

# The origin of our ideas of virtue or moral good

Francis Hutcheson

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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. Longer omissions are reported between brackets in normal-sized type. The division into seven sections is Hutcheson's; so are the 118 headings within sections, except that in the original they are in the margins rather than across the text.—This version is based on the second edition of the work, but some considerable alterations and additions from the third and fourth editions are included; only one of these (starting on page 13) is noted as an importation.

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## Glossary

**affection:** In the early modern period, ‘affection’ could mean ‘fondness’, as it does today; but it was also often used, as it is in this work, to cover every sort of pro or con attitude—desire, approval, liking, disapproval, disliking, etc. The first paragraph of **(1)** on page 11 is interesting about this. See also three paragraphs later, where Hutcheson says that hate is one of the two basic affections.

**amiable:** This meant ‘likable’, ‘lovable’, ‘very attractive’. A good deal stronger than the word’s normal meaning today.

**benevolence:** The desire to do good.

**benefactor:** Someone who does good.

**beneficence:** The doing of good.

**beneficiary:** Someone for whom good is done.

**contempt:** In early modern times, ‘contempt’ had a weaker sense than it does now. To have ‘contempt’ for something was to write it off as negligible—hence ‘contempt of pain’, ‘contempt of death’.

**contentedness, discontent:** These replace Hutcheson’s ‘complacence’ and ‘displacence’ respectively.

**determine, determination:** These are used an enormous amount in early modern philosophy. The basic meaning of ‘determine’ is *settle, fix, pin down*; thus, to determine what to do next is to decide what to do next, to settle the question. In our day ‘He is determined to do x’ means that he resolutely intends to do x; but in early modern times ‘He is determined to do x’ would be more likely to mean ‘Something about how he is constituted settles it that he will do x’; it could be that he is made to do x, or caused to do x. But ‘determine’ can’t simply be replaced by ‘cause’ throughout; when on page 19 Hutcheson speaks of God’s having dispositions that

‘determine’ him to act in a certain way, he would certainly have rejected ‘cause’.

**disinterested:** What this meant in early modern times is what it still means when used by literate people, namely ‘not *self*-interested’. I have ‘disinterested malice’ towards someone if I want him to suffer although there is no gain for me in this (apart, presumably, from the satisfaction of knowing that he is suffering).

**education:** In early modern times this word had a somewhat broader meaning than it does today. It wouldn’t have been misleading to replace it by ‘upbringing’ throughout.

**equipage:** This imprecise term covers: coach and horses, servants’ uniform, elegant cutlery and dishes, and so on. In some but not all uses it also covers furniture.

**evil:** Used by philosophers as a noun, this means merely ‘something bad’. We can use ‘good’ as a noun (‘friendship is a good’), but the adjective ‘bad’ doesn’t work well for us as a noun (‘pain is a bad’); and it has been customary to use ‘evil’ for this purpose (e.g. ‘pain is an evil’, and ‘the problem of evil’ meaning ‘the problem posed by the existence of bad states of affairs’). Don’t load the noun with all the force it has as an adjective.

**indifferent:** To say that some kind of conduct is ‘indifferent’ is to say that it is neither praiseworthy nor wrong.

**industry:** It here means ‘hard work’ or ‘hard-workingness’, with nothing pointing to factories, manufacture, or the like.

**liking:** Today’s meaning for Hutcheson’s word ‘relish’ makes his use of it distracting, so it and its cognates have been replaced by ‘liking’ throughout. These ‘likings’ are thought of as being like *tastes*.

**luxury:** This meant something like: *extreme* or *inordinate* indulgence in sensual pleasures. A 'luxurious' person was someone wholly given to the pleasures of the senses—mostly but not exclusively the pleasures of eating and drinking.

**magistrate:** In this work, as in general in early modern times, a 'magistrate' is anyone with an official role in government; sometimes but not always it was a role in law-enforcement. The magistracy is the set of all such officials, thought of as a single body.

**mean:** Low-down, poor, skimpy etc., in literal and metaphorical uses. On page 18 'meanest selfishness' = 'selfishness that is naked, open, uncaring about the welfare of others'. On page 23 the 'meanest of mankind' = 'the poorest and socially lowest people'. on page 47 'form mean opinions of us' = 'think of us as morally low-down'. On page 48 'meanness of spirit' = 'lack of moral or emotional or intellectual energy'.

**mischief:** This meant 'harm, injury'—much stronger and darker than the word's meaning today.

**moral:** In early modern times, 'moral' could mean what it does today but also had a use in which it meant 'having to do with intentional human action'. Until the 1960s Cambridge University called philosophy 'moral science', a relic of the time when much of philosophy was armchair psychology. In the move from 'moral actions' to 'moral sense' on page 4 Hutcheson may be exploiting this ambiguity; but perhaps not—think about it. Notice also that on page 49 he clearly implies that 'virtues' are only a subset of 'moral abilities'.

**object:** In early modern usage, anything that is aimed at, wanted, loved, hated, thought about, feared, etc. is an *object* of that aim, desire, love, etc. *Anything*: it could be a physical object, but is more likely to be a state of affairs, a state of mind, an experience, etc.

**occasion:** It is often used to mean the same as 'cause' (noun or verb), but it began its philosophical career in opposition to 'cause'. According to the 'occasionalist' theory about body-mind relations: when you are kicked, you feel pain; what causes the pain is not the kick but God, and the kick comes into it not as *causing* God to give you pain (because nothing causes God to do anything) but as the 'occasion' for his doing so. Perhaps something like a signal or a trigger. Writers who weren't obviously pushing the occasionalist line still used 'occasion' sometimes without *clearly* meaning anything but 'cause'.

**occult:** It did and still does mean 'hidden'. The phrase 'occult quality' (page 60) was a standard accusing label for anything that wasn't and perhaps couldn't be explained—e.g. gravity, magnetism.

**offices:** In the phrase 'good offices' (or occasionally with a different adjective, e.g. 'generous offices') the word means 'help given', 'favour done', or the like.

**passive obedience:** The doctrine that anything short of or other than absolute obedience to the monarch is sinful.

**performance:** In 18th century Britain a published work was often referred to as a 'performance' by its author, especially when it was being praised.

**prince:** As was common in his day, Hutcheson uses 'prince' to stand for the chief of the government. The word names a governmental role, not a rank of nobility.

**principle:** Hutcheson uses this word only in a sense, once common but now obsolete, in which 'principle' means 'source', 'cause', 'driver', 'energizer', or the like. (Hume's *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* is, as he explicitly tells us, an enquiry into the *sources in human nature* of our moral thinking and feeling.)

**selfish:** This is not a term of criticism. Think of it as 'self-ish', i.e. 'self-related' or 'concerned with one's own interests', but *not* necessarily to the exclusion of proper care for the interests of others.

**sensible:** This means 'relating to the senses', and has nothing to do with being level-headed, prudent, or the like.

**sentiment:** This can mean 'feeling' or 'belief', and when certain early modern writers speak of 'moral sentiments' they may mean both at once, or be exploiting the word's ambiguity.

**ugly:** This word does not occur in this work; nor does 'ugliness'. In the present version they replace 'deformed' and 'deformity', which mean something stronger and nastier

to us but didn't do so in Hutcheson's day. On pages 37–38 he twice uses 'deformed' apparently in our sense.

**uneasy:** Locke turned this into a kind of technical term for some of the writers who followed him, through his theory that every intentional human act is the agent's attempt to relieve his state of 'uneasiness'. It covers pain but also many much milder states—any unpleasant sense of something's being wrong.

**vice:** In this work, 'vice' simply means 'bad behaviour (of whatever kind)', and 'vicious' is the cognate adjective. Don't load either of these with the (different sorts of) extra meaning that they tend to carry today.

## Preface

**[This was the Preface not only of this work but also of Hutcheson's *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of Beauty, Harmony, Order, Design*. The two works were published together as a linked pair.]**

No part of philosophy is more important than a sound knowledge of human nature and its various powers and dispositions. There has recently been a great deal of investigation of our understanding and of the various methods of obtaining truth. It is generally agreed that the importance of any truth is simply its power to make men happy or to give them the greatest and most lasting pleasure; and 'wisdom' names the ability to pursue this goal by the best means. So it must surely be of the greatest importance to have clear conceptions of this goal itself and of the means necessary to obtain it, so that we can discover which are the greatest and most lasting pleasures, rather than wasting our highly trained reason in trivial activities. In fact, I am afraid that if we don't follow this line of inquiry most of our studies will be of very little use to us. Why? Because they don't seem to aim at anything much except the mere acquisition of speculative knowledge [= 'knowledge of non-evaluative truths'] itself. No-one has clearly explained how knowledge or truth can bring us pleasure.

