The origin of our ideas of virtue or moral good

Francis Hutcheson

[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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Contents

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 'displicence' 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.

3: The sense of virtue —the various opinions about it reduced to one general foundation. How to compute the morality of actions

All virtue is benevolent

(1) If we examine all the actions that are regarded as amiable [see Glossary] anywhere, and enquire into *why* they are approved, we shall find that the person who approves them always see them as benevolent—i.e. flowing from a love of others and a concern for their happiness—whether or not the approver is one of the beloved persons who are to profit from the action. Thus, all the kind affections [see Glossary] that incline us to make others happy, and all actions that are thought to flow from such affections, appear morally good—provided they don't accompany benevolence towards some persons with a pernicious effect on others. We won't find anything amiable in any •action that we don't see as benevolent, or in any •disposition or ability that we don't think of as being useful for—and designed for—benevolent purposes. Indeed (to repeat a point already made), actions that turn out to be exceedingly useful will appear to us to have no moral beauty if we know that they didn't come from kind intentions towards others; whereas an unsuccessful attempt at kindness or at promoting public good will appear as amiable as the most successful if it flowed from as strong a benevolence.

Religion

(2) So affections that would lead us to do good to *our benefactor* will appear amiable, and the contrary affections odious, even when our actions can't possibly do him any good or any harm. Thus

- a sincere love and gratitude towards our benefactor,
- a cheerful readiness to do whatever he requires, however burdensome it is,
- a strong inclination to comply with his intentions, and
- contentment with the state he has placed us in

are the strongest evidences of benevolence to such a person that we can show; so they must appear exceedingly amiable. I am talking here about every possible kind of rational devotion—i.e. of religion—towards a deity who is apprehended as good.

Gratitude

One aspect of our nature is wonderfully adapted to promote benevolence, namely: just as a benefit conferred necessarily arouses gratitude in the person who receives it, so also the expression of this gratitude, even from the meanest of mankind, is wonderfully delightful to the benefactor [see Glossary]. There has never been anyone so poor, so inconsiderable, that his grateful praise would not bring some pleasure. . . .

As for public religious practices, they are no doubt very various in different nations and ages; and education may get men to think that certain actions are pleasing to the Deity, and others displeasing; but ·despite this, there is a common thread running through all the ceremonial variety, namely·: wherever some rite of public worship is approved, at that time and place it is thought to come from love towards the Deity, or some other affection necessarily joined with love—such as reverence, repentance, or sorrow over having offended. Thus, the general principle [see Glossary] of love is the foundation for

all the apparent moral excellence of worship, even of the most fantastic rites that were ever approved. There are also •rites that are intended only to appease a furiously angry Being; but surely no-one thinks there is any virtue or excellence in •them—they are obviously chosen only as a dishonourable way of avoiding a greater evil [see Glossary]. Because there are different theological opinions about what is acceptable to the Deity, there are inevitably many different religious practices; but all the moral goodness of actions is still presumed to flow from love.

Social virtues

(3) Here is another bit of evidence that anything in the social virtues that is recognised as excellent is based on love, or benevolence: amidst the diversity of views about this among various sects, the agreed way to decide any controversy about any disputed practice is to enquire whether the practice will effectively promote the public good—the universal natural good of mankind—and when that question is answered the morality is immediately adjusted to fit. . . .

In our recent debates about passive obedience [see Glossary] and the right of resistance in defence of privileges, the dispute among men of sense concerned the answer to the question

> When privileges are invaded, which of the two responses—•submission by everyone and •temporary insurrections—would probably bring greater natural evils?

and not to the question

> If some course of action tends on the whole to further the public natural good, does that make it morally good?

If we thought that a divine command favoured the passive obedience side in the debate, that would introduce eternal rewards and punishments into the picture, and would surely throw the balance of natural good onto that side, which we would choose for reasons of ·self·-interest. And yet our sense of the moral good in passive obedience would still be based on some sort of benevolence—e.g. gratitude towards the Deity, and submission to the will of Someone to whom we are so much obliged. But I suspect that those who believe the Deity to be good wouldn't rashly claim that he had given such a command unless they also claimed that the commanded course of action did tend more to the universal good than did the contrary course—by preventing the external evils of civil war, or by training men in •patience or •some other quality that they thought to be necessary for everlasting happiness. Without that backing, ·divinely commanded· passive obedience might be recommended as an inglorious method of escaping greater harm, but it couldn't have anything morally amiable in it.

But let us leave the disputes of the learned, on whom custom and education may be thought to have had a powerful influence, and look at the grounds on which actions are approved or condemned, vindicated or excused, in common life. We would all be ashamed to call an action *just* because it tends to our advantage or to the agent's; nor would we look down on a beneficent kind action because it isn't advantageous to us or to the agent. Blame and censure are based on

- •a likelihood of causing public evil, or
- •a principle of private malice in the agent, or at least neglect of the good of others, or
- •inhumanity of character, or at least selfishness that is strong enough to stop the agent from caring about the sufferings of others;

and so we may blame and censure an action that has no effect on ourselves. Whenever an action has some bad consequences that make it appear to be wrong, any all the

moving and persuasive defence of it is based on the claim that •the action was required for some greater good that outweighed the evil; •severity towards a few is compassion towards multitudes; •transitory punishments are required if we are to avoid more long-lasting evils; •if some people didn't suffer in such cases, there would be no living for honest men. And so on. And even when an action can't be entirely justified, its guilt can be greatly lessened if we can plead that it was only the effect of carelessness without malice, or of partial good nature [= 'favouritism'], friendship, compassion, natural affection, or love of a party. All these considerations bring out the foundation of *all* our sense of moral good or evil, namely: benevolence towards others on one hand, and malice (or even laziness and uncaringness about the apparent public evil) on the other. Notice that we are so far from imagining all men to act only from self-love that we •expect everyone to have a regard for the public, and •regard the lack of this not merely as the absence of moral good or virtue but as positively evil and hateful.

Moral evil is not always malice

(4) Contraries can illustrate each other; so let us look in more detail at the general basis for our sense of moral evil. Disinterested [see Glossary] malice, or delight in the misery of others, is the highest pitch of what we regard as vicious; and we see as evil every action that we think flows from any degree of this affection [see Glossary]. Perhaps a violent passion may hurry men into it for a few moments, and our rash angry feelings about our enemies may represent them as having such odious dispositions ·as disinterested malice·; but the reasons I have given make it very probable that there is no such degree of wickedness in human nature as to be cold-bloodedly pleased with the misery of others while having no thought of this being useful to oneself.

The frequent, and apparently unprovoked cruelties of Nero and his like are often put forward in opposition to all this; but perhaps wrongly. Such tyrants are aware of being hated by all •those whom the world regard as virtuous, and they sense danger from •them. A tyrant looks on such men as designing, crafty, or ambitious, under a false show of virtue. He thinks that the surest way for him to stay safe is to appear terrible, and to deprive his enemies of all hopes of getting mercy from him. When an eminent person is known for his virtue, this is matter for envy, and is a reproach on the tyrant: it weakens his power, and makes such a man dangerous to him. Power becomes the tyrant's object of delight; and in his display of •it he may break through all the constraints of justice and humanity. Habits of cruelty can be acquired through a course of events like that. This seems to account for the cruelties of tyrants better than the supposition that they have a principle of calm malice-without-self-interest, of which the rest of mankind seem entirely incapable.

A tyrant's temperament

The temperament of a tyrant seems likely to be a continued state of anger, hatred, and fear. To form our judgment of his motives of action and those of less highly-placed men with similar temperaments, let us look into ourselves—when we are temporarily subject to any of the passions that are habitual with the tyrant, what view do we take of mankind? When we have just suffered an injury, our minds are wholly filled with thoughts about the person who harmed us, representing him as absolutely evil and as delighting in doing harm. (We overlook the virtues that we could have observed in him if we were calm; we forget that he may have been moved only by self-love, not malice; or perhaps he had some generous or kind intention towards others.) These are probably the opinions that a tyrant constantly forms concerning mankind; and having very much weakened all

kind affections in himself, however he may pretend to have them, he judges other people's characters by his own. If men really were as he takes them to be, his treatment of them wouldn't be very unreasonable. We will generally find that our passions come into play in a manner that fits our view of what other people are like; if these views are the rash output of some quick lilttle glimpses of other people, it's no wonder if they lead to behaviour that is very little suited to the real state of human nature.

Ordinary springs of vice

The ordinary springs of vice [see Glossary] among men, therefore, must be a mistaken self-love that has become so violent that it overcomes benevolence; or affections arising from false and rashly formed opinions about mankind—opinions that we run into through the weakness of our benevolence. When men who used to have good opinions of each other come to have contrary interests, their good opinions of each other are apt to be weakened by their imagining that they are being deliberately *and maliciously* opposed; they can hardly hate one another unless that's what they think. Thus two candidates for the same position wish each other dead, because that's an ordinary way by which men make room for each other; but if they still have some thought about each other's virtue, as sometimes happens with benevolent temperaments, then their opposition may be without hatred; and if another better position (where there is no competition) were given to one of them the other will rejoice at it.

Self-love is indifferent [see Glossary]

(5) Actions that flow solely from self-love but don't harm others and therefore show no signs of lack of benevolence seem to be perfectly *indifferent* in a moral sense, and don't raise love or hatred in the observer. Our reason can indeed discover certain limits such that

> the welfare of society as a whole needn't be harmed by actions motivated by self-love within those limits,

but also, more strongly,

> the welfare of society as a whole *will* be harmed if people *don't* act from self-love within those limits.

