

Five Sermons

Joseph Butler

Copyright © Jonathan Bennett 2017. All rights reserved

[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.—This text consists of the Preface and numbers 1, 2, 3, 11, 12 from Butler’s *Fifteen Sermons*.

First launched: December 2010

Contents

Preface	1
1: The Social Nature of Man	11
2–3: The Natural Supremacy of Conscience	19
11–12: The Love of our Neighbour	30

Glossary

abstruse: ‘Difficult to conceive of or apprehend’ (OED).

affection: A state of mind that is directly relevant to behaviour: what a person likes, hungers for, is drawn to by curiosity, etc. It includes what he is fond of, but only as one in a longish list. Butler sometimes calls self-love ‘the contracted affection’, simply meaning that it is an affection concerning just one object, oneself.

competent: On page 41, but not elsewhere in this text, Butler is using ‘competent’ in an old sense in which it means something like ‘adequate and no more than adequate’.

curiosity: In Butler’s day this meant ‘inquiringness’, typically serious rather than trivial.

disinterested: In Butler’s day this meant—and when used by literate people it still means—not *self*-interested’.

economy: The economy of a complex thing is the set of facts about the regular interplay amongst its parts.

faculty: This can refer to an ability or to the machinery (as it were) that creates the ability—a vexatious ambiguity. When on pages 20 and 22 Butler says that the ‘faculty’ of conscience is different from certain ‘principles’ (see below) that he has listed, he pretty clearly implies that it is nevertheless a principle. So in that passage, at least, ‘faculty’ refers not to an ability but to whatever creates it.

lead: When Butler says that some aspect of our nature ‘leads us to’ behave in a certain way, he often doesn’t mean that we *do* behave in that way. Think of ‘leading us to behave virtuously’ as on a par with ‘leading a horse to water’.

movement: On pages 8 and 19 Butler uses this word in its old sense of ‘a mental impulse, an act of the will’ (OED).

occasion: The occasion of an event is something that triggers it, sets it going; but it’s not its real cause. When you

and I find that we went in different decades to the same high school, that starts a friendship; but the same-school discovery is just a trigger or release mechanism for a drawing-together that is *caused* by a principle [see below] deep in our human nature. Thus Butler on page 16.

present: Like many other writers, Butler often uses ‘present’ to mean ‘before the life after death’.

principle: Butler’s 140 uses of this word in the present text *all* give it a sense, once common but now obsolete, in which ‘principle’ means ‘source’, ‘cause’, ‘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.) For example, ‘principles of action’ (page 5) means ‘whatever it is in someone’s make-up that cause him to act’.

regards to: Several times on page 27 Butler speaks of our having or lacking ‘regards to’ other people. At first this seems to mean *concern for* other people’s welfare, happiness, etc.; but a little later it seems also to cover *caring about what others think about us*. You might care to consider whether Butler is here illegitimately exploiting an ambiguity.

selfish: In Butler’s day this meant merely ‘self-interested’; it didn’t have the extra implication, as it does today, of ‘... with a disregard (or worse) of the interests of others’.

temporal: The present [see above] world was often called ‘temporal’—meaning ‘in time’—because it was thought that our life after death will be ‘eternal’ in some sense that involves not being in time at all.

vice: Morally wrong conduct, not necessarily of the special kind that we reserve ‘vice’ for these days. Similarly **vicious**.

11–12: The Love of our Neighbour

And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (*Romans* 13:9)

It is commonly observed that men are inclined to complain of the viciousness and corruption of the age in which they live, as being worse than that of former times; and this is usually followed by the observation that mankind has been in that respect much the same [= ‘has been vicious and corrupt’] all through the ages. When we look to history to see whether it supports this last claim, we can hardly doubt *this* much: vice and folly take different turns, and some *kinds* of it are more open and admitted in some ages than in others; and I think it can be said that our present time is notably marked out by people’s willingness to admit to a narrowed spirit and greater regard for self-interest than appears to have been the case at earlier times. So it seems worthwhile to ask:

- Is it the case that the more intensely self-love absorbs our energies and prevails over all other principles [see Glossary], the more our private ·self·-interest is likely to be promoted?
- Or is it instead the case that the contracted affection [see Glossary] is so prevalent that it disappoints itself, and even contradicts the good of the individual that is its whole purpose?

Now, there’s generally thought to be some special kind of opposition between self-love and the love of our neighbour, between the pursuit of private and of public good; so that when you recommend one of these you are taken to be speaking against the other; and that gives rise to a secret prejudice against all talk of public spirit and real good-will to our fellow-creatures—secret prejudice and frequently open

scorn! So we should ask:

What relationship *does* benevolence have to self-love? How does the pursuit of private ·self·-interest relate to the pursuit of public interest? Is there any special opposition between them, over and above what there is between self-love and other passions and particular affections, and their respective pursuits?

I hope you will address these questions in a favourable frame of mind. I shall make all possible concessions made to ·self-love·, the passion which has so much allowed to it and whose cause is so universally pleaded; I shall treat it with the utmost tenderness and concern for its interests!