That is what started me on an inquiry into the various pleasures that human nature is capable of receiving. In our modern philosophical writings we don't find much about this except for •a mere classification of them into 'sensible' and 'rational', and •some trite commonplace arguments to prove that rational pleasures are more valuable than sensible [see Glossary] ones. Our sensible pleasures are skated over, and explained only by some examples of tastes, smells, sounds, or the like that are generally regarded by thoughtful people

as very trivial satisfactions. and our rational pleasures have been treated in much the same way. We are seldom given any notion of *rational pleasure* that goes beyond the notion we have when we think about our possession. . . .of things that may give rise to pleasure. We call such things 'advantageous'; but we can't get a clear concept of *advantage*, i.e. of what is in our interests, until we know

- what pleasures are apt to be provided by advantageous objects [see Glossary], and
- what senses, i.e. powers of perception, we have with regard to such objects.

We may be surprised by how important this inquiry will turn out to be in morals, where it will show that •virtue is something real, and that •it is the surest happiness of the agent.

Our experience of our external senses shows us clearly that our perceptions of pleasure or pain don't depend directly on our will: objects don't please us or displease us according to whether we *want* them to do so. [Hutcheson is here discussing pleasure and pain received through our *external* senses, so the 'objects' in question in this paragraph are material objects.] The presence of some objects necessarily pleases us, and the presence of others equally necessarily displeases us. The only way we can voluntarily get pleasure or avoid pain is by procuring objects of the pleasing kind and avoiding objects of the displeasing kind. It's because of the basic way we are built that one sort lead to delight and the other to dissatisfaction.

This holds equally for all our other pleasures and pains. We do have others, because many other sorts of objects please or displease us as necessarily as do material objects do when they operate on our sense-organs. Almost every object that comes before our minds is the occasion [see Glossary] of some pleasure or pain. Thus we find ourselves pleased with a regular form, a piece of architecture or painting, a composition of notes, a theorem, an action, an affection [see Glossary], a character. and we're aware that this pleasure arises necessarily from the contemplation of the idea that is then present to our minds, with all its circumstances, although some of these ideas have nothing of what we call sensible perception in them; and in those that do involve sense-perception the pleasure arises from some uniformity, order, arrangement, imitation—not from the simple ideas of colour, or sound, or shape etc. separately considered.

These determinations [see Glossary] to be pleased with forms or ideas that we become aware of I call 'senses'. To distinguish them from the powers that are ordinarily called by that name, I'll call our power of perceiving the beauty of regularity, order, harmony, an 'internal sense', and the determination to be pleased with the contemplation of the affections, actions, or characters of rational agents that we call 'virtuous' I'll give the name 'moral sense'.

My main purpose is to show that human nature was not left quite indifferent in matters of virtue, .i.e. was not left with no immediate and instinctive reactions to good and to bad behaviour. If we had nothing of that kind, we would have to make our own observations regarding the advantage or disadvantage of actions, and to regulate our conduct accordingly. The weakness of our reason and the distractions caused by the infirmity and the necessities of our nature are so great that few men could ever have conducted those long inferences that show some actions to be on the whole

advantageous to the agent and their contraries pernicious. The author of nature has equipped us better for virtuous conduct than our moralists seem to imagine, by giving us *instructions* for it, ones that are almost as quick and powerful as the instructions we have for the preservation of our bodies. He has made virtue a *lovely* form, to spur us to pursue it, and has given us strong affections to serve as the springs of each virtuous action.

This *moral sense* of beauty in actions and affections may seem strange at first view. Some of our moralists themselves are offended by its appearance in Lord Shaftesbury's writings, for two reasons. •They are so accustomed to deduce every approval or disapproval from rational views of what is in our interests. . . . and •they think that the notion of a moral sense comes close to the notion of *innate ideas*, of which they have a horror. In my second treatise, on Virtue, I'll show that this moral sense has nothing to do with innate ideas.

Our gentlemen of good taste can tell us of a great many senses, tastes, and likings [see Glossary] for beauty, harmony, imitation in painting and poetry; and mightn't we also find in mankind a liking for a beauty in characters, in ways of behaving? I suspect that our foolish management of philosophy (as well as religion) has made it so austere and unshapely that a gentleman can't easily bring himself to *like* it; and those who are strangers to it can scarcely bear to hear our description of it. What a change from what was once the delight of the finest gentlemen among the ancients—their *recreation* after the bustle of public business!

In the first treatise I may sometimes have assumed a greater agreement of mankind in their sense of beauty than experience will confirm; but all I care about is to show

- that some sense of beauty is natural to men;
- that we find as much agreement in men's likings of forms as in their external senses (which everyone

agrees to be natural); and

- that pleasure or pain, delight or aversion, are *naturally* joined to men's perceptions.

If you are convinced that the mind is caused to be pleased with forms, proportions, resemblances, theorems, it won't be difficult for you to grasp that we have another sense, a superior one that is also natural to men, causing them to be pleased with actions, characters, affections. This is the *moral sense*, which is the subject of the second treatise.

The regular occasions [see Glossary] of perception by the external senses are presented to us as soon as we come into the world, and that may be what makes it easy for us to regard these senses as natural; but the objects of the superior senses of beauty and virtue generally don't crop up as early as that. It probably takes a while for children •to reflect (or anyway to let us know that they do) on proportion and similarity, on affections, characters, temperaments, or •to come to know the external actions that are evidences of these. This leads us to imagine that their sense of beauty, and their moral sentiments [see Glossary] concerning actions, must be entirely a product of instruction and upbringing; ·but that is a weak basis for that conclusion·. It's no harder to conceive •how a character or temperament might be *constituted by nature* as the necessary occasion of pleasure or object of approval than to conceive •how a taste or a sound might have that same status, despite the fact that the character or temperament isn't presented to the child as early in life as tastes and sounds are.

[Hutcheson now has three paragraphs gratefully praising three people who have supported him and given him useful criticisms of the two treatises' first editions. It is only the third person that need concern us here:]

There's no need for me to recommend Lord Shaftesbury's writings to the world: they will be admired as long as any careful thought remains among men. It is indeed to be wished that he hadn't mixed his noble performances [see Glossary] with some prejudices that he had against Christianity—a religion that gives us the truest idea of virtue, and recommends the love of God and of mankind as the sum of all true religion. Imagine that able nobleman coming across a dissolute set of men who enjoy nothing in life but the lowest and most sordid pleasures, searching in Shaftesbury's writings for insinuations against Christianity so that they can be less restrained in their debaucheries, although their low minds are incapable of savouring the noble sentiments of virtue and honour that he has placed in such a lovely light. How indignant that would have made him!

Whatever faults able people may find with this performance of mine, I hope that no-one will find anything in it contrary to religion or good conduct; and I'll be well pleased if I give the learned world an opportunity for a more thorough examination of these subjects that I think are of very considerable importance. My main basis for confidence that my views are mainly correct is that the first hints of them came to me from some of the greatest writers of antiquity. . . .

## 1: The moral sense by which we perceive virtue and vice and approve or disapprove them in others

### Different ideas of moral and natural good

(1) Our perceptions of •moral good and evil [see Glossary] are utterly different from our perceptions of •natural good, i.e. advantage; you'll be convinced of this if you reflect on the difference in your state when you observe a morally good action from your state when you come across something that is advantageous to you. If we had no

•internal• sense of *good*

distinct from the

what the external senses tell us is to our advantage  
or •self•-interest

and from

our •internal• perceptions of beauty and harmony,  
then our feelings for a generous friend or any noble character would be much the same as our admiration and love for a good vegetable-garden or a comfortable house, for in each there would be or might be advantage for us. And we wouldn't admire any action or love any person in a distant country, or at a remote time, whose influence couldn't extend to us, any more than we—not being involved in the Spanish trade—love the mountains of Peru! We would have the same sentiments and affections towards inanimate things as towards rational agents; and everyone knows that in fact we *don't*. Putting the two side by side, our attitude is this: 'Why should we admire inanimate beings or love and esteem them? They aren't trying to do good to us; their nature makes them fit for our uses, but they don't know what these are, and aren't trying to satisfy them. In contrast with that, rational agents do try to serve our interests; they delight in our happiness, and are benevolent [see Glossary] towards us.'