So someone who pursues his own private good while intending this to square with the good of the whole, and even more someone who promotes his own good with the positive intention of making himself more capable of •serving God or •doing good to mankind, acts not only innocently but honourably and virtuously. That is because in each case—·service to God, help for mankind·—a motive of benevolence runs in harness with self-love to arouse him to the action. . . . But when self-love •breaks through the limits I have mentioned, and •leads us into actions detrimental to others and to the whole or •silences the generous kind affections in us, then it appears vicious and is disapproved. Similarly, if some small injury or sudden resentment or weak superstitious idea makes our benevolence so faint that we entertain odious and unfounded conceptions of some men, thinking of them as wholly evil or malicious or anyway as worse than they really are, these conceptions are bound to lead us into malevolent affections or at least weaken our good ones, thus making us really vicious.

Self-love isn't excluded by benevolence

(6) 'Benevolence' is a good enough word to denote the internal spring of virtue, as Cumberland always uses it. But. . . .under this name some very different dispositions of the soul are included. Sometimes it denotes **(i)** a calm, extensive affection or good-will toward all beings that are capable of happiness or misery; **(ii)** sometimes a calm deliberate affection of the soul toward the happiness of certain smaller systems or individuals (e.g. patriotism, friendship, parental affection), as it is in persons who are wise and self-controlled; **(iii)**

sometimes the various passions of love, pity, sympathy, congratulation. . . .

Although all these different dispositions come under the general label 'benevolent', they are very different and have very different degrees of moral beauty. **(i)** is above all amiable and excellent: it may be the sole moral perfection of some superior natures; and the more power it has in any human mind, the more amiable the person appears, even when his benevolence doesn't merely check and limit his lower appetites but controls or counteracts his kindly particular passions. **(ii)** is more amiable than **(iii)** when it is strong enough to influence our conduct; and **(iii)**, though of a lesser moral dignity, is also beautiful when it doesn't in any way conflict with these more noble principles. And when there is a conflict between passion and principle, though •the passion doesn't justify actions that are really harmful to greater systems, •it is still a strong extenuating factor which does much to alleviate the moral ugliness. We are all aware of this when someone does something hurtful to larger societies out of friendship, parental affection, or pity.

Every moral agent rightly regards himself as a part of this rational system that may be useful to the whole; so that he may be in part an object of his own benevolence. Indeed, as I indicated earlier, he may see that the preservation of the system requires that each person innocently care for his own welfare. He may draw from this the following conclusion:

> An action that brings greater evil to the agent than good to others, however well it speaks for the agent's benevolence or virtuous disposition, must be based upon an exaggerated view of what the action will do for the public good.

Thus, a man who was thinking straight and comprehensively wouldn't act like that, however strong his benevolence, and wouldn't recommend others to act like that either. . . .

Consider a situation where a concern for myself tends as much to the good of the whole as a concern for you (say), or where the evil to myself is equal to the good that will come to you. If in this situation I act •for your good rather than mine, I'll be showing a very amiable disposition; but if instead I act •in my own interests, I shan't be showing an evil disposition, or any lack of the most extensive benevolence, because the amount [Hutcheson uses the word 'moment'] of good to the whole is exactly the same in the two cases. This isn't to deny that sometimes I ought to make gifts, although then I lose as much as the recipient receives; and here is why. The good that comes to the recipient is in a compound ratio of •the quantity of the good itself and •the poverty of the person. Thus, a gift from me to that street-sweeper may add much more to his happiness than it subtracts from mine. The most useful and important gifts are those of the rich to the poor. Gifts from equals are not useless, because they are often strong evidence of mutual love, and so increase the happiness of giver and recipient. But gifts from the poor to the rich are really foolish, unless they are merely small expressions of gratitude, which can also produce of joy on both sides. . . .

When an action does more harm to the agent than good to the public, his doing it shows him to have an amiable and truly virtuous disposition, although he is obviously acting on a mistaken view of his duty. If the private evil to the agent is so great that it makes him incapable at a later time of promoting a larger public good than is at stake in this action, then his action may really be evil. Though it flows from a virtuous disposition, it shows a neglect of a greater attainable public good for a smaller one.

How benevolence is affected by the qualities of its object

(7) The moral beauty or ugliness of an action isn't altered by the moral qualities of its object, any more than the qualities

of the object increase or diminish the action's benevolence or the public good intended by it. Thus, benevolence towards the worst characters. . . .may be as amiable [see Glossary] as any benevolence whatsoever; indeed it is often more amiable than benevolence towards the good, because it is evidence of a degree of benevolence that is strong enough to surmount the greatest obstacle, the moral evil in the object, ·i.e. the person to whom good is done·. That is why love for an unjust enemy is counted among the highest virtues. [Hutcheson mentions an exception: the case where benevolence towards a bad man encourages him in his badness. But] benevolence towards evil characters, when it doesn't encourage them or help them to do mischief [see Glossary], and doesn't divert our benevolence from more useful persons, has as much moral beauty as any whatsoever.

Qualities determining our choice of how to act

(8) When we have a choice of several possible actions and want to decide which of them to perform, i.e. which of them has the greatest moral excellency, our moral sense of virtue leads us to judge thus:

> . . . .The virtue of an action is in a compound ratio of •the quantity of good it produces and •the number of people who receive it (the dignity or moral importance of the people may make up for a smaller number of them). Similarly, the moral evil or vice of an action is as the degree of misery and number of sufferers.

Thus, the best action is the one that procures the greatest happiness for the greatest number; and the worst action is the one that occasions the greatest misery for the greatest number.

How consequences affect the morality of actions

(9) When all of a set of proposed actions have consequences that are mixed—partly advantageous, partly pernicious—the good action is the one whose good effects outweigh the evil by being useful to many and pernicious to few, and analogously for the evil action. [Hutcheson presumably meant to say that the *best* of the proposed actions is the one whose good effects *most* outweigh etc.] Here again the dignity or moral importance of the people may make up for a smaller number of them. So may the degrees of happiness or misery: to procure a small good for many but an immense evil to few may be evil; and an immense good to few may outweigh a small evil to many.

Many actions that have no immediate or natural evil effects—indeed that actually produce good effects—may still be evil, because the morality of an action depends not only on its direct and natural effects but on *all* the events that otherwise would not have happened. Suppose that I perform action A that I expect to do a great deal of good and no harm; but I foresee that if I do A that will probably lead *others* to act in ways that outweigh all the good produced by A. How might that happen? Well, they might, with foreseeable stupidity, •regard A as a precedent for superficially similar actions in very different circumstances, or •be provoked to act very badly because they wrongly think that A has infringed on their rights in some way. If I foresee anything like this when I perform A, then that action of mine is evil. In such cases, the *probability* has to be computed on both sides. [If I establish an orphanage in Somalia and this provokes some radicals to bomb a hospital, the ruin of the hospital and the birth of the orphanage are both things that 'wouldn't have happened' if I hadn't acted in that way. But Hutcheson doesn't count the former as a 'direct and natural' effect of my action because, presumably, it flows from my action *through the will of someone else*.]

That is why many laws prohibit all actions of a certain kind K, even though some particular instances of K would be very useful. •Allowing K actions across the board would—given the mistakes men would probably fall into—be

more pernicious than forbidding them across the board; and •there is no way of legally drawing the line between the right cases and the wrong ones. Faced with laws like these, we have a duty to comply with the generally useful constitution; and if in some very important cases violating the law would have better consequences than obeying it, we must patiently resolve to accept the penalties that the state has for good reasons set down; and this disobedience ·of ours· will have nothing criminal in it [he means: will not be morally wrong].

Although every kind affection, abstractly considered, is approved by our moral sense, we don't give equal approval to all sorts of affections or passions that pursue the good of others, because they don't seem all to be virtuous in the same degree. Our calm affections, whether private or public, are plainly different from our particular passions; calm self-love is quite different from hunger, thirst, ambition, lust, or anger; so calm good-will toward others is different from pity, passionate love, parental affection, or the passion of special friends. Now, every **kind passion** that isn't harmful to others is indeed approved as virtuous and lovely; and yet a **calm good-will** toward the same persons appears more lovely. So calm good-will toward a •small system is lovely, and preferable to more passionate attachments; and yet a •more extensive calm benevolence is still more beautiful and virtuous; and the highest perfection of virtue is a •universal calm good-will toward all beings that can feel. . . .

How partial benevolence is virtuous

(10) From all this we can see what actions our moral sense will most recommend for us to choose as the most perfectly virtuous, namely:

> those that appear to have the most universal unlimited tendency to the greatest and most extensive happiness of all the rational agents to whom our influence can reach.

All benevolence is amiable [see Glossary] if it isn't inconsistent with the good of the whole; but doing good for only a few people isn't *very* virtuous unless the range of our beneficence has been limited by lack of power and not lack of love for the whole. All strict attachments to parties, sects, factions, have only an imperfect species of beauty except in cases where the good of the whole requires a stricter attachment to a part—as in natural affection, or virtuous friendships. Another example: it might be that parts are so enormously useful to the whole that even universal benevolence would lead us to attend to their interests with special care and affection. Thus universal benevolence would incline us to a stronger concern for the interests of great and generous people in high positions, or the interests of a generous society whose whole constitution was designed to promote universal good. [Hutcheson decorates this point with a lengthy and not very helpful architectural analogy.]

This increase in the moral beauty of actions or dispositions according to how many persons they benefit may show us why actions that flow from the closer attachments of nature, such as that between the sexes and the love of our offspring, are not as amiable and don't appear to be as virtuous as actions that do an equal amount of good towards persons who are less attached to us. The reason is obvious: these strong instincts are limited by nature to small numbers of mankind, such as our wives or children; whereas a disposition that would produce the same amount of good for others with no special attachment ·to us·, if it was accompanied by a natural power to accomplish its intention, would be incredibly much more productive of great and good effects for the whole.