In order to do this, as well as to answer the questions I have presented, I’ll have to consider •the nature, •the object, and •the goal of self-love, as distinct from other principles or affections in the mind and their respective objects. Every man has

(a) a general desire for his own happiness,

along with a variety of

(b) particular affections, passions, and appetites

with particular external objects. **(a)** comes from self-love, or *is* self-love; it seems inseparable from all sensible creatures who can think about themselves and their own interest or happiness, so as to have that interest as an object they can mentally aim at. What is to be said of **(b)** is that they come from the particular nature of the man in question—come from his nature or jointly *constitute* his nature.

The object that **(a)** pursues is something internal, our own happiness, enjoyment, satisfaction, whether or not we have a distinct particular perception of what it is. The objects of **(b)** are this or that particular external thing that the affections

tend towards, and of which the man in question always has a particular idea or perception. When **(a)** the principle we call ‘self-love’ seeks an external thing, that is never for the sake of the thing itself but only as a means of happiness or good; **(b)** particular affections aim at the external things themselves. **(a)** belongs to man as a reasonable creature reflecting upon his own interest or happiness; **(b)**, though quite distinct from reason, are as much a part of human nature as **(a)** is.

Why do I say that all **(b)** particular appetites and passions aim at external things themselves, as distinct from the pleasure they give? Because that pleasure occurs as an upshot of the prior suitability between the object and the passion: there would be no enjoyment or delight in one thing more than another—in eating food more than in swallowing a stone—if there weren’t an affection or appetite for one thing more than another.

Every particular affection, even the **love of our neighbour**, is as really our own affection as self-love is; and the pleasure arising from its gratification—e.g. from my knowing that what I have done will make you happy at some future time—is as much *my own pleasure* as the pleasure that **self-love** would have from knowing that I would be happy at some later time would be *my own pleasure*. Because every particular affection is a man’s own, and the pleasure arising from its gratification is his own pleasure, you might think that any such particular affection must be called ‘self-love’. According to this way of speaking, •no creature whatever can possibly act from anything but self-love; and •every action and every affection whatever is to be traced back to this one principle. But this isn’t the way people generally talk about these matters; if it were, we would have no way to say how **(a)** the principle of an action based on the cool consideration that it will be to my own advantage differs from **(b)** an action—e.g. of revenge or of friendship—by which a man aims to harm

or help someone else at the cost of certain ruin for himself. Obviously the principles of these actions are totally different; so we need different words to distinguish them by. All that the actions have in common is: coming from an inclination in a man’s self, and being performed in order to gratify that inclination. But the principle or inclination in one case is self-love, and in the other it is hatred or love of someone else. So

the cool principle of self-love, or general desire for our own happiness, considered as one part of our nature and one principle of action

is to be distinguished from

the particular affections towards particular external objects, as another part of our nature and another principle of action.

However much is to be allowed to self-love, therefore, it can’t be allowed to be the whole of •our inner constitution because, you see, other parts or principles come into •it.

Furthermore, private happiness or good is the only thing that self-love can make us desire or be concerned about. **(a)** Satisfying self-love consists in having this private happiness; it is an affection to ourselves, a regard for our own interest, happiness, and private good; and the extent to which a man has *this* is the extent to which he is ‘self-interested’ or ‘a lover of himself’. (Keep this in mind, because these phrases are commonly given a different sense; I’ll return to this later.) **(b)** On the other hand, particular affections tend towards particular external things; these are their objects; having these is their end; their gratification consists in this—whether or not it favours our interest or happiness on the whole. An action motivated by **(a)** is called a ‘self-interested’ action. An action that comes from any of **(b)** can be described as ‘passionate’, ‘ambitious’, ‘friendly’, ‘vengeful’ etc. on the basis of the particular appetite or affection that it comes

from. . . .

From this it will be easy to see how—and how far—each of these can contribute to. . . .the private good of the individual. Happiness doesn't consist in self-love. The desire for happiness isn't the thing itself, any more than the desire for riches is the possession or enjoyment of them. People may love themselves with the most entire and unbounded affection, and yet be extremely miserable. And self-love can't in any way help them out except by stimulating them to work to get rid of the causes of their misery, to get or use the objects that are by nature adapted to provide them with satisfaction. Happiness or satisfaction is simply the enjoyment of the objects that are suited by nature to our various particular appetites, passions, and affections. Thus, if we are so full of self-love that there's no room left for any other principle, we can't have *any* happiness or enjoyment of any kind, because happiness consists in the gratification of particular passions, which presupposes that the passions have been *had*. Self-love, then, doesn't bring it about that this or that is in our interests or is good for us; what creates our interests and our good is *nature*, and all that our supposed self-love does is to set us to work *getting* it. So if it can happen that self-love prevails and exerts itself in a way that *doesn't* serve this end, then it isn't certain that our interests will be promoted in proportion to how intensely self-love engrosses us and prevails over other principles. And it goes further than that: the private and contracted affection [see Glossary], when it is not aimed at this goal of private good, may. . . .have the effect of working directly *against* the person's private good. And if we think about it we'll see that it often really has done so. If we are to enjoy something, it is absolutely necessary for us to be disengaged—i.e. to be in a free, loose, limber frame of mind—and a person may have his eye fixed so steadily on his own interests (whatever those are) that he