So we are all aware of the difference between •the love and esteem—the perception of moral excellence—that benevolence arouses in us towards the person in whom we observe it and •the opinion that something is a natural good, which only arouses our desire to own it. This difference is strong evidence against the thesis that all approval, i.e. all sense of *good* comes from the prospect of *advantage*. If that thesis were true, why would there *be* this difference? Don't inanimate objects bring advantage to us, as well as benevolent persons who do us offices [see Glossary] of kindness and friendship? Then shouldn't we have the same warm sentiments regarding both? or only the same cold opinion of advantage with regard to both? The reason why that's not how things stand must be this: we have a distinct perception of beauty, i.e. excellence, in the kind affections of rational agents; and this determines [see Glossary] us to admire and love such characters and persons.

### In actions done to ourselves

Suppose we get the same advantage from two men, one of whom does things for us •because he loves us and delights in our happiness, while the other acts •out of self-interest or under constraint. The two are equally beneficial or advantageous to us, and yet we'll have quite different sentiments regarding them. So it's certain that we have perceptions of moral [see Glossary] actions other than those of advantage; and this power of receiving these perceptions can be called a moral 'sense', since it fits the definition of that word, namely 'a determination of the mind to receive an idea from the presence of an object that we are presented with independently of our will'.

**Moral and natural evil**

This may be equally evident from our ideas of evil ·as done to us blindly by some natural event or· done to us designedly by a thinking person. ·If we didn't have the internal sense that I am calling 'the moral sense'· our senses of *natural* good and evil would make us receive

- an assault, a punch, an affront from a neighbour, a cheat from a business partner or trustee
- in the same spirit as that in which we receive
- an equally harmful fall of a beam or a roof-tile, or a tempest,

having the same thoughts and feelings in each kind of case. Villainy, treachery, cruelty, would be as meekly deplored as a storm, or mildew, or a river in flood. But I think that in fact everyone is very differently affected on these occasions, though there may be equal natural evil in both. Indeed, actions that do no harm may give rise to the strongest anger and indignation, if they manifest impotent hatred or contempt. And on the other hand when someone acts in a way that causes us the greatest natural evil, it can happen that moral ideas intervene and prevent us from hating the person or judging his action to be bad. For example, when a magistrate passes sentence on us—the sentence being one that entails great suffering—our belief that the sentence is just will •prevent us from seeing the carrying out of the sentence as morally evil and •prevent us from hating the magistrate.

**In actions towards others**

(2) In our sentiments regarding actions that affect ourselves, there is indeed a mixture of the ideas of natural and of moral good, which require some attention to separate them. But when we reflect on actions that affect others but not ourselves, we can observe the moral ideas unmixed with those of natural good or evil. ·In saying this I am relying on

something that it is important to get straight·:

The senses by which we perceive pleasure in natural objects, making them advantageous, could never raise in us any desire of •public good but only of what was good •to ourselves in particular. And they could never make us approve an action because it promotes the happiness of others.

But as soon as any action is represented to us as flowing from the agent's love, humanity, gratitude, compassion, concern for the good of others and delight in their happiness, we feel joy within us and we admire the lovely action and praise its author—even if this happened at the far end of the world and centuries ago. And on the other side, every action represented as flowing from hatred, delight in the misery of others, or ingratitude, raises abhorrence and aversion in us.

It's true that the actions of others that we approve of are generally thought to bring some natural benefit to mankind or to some parts of it. But this secret chain between each person and mankind—where does it come from? How are my interests connected with •the most distant parts of mankind? Yet I can't help admiring actions that are beneficial to •them, and loving the author. What is the source of this love, compassion, indignation and hatred even towards fictional characters, and people long ago and far away, according to whether they appear kind, faithful, compassionate, or of the opposite dispositions, towards their perhaps fictional contemporaries? If there is no moral sense that makes intentional actions appear beautiful or ugly [see Glossary]—if all approval comes from the approver's ·self·-interest—*What's Hecuba to us, or we to Hecuba?* [In Shakespeare's play, Hamlet exclaims over an actor's ability to express compassion for Hecuba over the death of her husband, King Priam of Troy, in the words: 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, that he should weep for her?']

**Moral ideas aren't based on ·self-interest**

**(3)** Some subtle explainers of self-love may tell us that we hate or love characters according to whether we think we *would have been* helped or harmed by them if we had lived at their time. But it's easy to see what is wrong with that. If we had no sense of •moral good in humanity, mercy, faithfulness, why wouldn't self-love and our sense of •natural good always bring us in on the side of the winner and make us admire and love the successful tyrant or traitor? . . . It's obvious that we have some secret *sense* that determines our approval without regard to self-interest; otherwise we would always favour the winners without regard to virtue, and think of ourselves as on that party's side.

Just as Hobbes explains all the sensations of pity in terms of our fear of similar evils when we imagine ourselves in the situation of the sufferers, so others explain all approval and condemnation of actions in distant times or places in a similar way: we imagine ourselves in the situation of others, and see an imaginary private advantage or disadvantage in these actions. But Hobbes's account of pity will never explain how our pity is increased if we think of the sufferer as worthy or if we have been fond of him; because the sufferings of any stranger can suggest the same possibility of our suffering in the same way. And this explanation of (dis)approval can't account for our high approval of brave unsuccessful attempts that do harm to the agent and to those he was trying to help, because in such a case there is no private advantage to be imagined. Nor will it account for our abhorrence of injuries of kinds that we aren't capable of suffering—for example a man's abhorrence of a case of rape. [Hutcheson decorates the point in terms of a legendary case from early Rome.]

Think of two cases of burning cities: in one the fire was started by someone who was acting innocently, and not even carelessly; in the other a cruel and malicious arsonist was

responsible. The amount of damage in the two fires was the same, but who will say he has the same idea of both actions or of sentiments of both agents? Well, then, where does this difference come from?

Now let us consider another fictional example (perhaps not far from being factual), to see if we can't approve of and see moral good in actions that are disadvantageous to us.

- (i)** A few ingenious artisans, persecuted in their own country, flee to ours for protection; they teach us some manufacturing process that supports millions of the poor, increase the wealth of almost every person in the state, and make us formidable to our neighbours.
- (ii)** In a nation not far distant from us some resolute burgomasters, full of love for their country and compassion towards their fellow-citizens, but oppressed in body and soul by a tyrant and by the Inquisition, with untiring diligence, public spirit, and courage •support a long-drawn-out perilous war against the tyrant and •form an industrious republic which rivals us in trade and almost in power.

Everyone can see which of these is more advantageous to us; but look into yourself and consider which of the two characters he has the more agreeable idea of—the **(i)** useful refugee or **(ii)** the public-spirited burgomaster whose love of his own country has led to harm to our interests? I'm confident that you'll find some other basis for respect than *advantage*, and will see a sound reason why the memory of our artisans is so obscure among us while that of our rivals is immortal.

**Self-love is not the basis for approval**

**(4)** Some moralists—ones who would rather twist self-love into a thousand shapes than allow any other principle [see Glossary] of approval than ·self-interest—may tell us •that whatever profits one part of mankind without harming any

other profits the whole, so that some small share of the advantage will come to each individual; •that actions that tend to the good of the whole, if performed by everyone, would do the most for each individual's happiness; and •that we can therefore approve of such actions on the grounds that we think they tend ultimately to our own advantage.

We needn't trouble these gentlemen to show by their intricate sequence of consequences. . . .that we in this age get some benefit from Orestes' killing the treacherous Aegisthus or from the ·fine· actions of ·the Athenian king· Codrus or ·the Roman emperor· Decius. Even if their reasonings are perfectly good, they only prove that after **long reflection and reasoning** we can discover some basis—even a ·self·-interested one—for approving actions that every man, *not* looking at them from the point of view of self-interest, admires **as soon as he hears of them**.

Suppose one of our travelers finds some old Greek treasure: the miser who hid it certainly did something more to the traveler's advantage than Codrus or Orestes ever did; for he can only have a small share of benefit from *their* actions, the effects of which have been scattered and lost down the years and across the nations; so surely this miser must appear to the traveler as a prodigious hero in virtue! Self-interest will make us value men only according to the good they do to ourselves, and will give us ideas of public good that are tailored to our share of it. But can a man admire generosity, faith, humanity, gratitude only if he is as thoughtful as Cumberland or Pufendorf? Does he need that kind of reasoning to see the evil in cruelty, treachery, ingratitude? . . . It would be an unhappy thing for mankind if the only people with a sense of virtue were ones capable of that kind of metaphysical thinking!