Moral dispositions and abilities

From this primary idea of moral good in *actions* arises the idea of good in *dispositions*—natural or acquired—that

•enable us to do good to others or •are presumed to be acquired or cultivated for that purpose. So as long as nothing appears contrary to that presumption, those ·dispositions or· abilities may increase our love for the person who has them; but when we see them as intended for public mischief, they make us hate him all the more. Examples:

penetrating judgment,
tenacious memory,
quick-wittedness,
willingness to endure labour, pain, hunger,
disregard for wealth, rumour, death.

These may be called 'natural abilities' rather than 'moral qualities'. It is foolish to venerate these qualities except to the extent that they are employed for the public good; such veneration flows from our moral sense on the basis of a false opinion; for if we plainly see them maliciously employed they make the agent more detestable.

How we compute the morality of actions. . . .

(11) To find a universal system for computing the morality of any actions with all their details—actions by ourselves or by others—we need the following six propositions or axioms:

[Hutcheson decorates five of the six with pseudo-mathematical equations, of which only the first will be given here, just as a sample. He dropped all of them from the final edition of the work.]

(i) The moral importance of an agent—i.e. the quantity of public **g**ood he produces—is in a compound ratio of his **b**enevolence and his **a**bilities, i.e. **g = b** $\times$ **a**.

(ii) Similarly, the amount of private good or interest produced by any person for himself is in a compound ratio of his self-love and his abilities.

(iii) When two agents are equal in ability and are acting in similar circumstances, the amount of public good they produce will differ in proportion to the difference between their strengths of benevolence.

(iv) When two agents are equal in benevolence and other circumstances alike, the amount of public good they produce will differ in proportion to the difference between their abilities.

(v) The virtue or benevolence of two agents always varies •directly with the amount of good they produce in similar circumstances, and •inversely with their abilities.

[The sixth 'axiom' needs a good deal of introduction, which Hutcheson provides:] The natural consequences of our actions are various—

•some good to ourselves and evil to the public,
•others evil to ourselves and good to the public,
•yet others useful to ourselves and others, and
•others again pernicious to both.

So the entire motive for good actions is not always benevolence alone; nor is the sole motive for bad actions malice alone (indeed malice is seldom a motive at all). In most actions we must look upon self-love as another force, sometimes working with benevolence, when we are aroused by prospects of private ·self·-interest as well as public good; and sometimes opposing benevolence, when the good action is difficult or painful to perform or has consequences that are detrimental to the agent. . . . I'll discuss these selfish [see Glossary] motives more fully later. Just now I'll bring them all under the general label '·self·-interest' . [And now we come to the meat of the sixth 'axiom':]

(vi) When self-interest works *with* benevolence in any action where 'more' and 'less' are appropriate, it must produce more good than benevolence alone would have done; and therefore. . . [The rest of the passage is needlessly complex. Its basic content is clear:]

•If x acting purely from benevolence produces the same amount of good as y produces acting from benevolence and **co-operating** self-interest, then x's

virtue in this is **greater than** y's by the amount of y's relevant self-interest.

- If x acting purely from benevolence produces the same amount of good as y acting from benevolence and **against** self-interest, then x's virtue in this is **less** than y's by the amount of y's relevant self-interest.

A qualification of this that Hutcheson awkwardly tacks onto the end of the next paragraph really belongs here, namely:] Self-interest lessens the virtue or benevolence only if without it the action wouldn't have been undertaken, or would have been less effective in bringing benefit to others.

Intention and foresight affect actions

Suppose that somebody x performs a kind action that brings benefit to others: •if it also brings benefit to x, that fact doesn't make it less amiable if the benefit wasn't intended; and •if it has adverse consequences for x, that fact doesn't make it more amiable if those consequences were not foreseen or intended. That is because in the former case benevolence isn't helped along by x's self-love, and in the latter it doesn't have to fight against x's self-love. . . .

Axiom **(vi)** only explains the external marks that men must judge by because they don't see into each others' hearts. It may often happen that an agent has enough benevolence to overcome any difficulty but doesn't meet with any difficulty; and in that case there's as much virtue in him—though he doesn't give proof of it to his fellow-creatures—as if he *had* surmounted difficulties in his kind actions. This must also be the case with the Deity, for whom nothing is difficult.

Perfect virtue

. . . .When the agent acts to the utmost of his power for the public good, that is the perfection of virtue. [Hutcheson expresses this in terms of his mathematical formulae, which he says] may show us the only basis for the Stoics' boast that a creature who is supposed innocent can by pursuing virtue with his utmost power equal the gods in virtue. . . .

How moral evil is computed

(12) The same axioms can be used to compute the moral evil in actions. I shall give the label 'hatred' to the disposition that leads us to evil (though it is oftener only self-love plus carelessness about consequences). Then

(i) The amount of **e**vil produced by any agent is the product of his **h**atred and his **a**bility, that is, **e** = **h** × **a**.

[Axioms **(ii)**, **(iii)** and **(iv)** are uninteresting corollaries of this, expressed with formulae. Then:]

(v) The motives of ·self·-love may co-operate with hatred, or oppose it, just as they can with benevolence; and the evil of an action is lessened to the extent that self-interest contributed to it, and is increased to the extent that self-interest worked against it.

[Here is an application of 'axiom' **(v)**: 'It was vile of him to murder her.' 'Well, it wasn't quite as bad as you might think, because as well as hating her he stood to inherit her wealth.' This is so absurd that Hutcheson couldn't have looked it in the eye and judged it to be reasonable. Then why did he say it? Perhaps he thought that murdering someone from pure hate is worse thsn murdering someone through a mixture of hate and love, even if the love is the murderer's love for himself. We can't take this seriously when we see what it implies. And in any case it is reduced to rubble by Hutcheson's statement that what we call 'hatred' is more often 'only self-love plus carelessness about consequences'. Presumably he arrived at 'axiom' **(v)** by reading it off mechanically from the structurally analogous thesis about benevolence, without thinking about it.]

Intention, foresight

But innocence is not the only thing that expected from all mortals; they are presumed from their nature to be to some extent inclined to public good; so that someone's merely

lacking this desire is enough to get him to be thought of as evil. An action can be evil even if it doesn't come from any direct intention to produce public evil; all that is needed is for it to flow from self-love, along with a mere *neglect* of the good of others, or an insensibility to their misery, which the agent foresees or regards as probable.

It's true that my present action isn't made criminal or odious by public evil that arises from it but that I don't confidently foresee or regard as probable. Perhaps I *would have* foreseen it if I had seriously examined my own actions; but as things are, my **present** action doesn't present evidence of malice or lack of benevolence. However, my **past** negligence in not examining the tendency of my actions is clear evidence of my not having the degree of good affections that is necessary for a virtuous character; so strictly speaking the guilt attaches to that past neglect, rather than to the present action which—·we may suppose·—really flows from a good intention. But human laws can't examine the agent's intentions or secret knowledge, so it has to judge, bluntly, the action itself, presupposing that the agent knew everything that he ought to have known.

Similarly: no good effect of my action makes it morally good if I didn't actually foresee and intend it. But human laws or governors, who can't search into men's intentions or know their secret designs, rightly reward •actions that tend to the public good, even if the agent was motivated only by selfishness and consequently wasn't encouraged in •them by any virtuous disposition.

The difference in degree of guilt between

(a) crimes of ignorance, where the agent's ignorance about the likely upshot of his action was avoidable, and he is at fault for it, and

(b) crimes of malice or direct evil intention,

consists in this: **(a)** show by the past neglect that the agent lacked the proper degree of benevolence, i.e. right affection; **(b)** shows that the agent has direct evil affections, which are vastly more odious.

Morality is distinct from ·self·-love

(13) From axiom **(v)** [the one on the page 30] we can infer almost demonstratively that we have a sense of goodness and moral beauty in actions, as something distinct from advantage: if our only basis for approving of actions was the advantage that might come to us from them. . . ., we wouldn't care about the agent's abilities as distinct from what he did for us. We do in fact care about the abilities ·as well as the actions· because abilities are relevant to the degree of benevolence, which presupposes that benevolence is amiable. Who ever liked a barren rocky farm or an inconvenient house any better by being told that the poor farm gave as much product as it could? or that the house accommodated its possessor as well as it could? Whereas in our attitude to actions that do very little good, our sense of the beauty of an action is enormously much intensified when we learn that the poor agent had done all could for the public, or for his friend.

Morality of characters

(14) The moral beauty of characters arises from what they do or sincerely intend to do for the public good, according to their power. We form our judgment of them according to what appears to be their fixed disposition, and not according to any particular little surges of unkind passions, although these do lessen the beauty of good characters, just as episodes of the kind affections lessen the ugliness of the bad ones. What strictly constitutes a virtuous character, then, is not a few passing thrusts of compassion, natural affection, or gratitude; but rather a fixed humanity or desire for the public good of everyone to whose happiness we can make any difference—a desire that uniformly arouses us to

all acts of beneficence, according to our utmost prudence and knowledge of the interests of others; and any strongly benevolent person takes the trouble to be well-informed about the best methods of serving the interests of mankind. Every episode of the kind affections, ·however brief·, appears to be in some degree amiable; but what we say about a man's character is based on the prevailing principle [see Glossary] ·in his make-up·.