fails to attend to many available gratifications that others have their minds free and open to. Over-fondness for a child is not generally thought to be for its advantage; and to judge by appearances the character that we call 'selfish' is not the most promising for happiness. Such a temperament can exist and exert itself in such a way as to prevent the person from even obtaining the means and materials of enjoyment, let alone making use of them. Immoderate self-love does a very poor job of taking care of its own interests; and it is certainly true—however paradoxical it may seem—that our own self-love should make us try to get rid of all excessive concern for and thought about ourselves. Every one of our passions and affections has its natural limits, which can easily be exceeded; whereas our enjoyments can possibly be but in a determinate measure and degree. [That sentence, from 'whereas. . .' to the end, is exactly as Butler wrote it. His point seems to be: a certain *moderateness* is of the essence of enjoyment, which therefore can't be achieved through an immoderately sweeping or intense passion.] Therefore such excess of the passion or affection, since it can't lead to any enjoyment, must always be useless and is usually worse than useless—accompanied by disadvantages and often by outright pain and misery. This is as true about self-love as it is about all the other affections. Self-love at its natural level of intensity can be really advantageous to us, by spurring us to work to acquire and use the materials of satisfaction; but beyond or beside this it is in several respects an inconvenience and disadvantage. Thus it appears that private self-interest is so far from being likely to be promoted in proportion to how thoroughly self-love swamps our minds and prevails over all other principles, that the contracted affection [see Glossary] may be so prevalent as to disappoint *itself* and positively conflict with its own goal, private good.

·There is a fairly widespread theory or attitude that would lead its friends to comment on what I have been saying, like this·:

‘But who, except for the most sordidly greedy person, ever thought that •the love of greatness, honour, or power, or •sensual appetites were in any way rivals of •self-love? No; there’s a perfect harmony between them. It is by means of these particular appetites and affections that self-love is gratified in enjoyment, happiness, and satisfaction. The competition and rivalry is between •self-love and •the love of our neighbour, the affection that leads us out of ourselves and stops us from caring about our own interests and starts us caring about someone else’s interests instead.’

Whether there really is any special competition and contrariety in this case—i.e. between self-love and love of our neighbour—is what I shall now consider.

I said that self-love and ·self·-interestedness consisted in an affection towards ourselves, a regard for our own private good; so it is distinct from benevolence, which is an affection towards the good of our fellow-creatures. But the mere fact that •benevolence is not the same thing as self-love isn’t a reason to view •it with suspicion; because *every* principle through which self-love is gratified is distinct from it! And all things that are distinct from each other are equally so; ·it makes no sense to say ‘x is more distinct from y than z is from w’·. A man has an affection or aversion towards someone else; one of these tends to and is gratified by doing good, the other by doing harm; but these facts don’t make the slightest difference to how either of these inner feelings relates to self-love. We use the word ‘property’ in statements like ‘That bit of land is this man’s property’ as a way of excluding everyone else from having an interest in that bit of land; and we often use the word ‘selfish’ [see Glossary] as a way

of excluding all concern for the good of others. But the cases are not parallel: the idea of *property* really does involve that of *exclusion*; but when we connect self-love with disregard for the good of others we are *adding* to it, changing it from what I earlier said it consists in, namely an affection towards ourselves. This being the *whole* idea of self-love, it can’t exclude good-will or love for others other than merely by not including it, and by *that* standard self-love also ‘excludes’ love of arts, reputation, and everything else! And there’s no exclusion the other way either: benevolence doesn’t exclude self-love any more than love of arts or of reputation does. Love of our neighbour, then, is no more distant from self-love than is hatred of our neighbour, or love or hatred of anything else—these are all equidistant from self-love. Consider

- the principle [see Glossary] that leads someone to rush toward his own certain ruin in order to destroy an enemy, and
- the principle that leads someone to rush toward his own certain ruin in order to rescue a friend;

these relate to the private affection ·of self-love· in exactly the same way: they are equally ·self·-interested or equally disinterested [see Glossary]. . . . So to those who are surprised to hear virtue spoken of as ‘disinterested’ I grant that it is indeed absurd to speak of it thus, unless hatred and various instances of vice and all the common affections and aversions in mankind are also acknowledged to be disinterested. Is self-love any more inconsistent with the love of our neighbour than it is with the love of inanimate things or of creatures that are merely sensitive ·and not thinking·? Is self-love lessened by a desire for and delight in the •happiness of someone else any more than by a desire for and delight in the •admiration of someone else? They are both equally desire for and delight in something external to ourselves. . . . The object of self-love is expressed

in the word 'self'; and every appetite of sense, and every particular affection of the heart, is equally ·self-·interested or disinterested, because the object of each of them is either self or something else. Thus. if you think it appropriate to ridicule the mention of a disinterested principle or action, you should take the same attitude to •ambition and to every appetite and particular affection, as much as to •benevolence. In fact all the ridicule that this subject has drawn on itself (and all the solemn puzzlement that has surrounded it) comes merely from *words*. The most intelligible way of speaking of it seems to be this: self-love and the actions done in consequence of it are ·self-·interested; particular affections towards external objects and the actions done in consequence of those affections are not ·self-·interested. But everyone is at liberty to use words as he pleases. All I am here insisting on is that ambition, revenge, benevolence, all particular passions whatever *and* the actions they produce, are equally ·self-·interested or disinterested.