#### **Our moral sense can't be bribed**

(5) This moral sense, either of our own actions or of those of

others, has this in common with our other senses: however much our desire for virtue may be counterbalanced by ·self·-interest, our sentiment [see Glossary] or perception of virtue's beauty cannot; whereas it certainly could be if the only basis for our approval was our expectation of advantage. Let us consider this in relation both to our own actions and to those of others.

#### **Judging our own actions**

A covetous man will dislike any branch of trade, however useful it may be to the public, if there's no gain for *him* in it; this is an aversion based on ·self·-interest. Arrange for him to make a profit from this trade and he'll be the first who sets about it, with full satisfaction in his own conduct. Is it like that with our sense of moral actions? ·Absolutely not·! If we are advised to wrong a child or an orphan, or to do something ungrateful towards a benefactor [see Glossary], we are at first horrified; if you assure us that it will be very advantageous to us, if indeed you offer us a reward, our sense of the action is not altered. It's true that these motives ·of self-interest· may make us perform the action, but they can't make us approve of it, just as a physician's advice may lead us to force ourselves to swallow some nauseous medicine but it can't make us enjoy it.

If our only way of thinking about actions was in terms of their advantage or disadvantage ·to us·, could we ever choose an action as advantageous while remaining aware that it was evil? What need would there be for such high bribes to prevail with men to abandon the interests of a ruined party, or for tortures to force out the secrets of their friends? Is it so hard to convince men's *understandings*—if that is the only faculty we have to do with—that it is probably more advantageous •to secure present gain and avoid present evils by joining with the prevalent party than •to wait for the remote possibility of future good through an improbable

revolution? And when men are induced to change sides by the prospect of advantage, do they always approve of their own conduct? Far from it! In many cases their remaining life is odious and shameful, to themselves as well as to others to whom the base action was profitable.

If anyone becomes satisfied with his own conduct in such a case, what's his basis for this? How does he please himself, or vindicate his actions to others? Never by reflecting upon his private advantage, or alleging it to others as a vindication; but by gradually twisting himself into accepting the moral principles of his new party (every party has them!). Thus, men become pleased with their actions when viewing them in terms of appearance of moral good as distinct from advantage.

#### **Our moral sense is not based on religion**

This might be claimed: In the actions of our own that we call 'good' there is always an advantage that outweighs everything else and is the basis for our approval, enabling our self-love to motivate those actions—namely our belief that the Deity will reward them. I'll discuss this more fully later on; all I need say here is that many people •have high notions of honour, faith, generosity, justice, while having almost no opinions about the Deity, and no thoughts of future rewards; and •abhor any thing that is treacherous, cruel, or unjust, without any regard to future punishments.

And another point: Even if these rewards and punishments did make my own actions appear advantageous to me and make me approve them out of self-love, they wouldn't make me approve and love another person for similar actions whose merit would not be mine. Those actions are indeed advantageous to the agent; but his advantage isn't my advantage; and self-love couldn't lead me to approve actions as advantageous to others or to love the authors of them on that account.

#### **Our moral sense of the actions of others is not to be bribed**

This is the second thing to be considered, whether our sense of the moral good or evil, in the actions of others, can be outweighed or bribed by considerations of ·self-interest. I may be thoroughly capable of wishing that someone else would perform an action that I abhor as morally evil, if it was very advantageous to me: ·self-interest in that case may outweigh my desire for virtue in another person. But my ·self-interest can't make me approve an action as morally good if apart from my interests it would have appeared morally evil. . . . In our •sense of moral good or evil, our own private advantage or loss carries no more weight in making an action appear good or evil than does the advantage or loss of a third person. So •this sense cannot be outweighed by ·self-interest. It would be simply ridiculous to try through rewards or threats to get someone to have a good opinion of an action that was contrary to his moral notions. All we can do by such promises or threats is to get the man to *pretend* to have the moral opinion in question.

#### **It isn't an effect of praise**

(6) A clever author who is now deceased [Mandeville] said that the leaders of mankind don't really *admire* such actions as those of Regulus or Decius; they merely note that such men are very useful for the defence of a state; so they use songs of praise and statues to encourage such temperaments in others, as being the most tractable, and useful. Well, consider these two:

- a traitor who sells his own country to us, and
- a hero who defends us.

It may well be that the traitor does as much for us as the hero, but we hate him all the same, though we love the treason; and we may praise a gallant enemy who does us a great deal of harm. Is there nothing in all this but an opinion about what will be to our advantage?

And another point: If this thesis were right, what could a statue or song of praise achieve? Men love praise. They'll do the things that they see to be praised. For men whose only idea of *good* is *advantageous to me*, praise is merely a nation's or party's opinion that a certain man is useful to them. Regulus or Cato or Decius received no advantage from the actions that profited their country, so they themselves couldn't admire those actions, however much their beneficiaries [see Glossary] might praise them. Regulus or Cato couldn't possibly praise or love another hero for a virtuous action, for that wouldn't gain *them* the advantage of honour; and they would have to regard their own actions not as something amiable [see Glossary] that they could think about with pleasure, but merely as the high price they had to pay for the purchase of honour. You don't have to look very hard at such characters to see how *utterly* unlike them this is!

But, our clever author says, these amazingly cunning governors used statues and panegyrics to make men believe that there is such a thing as *•public spirit*, and that this is itself excellent; so men are led to admire *•it* in others and to imitate *•it* in themselves, forgetting the pursuit of their own advantage. That's how easy he thinks it is

- to stop judging others by what we feel in ourselves,
- for a wholly selfish person to think that others are public-spirited,
- for someone whose only idea of *good* is *advantageous to me* to be persuaded by others to adopt a conception of goodness in actions that are admittedly harmful to himself but profitable to others—and indeed to approve such actions thoroughly only to the extent that he thinks they come from a disinterested [see Glossary] care for the good of others.

All this, it seems, is to be accomplished by statues and song of praise!

It's easy enough for men to *say* this or that; but to answer the question 'Don't some moral actions at first view appear amiable even to those who won't profit from them?' we must look into our own hearts. Or the question 'Don't we sincerely love a generous kind friend, or a patriot, whose actions bring honour only to him with no advantage to ourselves?' It's true that the actions that we approve of are useful to mankind, but they aren't always useful to the approver. It might well be useful to mankind as a whole if all men agreed in performing such actions, and then everyone would have his share of the advantage. But this only shows that reason and calm reflection may give us a self-interested basis for liking actions which our moral sense determines [see Glossary] us to admire at first sight, without considering this *•self-•interest*. [Hutcheson here repeats the point that he made just before **(2)** on page 5 about the possibility of a convicted felon's morally approving of the system and the judge who are condemning him to great suffering.]

**Nor by custom, education, &c.**

**(7)** If what I have said shows that we have some amiable idea of actions other than the idea *advantageous to me*, we can infer that this perception of moral good is not derived from custom, education [see Glossary], example, or study. These give us no new ideas: they might make us see advantage to ourselves in actions whose usefulness wasn't at first apparent; or lead us—through some intricate lines of reason, or through a rash prejudice—to see as harmful to us actions that we wouldn't have seen in that way otherwise; but they could never have made us regard actions as amiable or odious independently of our own advantage.

(8) So what we are left with is this: Just as the Author of nature has determined us

- to receive through our external senses ideas of objects that are pleasant or disagreeable depending on whether they are useful or hurtful to our bodies; and
- to receive from uniform objects the pleasures of beauty and harmony, to arouse us to the pursuit of knowledge and reward us for finding it; or to give us evidence of His goodness, as the uniformity itself proves His existence whether or not we have a sense of beauty in uniformity,

so He has also

- given us a moral sense, to direct our actions, and to give us still nobler pleasures so that while we are only intending the good of others we inadvertently promote our own greatest private good.

**This moral sense doesn't involve innate ideas or propositions**

We are not to imagine that this moral sense presupposes innate ideas, knowledge, or practical propositions, any more than our other senses do. All I mean by it is a determination of our minds to receive amiable or disagreeable ideas of actions that we observe, independently of any opinions about whether they will help or harm us; just as we're pleased with a regular form without having any knowledge of mathematics, or with a harmonious composition without seeing any

advantage in it other than the immediate pleasure.