Instinct may be the spring of virtue

(15) Some people hold that nothing that flows from instincts or passions can be virtue, but they can't be right. They say that virtue arises from *reason*, but what is reason? It's nothing but the intelligence we use in pursuing any end. The ultimate end proposed by the common moralists [Hutcheson's phrase] is the happiness of the agent himself, and it's certain that he is driven by instinct to pursue it. Well, mightn't there be another instinct—this time towards the public good, the good of others—that is as genuine a principle of virtue as the instinct towards private happiness is? And wouldn't reason have just as much work to do in our pursuit of that goal as it does in pursuit of the other? This much is certain: whereas we look on the selfish actions of others with indifference at best, we see something amiable in every action that flows from kind affections or passions towards others—so long as they are conducted with prudence and have some measure of success. Our passionate actions, as I showed earlier, aren't always self-interested; when we act from passion, our intention is not to •free ourselves from the discomfort of the passion but to •alter the state of the object.

·HUTCHESON'S NEXT TWO SENTENCES, VERBATIM·

If it be said, that actions from instinct, are not the effect of prudence and choice; this objection holds full as strongly against the actions which flow from self-love; since the use of our reason is as requisite, to find the proper eans of promoting public good, as private good. And as it must be an instinct, or a determination previous to reason, which makes us pursue private good, as well as public good, as our end; there is the same occasion for prudence and choice, in the election of proper means for promoting of either.

·WHAT HE MAY HAVE BEEN GETTING AT·

Here is something you might say as an objection to my thesis that benevolence is a basic trait of human nature, an *instinct*:

> 'It can't be an instinct, because actions from instinct are not the effect of **prudence** and **choice**; in acting on an instinct you don't spend time and thought on pondering how to go about it; but that is just what you often *do* do when acting out of benevolence. In short: we use **reason** when acting benevolently, but one doesn't use when acting from instinct.'

Well, think about our basic determination [see Glossary] to try to further our own private interests; *that* is basic enough to count as an instinct, isn't it? But obviously when we act on it, i.e. act self-interestedly, we often do this **prudently**, using **reason** to help us **choose** a course of action. The two cases are strictly parallel. In each we have an instinct that is entirely separate from reason, and in each case reason comes on the scene helping us in the choice of means to the end that our instinct sets before us.

I see no harm in supposing that men are naturally disposed to virtue, and aren't left merely indifferent about how to act except when their action can affect their private good. Surely, the supposition of a *benevolent universal instinct* would make human nature and its Author more lovable by any good man, while leaving plenty of room for the use of reason •in devising and instituting rights, laws, and constitutions, and •in inventing and practising skills

and techniques to make the most effective job of gratifying that generous inclination. If we must bring in self-love to make virtue rational, a little reflection will reveal that this benevolence is our greatest happiness; and *that* could lead us to cultivate this sweet disposition as much as possible and to despise every opposite interest. Not that we can be truly virtuous if all we intend is to obtain ·for ourselves· the pleasure that accompanies beneficence, without ·being moved by our· love of others; indeed this pleasure itself is based on our being conscious of disinterested love for others as the spring of our actions. Self-interest may be our motive for choosing to stay in this agreeable state, but it can't be the sole motive—or even the principal one—of any action that appears virtuous to our moral sense.

Heroism, at all social levels

It may initially strike you as extravagant and wild to apply mathematical calculations to moral subjects; but some corollaries ·of my axioms·, which I will easily and securely derive, may show what a useful procedure this is if it could be further pursued. Right now I shall draw only one conclusion, which seems to be the most joyful imaginable to people at *every* level of society, namely that no external circumstances of fortune (·e.g. extreme poverty·) and no involuntary disadvantages (·e.g. blindness·) can exclude any mortal from the most heroic virtue. However little public good he can accomplish, if his abilities are correspondingly small the quotient that expresses the degree of virtue may be as great as anyone's.

[Hutcheson is here applying axiom (i) from page 30, namely **g** = **v** × **a**, the amount of public **g**ood someone produces is the mathematical product of his **v**irtue and his **a**bilities. (Back there he spoke of 'benevolence' rather than 'virtue', but he equates the two, so it's all right to switch from **b** to **v**.) From that 'axiom' we get by simple arithmetic $v = \frac{g}{a}$. A blind pauper will have a terrifically low value for a, and that gives him a chance for an impressively high value of v.]

So it's not only the prince [see Glossary], the statesman, the general that are capable of true heroism. These are indeed the chief characters whose fame spreads through the world and down the ages; but when we find in an honest shopkeeper

- the kind friend,
- the faithful prudent adviser,
- the charitable and hospitable neighbour,
- the tender husband and affectionate parent,
- the sedate yet cheerful companion,
- the generous assistant of merit,
- the cautious calmer of contention and debate,
- the promoter of love and good understanding among acquaintances;

if we think that these were all the good works his position in the world gave him an opportunity to perform, we should judge this person's character to be in fact just as amiable as those whose external splendor dazzles an injudicious world into thinking they are the only heroes in virtue.

4: This moral sense is universal

This moral sense is universal

(1) To show how far mankind agree in what I have said is the universal foundation of this moral sense, namely benevolence, I have already pointed out that when we are asked why we approve this or that action, we always answer in terms of its usefulness to the public, not its usefulness to the agent himself. If we are defending an action that has been condemned, and are maintaining that it was lawful, we always have as one article of our defence that it didn't harm anybody, or that it did more good than harm. On the other hand, when we blame any piece of conduct we show it to be harmful to people other than the agent, or at least to show a neglect of their interests when •it was in the agent's power to serve them or when •gratitude, natural affection, or some other disinterested tie should have raised in him a concern for their interests. If we sometimes blame foolish conduct in others, without any thought about its tendency to harm the public, this is still prompted by our benevolence, which makes us concerned for the evils befalling the agent, whom we must always look on as a part of the system. We all know •how great an extenuation of crimes it is to plead that the poor man does harm to nobody but himself, and •how often this turns hatred into pity. And yet if we examine the matter well, we'll find that most of the actions that are immediately harmful to the agent and are often regarded as innocent towards others do really tend to harm the public by making the agent incapable of doing the good things he could otherwise have done and perhaps would have been inclined to do. That is the situation with intemperance and extravagant gluttony.

Benevolence is the only ground of approval

(2) We have never approved of any action by another person except of the basis of our belief—on good evidence or bad—of some really good moral quality ·in the person·; it is always some really amiable and benevolent appearance that draws our approval. We may perhaps commit mistakes, judging that actions tend to the public good when really they don't; or be so stupidly careless that we focus on some partial good effects and overlook many evil consequences that counterbalance the good ones. Our reason may do its work very defectively, giving us *partial* representations of the tendency of actions; but it is still some apparent species of benevolence that commands our approval. And this ·moral· sense, even when outweighed by motives of external advantage that are stronger than it, doesn't stop operating: even in those cases it has enough strength to make us uneasy and dissatisfied with ourselves. In this respect it is like our other senses: for example, reasons of ·self·-interest make us force ourselves to swallow some disgusting potion, but our sense of taste is still at work making the stuff taste dreadful.

False approvals

So it's not relevant here to point out that **(i)** many actions tending to do public harm are performed and approved; this is parallel to the fact that **(ii)** actions tending to harm the agent are often performed and *for a while* approved. We don't infer from **(ii)** that the agent has no self-love, no sense of ·self·-interest; so we shouldn't infer from **(i)** that such men have no sense of morals, no desire for public good. The facts are clear: men are often mistaken about actions' tendency to public or to private good; indeed, sometimes violent passions will (while they last) make them approve *as advantageous*

actions that are **(i)** very bad in a moral sense or **(ii)** very harmful to the agent. But this proves only that sometimes there may be some more violent motive to action than **(i)** a sense of moral good, and that men's passions may blind them even **(ii)** even to their own interests.

To prove that men have no moral sense, we would have to find cases where cruelly malicious actions are performed, and approved by others, when there's no motive of real or apparent ·self·-interest except gratifying that very desire to harm others. We must find a country where murder in cold blood, torture, and everything malicious—without any advantage to anyone—is approved, or at least regarded with indifference and no hostility towards the perpetrators, by the unconcerned onlookers. We must find men for whom the treacherous, ungrateful, and cruel are on a par with the generous, friendly, faithful, and humane; and who approve the latter no more than the former except when they personally are affected by the influence of these dispositions. . . . Although the universe is large enough, and stored with a considerable variety of characters, it may be questioned whether it will provide us with any instance—any nation, any club, any individual person—who will have no moral attitude to any actions that don't relate to its own concerns.

Explaining the diversity of manners. . .

(3) From what I have said, we can easily explain the vast diversity of moral opinions across the nations and down the centuries. This diversity is indeed evidence that there are no innate ideas or propositions; but it doesn't show that mankind lacks a moral sense to perceive virtue or vice in actions. There are three main reasons for this diversity. ·I deal with one here, and the others in **(4)** and **(5)**·.

(i) . . . from various notions of happiness

First, there are different opinions about happiness—i.e. natural good—and of the most effective way to increase it. Thus in one country where a courageous disposition is prevalent, where liberty is counted as a great good and war as an inconsiderable evil, all uprisings in defence of privileges will appear as morally good to our sense, because they'll appear as benevolent; and yet the same sense of moral good in benevolence will make those same actions appear odious in another country where the spirits of men are more abject and timorous, not putting much value on liberty and regarding civil war as the greatest natural evil. In Sparta, where the security of possessions didn't matter much because they weren't interested in wealth, and where they did want, above all, the state to stay healthy through having an abundance of hardy agile young people, there was so little dislike of skillfully done *theft* that it was actually protected by law.

But in these and all such cases the approval is based on benevolence, because of some real or apparent tendency to the public good. We can't expect this ·moral· sense ·of ours· to give us, automatically, ·accurate· ideas of complex actions or of their natural tendencies to good or evil; all it does is to make us approve of benevolence whenever it appears in any action, and to hate the contrary. Similarly, our sense of beauty doesn't give us—without reflection, instruction, or observation—ideas of the regular solids such as temples and theatres; all it does is to make us approve and delight in uniformity amidst variety wherever we observe it. If we read the preambles of any laws we regard as unjust, or the defences by moralists of any disputed practice, we'll doubtless find that men are often mistaken in computing the over-all natural good or evil resulting from certain actions; but the basis on which any action is approved is still some tendency to the greater natural good of others, in the opinion of those who approve it.