So we find that that there is no special opposition between self-love and benevolence; no greater competition between these two than between self-love and any other particular affection. This relates to the affections themselves. Let us now see whether there is any special opposition between the respective courses of life that these affections lead to. The question is: Is there any greater competition between the pursuit of private and the pursuit of public good than between any other particular pursuits and that of private good?

The only reason I can find to suspect that there's a special opposition is the fact that the course of action that benevolence leads to has a more direct tendency to promote the good of others than the course of action that any other particular affection (e.g. love of reputation) leads to. But that an affection's tending to the happiness of someone else

doesn't block it from tending to one's own happiness too. That others enjoy the benefit of air and sunlight doesn't block me from getting private benefit from them just as I would if I *owned* them! So a pursuit of mine that tends to promote the good of someone else may have as great tendency to promote my own private interest as a pursuit that doesn't tend to the good of anyone else or that is harmful to someone else. All particular affections—such as •resentment, •benevolence, •love of the arts—equally lead to a course of action for their own gratification, i.e. for *our* gratification; and the gratification of each of them gives delight; so clearly they all relate in the same way to private ·self-·interest. Now, think about the fact that of these three pursuits •one aims at harming someone else, •the second aims at doing good for someone else, and •the third doesn't automatically tend either way. Do these additional considerations force us to change our previous view about how each of the three relates to private self-interest? ·Clearly not·. Thus, one man's aim is to get honour for himself, and for that end he is willing to take any amount of trouble. A second man aims just as single-mindedly to do public good, and works just as hard to achieve this. If they both succeed, surely the man of benevolence has as much enjoyment as the man of ambition. . . ., but if they both fail, the benevolent man is clearly better off than the man of ambition, because *trying to do good*, considered as a virtuous pursuit, is gratified by its own consciousness, i.e. is in a degree its own reward.

Now let us compare benevolence with ambition (or with any other particular passion) in respect of the temperament or general character that each is associated with: is either of them more likely than the other to dispose the person to enjoy all the common blessings of life, distinct from their own gratification? Is benevolence less the temperament of tranquility and freedom than ambition or greed? Does

the benevolent man's love for his neighbour make him less easy with himself? Is he less apt to enjoy being alive? Is there any special gloom on his face? Is his mind less open to entertainment, to any particular enjoyment? Nothing is more manifest than that being in good humour, which is benevolence whilst it lasts, is itself the temperament of satisfaction and enjoyment. [The clause 'which is benevolence whilst it lasts' is Butler's; it is offered here with no understanding of what it means.]

Suppose someone is sitting down to consider how he can become most easy with himself, and achieve the greatest pleasure he could—everything that is his real natural happiness. This can only consist in the enjoyment of the items that are by nature adapted to his various faculties. These particular enjoyments make up the sum total of his happiness; and they are supposed to arise from riches, honours, and the gratification of sensual appetites. So be it; but no-one declares himself to be so completely happy in *these* enjoyments that there's no room left in his mind for others, if others were presented to him. Indeed, much as riches etc. engage us, they aren't thought so high that human nature isn't capable of going higher. Now, all through the ages there have been people who have declared that they found satisfaction

- in the exercise of charity,
- in the love of their neighbour,
- in trying to promote the happiness of everyone they had any contact with, and
- in the pursuit of what is just and right and good,

having all this as the general slant of their mind and the goal of their life; and who have also declared that doing something base or cruel would be as great a violence to their self, as much a *break-in* on their nature as any external force. People like this would add (if anyone would listen)

that they consider themselves as acting while being viewed by an infinite Being who is the object of reverence and of love in a much higher sense than all the rest of the world is; so that they couldn't get pleasure from a wicked action performed under his eye any more than the people to whom they are making this speech could get pleasure from a wicked action of which all mankind were spectators. And they could further declare that the satisfaction of approving themselves to the unerring judgment of the Being to whom they thus refer all their actions is a more continued settled satisfaction than any that this world can provide; and also that they have, as much as anyone has, a mind free and open to all the common innocent gratifications of it, such as they are. Let us stop there, and ask: *Do we find any absurdity in this?* Will anyone venture to say that a man can't find satisfaction in •this general course of life as much as in •the most unbounded ambition or •the excesses of pleasure? Or that a temperamentally benevolent person has made a worse job of thinking about his own satisfaction and peace of mind than has the ambitious or the dissolute man? As for the consideration that God himself will in the end justify their taste and support their cause: I am not going to bring this explicitly into the argument •because I am engaged in relating benevolence to self-love purely in terms of this present life•; but I do want to remark that *all* enjoyments are much more clear and unmixed when one is assured that they will end well. Is it certain, then, that there is **nothing** in these claims to happiness, especially when plenty of people have supported themselves with satisfactions of this kind in sickness, poverty, disgrace, and in the very pangs of death, whereas all other enjoyments obviously fail in these circumstances? This surely looks suspiciously like having **something** in it! Self-love, I think, should be alarmed. Mightn't she be passing up greater pleasures than those

she is so wholly taken up with? [Butler is having fun here, but those last two sentences are misleading. His central thesis in these two sermons is precisely that self-love, understood deeply and thoroughly, has nothing to 'be alarmed' about.]