To see more clearly how •moral perceptions differ from •others, consider this: When we taste a pleasant fruit, we're conscious of pleasure; when someone else tastes it, all we do is to form the opinion that it is giving him pleasure, and his doing so is to us a wholly indifferent matter, creating no new sentiment or affection (unless there was some previous good-will or anger towards him). But when we are under the influence of a virtuous temperament and thereby engaged in virtuous actions, we aren't always conscious of any pleasure, and aren't only pursuing private pleasures. . . . The pleasures of virtue come to us only through our •reflecting on ourself and thinking about our temperament and conduct. And when we judge the temperament of someone else to be virtuous, we aren't always imagining him to be having pleasure, though we know that •reflection will give it to him. Also, . . . the quality approved by our moral sense is thought of as residing in the person approved, and to be a perfection and dignity in him; approval of someone else's virtue isn't thought of as making the approver happy or virtuous or worthy, though it is accompanied by some small pleasure. So virtue is called amiable or lovely because it raises good-will or love in spectators towards the agent; and not from the agent's seeing the virtuous temperament as advantageous to him. . . .

## 2: The immediate motive to virtuous actions

### The immediate motive to virtuous actions

To understand the motives of human actions, i.e. their immediate causes, let us first consider the passions and affections. At present I'll restrict myself to the springs of the actions that we call 'virtuous', and only the aspects of them that bear on the general foundation of the moral sense.

### Affections are the motives to actions

(1) Every action that we regard as either morally good or evil is supposed to flow from some affection [see Glossary] towards rational agents; and anything we call 'virtue' or 'vice' either *is* or *results from* some such affection. Or it may be enough to make an action or omission count as vicious if it manifests the lack of the kind of affection towards rational agents that we expect in characters we count as morally good. In any country, all the actions regarded as *religious* are supposed by those who so regard them to flow from some affections towards the Deity; and when we call something *socially virtuous* we are still thinking of it as flowing from affections—in this case affections towards our fellow-creatures. Everyone, it seems, agrees that external motions—actions—can't be morally good or evil if they aren't accompanied by affections towards God or man and don't show a lack of the expected affections towards either.

For example, ask the most abstemious hermit this:

Would **temperance** be morally good in itself, if it didn't show obedience towards the Deity, and didn't do better than luxury in fitting us for devotion, or the service of mankind, or the search for truth?

He will freely grant that in that case temperance wouldn't be a •moral good, though it might still be •naturally good or advantageous to health. And mere **courage** or disregard

for danger, if it weren't aimed at defending the innocent, or righting wrongs, or self-interest, would only entitle its possessor to admission to the mad-house. When that ·seemingly free-floating· sort of courage is admired, as it sometimes is, the admirer is either •silently assuming that the other person intends to use his courage well or •admiring courage just as a *natural* ability that could be well used. **Prudence** when employed in promoting private ·self·-interest is never thought of as a virtue. And **justice** (i.e. observing a strict equality)—if it isn't concerned with the good of mankind, or the preservation of rights, or the securing of peace—is a quality that is better measured by the beam and scales that it carries than by a rational agent. [...scales that it carries? That's a little joke: Hutcheson is thinking of Justice as conventionally personified in statues.] So that these four qualities, commonly called 'cardinal virtues', are given that name because they are dispositions universally necessary to promote public good, and manifest affections towards rational agents; otherwise there would appear no virtue in them.

### Disinterested affections

(2) If it can be shown that none of the affections that we call 'virtuous' comes from self-love or a concern for ·self·-interest, we get the result that *virtue* is not pursued from the ·self·-interest or self-love. That is because all virtue consists in such affections or in actions arising from them.

### Love of contentedness, and hatred of discontent. . .

[For 'contentedness' and 'discontent' see the Glossary.] The affections that matter most in morals are love and hatred; all the rest seem to be only special cases of these two basic affections. In any discussion of love towards rational agents, ·considered as a virtue·, it's obvious that we shouldn't include love

between the sexes; because that, when no other affections go with it, is only a desire for pleasure and is never counted as a virtue. Love towards rational agents is subdivided into

- (i) love of contentedness, i.e. esteem, and
- (ii) love of benevolence.

And hatred is subdivided into

- (iii) hatred of discontent, i.e. contempt, and
- (iv) hatred of malice.

I'll take each of these separately, and consider whether it can be influenced by motives of self-interest.

[In the next paragraph and many later ones we'll see Hutcheson using 'love of' and 'hatred of' in a way that now seems bizarre. What he means by the above numbered four lines is:

- (i) contented love for someone, i.e. esteem for him;
- (ii) benevolent love for someone,
- (iii) discontented hatred of someone, i.e. contempt for him,
- (iv) malicious hatred for someone.

In short, 'love of' and 'hatred of' mean something more like 'love with' and 'hatred with'. The next paragraph won't do anything to get rid of this oddity, so you'll be able to see for yourself that it really is there. Two of Hutcheson's occurrences of 'with' and four of 'of' are in bold type, as an aid to grasping this point. From there on, all the relevant 'of's and 'with's will be Hutcheson's also.]

### ... are entirely disinterested

Love **of** contentedness, esteem, or good-liking, appears at first view to be disinterested [see Glossary], and so does the hatred **of** discontent, or dislike. These are entirely aroused ·in us· by some good or bad moral qualities that we think to be in the object, ·i.e. in the person loved or hated·. We are determined to love or hate these qualities by the very frame of our nature—·i.e. the basic way we are built·—according to the moral sense that I have explained. Offer a man all the rewards in the world, or threaten him with all the punishments, to get him to love **with** esteem and contentedness a third person whom he either doesn't know or knows and

thinks to be cruel, treacherous, ungrateful; you may get him to speak and act in ways that would go with love for the person in question, real love **of** esteem is something no price can purchase. And this obviously holds also for hatred **of** contempt, which no motive of advantage can prevent. On the contrary, represent a character as generous, kind, faithful, humane, though in the most distant parts of the world, and we can't help loving it **with** esteem and contentedness. A bribe might induce us to try to ruin such a man; some strong motive of our self-interest may spur us to oppose his interests; but it can't make us hate him as long as we see him as morally excellent. Indeed, when we look into ourselves we'll find that we can hardly ever persuade ourselves •to attempt to harm such a person from any motive of advantage, •or to do him harm without the strongest reluctance and remorse—until we have blinded ourselves into thinking of the person as morally bad.

### Benevolence and malice are disinterested

(3) As for the love of benevolence, the very name excludes self-interest. If a man is in fact useful to others but is aiming only at his own ·self·-interest, with no desire for or delight in the good of others, he is not someone we call 'benevolent'. If there's any such thing as benevolence, it must be disinterested. . . . There were never any human actions more advantageous than the discoveries of fire and iron; but if these were discovered accidentally, or if the discoverer was only looking after his own interests, there's nothing in those actions that can be called benevolent. Wherever benevolence is supposed, it is taken to be disinterested and designed for the good of others.

### Self-love joined with benevolence

Everyone has self-love as well as benevolence, so it can happen that these two principles [see Glossary] jointly drive a

man to the same action; and when that happens they should be thought of as ·analogous to· two forces acting on one body that is in motion. They may

- work together, or
- be irrelevant to each other, or
- be to some extent opposite to each other.

If a man performs a benevolent action while seeing that it will bring advantage also to him personally, if the self-interest factor doesn't increase the amount of good he does, then it doesn't detract in the least from the benevolence of his action. If on the other hand, he wouldn't have produced so much public good if he hadn't had the prospect of self-interest, then the benevolence of his action is fixed by the total good it does *minus* the amount of it that is due to his self-love. And if a man's benevolence is harmful to himself, then his self-love is opposite to his benevolence, and the benevolence is proportioned to the good he produces *plus* the resistance of the self-love that it overcame. Men can hardly ever know how far their fellows are influenced by one or other of these two principles; but yet the general truth is sufficiently certain, that this is how the benevolence of actions is to be computed. Thus, since no love for rational agents can come from self-interest, every action must be disinterested to the extent that it flows from love to rational agents.

[The passage from here to '... than any others.' on page 17 was added in the third edition of the work. It replaced a couple of paragraphs that are not given here.]

#### **Benevolence is disinterested**

(4) Someone who thinks he can deduce •benevolence from self-love has two ways of going about it.