Travelers' reports of barbarous customs .

Some travelers have reported strange cruelties practised towards the aged or children in certain countries, and this has been treated as an objection to the thesis that the moral sense is universal throughout mankind; but this objection can be met in the same way as the preceding one. If such actions are performed in sudden angry passions, all they show is that other motives—other springs of action—can overpower benevolence ·even· in its strongest ties. And if in the countries in question those cruel actions really are universally allowed and seen by everyone as innocent, that will certainly be because in some way they appear ·to those people· as benevolent. Perhaps they think they are

- securing them against insults of enemies,
- saving them from the infirmities of age (which they may regard as worse than death), or
- freeing the vigorous and useful citizens from the expense of maintaining them or the labour of caring for them.

A love of pleasure and ease may be stronger in some people than gratitude towards their parents or natural affection for their children. But the fact that such nations stay in existence despite all the toil in educating [see Glossary] their young is a sufficient proof of natural affection. ·I say 'natural affection'· because I don't think we'll find that such nations have laws compelling parents to provide a proper education for n of their offspring, for some precise value of n! We know very well that an appearance of public good was the basis for equally barbarous laws enacted by Lycurgus ·of Sparta· and Solon ·of Athens·, providing for the killing of deformed or weak people so as to prevent a burdensome crowd of useless citizens.

The late Lord Shaftesbury rightly remarked on the absurdity of the monstrous taste that has possessed both the writers of travels and their readers. They tell us almost nothing about the natural affections, the families, associations, friendships, clans, of the Indians; and just as little about their abhorrence of treachery among themselves, their proneness to mutual aid and to the defence of their various states, their contempt [see Glossary] of death in defence of their country or on points of honour. These are common stories—no need to travel to the ·West· Indies for what we see in Europe every day! So the entertainment in these ingenious works consists chiefly in creating horror and making men stare. The ordinary employment of the bulk of the Indians in support of their wives and offspring or relatives has nothing amazing about it; whereas a human sacrifice or a feast on enemies' carcasses can create horror and amazement at the wondrous barbarity of Indians—and this is in nations that are no strangers to the massacre at Paris, the Irish rebellion, or the journals of the Inquisition! The Europeans behold *these* with religious veneration; but the Indian sacrifices, flowing from a similar perversion of humanity by superstition, arouse the highest abhorrence and amazement. What is most surprising in these books is the way in which some gentlemen who claim to be cautiously sceptical on other matters are utterly credulous when it comes to marvelous memoirs of monks, friars, sea-captains, pirates; and to the histories, annals, chronologies that they get from oral tradition or hieroglyphics.

The use of reason in morals

Men have reason given them to judge regarding the tendencies of their actions, so that they won't stupidly follow the first *appearance* of public good; but still it *is* some appearance of good that they pursue. And it's a strange thing that everyone thinks that ·all· men have reason, despite all the stupid, ridiculous opinions that are accepted in many places, and yet absurd behaviour based on those

very opinions is taken as evidence against ·there being· any moral sense; although the bad conduct is an upshot not •of any irregularity in the moral sense but •of a wrong judgment or opinion. If putting the aged to death really is, with all its consequences, a furthering of the public good and a lessening of the misery of the aged, it is no doubt justifiable; indeed, even the aged themselves might choose it, in hopes of a future state. If a deformed or weak population can't possibly make themselves useful to mankind, and are going to become an absolutely unsupportable burden, involving a whole state in misery, it is *just* to put them to death. We all agree that this ·line of moral reasoning· is sound when applied to an over-loaded boat in a storm. As for parents' killing a ·new-borm· child when they have enough children already, infanticide is perhaps practised and allowed from self-love; but I can hardly think it counts as a good action anywhere. If wood or stone or metal •is a deity, •has power and uses it to govern, and •has been the author of benefits to us, it is morally amiable to praise and worship it. If the true deity is pleased with worship before statues or any other symbol of some more immediate presence or influence, then image-worship is virtuous. If he delights in sacrifices, penances, ceremonies, cringings, they are all laudable. Our sense of virtue generally leads us accurately enough according to our opinions; so the absurd practices that prevail in the world are much better evidence that men have no reason than that they have no moral sense of beauty in actions.

(ii) . . . from the perverting influence of narrow systems

(4) The second reason for the diversity in ·moral· sentiments is the diversity of the systems to which men—led by foolish opinions—confine their benevolence. I indicated earlier that it is regular and beautiful to have stronger benevolence towards the morally good parts of mankind, who are useful to the whole, than towards the useless or pernicious parts. Now, if men accept a low or base opinion of any group or sect of men—if they see them as •trying to destroy the more valuable parts ·of the human race·, or even merely as •useless burdens—benevolence itself will lead them to neglect the interests of those people and to suppress them. This why among nations with high notions of virtue every action towards an enemy can be counted as just; and why Romans and Greeks could approve of enslaving those they called 'barbarians'.

Sects are harmful to virtue

The late Lord Shaftesbury rightly said •that the various sects, parties, factions, cabals of mankind in larger societies, are all influenced by a public spirit; •that they come into existence when some broad-minded notions of public good. . . .arouse men of the same faction or cabal to the most disinterested mutual support and help; and •that all the conflicts amongst the different factions, and even the fiercest wars against each other, are influenced by a sociable public spirit within a limited system. Men certainly don't owe much to those who often skillfully raise and foment this party spirit; or split them into several sects for the defence of very trifling causes. Associations for innocent business purposes, cabals for the defence of liberty against a tyrant, or even less elevated clubs for social amusement or improvement by conversation, are very amiable and good. But

- •when men's heads are filled with some trivial opinions,
- •when operators, for their own purposes, raise in men's minds some unaccountable notion of sanctity and religion in tenets or practices that don't increase our love for God or for our own species,
- •when the various factions are taught to look on each other as odious, contemptible, profane, because of their different tenets or opinions,

- •when these tenets, whether true or false, are often perfectly useless to the public good,
- •when the keenest passions are raised about such trifles, and men begin •to hate each other for things that in themselves have no evil in them, and •to love the zealots of their own sect for what is in no way valuable—indeed for their fury, rage, and malice against opposite sects (which is what all parties commonly call 'zeal'), in short
- •when our admiration and love, or contempt and hatred, are thus perverted from their natural objects,

it's no wonder if our moral sense is much impaired and our natural notions of good and evil almost lost.

If you have had the good fortune never to hear of the party-tenets of most of our sects, of if you have heard of them but have either never joined any sect or joined all of them to the same extent, you have the best chance to have a truly natural and good disposition, because your temperament has never been soured about vain trifles, and you haven't caught—like a disease!—any sullenness or rancour against any part of mankind. If any opinions deserve to be defended, they're the ones that give us lovely ideas of the Deity and of our fellow-creatures; if any opinions deserve to be opposed, they're the ones that •create doubts in our minds about the goodness of providence, or •represent our fellow-creatures as base and selfish by instilling into us some ill-natured, cunning, shrewd insinuations that our most generous actions are based entirely on self-interest. This *wise* philosophy of some modern followers of Epicurus can't produce anything but discontent, suspicion, and jealousy—a state infinitely worse than any little transitory injuries that we might be exposed to by a good-natured credulity. But despite such opinions, our nature itself leads us into friendship, trust, and mutual confidence, for which we owe thanks to the kind Author of our nature.

Robbers show a moral sense in the equal or fair division of their takings, and in faith to each other. If we mixed socially with them we would find that •they have their own lofty moral ideas of their gang as generous, courageous, trusty—even honest, indeed; and that •people whom we call honest and industrious are regarded by the robbers as mean-spirited, selfish, churlish, or extravagantly self-indulgent, as not *deserving* their wealth, which the robbers therefore want to put to better uses in maintaining gallanter men who have a right to a living as well as their neighbours, who are their declared enemies. If we attend to what is said by our professed debauchees, our most dissolute rakes, we'll find their vices clothed in their imaginations with some amiable dress of liberty, generosity, just resentment against the contrivers of cunning rules to enslave men and rob them of their pleasures.

It may be that no-one ever pursued vice for long with peace of mind unless he had some such deluding fiction of moral good, helping him to remain unaware of the barbarous and inhuman consequences of his actions. The idea of an *ill-natured villain* is too frightful ever to become familiar to any mortal. Hence we'll find that the basest actions are disguised by a tolerable mask. Here are some of the disguises:

- •avarice .... prudent care of one's family or friends;
- •fraud .... skillful conduct;
- •malice and revenge .... a just sense of honour, and a vindication of our right to our possessions or our fame;
- •fire and sword, and desolation among enemies ..., a just thorough defence of our country;
- •persecution .... zeal for the truth, and for the eternal happiness of men, which heretics oppose.

In all these cases, men generally act from a sense of virtue based on false opinions and mistaken benevolence; on wrong or partial views of public good and the means to promote it; or on very narrow systems formed by similar foolish opinions. The horrid crimes that fill our histories don't come from a delight in the misery of others, i.e. from malice, but generally from an unwise and unreasonable enthusiasm for some kind of limited virtue.

(iii) . . . and from false opinions about the divine laws

(5) The last source of ·moral· diversity consists in false opinions about the will or laws of the Deity. We are bound to obey these, ·the zealots say·, by gratitude and also by God's right (as they see it) to do what he pleases with the fortunes of his creatures. I needn't cite particular examples: everyone knows that this has produced follies, superstitions, murders, devastations of kingdoms—all from a sense of virtue and duty. I will only remark that all those follies or barbarities confirm rather than destroy the thesis that we have a moral sense:

·THE REMAINDER OF THE SENTENCE VERBATIM·

since the Deity is believed to have a right to dispose of his creatures; and gratitude to him, if he be conceived good, must move us to obedience to his will: if he be not conceived good, self-love may overcome our moral sense of the action which we undertake to avoid his fury.

