and courage, temperance and industry, wisdom and knowledge are agreed to form a considerable part of personal merit; if a man who has those qualities is better satisfied with himself and better entitled to the good-will, respect and co-operation of others than is anyone who entirely lacks them; if, in short, these **(2)** endowments arouse similar sentiments to those aroused by **(1)** the social virtues; is there any reason for us to be so extremely scrupulous about a *word*, or to argue about whether they are entitled to the label ‘virtues’? It may be claimed that the sentiment of approval produced by the **(2)** accomplishments, as well as being *inferior to* the sentiment that greets the **(1)** virtues of justice and humanity, is also somewhat *different from* it. But this doesn’t seem to be a sufficient reason for classifying the two quite differently and giving them different labels. Within the class of characteristics that are uncontroversially classed as ‘virtues’, there are considerable differences in the sentiments that they produce in others. The historian Sallust describes the characters of Caesar and of Cato in a way that qualifies each to count as ‘virtuous’ in the strictest and tightest sense of the word; but their ways of being virtuous were different, and the sentiments they arouse in us are also somewhat different. Caesar produces love, Cato produces admiration; Caesar is amiable, Cato is awe-inspiring; we would like our friends to resemble Caesar, but our ambition for ourselves would be to resemble Cato. Similarly, the approval we give to temperance or industry or frugality may be somewhat different from our approval

of the social virtues—but not so different as to make them completely different species of approval. . . .<sup>26</sup>

I believe that most people will naturally and unhesitatingly agree with what an elegant and judicious poet wrote:

Virtue (for mere good-nature is a fool)  
Is sense and spirit with humanity.

What claim does a man have to our generous assistance if he has dissipated his wealth in luxurious expenses, idle vanities, fatuous projects, dissolute pleasures or extravagant gambling? These vices (I do call them ‘vices’) bring unpitied misery and contempt on everyone who is addicted to them.

Achaeus, a wise and prudent prince, fell into a trap that cost him his crown and his life, after he had used every reasonable precaution to guard himself against it. On that account, says the historian Polybius, he deserves both respect and compassion; only those who betrayed him merit hatred and contempt.

Pompey’s sudden flight and rash negligence at the start of the civil wars struck Cicero as such notorious blunders that they wiped out his friendship towards that great man. He compared the effect on him of this behaviour of Pompey’s with the way we would be affected by lack of cleanliness or decency or discretion in a mistress. That’s how Cicero put it when speaking in his role not as a philosopher but as a statesman and man of the world. But when this same Cicero was thinking like a philosopher, he followed all the ancient moralists in presenting a very broad idea of *virtue*, giving that honourable label to every praiseworthy quality or endowment of the mind. This leads me to . . .

<sup>26</sup> [Hume has a longish footnote about differences in emotional response to various character-traits, focussing mainly on •love and •admiration. He throws in another example:] There seems to be a stronger mixture of •pride in •contempt than of •humility in •admiration; and it wouldn’t be hard to work out why, if one made a careful study of all the passions. All these various mixtures and compositions and appearances of sentiment make a challenging subject of theoretical investigation, but they aren’t relevant to my present topic. Throughout the present Enquiry I have always considered in a *general* way what qualities are praised or blamed, without going into all the minute differences of sentiment that they arouse. . . .

**(3)** The ancient moralists, the best models, attached little weight to any differences among the different kinds of mental endowments and defects, treating them all alike as ‘virtues’ or ‘vices’ and bringing them all within the scope of their moral reasonings. . . . In the classification adopted by that eloquent moralist Cicero, our social duties constitute merely one of four main kinds of virtue. [At this point Hume has a footnote quoting (in Latin) a passage by Cicero which he says clearly and explicitly makes his (Hume’s) point.]

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We need only glance through the chapter-titles in Aristotle’s ethical works to be convinced that he takes the ‘virtues’ to include not only •justice and friendship but also •courage, temperance, magnificence, magnanimity, modesty, prudence, and manly openness.

For some of the ancients, all morality is summed up in ‘Sustain and abstain’, i.e. ‘Be patient and continent’. [That’s a morality that tells us to •put up with the blows that fate lands on us, and to •refrain from various kinds of misconduct. Hume’s point, presumably, is that such a morality is notably distant from emphasizing *virtue* in anything like his or our sense of the word.]

Epictetus hardly ever mentioned the sentiment of humanity and compassion except to warn his disciples against it. The ‘virtue’ of the Stoics seems to consist mainly in a firm temperament and a good intellect. With them, as with Solomon and the eastern moralists, •folly and •wisdom

are equivalent to •vice and •virtue respectively.