- (a) One is to suppose that we voluntarily bring •this affection upon ourselves—we *make* ourselves become benevolent—whenever we think it will be in our interests to have this affection.

Why would we think that? Because benevolence may be immediately pleasant, or may give our moral sense pleasant reflections afterwards, or may tend to procure some external reward from God or man. The other approach doesn't claim that we can voluntarily choose to have this or that desire or affection. Rather,

- (b) it supposes that •our minds are determined [see Glossary] by how they are constituted to desire whatever is thought to be a means to private happiness; and that •the observation of the happiness of other persons often compels pleasure in the observer, as their misery compels his uneasiness; and as soon as we are alerted to this connection we begin to desire the happiness of others as the means of getting this happiness for ourselves. . . .

The friends of approach (b) claim that it's impossible to desire any event whatsoever—including someone's becoming happy—without conceiving it as the means of some happiness or pleasure to ourselves; but they acknowledge that desire is not raised in us directly by any volition, but arises necessarily when we take some object or event to be conducive to our happiness.

#### **Opinion (a) confuted**

You can see that approach (a) is not sound from the **general** point that neither benevolence nor any other affection or desire can be directly raised by volition. If they could, we could be bribed into any affection whatsoever towards any object, however improper; we could *hire* someone to be jealous, afraid, angry, loving towards any target of our choosing, just we engage men to act externally in certain ways, or to act as though they had certain passions; but everyone knows from his own experience that this is impossible. If we think that having a certain affection towards something will be advantageous so us, we can turn our attention to the

qualities of the thing in question that are sure to produce in us the advantageous affection; and if we find them in the object, the affection will certainly arise. Thus *indirectly* the prospect of advantage can tend to raise an affection; but if these qualities aren't found or thought to be found in the object, no volition or desire of ours will ever raise any affection in us.

Then there's a more **particular** point, namely. . . . that benevolence is not always accompanied by pleasure. Indeed, it often brings pain, when the object is in distress. Desire in general is uneasy [see Glossary] rather than pleasant. It is true indeed that all the passions and affections justify themselves: while they continue. . . ., we generally approve our being thus affected on this occasion—as an innocent disposition or a just one—and we would condemn a person who was affected differently on such an occasion. So people who are sorrowful, angry, jealous, compassionate, approve their various passions in their situation as they see it; but we shouldn't infer from this that sorrow, anger, jealousy or pity are pleasant, or chosen for the pleasure that comes with them. . . .

The same line of thought shows that we do not by an act of our will raise in ourselves the benevolence that we approve as virtuous, aiming to obtain future pleasures of self-approval through our moral sense. If we could stir up our affections in this way, we could be motivated to acquire any affection by the prospect of getting something out of it—not self-approval, perhaps, but wealth or sensual pleasure or the like, which for many temperaments are more powerful. But we all agree that the disposition to do good offices [see Glossary] to others that is raised by these motives is not virtuous; so how can we imagine that benevolence—which is virtuous—is brought upon us by a motive as selfish [see Glossary] as that?

But what will most effectively convince us of the truth on this point is reflection on our own hearts: Don't we have a desire for the good of others usually without any thought or intention of obtaining these pleasant reflections on our own virtue? In fact, this ·benevolent· desire is strongest in cases where we are furthest from thinking about virtue—namely, in natural affection for our offspring and in gratitude towards a great benefactor. *Not* having these affections is indeed the greatest vice, but the affections themselves are not regarded as significantly virtuous. The same reflection will also convince us that these desires or affections are not produced deliberately so as to obtain this private good.

And if no volition of ours can directly raise affections as a means to securing some interest, no volition of ours raise affections with a view to obtaining eternal rewards or avoiding eternal punishments. The motives in the two cases differ only in degree: smaller and greater, shorter and longer-lasting. If affections could be directly raised by volition, the same consideration—·i.e. the prospect of some payment for services rendered·—would make us angry at the most innocent or virtuous character, jealous of the most faithful and affectionate, or sorrowful for the prosperity of a friend; and we all know that we can't possibly do any of these things. The prospect of a future state ·of reward or punishment in the life after death· no doubt has a greater indirect influence than any other consideration—I mean influence by turning our attention to the qualities in the objects that are naturally apt to raise the required affection.

It's probably true that people who are drawn in by the prospect of future rewards to do good offices to mankind are usually motivated *also* by virtuous benevolence. As will appear later on, benevolence is *natural* to mankind, and always operates where there's no opposition of apparent interest and where any contrary apparent interest is overbalanced by

a greater interest. Because we are aware of this, we generally approve good offices that are motivated partly by hopes for the agent's future state; but that approval is based on our belief that another part of the motivation is a disinterested desire on the agent's part to help people. If that first part of the motivation were the whole of it, there would be no limit to the evil that this person might be induced to do through suitable promises of reward or threats of punishment. . . .

**Opinion (b) confuted**

(5) The other approach is more plausible. It doesn't say that we voluntarily *make* ourselves benevolent in order to get some private advantage. What it says is that we expect to feel pleasant sensations when we see other people happy, and this motivates us to try to make them happy; and we have a similar motivation to try to keep them out of misery. This connection between the happiness of others and our pleasure, these theorists say, is chiefly felt among friends, parents and children, and eminently virtuous characters. But (they say) this benevolence flows as directly from self-love as any other desire.

[This paragraph departs very far from Hutcheson's wording, but the content is all his.] To show that this theory isn't true to the facts, consider this case:

H is a man who is so truthful that we can absolutely believe him when he tells us whether or not he is happy. I place a bet with someone that next Tuesday H will be a happy man. I am now motivated to want him to be happy and to try to make him so. Will anyone say that these efforts of mine are *virtuous*?

Of course not! But how does this differ from what my present opponents say is going on whenever we have and exercise benevolence? In each case, I seek someone else's happiness as a means to pleasure for myself. The only difference is in

the •kinds of pleasure. And •amounts of pleasure? No; any difference in that respect can be cancelled out by raising or lowering the size of the bet.

Here again the best way to discover the truth is to reflect on our own minds. Many people have never given any thought to this connection ·between our pleasure and others' happiness·; and in the ordinary course of things we *don't* intend to get any such pleasure for ourselves. When we do generous offices for others, we all often feel delight upon seeing them happy, but we didn't pursue their happiness *in order to* have this delight. We often feel the pain of compassion; but when we try to relieve the misery of others we are not ultimately aiming just to free ourselves from this pain. Consider this:

You are confronted by a friend who is in great distress, and God offers you a choice between two things He might do:

- completely blot out all your memory of the person in distress, disconnecting his misery from your pain, so that while he suffers you will be comfortable;
- relieve your friend from his misery.

According to the theory I am examining, you should be as ready to choose the former way as the latter; because since each of them will free you from your pain, which on this theory is the entire goal of the compassionate person.

When we try out this ·thought-experiment· don't we find that our desire is not ultimately for the removal of our own pain? If that were our sole intention, we would run away, shut our eyes, or divert our thoughts from the miserable object, as the readiest way of removing our pain; and we seldom do that—indeed, we crowd around such objects, ·such people in distress·, and voluntarily expose ourselves to

this pain (unless our inclination to help is •countermanded by realization that we can't help or •overpowered by some selfish affection such as fear of danger.

To make this still clearer, suppose that the Deity should tell a good man that he was soon to be suddenly annihilated, and that at the instant of his exit he would have a choice to make: it would be up to him whether a certain friend of his would be made happy or miserable for the future, when he himself could have neither pleasure nor pain from that person's state. Or try variants on the story: the choice concerns the future state of his children, or of his country. Tell me, would he be any more indifferent about their state at that last moment of his life, when he neither hoped nor feared anything to himself from it, than he had been at any previous time in his life? Isn't it a pretty common opinion among us that after we die we won't know anything of what befalls those who survive us? How does it come about then that at the approach of death we *don't* lose all concern for our families, friends, or country? According to my opponents, this has to be a case where we want something only as a means to our own private advantage, but we know that we'll enjoy this good for a few minutes at most and yet we want it as fiercely as if we expected to have it for many years? Is this the way we compute the value of annuities?