·THE MODIFIED VERSION NOW RESUMES·

As for the vices that commonly come from love of pleasure, or from any violent passion, since the agent usually becomes aware of their evil—sometimes in the heat of the action—they only prove that this moral sense, and benevolence, can be overcome by the more urgent calls of other desires.

The objection from incest

(6) Before leaving this subject, I should remove one of the strongest objections against the thesis I have been defending, namely that this ·moral· sense is natural, and independent of custom and education. The objection is that some actions always arouse the strongest immediate abhorrence throughout some whole nations, although they don't manifest anything contrary to benevolence; and those same actions in other nations are regarded as innocent or ·even· honourable. Thus, among Christians incest is abhorred at first appearance as much as murder, even by those who don't know or don't think about any necessary tendency it has to the detriment of mankind. Now we generally allow that anything that comes from nature in one nation would come from nature in all. So this horror over incest can't come from nature, because in ·ancient· Greece it was regarded as honourable to marry one's half-sister, and the priestly class in ancient Persia honoured marrying one's mother. Therefore—the argument goes—mightn't it be that *all* our approval or dislike of actions arise the same way from custom and education?

This is easily answered on the basis of what I have already said. If we didn't have a moral sense that is natural to us, we would only look upon incest as hurtful to the perpetrator, and avoid it; we wouldn't hate other incestuous persons any more than we do a bankrupt merchant; so this abhorrence does presuppose a sense of moral good. Also. . . .wherever incest is hated, it is regarded as offensive to the Deity, and as exposing the person concerned to his just vengeance. Now, everyone agrees that it is the grossest ingratitude and baseness for any creature to go against the will of the Deity, to whom he owes so much. So this is plainly a morally evil quality that incest is seen to have, and is reducible to the general basis of malice or rather of lack of benevolence. Furthermore, where this opinion that •incest is offensive to the Deity prevails, •it directly conflicts with benevolence in a second way, because we must see the perpetrator as

exposing an associate—one who should be dear to him by the ties of nature (·as his sister and mother are·)—to the lowest state of misery, baseness, infamy and punishment. But in countries where there's no prevalent opinion about the deities hating or prohibiting incest, if it isn't accompanied by any obvious *natural* evils, it can be regarded as innocent. And a last point: just as

> men who have a sense of taste may acquire from others prejudices against certain foods, regarding them as nasty though they have never tasted them,

so also it can happen that

> men who have a moral sense may acquire an opinion, by implicit faith, about the moral evil of actions in which they don't themselves see any tendency to natural evil.

Perhaps they think that others do see such a tendency; or perhaps their education has left them with ideas associated with the idea of incest, giving them an abhorrence of it for which they have no reason. But ·this has been about men who do have a moral sense·. Without such a sense we couldn't acquire a prejudice against any actions except as being naturally disadvantageous to ourselves.

The moral sense doesn't come from education

(7) That everyone has this moral sense, and that it is independent of instruction, can be seen in the sentiments of children when they hear the stories that they are commonly entertained with as soon as they understand language. They always passionately align themselves with the side where kindness and humanity are found; and they detest the cruel, the covetous, the selfish, or the treacherous. How strongly we see their passions of joy, sorrow, love, and indignation being moved by these moral representations, although no-one has worked to give them ideas of a deity, of laws, of a future state, or of the intricate ways in which the universal good tends to the good of each individual!

5: Further evidence that we naturally have practical dispositions to virtue
A further account of our instinct to benevolence in its various degrees
Additional motives of ·self·-interest, namely honour, shame and pity

Degrees of benevolence

(1) I have tried to show that there is a universal determination to benevolence in mankind, even towards the most distant parts of the species; but don't think that this benevolence is equally strong towards everyone. There are closer and stronger degrees of benevolence towards •people to whom we are more closely related (some of these have been given distinct names—'natural affection', 'gratitude') or towards people for whom we have a greater love of esteem [see note on page 12].

Natural affection

One sort of natural affection, namely the one that parents have towards their children, I have already discussed. I'll here add only the further point that there is the same kind of affection among siblings, though in a weaker degree. You can see this at work in all families unless some opposition of interests produces contrary actions or outweighs the power of this natural affection.

Not based on merit or acquaintance .

Parental affection can't be entirely based on merit or acquaintance. . . .because it operates where acquaintance would produce hatred, even towards children thought to be vicious. Further evidence that parental affection is natural is the fact that we always see it descending from parents to children and not ascending from children to parents. Nature, who sometimes seems frugal in her operations, has strongly set parents to care for their children, because they all stand in absolute need of parental support; but she has left it to reflection and a sense of gratitude to produce returns of love in children towards their kind benefactors, who seldom have such an absolute need for support from their offspring as their children did for support from them. Now, if natural affection were produced by acquaintance, or by merit, we would find it strongest in children, on whom all the obligations are laid by a thousand good offices; but that is *not* what we find. Indeed, •benevolence seems not to be confined to mankind, but extends to other animals, though we hardly ever think of them as having *merit*, and •it is observed to continue in them only for as long as the needs of their young require. It wouldn't do their young any good if it did continue, because when they are grown up they couldn't get any benefit from the love of their mothers. But that's not the case with rational agents, so *their* affections—·*our* affections·—continue for longer, even for our whole lifetimes.

Gratitude

(2) Nothing will give us a sounder idea of how wisely human nature is formed for universal love and mutual assistance than thinking about the strong attraction of benevolence that we call 'gratitude'. Everyone knows that beneficence [see Glossary] towards ourselves makes a much deeper impression upon us, and creates gratitude, which is a stronger love towards the benefactor than ·would be produced in us· equal beneficence towards a third person. There are vastly many human beings scattered around the globe, and no-one can be significantly useful to so many; if our benevolence ·were equally spread across all of them, it· would either •be hopelessly distracted by the multiplicity of beneficiaries whose equal virtues would equally recommend them for our concern, or •become useless through being directed equally at scattered multitudes whose interests we couldn't understand or promote because we'd had no previous dealings with them. To avoid this, nature has more powerfully made us admire and love the moral qualities of others who affect ourselves, and has given us more powerful impressions of good-will towards those who are beneficent to ourselves. We call this 'gratitude'. In this way a foundation is laid for joyful associations in •all kinds of business and in •virtuous friendships.

This fact about how people are constituted results also in a benefactor's being more encouraged in his beneficence, with a higher likelihood of an increase of happiness through grateful returns, than if his virtue were to be honoured only by the colder general sentiments of people who weren't connected to him, and couldn't know his needs or how to be profitable to him, especially when they would all be driven to love innumerable multitudes of people whose equal virtues would give them the same claims to their love. We escape that ·weakening of love by spreading it thinly and equally

over everyone· by having a constitution that gives us greater love for people who are more closely attached to us or to our friends, by good offices that affect ourselves, or our friends.

This universal benevolence towards all men can be compared with the force of gravitation. This may extend to all bodies in the universe; but like the love of benevolence it increases as the distance is lessened, and is strongest when bodies come to touch each other. This increase of attraction as things get nearer to one another is as necessary to the structure of the universe as the bare fact of there being any attraction at all. If there were a general attraction, equal at all distances, the interplay amongst such multitudes of equal forces would put an end to all regularity of motion and might even bring everything to a halt.

This increase of love towards the benevolent, scaled to how close to us their benefits place them, can be seen in the high degree of love that heroes and law-givers universally receive in their own countries—higher than what they find abroad, even among those who are aware of their virtues. It can also be seen in all the strong ties of friendship, acquaintance, neighbourhood, partnership, which are utterly necessary for the order and happiness of human society.

Love of honour

(3) From considering our nature's strong determination to gratitude and love towards our benefactors, which I earlier showed to be disinterested, we move smoothly along to consider another equally natural determination of our minds, namely to delight in the good opinion and love of others even when we don't expect any other advantage from them. . . . This fact about our constitution makes honour an *immediate* good, ·i.e. something that is good •in itself and not merely good •because of what may follow from it·. (I would call this desire for honour 'ambition', if custom hadn't joined some evil ideas to that word, making it stand for a desire for honour—and also for power—that is so violent that the person who has it will stop at nothing in his efforts to obtain them. [Despite this aside, Hutcheson does call the desire for honour 'ambition' in four places.]) On the other hand, we are by nature subjected to a grievous sensation of misery when others have an unfavourable opinion of us, even if we have no fear that they'll harm us. This sensation is *shame*. It works as an immediate evil, just as (I have said) honour is an immediate good.

If there were no moral sense, i.e. if our only ·evaluative· idea of actions were *advantageous ·to me·* or *hurtful ·to me·*, I see no reason why we would be delighted with honour or vulnerable to the uneasiness of shame; or how it could happen that a man who was secure from punishment for some action would ever be uneasy at its being known to all the world. The world thinks worse of him because of it; but what puts his ease [see Glossary] at the mercy of the opinion of the world? Perhaps from now on he •won't be so much trusted in business, and •will suffer loss in that way. But if *that*'s the only reason for shame—if it has no immediate evil or pain in it, apart from the fear of loss—then whenever we expose ourselves to loss we should be ashamed and try to conceal the action. But that is now how things stand.

[Hutcheson adds a paragraph saying that a business loss in a good cause can be a positive source of pride rather than shame.]