‘Men will praise thee’, says David ‘when thou dost well unto thyself’ (Psalm 49). The Greek poet Euripedes says ‘I hate a wise man who isn’t wise to himself’.

Plutarch doesn’t let *systems* of morality cramp his style in his philosophy any more than in his history. When he compares the great men of Greece and Rome, he sets out all their blemishes and accomplishments, of whatever kind, including everything significant that could either lower or raise their moral standing. His moral discourses contain the same free and natural censure of men and manners.

Livy’s description of the character of Hannibal is regarded as biased, but it does allow him many eminent virtues. According to Livy, before Hannibal there had never been anyone as well equipped as he was for both of his opposite roles—commanding and obeying—so that it would be hard to decide whether he was valued more by the general whom he obeyed or by the army which he commanded. There was no-one to whom the general Hasdrubal would more willingly entrust the conduct of any dangerous enterprise; and no-one under whom the soldiers revealed more courage and confidence. Great boldness in facing danger; great prudence in the midst of it. No labour could fatigue his body or subdue his mind. Cold and heat meant nothing to him; food and drink he sought as •something needed to keep him alive, not as •gratifications of luxurious appetites. Waking or rest he used indiscriminately, by night or by day. These great *virtues* were balanced by great *vices*—inhuman cruelty, treacherousness that was extreme even for a Carthaginian, no truth, no faith, no respect for oaths or promises or religion.

The character of Pope Alexander VI, as drawn by the historian Guicciardini, is pretty similar, but less biased; and it shows that even the moderns, when they speak naturally,

use the same moral language as the ancients. This Pope, says the historian, had a singular capacity and judgment, admirable prudence, a wonderful talent for persuasion, and in any important enterprise incredible diligence and dexterity. But these *virtues* were infinitely outweighed by his *vices*—no faith, no religion, insatiable greed, extravagant ambition, and more than barbarous cruelty.

Polybius regards the Sicilian leader Agathocles as the most cruel and impious of all tyrants; but he still rebukes Timaeus for giving such a one-sidedly negative account of him. From Timaeus himself, Polybius says, we learn this about Agathocles:

He took refuge in Syracuse, fleeing the dirt and smoke and toil of his former profession as a potter. From such humble beginnings he rose quite quickly to be the master of all Sicily; he put the Carthaginian state in the utmost danger; and he died as an old man in possession of sovereign dignity.

If all that is right (says Polybius), shouldn't it be granted that there was something prodigious and extraordinary about him, and that he had great talents and capacity for business and action? His historian oughtn't have recorded only what tended to his reproach and infamy but also what might redound to his praise and honour.

We may notice that the distinction between voluntary and involuntary wasn't attended to much by the ancients in their moral reasonings, as witness the fact that they often treated the question 'Can virtue be taught?' as genuinely open. [Hume refers to Plato, Seneca, Horace, and one other writer. Then:] They rightly thought that cowardice, meanness, frivolity, anxiety, impatience, folly, and many other qualities of the mind might appear ridiculous and deformed, contemptible and odious, even though they are independent of the will. And it couldn't be supposed that

everyone always has the power to attain every kind of mental excellence, any more than the power to become physically beautiful.

(4) Why in their moral enquiries have modern philosophers often followed such a different course from that of the ancients? In later times, philosophy of all kinds and especially ethics has been more closely united with theology than was ever the case with the heathens; and that has made a big difference, because theology won't bargain or compromise, but bends every branch of knowledge to its own purposes, without much regard to the phenomena of nature or to the unbiassed sentiments of the mind. Because of this intransigence, reasoning and even language have been warped from their natural course, and people have tried to establish verbal distinctions where the difference in the objects was virtually imperceptible. Philosophers, or rather theologians disguised as philosophers, have treated all morals as on a par with civil laws, guarded by the sanctions of reward and punishment; and this has inevitably led them to put the voluntary/involuntary distinction at the foundation of their whole theory. Well, anyone may use words in whatever senses he likes, but they ought to concede that people *often* have sentiments of blame and praise that they direct at items that don't fall within the scope of will or choice, and that we ought—if not as moralists then as theoretical philosophers—to give some satisfactory theory and explanation of this phenomenon.

A 'blemish', a 'fault', a 'vice', a 'crime'—these expressions seem to express different degrees of censure and disapproval. But they are all basically pretty much the same, belonging to the same kind or species. Having one of them explained will easily lead us into a sound conception of the others, and it matters more to attend to things than to attend to verbal labels. Even the most ordinary system of morals will agree

that we owe a duty to ourselves, and it must be worthwhile to examine that duty in order to see how it compares with the duty we owe to society. It is probable that the approval

given to the performance of either of these duties is similar, and arises from similar sources, whatever label we may give to either of these excellences.