It's hard to explain why anyone should think that a disinterested desire for the good of others is inconceivable. Perhaps it comes from the attempts of some great men to give definitions of simple ideas. *Desire*, they say, is uneasiness, i.e. an uneasy sensation because of the absence of some good. ·If that were right, then it would be at least plausible to suppose that basically the only thing one can desire is to be, oneself, in a certain state.· But in fact desire is as distinct from uneasiness as volition is from sensation. Don't these people themselves often speak of our *desiring*

*to remove uneasiness?* If we can do that, then desire is different from uneasiness, however constantly a sense of uneasiness accompanies it; just as the idea of colour is a very distinct idea from the idea of extension, although you can't have one without the other. What is impossible about desiring the happiness of someone else without thinking of that as a means to something further, just as we desire our own happiness without thinking of *that* as a means to anything? If you say 'We desire our own happiness as a means of removing the uneasiness we feel in the absence of happiness', then at least ·you are conceding that· the desire to remove our own uneasiness is an ultimate desire. Why, then, can't we have other ultimate desires? ·And why can't a desire for the happiness of other people be one of them?· . . .

(6) Here are some questions that you might want to raise:

- Since none of these motives of self-interest arouse our benevolence, and since in our virtuous actions we intend solely the good of others, what's the *purpose* of our moral sense, our sense of pleasure from the happiness of others?
- What's the purpose of the wise order of nature by which virtue is even made generally advantageous in this life?
- Why—to what end—are eternal rewards appointed and revealed?

I have already partly answered these questions: all these motives may make us want to have •benevolent affections, and consequently make us attend to the qualities in objects that arouse them; they may overbalance all apparent contrary motives, and all temptations to vice. But beyond that, I hope it will be still thought an end worthy of the Deity to create a wise constitution of nature by which the virtuous are made happy, whether or not all their actions are performed with an intention to obtain this happiness. Beneficent [see

Glossary] actions tend to the public good; it is therefore good and kind to give all possible additional motives to them—to stimulate men who have some weak degrees of good affection to promote the public good more vigorously through motives of self-interest, and to stimulate even those who have no virtue at all to perform external acts of beneficence and to restrain them from vice.

The bottom line turns out to be that there is in human nature a disinterested ultimate desire for the happiness of others; and that our moral sense determines us to approve as virtuous only actions that we think come at least partly from such a desire.

[Hutcheson has a long footnote discussing verses in *Hebrews* 11 and 12, contending that it has been wrong to interpret them as meaning that the essence of virtuous behaviour is acting well in the hope of reward in Heaven. He concludes:] If you appeal to the general strain of the Christian exhortations, you'll find disinterested love more inculcated, and motives of gratitude more frequently suggested, than any others.

#### **Human nature is incapable of calm malice**

(7) As for malice, human nature seems hardly capable of malicious disinterested [see Glossary] hatred, i.e. of a calm delight in the misery of others whom we don't think of as in any way harmful to us or our interests. As for the hatred that makes us oppose those whose interests are opposed to ours, it is only an effect of self-love and not of disinterested malice. A sudden passion may give us wrong thoughts about some of our fellow-creatures and briefly portray them as absolutely evil; and while this is the case we may give some evidences of disinterested malice; but as soon as we reflect on human nature and return to thinking properly, this unnatural passion is allayed and only self-love remains; and *that* may make us, from self-interest, oppose our adversary's

interests.

Everyone these days rejoices in the destruction of our pirates. Now try a thought-experiment regarding them. Let us suppose that a gang of such villains have been dumped on a desolate island, and that we are sure that (for some reason) they will never leave there, so that they can't disturb mankind any more. Now let us calmly think about these people. They

- are capable of knowledge and counsel,
- may be happy and joyful, or involved in misery, sorrow, and pain.
- may return to a state of love, humanity, kindness, and become friends, citizens, husbands, parents, with all the sweet sentiments that accompany these relations.

Then let us ask ourselves, when self-love or concern for the safety of better men no longer makes us want them to be destroyed, and when we stop regarding them—as we did—under the ideas suggested by resentment of recent injuries done to us or our friends—as utterly incapable of any good moral quality, *what do we want to happen to them?* Do we want them to . . . stab one another to death with their swords or suffer a worse fate by excruciating tortures? Or would we prefer that they come to have the ordinary affections of men; become kind, compassionate, and friendly; contrive laws, constitutions, governments, properties; and form an honest happy society, with marriages and dear relations and all the charities of father, son, and brother?

I think the latter would be the wish of every mortal, despite our present abhorrence of the pirates that is soundly based on self-interest or public love and desire to further the interests of our friends who are exposed to their ferocity. This reaction plainly shows that we hardly ever have any calm malice against anyone, i.e. delight in his misery. Our hatred comes only from opposition to our interests; or if we

are capable of calm malice, it must be towards a character that we take to be *necessarily and unalterably* evil. A sudden passion sometimes has us thinking of our enemies in that way, but it may be that in a universe created by a good deity there are no actual examples of such a character.

### Other affections can also be disinterested

[Go on remembering what Hutcheson means by 'love of esteem', love of benevolence' etc. See the note in (2) on page 12.]

(8) I think I have shown that our love of esteem and our love of benevolence are not based on self-love or on a self-interested perspective. Now let us see whether some other affections that may be regarded as virtuous do arise from self-love. Take the example of **fear**, i.e. reverence arising from a belief in the goodness, power, and justice of the being who is revered. (I set aside the fear that consists in base dread and servitude towards a powerful evil being—no-one sees any virtue in *that*—and it is indeed the meanest [see Glossary] selfishness.) The same arguments that show love of esteem to be disinterested also show that this honourable reverence is disinterested too. That is because it clearly arises from a belief in the person's amiable qualities, and love towards him, which creates a horror at the thought of offending him. If we could reverence a being because it was in our interests to do so, a third person might *bribe* us into reverence towards a being who is neither good nor powerful; and anyone can see that that's just a joke. The same line of argument holds for all the other passions that have rational agents for their objects.

### Objections

(9) Nothing so effectively arouses our love towards rational agents as their beneficence to us; and that fact might seem to support an objection against disinterested love, by suggesting that our love of persons as well as of unthinking things

flows entirely from self-interest. But let us here examine ourselves more closely. *Do* we love the beneficent solely because it is in our interests to love them? *Do* we choose to love them because our love is the means of procuring their bounty? If so, then we could love *any* character if someone made it worth our while. It is of course possible to pay us to *serve* someone who is the greatest villain; but if the thesis I am attacking were correct, we could be bribed not merely to serve him but to *love him heartily*; and it's obvious that this is impossible.

Furthermore, isn't our love always a result of bounty rather than a means of procuring it? External show, bowing and scraping, *pretence* may precede and be a means to beneficence; but real love always presupposes it, and is bound to arise from consideration of past benefits, even when we expect no more. If that is wrong, then this is right:

We love beneficent people as we love a field or garden, because of its advantage to us. So our love must cease towards someone who can't do any more for us because he has been bankrupted by the good things he has already done for us (like the way we cease to love an inanimate object that stops being useful. . . .). And we have the same love towards the worst characters as towards the best, if they are equally bountiful to us.

This is all false. beneficence raises our love because it is an amiable moral quality; so we love even those who are beneficent to others.

It may be said that bounty towards ourselves is a stronger incitement to our love than equal bounty towards others. This is true, and I'll explain why in a moment. But it doesn't show that in this case our love of persons comes from the self-interested perspective; because this love isn't prior to the bounty as a means to getting it, but comes after the

bounty even when we expect no more. ·Well, then, why? For two reasons·. **(a)** In the benefits that *we* receive we're more fully aware of their value, and of the details of the action, which manifest a generous temperament in the donor. **(b)** From our good opinion of ourselves we are apt to look on kindness to us as better employed than kindness to others of whom we may have less favourable sentiments! [Hutcheson ends this paragraph by repeating what he said in the preceding one.]

### **Virtue is disinterested**

So we have come this far: •Love towards persons is never influenced by self-love or by the ·self·-interested perspective. •And all virtue flows from love towards persons or from some other affection that is equally disinterested. So there must be some motive other than self-love or ·self·-interest that spurs us to perform the actions that we call 'virtuous'.

If our only idea of *good* is *advantageous to me*, we must think that every rational being acts only for its own advantage. We may call a beneficent being 'good' because it acts for our advantage, but on the view I am now examining we should be hard to convince that there is in nature *any* being that is beneficent, i.e. that acts for the good of others. And another point: if there's no sense of excellence in public love and promoting the happiness of others, what makes people think that the Deity will make the virtuous happy? Can we show that it is somehow in the Deity's *interests* to do this? This will surely be looked upon as very absurd unless we suppose that some beneficent dispositions are essential to the Deity—a part of his intrinsic nature—which determine him to •care about the public good of his creatures, and •reward those who co-operate with his kind intention. And if there are such dispositions in the Deity, what's impossible about there being some small degree of this public love also in his creatures?