Morals are not based on the opinions of our country

(4) Some writers hold that the opinions of our country are the first standard of virtue. They contend that we first distinguish between moral good and evil by setting actions alongside those opinions; and then (they say) our chief motive is ambition, i.e. the love of honour. But what is honour? It isn't merely *being universally known, no matter how*. A covetous man isn't honoured by being universally known as

covetous; nor is a weak, selfish, or luxurious man, when he is known to be so. Much less can a treacherous, cruel, or ungrateful man be said to be *honoured* for being known as such! A contortionist, a fire-eater, or a stage magician is not *honoured* for these public shows, unless we see him as a person capable of giving the pleasures of admiration and surprise to multitudes. Thus, honour is the opinion of others concerning our •morally good actions or •abilities presumed to be used in morally good ways. . . . Now, it is certain that ambition or the love of honour is really selfish; but this determination to love honour presupposes a sense of moral virtue both in those persons who confer the honour and in him who pursues it. [Here and below, Hutcheson is *not* using 'ambition' to name a vice; he is using it—as he implied early in **(3)** that he wouldn't—as a general name for the love of honour. If you think the word 'selfish' shows otherwise, see the Glossary on that.]

Still, if we knew that someone was motivated in his actions solely by ambition, we wouldn't see any virtue even in his most useful actions, because they wouldn't have flowed from any love for others or desire for their happiness. Because honour is naturally pleasant to us, it may be an additional motive to virtue, comparable with the pleasure that comes from reflecting on our own benevolence; but the person we see as perfectly virtuous acts *immediately* from the love of others. However, these less immediate interests may be joint motives for him to set about acting as he does, or to cultivate every kind inclination, and to despise every contrary interest because it would give less happiness than ·he can get from· reflection on his own virtue and awareness of the esteem of others.

Because of how we are constituted, shame is in the same way an immediate evil, and influences us in the same way to abstain from moral evil; though no action or omission would appear virtuous if its sole motive was fear of shame.

Opinions flow from the moral sense

(5) Let us look further into the thesis that the opinions of our countrymen can raise ·in us· a sense of moral good or evil. If an opinion is universal in a country, men who don't think much will probably embrace it. [Throughout the rest of this paragraph, Hutcheson writes about 'an action' where his real topic is a *kind* of action.] If an action is believed to be **advantageous to the agent**, we may be led to believe so too, and then self-love may make us perform it [= 'to perform an action of that kind'; and so on throughout]; and similarly we may be made to avoid an action that is reputed to be **harmful to the agent**. If an action is regarded as **advantageous to the public**, we may believe so too. . . but then what? If we don't have disinterested benevolence, what will move us to perform it? 'Oh, we love honour; and to obtain this pleasure we will perform the action out of self-interest.' ·This is a renewed attempt to make 'the love of honour' play the role that really belongs to the moral sense; and it won't work·. Is honour only the opinion of our country that an action is advantageous to the public? No! We don't see honour being given to

- •the useful treachery of an enemy whom we have bribed to work on our side,
- •actions that happened to bring advantage to the public but weren't intended to do that, or to
- •useful things done by cowards under compulsion;

and yet we *do* see honour being paid to *un*successful attempts to serve the public, motivated by sincere love for it. Thus, honour presupposes a sense of something amiable other than advantage, namely a sense of excellence in a public spirit; so the first sense of moral good must be prior to honour because honour is based on it. The company we keep may lead us to believe uncritically that certain actions tend to the public good; but our company's honouring such actions and loving the agent must flow from a sense of some

excellence in this love of the public. . . .

'That is why we pretend to love the public,' say my opponents, 'although ·really· we only desire the pleasure of honour; and we'll applaud everyone who seems to act in that manner, so as to •reap advantage from his actions or •get others to believe that we really love the public.' But. . . .will I ever really love men who appear to love the public, if I don't have a moral sense? No—·without a moral sense of my own· I couldn't form any idea of such a temperament. As for these pretenders to public love, ·if I had no moral sense· I would hate them as hypocrites and as my rivals for fame. This is all that could be achieved by the opinions of my countrymen, even supposing *they* had a moral sense, provided I didn't; they could never make me admire virtue or virtuous characters in others, but could only give me opinions about advantage or disadvantage in actions, according to whether they tended to bring me the pleasures of honour or the pain of shame. [Hutcheson wrote that using 'we' and 'our', not 'I' and 'my'; the shift to the singular in this version is meant as an aid to clarity; it doesn't affect the philosophical argument.]

But if ·instead· we suppose that men naturally have a moral sense of goodness in actions, and that they are capable of disinterested love, everything falls into place. The opinions of our company may make us rashly conclude that certain actions tend to harm everyone and are morally evil, when perhaps they are not so; and then our ·moral· sense may determine us to have an aversion to them and their authors. Or we may in the same way be led into prejudices in favour of actions as good, ·when they are not so·; and then our desire for honour may co-operate with benevolence in moving us to perform such actions. ·Those are two kinds of moral mistake that we couldn't make if we didn't have a moral sense·. If we had no •sense of moral qualities in actions, nor any •conceptions of them except as advantageous or hurtful ·to us·, we could never have honoured or loved agents for public love, or had any concern with their actions except for their effects on ourselves in particular. We might have formed the metaphysical idea of public good, but without a principle of benevolence we would never have •desired it apart from its bearing on our own private ·self·-interest, or •admired and loved those who worked to achieve it. A late author [Mandeville] called virtue the 'offspring of flattery, begot upon pride'; this is so far from the truth that *pride* (in the bad meaning of that word) is the spurious brood of ignorance by our moral sense—·or, in language like Mandeville's, the 'offspring of ignorance, begot upon our moral sense'·—and flattery is only an engine that a cunning person may use to turn the moral sense in others to the purposes of *his* self-love.

The moral sense doesn't come from love of honour

(6) To explain what I have said about the power of honour, ·try this analogue of it·. Suppose that a state or its ruler, seeing the money that is drawn out of England by Italian musicians, were to decree honours, statues, titles, for great musicians. This would certainly stir all who had hopes of success to the study of music, and men with a 'good ear' would approve of the good performers not merely as very entertaining be also as useful subjects. But would this give all men a good ear, or make them delight in harmony? Or could it ever make us really love, in the same way we love a patriot or a generous friend, a musician who studied nothing but his own gain? I doubt it! Yet friendship, unaided by statues or honours, can make persons appear exceedingly amiable.

Here's another example. Suppose that statues and triumphal arches were decreed, as well as a large sum of money, to the discoverer of •the longitude or •any other useful invention in mathematics. [That is, the discoverer of a reliable means

for mariners at sea to know where they are on the east-west dimension. A monetary prize *was* offered for its discovery, which was made soon after this work of Hutcheson's appeared. The comparable problem about knowledge of latitudes had been solved for centuries.] This would stir everyone into wanting (from self-love) to make this discovery; but would it lead men to love a mathematician as they do a virtuous man? Would a mathematician love every person who had reached perfection in that knowledge, even while knowing that it wasn't accompanied by any love to mankind or care for their good, but by ill-nature, pride, covetousness? In short, whatever external honours we shower on someone who makes such a discovery, if we don't see or assume that he acted out of benevolence . . . .we won't have for him the endearing sentiments of esteem and love that our nature determines us to have for benevolence, i.e. for virtue.

Love of honour and aversion to shame may often move us to perform actions for which others claim to honour us though we ourselves see no good in them; and conduct that complies with the inclinations of others may earn the agent some love—as it evidences humanity—-from spectators who see no moral good in the conduct itself. But without some *sense of good* in the actions, men will never be fond of such actions in solitude, or ever love anyone for perfection in them (or for performing them) in solitude; and much less will they be dissatisfied with themselves when they act otherwise in solitude. But *we do* when it's a matter of virtue; so we must have by nature a moral sense of virtue antecedent to ·and therefore independent of· honour.

This will enable us to evaluate the judgment of a late author [Mandeville] when he compares the origin of our ideas of virtue and of approval of it to the procedure of regulating the behaviour of difficult children by commendation. I'll show later on that our approval of some gestures and of what we call 'decency' in motion depends upon some moral ideas in adults. But before children come to observe this relation ·between the conduct and morality·, they try to behave as they are desired because of good nature, an inclination to please, and love of praise; not because of any perception of excellence in this behaviour. So they have no concern about gestures when alone, unless ·they are merely practising·, with a view to pleasing ·the adults· when they return to company; and they don't ever love or approve others for any perfection of this kind, but rather envy or hate them—until they either •come to see how the gestures are connected to moral qualities, or •reflect on the good nature that is manifested by such a compliance with the desires of the ·adult· company.

False honour

(7) Thinking about honour as I have explained it may show why men are often ashamed for things that aren't vicious and honoured for actions that aren't virtuous. If an action only *appears* vicious to a group of people, even if it isn't so, they will have a bad idea of the agent; and then he may be ashamed, i.e. suffer uneasiness in being thought to be morally evil. In the same way, those who look on an action as morally good will honour the agent, and he may be pleased with the honour even if he himself doesn't perceive any moral good in what has brought it to him.

Moral incapacity is shameful

[Hutcheson is now using 'moral' in its old sense (see the Glossary), so that 'moral incapacity means 'inability to engage in some part of the ordinary business of being a human being'.]