In brief: Happiness consists in the gratification of certain affections, appetites, passions, by objects that are by nature adapted to them. Self-love may indeed spur us to try to gratify these affections, etc.; but happiness or enjoyment has no *immediate* connection with self-love, and arises solely from such gratification. Love of our neighbour is one of those affections. Considered as a virtuous principle, love of our neighbour is gratified by a consciousness of trying to promote the good of others; but considered as a natural affection, its gratification consists in actual success in this attempt. [This distinction between 'virtuous principle' and 'natural affection' echoes and is explained by the treatment of parental love starting on page 15.] Now, indulgence or gratification of this affection, whether in the consciousness of trying or in success, relates to self-interest in the same way as the indulgence of any other affection; they all come from self-love or none of them do; they all include self-love or all exclude it. Thus it appears that benevolence and the pursuit of public good are related to self-love and the pursuit of private good at least as closely as any other particular passions and their respective pursuits.

Neither is greed, whether as a character-trait or an activity, any exception to this. If by 'greed' is meant the desire and pursuit of riches for their own sake, with no thought for the uses of them, this has as little to do with self-love as benevolence has. But 'greed' is usually used to refer not to that madness and total distraction of mind but rather to immoderate affection towards and pursuit of riches as possessions, as a means to some further end, namely satisfaction, interest, or good. So this isn't a particular affection, or particular activity; rather, it is the general

principle of self-love, and the general pursuit of our own interest. . . . Now, just as it is ridiculous to assert that self-love and the love of our neighbour are the same, so also it would be ridiculous to say—and I therefore *don't* say—that *acting on* these different affections has the same effect on our own interest. The comparison is not between

- self-love and •the love of our neighbour, or between
- pursuit of our own interests and •pursuit of the interests of others;

rather, it is between

- human nature's various particular affections towards external objects and •one particular affection, namely that towards the good of our neighbour.

And I have shown that all these have the same relation to self-love and private interest.

It does indeed often happen that self-love or private interest is interfered with by the various particular appetites, passions, affections, or the pursuits they lead to. But this competition or interference is merely accidental rather than systematic, and it happens much oftener between private interest and pride, revenge, or sensual gratifications than it does between private interest and benevolence. We often see men give themselves up to some passion or affection in direct contradiction to what are obviously their real interests and to the loudest calls of self-love; whereas the seeming competitions and interference between benevolence and private interest relate much more to the materials or means of enjoyment than to enjoyment itself. There is often an interference in materials or means where there is none in enjoyment. Consider **riches**: however much money a man gives away, he will have that much less remaining in his possession; this is a real interference. But though a man can't possibly give without lessening his fortune, many people could give without lessening their own enjoyment,

because they have more money than they can turn to any real use or advantage to themselves. Then consider **thought and time**: the more thought and time someone employs about the interests and good of others, the less he has to attend his own interests, but he may have such a large and accessible supply of the things he needs that such thought would be really useless to himself though of great service and assistance to others.

The widespread erroneous belief that •self-interest is *more* at odds with •trying to promote the good of someone else than it is with •anything else seems—as I hinted earlier—to arise from men’s identifying their interests and happiness with the means and materials of enjoyment rather than with the enjoyment of them. Our interest or good is supposed to consist in *owning* riches, houses, lands, gardens. Now if ‘riches’ and ‘happiness’ are identical terms, it may well be thought that just as by giving riches you lessen your own so also by promoting the happiness of someone else you lessen your own. If that were right, it would produce a real conflict between private and public good. [Most of this paragraph up to here was replaced in the second edition of this work by a difficult longer passage in which Butler goes on from •the mistaken view that property is happiness to •a whole ‘general way of thinking’ dominated by thoughts about property. His one example of this is unconvincing and unhelpful; we can do without it. Rejoining the first edition:] Anyway, whatever caused the erroneous belief, I hope I have fully proved that it *is* erroneous. . . .

And there’s another point. Religion is the source of our strongest obligation to benevolence, and *it* is so far from disowning the principle of self-love that it *often* addresses itself to that very principle, and *always* does so when speaking to the mind in the state in which reason presides. •It must do so, because• the only way to get through to men’s

understandings is by convincing them that the course of life we are trying to persuade them to adopt is not contrary to their interests. It does no harm to the cause of virtue and religion if we allow that •our ideas of happiness and misery are nearer and more important to us than any of our other ideas; that •they will—that they *ought to*—prevail over the ideas of order, beauty, harmony, and proportion; or rather that they would deserve to prevail if there were ever any conflict here, which there can’t possibly be. . . . Virtue or moral rectitude does indeed consist in affection towards and pursuit of what is right and good, as such; but let us admit that when we sit down in a cool hour we can’t justify to ourselves this or any other pursuit until we are convinced that it will be for our happiness, or at least not contrary to it.

Common reason and humanity will have some influence on mankind, whatever the outcome is of theoretical disputes; but to the extent that the interests of virtue depend upon the theory of it [Butler’s phrase] being secured from open scorn, to that extent its very existence in the world depends on its being seen not to be opposed to private •self•-interest and self-love. So I hope that what I have said in this sermon has gained a little ground in favour of the precept before us, •namely ‘Love thy neighbour as thyself’. Expounding this in detail will be the topic of the next sermon.