In short: if we don't acknowledge some principle of action in rational agents other than self-love, I see no basis for expect beneficence or rewards from God or man other than what it is in the interests of the benefactor to provide. As for expectation of benefits from a being whose interests are independent of us—that is perfectly ridiculous! What would induce the Deity to reward virtue? According to this view of things, virtue is only a skillful way of caring for own happiness consistently with the good of the whole; and vice is the same thing foolishly pursued in a manner that is less likely to succeed and is contrary to the good of the whole. But how is the Deity concerned in this whole, if every agent always acts from self-love? And what ground have we, from the idea of *a god* itself, to believe the Deity is good in the Christian sense, i.e. that he cares for the good of his creatures? Perhaps their misery may give him as much pleasure as their happiness; and who can blame such a being for caring to make them miserable, for what else should we expect? An *evil god* is a notion that men would as readily find in their heads as that of a *good god*, if there is no excellence in disinterested love, and no being acts except for its own advantage. . . .

### **The true spring of virtue**

**(10)** Having removed these false springs of virtuous actions, let us next establish the true one, namely something in our nature that determines us to care for the good of others; or some instinct—independent of any ·self·-interested reason—which influences us to love others; just as the moral sense (I have explained) makes us approve of actions that flow from this love in ourselves or others. This disinterested affection may seem strange to men who have had the notion of self-love as the sole spring of action stamped on their minds by the pulpit, the Schools [here = 'the Aristotelian philosophy departments'], and the systems and conversations dominated by them.

But let us consider the strongest and simplest kinds of disinterested affection; they will show us that this is a possibility, and then it won't be hard for us to see how widespread it is.

### **Natural affection**

An honest farmer will tell you that he cares about the preservation and happiness of his children, and loves them without any design of good to himself. But some of our philosophers maintain that the happiness of their children gives parents pleasure, and their misery gives them pain; and therefore to obtain the pleasure and avoid the pain they care for the good of their children out of self-love. Well, consider this case:

Several merchants combine all of their wealth into a partnership; one of them is employed abroad managing the stock of the company; his prosperity brings gain to them all and his losses give them pain because of their share in the loss.

Is *this* the kind of affection that parents have for their children? Is there the same tender, personal regard? I don't think any parent will say so. In this case of merchants there is a plain conjunction of interests; but what creates a conjunction of interests between the parent and child? Do the child's sensations give pleasure or pain to the parent? Is the parent hungry, thirsty, sick, when the child is so? No, but his love for the child results in his being affected with the child's pleasures or pains. So this 'parental' love comes before the conjunction of interests: it's a cause of it, not an effect; so this love must be disinterested. 'No!' says another clever arguer—'our children are *parts of* ourselves, and in loving them we are merely loving ourselves in them.' A very good answer! Let us carry it as far as it will go. How are they parts of ourselves? Not in the way a leg or an arm is; we don't feel their sensations. 'But their bodies were

formed from parts of ours.' So is a fly or a maggot that can breed in any discharged blood or other bodily fluid—dear little insects! 'Since that's no good' there must be something else then that makes our children parts of ourselves; and we know what it is—its the affection that nature leads us to have towards them. This love *makes* them parts of ourselves, so it isn't something that comes from their having been parts of ourselves before. This 'parts of' is indeed a good metaphor; and wherever we find a group of rational agents whose natures lead them to mutual love, let each individual be looked on as a part of a great whole, and concern himself with the public good of it.

Another author thinks that all this can easily be derived from self-love. Children are not only made of our bodies but *resemble* us in body and mind; they are rational agents as we are, and we only love our own likeness in them. Excellent stuff! But what is likeness? It is... only being included under one general or specific idea. Thus

- there is likeness between us and other men's children,
- any man is like any other in some respects,
- a man is like an angel, and in some respects like a lower animal.

Then does every man have a natural disposition to love his like, to wish well not only to his individual self, but to any other thinking or feeling being that is *like* him? Is this disposition strongest where there is the greatest likeness in the more noble qualities? If all this is called 'self-love', so be it. The highest mystic needs no principle [see Glossary] higher than this one! It is not confined to the individual, but spreads ultimately to the good of others; and it may extend to everyone, because each one some way resembles each other. Nothing can be better than *this* 'self-love', nothing more generous. . . .

But a later author [Mandeville] observes that natural affection in parents is weak until the children begin to show signs of having knowledge and affections. Mothers say they feel it strongly from the very first. . .

**Hutcheson, puzzlingly, verbatim:** . . . and yet I could wish for the destruction of his hypothesis, that what he alleges was true; as I fancy it is in some measure, though we may find in some parents an affection towards idiots.

Seeing the signs of understanding and affections in children, which make them appear to be moral [see Glossary] agents, can increase love towards them without any prospect of self-interest; for I hope this increase of love doesn't come from the prospect of advantage from the knowledge or affections of the children for whom parents are still toiling with no expectation of being refunded their expenses or recompensed for their labour except in cases of extreme necessity. So, if observing a moral capacity can lead to an increase in love that doesn't involve self-interest and comes from our basic nature, mightn't this be a basis for weaker degrees of love—with no preceding tie of parentage—extending to all mankind?

#### **Public affections are natural**

**(11)** To see that this is in fact so, consider some attachments that are more distant than parent to child. I shall present three of these. **(i)** Think about your neighbours, people who simply live near to you but haven't done you any favours and with whom you haven't formed partnerships or even friendships, let alone family ties: won't you be better pleased with their prosperity (when their interests aren't in conflict with yours) than with their misery and ruin? If the answer is Yes, then you have found a bond of benevolence that extends far beyond family and children, although the ties are not so strong. **(ii)** Suppose that a man leaves his native country and

settles abroad, conducting a successful trading company. His extended family all live in the new country; the man doesn't expect to return to his native land, though it has never harmed him and he has nothing against it. Would this man take pleasure in hearing of the prosperity of his country? or could he, now that his interests are separated from that of his nation, be just as glad to hear that it was laid waste by tyranny or a foreign power? I imagine that his answer would show us a benevolence extending beyond neighbourhoods or acquaintances. **(iii)** Let a calmly stable man devote his leisure time to reading about the states of affairs in a foreign country in a most distant part of the earth, observing its art and design, and studying the public good in the laws of this foreign land. What effect will this have on his *attitude* to the people of that land? His mind will be moved in their favour; he'll be devising corrections and amendments to their political set-up, and will regret any unlucky part of it that may be pernicious to their interest; he'll bewail any disaster that befalls them, and accompany all their fortunes with the affections of a friend. Now this proves benevolence to be in some degree extended to all mankind (when there's no conflict of interests that might draw self-love into obstructing it). And if we had any notions of rational agents capable of moral affections in the most distant planets, our good wishes would still go with them and we would delight in their happiness.

#### **Love of one's country**

**(12)** I note in passing what the foundation is for 'national love', i.e. love of one's native country. In any place we have lived in for a considerable time we have been most clearly aware of the various affections of human nature; we have known many lovely characters; we remember the associations, friendships, families, natural affections, and other human sentiments; our moral sense determines us

to approve these lovely dispositions where we have been most clearly aware of them; and our benevolence draws us into a concern for the interests of the people who have them. When we come to observe similar things as clearly in another country, we begin to acquire a national love towards it also; and in our thoughts about this, our own country isn't given a preference over other countries, except through an association of the pleasant ideas of our youth with the buildings, fields, and woods where we received them. This can show us how this national love, this the dear idea of a country, is destroyed by tyranny, faction, neglect of justice, corruption of manners, and anything that brings about the misery of the subjects.

**The reason why natural affections do not always appear**

The only reason for the apparent lack of natural affection among collateral relations [i.e. blood-relatives who are not in the same direct line] is that these natural inclinations are often overpowered by self-love in cases where there's a conflict of interests; but where there's no such conflict we'll find all mankind under the influence of natural affections, though with different degrees of strength depending on •how closely related the people are to one another, and on •the extent to which he the natural affection of benevolence is combined with and strengthened by esteem, gratitude, compassion, or other kind affections, or on the contrary weakened by discontent, anger, or envy.