Again, we shall be ashamed of every evidence of moral incapacity or lack of ability; and there's a sound basis for this when this lack is brought about by our own negligence. Indeed, if any circumstance is looked on as indecent in any country—as ugly, i.e. offensive to others—our love of the

good opinions of others will lead to our being ashamed to be found in such circumstances, even when we're aware that this indecency or offensiveness is not based on nature but is merely an effect of custom. **(**Thus, being observed in functions of nature [Hutcheson's phrase] that are regarded as indecent and offensive will make us uneasy, although we're aware that they really don't manifest any vice or weakness.**)** Whereas, on the other hand, since moral abilities of any kind bring us the esteem of others (on the general presumption that we'll use them well), we shall value ourselves on them, i.e. grow proud of them, and be ashamed of any discovery of our lack of such abilities. That is why wealth and power—the great engines of virtue—•bring honour from others when they are presumed to be intended for benevolent purposes towards our friends or our country, and •are apt to generate pride in the possessor. Because pride is a general passion that can be either good or evil depending on what its basis is, we can describe it as 'the joy that arises from •the real or imagined possession of honour or •a claim to it'. It's the same with the effects of knowledge, sagacity, strength, which is why men are apt to boast of them.

But when we find that the possessor of such abilities or natural advantages plans to use them only for his own private advantage, the honour ceases, and he tries to conceal them or at any rate doesn't enjoy parading them; and this holds even more strongly when there's a suspicion that his use of his abilities and advantages will be not merely selfish but ·positively· ill-natured. Thus some misers are ashamed of their wealth, and try to conceal it, as the malicious or selfish try to hide their power—sometimes even when there is no positive evil intention, because diminishing their abilities increases the moral good of any little kind action that they perform. [E.g. the millionaire purports to be only mildly affluent, so that he can get big credit for donating £100 to the church-tower fund.]

Selfishness is shameful

In short, actions that flow from public love are, we find, always performed with generous boldness and openness; whereas malicious actions—and even ones that are ·merely· selfish [**see Glossary!**]—are performed with shame and confusion and attempts to conceal them. The love of private pleasure is what ordinarily leads to vice; and when men have acquired any lively notions of virtue, they generally begin to be ashamed of everything that reveals selfishness, even in instances where it is innocent. We're apt to think that when others see us engaged in such pursuits they form mean [see Glossary] opinions of us, seeing us as too much set on private pleasure; and so we find that in most civilized nations such enjoyments are concealed from those who aren't taking part in them. One example is sexual pleasures between married couples; another is eating and drinking elegant and expensive sorts of meat or drink. In contrast with this, a hospitable table is rather matter of boasting, and so are all other kind, generous offices between married persons, where there's no suspicion of *self*-love in the agent, and he is taken to be acting out of love for his partner. I imagine that this is what first introduced ideas of modesty in civilized nations, and custom has strengthened them enormously, so that we are now ashamed of many things upon the basis of some confused tacit opinions of moral evil, though we don't really know what our reasons are.

Honour and shame often come from associations of ideas

This also shows us why we aren't ashamed of any of the methods of grandeur or high-living. There is such a mixture of moral ideas—

- •benevolence,
- •abilities kindly employed;
- •so many dependents supported,
- •so many friends entertained, assisted, protected;

•such a capacity imagined for great and amiable actions,

—that we are never •ashamed but rather •boast of such things: we never try for obscurity or concealment, but rather want our state and magnificence to be known. If it weren't for this conjunction of moral ideas, no mortal could bear the drudgery of state [here = 'formalized high living'] or refrain from laughing at those who could. Could any man be pleased to have sitting with him at his table a company of *statues* that •had been skillfully designed to eat his various courses, and •were caused by some servant—like so many puppets!—to say the usual trivial things in praise of the meal? Who would want to host a formal reception with a set of *machines* to perform the cringes and whispers?

The shame we suffer from the meanness of dress, table, equipage [see Glossary] is entirely due to the same thing. This meanness is often thought to be evidence of avarice, meanness of spirit, inability or idleness or moral disabilities of one kind or another. To confirm this, notice that men will glory in the meanness of their food when this was part of a good action. Many men who would be •ashamed to be caught having a dinner of cold meat will •boast of having eaten dogs and horses at the siege of Londonderry, and they'll all tell you that they weren't and aren't ashamed of this.

This ordinary connection in our imagination between •external grandeur, propriety in dress, equipage, retinue, badges of honour and •greater than ordinary moral [see Glossary] abilities may *matter* more in the world than some reclusive philosophers realize—I mean the philosophers who pride themselves on despising these external shows. It may be a large part of the reason for a fact that some regard as miraculous, namely that

> civil governors who are no abler than their neighbours manage somehow—through some inexpressible awe and authority—to quell the spirits of the common people and keep them *under* by means of armed forces that are really small—so small that they could easily be conquered by a force that could be recruited from among the disaffected. . . .

We also have here an explanation of why gratifying our superior senses of beauty and harmony, or enjoying the pleasures of knowledge, never gives us any shame or confusion even if our enjoyment is known to all the world. The objects [see Glossary] that provide this pleasure are of a kind that can give the same delights to multitudes; one person's enjoyment of them needn't exclude anyone else from a similar enjoyment. Thus, although we pursue these enjoyments from self-love, because our enjoyment can't be prejudicial to others we can pursue the fullest possible enjoyment of them without being thought to be any way inhumanly selfish. . . . No-one takes someone else to be too selfish because of his pursuit of objects of unexhausted universal pleasure.

This view of honour and shame may also show us why most men are uneasy at being praised in their own presence. Everyone is delighted with the esteem of others, and must get great pleasure from hearing himself being commended; but we don't want others to •see our (selfish) enjoyment of this pleasure, or to •think that we are fond of it or that our good actions are influenced by hopes of being praised; so we choose secrecy for the enjoyment of it, as we do with respect to other pleasures in which others don't share with us.

Compassion is a motive to virtue

(8) Compassion is another state of our mind that strongly proves benevolence to be natural to us—it disposes us to care for the interests of others without looking for private advantage. I hardly need to give examples. Every mortal is made uneasy by any grievous misery he sees someone else involved in, unless he takes the person to be morally evil;

indeed, even in that case it is almost impossible for us to be unmoved. Our own private advantage may •make us do something cruel, or may •overcome pity; but it hardly ever •extinguishes it. In a sudden passion of hatred or anger we may see a person as absolutely evil, and so extinguish pity ·for him·; but when the passion is over, the pity often returns. Sometimes pity is coolly overcome by the force of some disinterested cause that we are engaged in, such as love for our country or zeal for religion. Persecution is generally occasioned [see Glossary] by •love of virtue and •a desire for the eternal happiness of mankind, although our folly makes us choose absurd means to promote it; and it is often accompanied with enough pity to make the persecutor uneasy in the line of conduct that he has chosen, for his powerful reasons; unless his opinion leads him to regard the heretic as absolutely and entirely evil.

The constitution of human nature is wonderfully adapted to move compassion. Our misery or distress immediately •appears in our faces if we don't try hard to prevent it, and •passes some pain along to all the spectators, who always understand the meaning of those dismal signs. Whenever we are suddenly confronted by a risk of evil, we emit shrieks and groans mechanically, so that sometimes no regard for decency can restrain them. This is the voice of nature, understood by all nations, by which everyone present is roused to our assistance and sometimes our injurious enemy is made to relent.

We are not (I repeat) *immediately* aroused by compassion to want our own pain to be removed: we think it right that we should be so affected in this situation, and we dislike those who aren't. What we are immediately aroused to do is to bring relief to the person in misery, without any thought of this relief's also being a private good to ourselves. If we see that relief is impossible, we may think our way through to the realization that it would be pointless for us to act on our compassion any further; and *then* self-love will prompt us to pull back from the object that occasions our pain and to try to think about other things. But where this line of thought doesn't occur, people are hurried by a natural, kind instinct to •see objects of compassion and •expose themselves to this pain when they can give no reason for it. Public executions are an example of this.

This same urge leads men to see stage tragedies; but another strong reason is also at work here, namely the moral beauty of the characters and actions that we love to behold. I doubt if any audience would be pleased to see fictitious scenes of misery if they weren't informed about the moral qualities of the sufferers, or of their characters and actions. Without such knowledge there would be no beauty to make us want to see such representations; and I don't think we would expose ourselves to the pain ·of compassion· from misery that we knew to be fictitious.

It was the same cause that crowded the Roman theatres to see gladiators. There the people had frequent instances of great courage, and contempt [see Glossary] of death, two great moral abilities, if not virtues. Hence Cicero regards gladiatorial combats as great instructions in fortitude. Among the thoughtless members of the public the antagonist gladiator [evidently the one cast in the role of the 'bad guy'] bore all the blame for the cruelty that was committed, and the courageous and skillful one obtained a reputation for virtue and favour among the spectators, and was justified by the necessity of self-defence. In the meantime they—·these thoughtless people·—weren't aware that the true occasion of all the real distress or assaults that they were sorry about was their crowding to such sights and favouring the men who gave them such spectacles of courage and opportunities to indulge their natural instinct for compassion.

[This next paragraph concerns the putting on of gladiatorial shows etc. by candidates for political office, as a means of becoming popular with the public.] Suppose a candidate had presented his countrymen only with scenes of misery—emptied the hospitals and infirmaries of all their pitiable inhabitants, or tied up slaves and then butchered them with his own hands—what opinions about himself would he have created? Even if compassion caused his 'shows' still to draw the crowds, I very much doubt his chance of being elected if his political rival put on entertainments that were apparently more virtuous or had some scenes of virtue mixed into them.

Compassion is natural

This disposition to compassion doesn't depend on custom, education, or instruction, as can be seen from the prevalence of compassion in women and children, who are less influenced by custom etc. It's true that children delight in some actions that are cruel and tormenting to animals they have in their power; but the source of this is not malice or lack of compassion, but rather •their ignorance of the signs of pain that many creatures make, along with •their curiosity to see the various contortions of the animals' bodies. When children become better acquainted with these creatures, or come by any means to know their sufferings, their compassion often becomes too strong for their reason; as it generally does when they see executions, where as soon as they observe the evidences of distress or pain in the malefactor they are apt to condemn this necessary method of self-defence in the state.