[Butler closes with a paragraph emphasizing the centrality of ‘Love thy neighbour’ in Christianity and in the ‘perfect example’ set by Jesus. He quotes this: ‘The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light.’ (*Romans* 13:12)]

That ends sermon 11.

Sermon 12 retains the same title and repeats the same Biblical text.

And if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (*Romans 13:9*)

Having removed the prejudices against public-spirit (i.e. the love of our neighbour) on the side of private self-interest and self-love, I now turn to the detailed exposition of the precept that is now before us, by showing **(1)** who is our neighbour, **(2)** in what sense we are required to love him as ourselves, **(3)** the influence such love would have upon our behaviour in life, and lastly **(4)** how this commandment contains within it all the others.

[1] The objects and due extent of this affection will be understood by attending to the nature of it, and to the nature and circumstances of mankind in this world. The love of our neighbour is the same as charity, benevolence, or good-will. It is an affection towards the good and happiness of our fellow-creatures. This implies in it a disposition to produce happiness: and this is the simple notion of goodness, which strikes us as so lovable whenever we meet with it. It is easy to see from this that the perfection of goodness—the ultimate kind of goodness—consists in love for the whole universe. This is the perfection of Almighty God.

But it is not to be thought of that the universe should be the object of benevolence to such creatures as we are! We are too limited in our abilities, we can observe and influence too small a part of the creation, and we aren't used to considering things in such a sweeping way. . . . For this reason, moral writers have substituted a less general object for our benevolence, namely *mankind*. But this is still too general for us, and very much out of our view. This has led more practical writers to replace 'mankind'

by 'our country', implying that the principle [see Glossary] of virtue—of *human* virtue—consists in the entire uniform love for our country [Butler's phrase]. This is what we call a 'public spirit', and in men in public positions it counts as being a *patriot*. But this is addressed to the upper part of the world—i.e. *to rulers and governments and high officials*. Kingdoms and governments are large; and the sphere of action of almost every individual is much narrower than that of the government he lives under; and anyway ordinary people don't think of their actions as affecting the whole community of which they are members. So clearly we need a 'less general and nearer object of benevolence for most men than their country. That is why the Scripture, not being a book for theory-building but a plain rule of life for mankind, has with the utmost possible propriety taken as the principle of virtue the love of *our neighbour*, i.e. the part of the universe, of mankind, of our country, that we can directly observe, know, and influence—the part that we have dealings with.

This is clearly the true account or reason why our Saviour places the principle of virtue in the love of our neighbour; and the account itself shows who are to count as our neighbours.

[2] Let us now consider in what sense we are commanded to love our neighbour *as ourselves*.

When this precept was first issued by our Saviour, he introduced it like this: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thy neighbour as thyself.' (*Matthew 23:37*) These very different expressions—'with all thy heart. . .', '. . . as thyself'—don't lead our thoughts to the same measure or degree of love common to both objects; but rather to one for 'thy God' and another for 'thy neighbour'. So we have to take it that the words 'as thyself' mean something distinct and appropriate, but what is it? The precept we

are considering could be taken in any one of these senses: **(a)** we should have the same *kind* of affection towards our neighbour as we do towards ourselves; **(b)** the intensity of the love we have for our neighbour should have some specific *proportion* to the intensity of our self-love; **(c)** the intensity of the love we have for our neighbour should be *exactly the same* as that of our self-love.

(a) The precept can be understood as requiring only that we have the same *kind* of affection towards our fellow-creatures as we have towards ourselves: just as every man has the principle of self-love that disposes him to avoid misery and watch out for his own happiness, so also we should cultivate the affection of good-will towards our neighbour, letting it influence us to have the same kind of regard for him. This at least *must* be commanded; and it will not only prevent us from harming our neighbour but will require us to promote his good. There are blessings in life that we share with others: peace, plenty, freedom, healthful seasons. But real benevolence to our fellow-creatures would give us the notion of a ‘common interest’ in a stronger sense, because to the extent that we love someone else *his* interests, joys, and sorrows are our own. It is from self-love that we form the notion of private good, and consider it as our own; love of our neighbour will teach us in that way to take to ourselves his good and welfare, to consider ourselves as having a real share in his happiness. Thus the principle of benevolence would be an advocate within our own breasts, telling us to be careful for the interests of our fellow-creatures in all the interferences and competitions that are inevitable given the imperfections of our nature and world we live in. It would also to some extent lessen that interfering, and hinder men from forming as strong a notion of private good, distinct from the good of others, as we commonly do. Thus, as the private affection of self-love makes us in a special way aware of

humanity, and of justice or injustice, when exercised towards ourselves, so also love of our neighbour would give us the same kind of awareness on his behalf. This would be the best assurance of our always obeying that most equitable rule ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.’ (*Matthew* 7:12)

All that this comes down to is just that we should have a *real* love for our neighbour; but notice that the words ‘as thyself’ say this with great clarity. . . . The advantage which this principle of benevolence has over other remote considerations is that it is itself the temper of virtue [Butler’s phrase] and also the main security—actually the *only* effective security—for our performing the various acts of kindness that we owe to our fellow-creatures. When distant considerations lead men to decide on something that they have no liking for, or even that they actively dislike, they are perpetually digging up evasions and excuses (there are always plenty to be found if people look for them), and they play tricks on themselves with ambiguities in what are really the plainest cases in the world. This can happen over some one determinate act of virtue; but it happens much more when the unwanted obligation is to a general course of behaviour, especially if that general course can’t be reduced to fixed determinate rules. This observation may account for the use of two different verbs in the well-known passage of the prophet Micah, ‘To *do* justly, and to *love* mercy.’ A man’s heart must be shaped to humanity and benevolence, he must *love* mercy; otherwise he won’t act mercifully in any settled course of behaviour. The only guarantee that we will persevere in our duty in the face of great temptation comes from our thought of the future sanctions of religion; and the only way to get us to act rightly in the familiar and daily relations with one another is to get our heart and temperament formed to a love and liking for what is good.

(b) The precept before us may be understood to require that we love our neighbour in some particular proportion to how we love ourselves. And indeed a man's character can't be determined by •the love he has for his neighbour, considered absolutely [i.e. not in relation to anything else]. The chief thing that forms the character and influences the actions is the proportion that •this has to his self-love. . . . For just as the form of the body is a composition of various parts, so also our inner structure is not simple or uniform, but is a composition of various passions, appetites, and affections—and also rationality, which includes both the awareness of what is right and a disposition to live by it. There is greater variety of parts in what we call a 'character' than there are features in a face; and the morality of the character isn't settled by one part, any more than the beauty or ugliness of a face is settled by one feature. . . . In the inner frame the various passions, appetites and affections can relate in different ways to each other. One principle in someone's mind may flatly oppose another, or it may merely restrain it and cool it down, or it may encourage it and give it help. And two principles that aren't in themselves related to one another in any way may in a given case hinder or help one another because of temporary circumstances.

A result of this is that even if we could look into the inner structure of someone's heart and see *exactly* how strong some one principle is there, that wouldn't tell us •how far that principle would go towards forming the person's character, or •what influence it would have on his actions, unless we could also see what other principles prevailed in him, and see how they all compare with one another in intensity. For example: two men x and y have the affection of *compassion* in exactly the same degree, but in x the principle of resentment (or of ambition) is so strong that it prevails over the principle of compassion and prevents it from having any influence on

his actions, so that x may deserve to be described as 'hard' or 'cruel'; whereas y, who has compassion in just the same degree as x, has a lower intensity-level of resentment (or ambition) so that his compassion can win out over them and thus influence his actions, which entitles him to qualify as 'compassionate'. . . .

Furthermore, the whole system of affections (including rationality) that constitute the heart (as 'heart' is used in Scripture and on moral subjects) may be stronger in some than in others. [Having said that, Butler oddly drops the point and repeats his thesis about the proportional strengths of two principles in one person's 'heart', this time applying it specifically to self-love and benevolence. in particular. He ends this bit of the discussion thus:] This is like the way it is with scales: whether a scale-pan goes up or down depends not simply on the weight of what it contains but on how that weight compares with the weight of whatever is in the other pan.

So (i) it's obvious that the influence of benevolence on our actions, and how far it goes towards forming our character, is determined not by the strength of this principle in our mind but by how its strength compares with that of self-love and other principles; and (ii) the text ·from *Romans*· that we are investigating tells us to compare our self-love and our love of our neighbour. Put these two points together and you get a sufficient basis for discussing that proportion here: it plainly is implied in the precept, even if it isn't exactly contained in the meaning of the words 'as thyself'.

Love of our neighbour, then, must be in some proportion to self-love; and virtue consists in getting that proportion right. [The next two sentences are rather free versions of what Butler wrote, but they are true to its content.] We could be talking here about the relative strengths of self-love and benevolence •as they exist in the person's mind, or about the relative

strengths of •their roles in his conduct. We have no way of measuring the former of these, so let us turn to the latter.

Our nature and our situation in the world both require each individual man to provide for himself in particular; and the question ‘What proportion should benevolence have to self-love?’, when handled in terms of conduct, becomes **‘What is a competent care and provision for ourselves?’** [For ‘competent’ see the Glossary.] Each man must answer this for himself; it would be ridiculous for anyone to try to answer it for anyone else; but the fact remains that there *is* an answer—there’s a limit to what can count as a *competent* provision for one’s needs, and the answer can’t be ‘As much as we can possibly get and keep hold of without breaking the criminal law!’ Almost everyone in answering this will bring in things that are of no real value—things needed for a so-called ‘life of pleasure’, things catering to his greed or his imaginary notions of superiority over others—but anyone who wants to act well in society ought to ask himself ‘If it’s a question of what counts as “competent” from a moral point of view, are any of these things really needed for that?’ All I can say on the matter is this: On the (safe!) assumption that people don’t neglect what they really owe to themselves, the more of their care and thought and resources they put into doing good to their fellow-creatures, the nearer they come to obeying the law of perfection ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’.

(c) If the words ‘. . . as thyself’ were to be understood as meaning an *equality* of affection towards one’s neighbour and towards oneself, it wouldn’t have all the consequences that might be thought to follow from it. Let’s consider someone who has the same settled concern for others as for himself; in every deliberate plan or activity he takes •their interests into account to the same extent as •his own, so far as an equality of affection—an equality of self-love and

neighbour-love—produces this. Despite this, he will and ought to be much busier working on his own concerns than on the concerns of others. Why is that? Because in addition to the one •common affection towards himself and his neighbour, he will have many other particular affections, passions, appetites, which he couldn’t possibly feel in •common both for himself and others. Now, these affections etc. greatly preoccupy him, and may have as much influence on his conduct as self-love does; the feeling of those affections, appetites, and passions will spur him to search out and use the means of satisfying them. And *this* part of his conduct must be exclusive to himself—he can’t match it with behaviour on behalf of others. . . .

From moral considerations, our concern for ourselves ought to be more prevalent than attention to the concerns of others. We are, so to speak, *entrusted with ourselves*, so that each person’s care for his own interests—as well as his conduct—is especially *his*.

And there’s another point. Moral obligations can’t extend beyond what is naturally •possible; we carry around with us a perception of our own interests, like our awareness of our own existence; and it seems •impossible for us to have that kind and intensity and steadiness of awareness of the interests of others.

These points taken together pretty clearly show that even if we love our neighbour as much as we love ourselves (so far as this is possible), our individual care of our individual selves wouldn’t be neglected; and that removes what seems to be the only objection to understanding the precept in this strict sense.

[3] [The numeral ‘3’ refers to the numbered quartet of topics announced on page 38.] Our next topic is the general mind-set that the appropriate love of our neighbour would create in us, and the influence it would have on our everyday behaviour.

The mind-set and behaviour of charity is broadly described in this well-known passage of St. Paul:

‘Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not. . . , doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own. . . , thinketh no evil. . . , beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things.’ (1 *Corinthians* 13:4–7)

As for the meaning of the expressions ‘seeketh not her own, thinketh no evil, believeth all things’: however those expressions may be explained away,

- this meekness and (to some extent) temperamental relaxedness, this
- willingness to forgo our rights—for the sake of peace and also as an expression of compassion, and this
- freedom from mistrust, and disposition to believe well of our neighbour

—this general temperament accompanies and is plainly an effect of love and good-will. It’s true that the world we live in is such that experience and knowledge of it is bound to give us more concern for ourselves and doubt about the characters of others—more, I mean, that is built into human nature—but these oughtn’t to be taken further than the nature and course of things make necessary. Even in the present state of things, bad as it is, it’s still true that a real good man [Butler’s phrase] would rather be deceived than be suspicious, would rather forgo his known right than run the risk of ·doing something unjust or· even of doing something harsh. This is the general frame of mind of the charity of which the apostle says that ‘though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing’, and that charity ‘never faileth’.

The good effects of this temperament extend to every different relation and circumstance in human life. They plainly make a man better, more to be desired, with regard

to all the respects and relations we can have to one another. The benevolent man is disposed to use all his external advantages in ways that contribute to •the good of others as well as to •his own satisfaction. His own satisfaction consists in this. He will be relaxed and kind to his dependents, compassionate to the poor and distressed, friendly to all with whom he has to do. This includes the good neighbour, parent, master, magistrate; and such behaviour would clearly make life easier for people who were dependents, inferiors, even slaves. [Butler writes of making ‘servitude’ less burdensome, and that just did mean ‘slavery’. But he doesn’t speak of these beneficiaries of the conduct of the charitable man as *his* dependents, inferiors, or slaves.] Thus, a good or charitable man of superior rank in wisdom, fortune, authority, is a blessing to everyone in the place where he lives; happiness grows under his influence. This good principle would reveal itself in inferiors through their paying respect, gratitude, obedience as appropriate. So I think that one good way of testing one’s own character is to ask ourselves: ‘Am I really a better master or servant, a better friend, a better neighbour, than x?’, where x is someone whom I haven’t thought to deserve the descriptions ‘virtuous’ and ‘pious’ as much as I do.

As for the •partisanship that unfortunately prevails amongst mankind. . . , someone who is friendly to his fellow-creatures will automatically make appropriate allowances for •it, as something that is inevitable among such creatures like us in a world like this. The wrath and fury and bullying in these disputes comes from men’s *feeling only on their own side* (so to speak); so a common feeling for others as well as for ourselves would make us aware of the fact that we differ from others just as much as they differ from us. (It’s strange that this truth has so little influence!) The issues at stake in all those disputes and all that working up of partisanship are really nothing at all; but I am not pressing that point

here, because I can hardly expect that men in general can be induced to accept it. What I *have* said is based on my expectation that people in general, however much they are in earnest about their respective peculiarities, will allow humanity and common good-will to their fellow-creatures to moderate and restrain the wretched spirit of partisanship.

The charitable frame of mind would likewise prevent strife and enmity in other contexts; it would prevent our giving just cause of offence, and our taking offence without cause. And in cases of real injury, a good man will make all the allowances that should be made; and without trying to retaliate he will think only of future protection from injustice and wrong for himself and for other men.

[4] My last topic is the statement in the *Romans* passage that all the virtues are ‘briefly comprehended’ in the command to love our neighbour, i.e. that to love our neighbour as ourselves includes all the other virtues. . . .

In almost everything that is said, there ’s something to be understood beyond what is explicitly laid down—something that the listener or reader supplies automatically. . . . Thus, when benevolence is said to be ‘the sum of virtue’, this isn’t being said about benevolence as a blind propensity but about it as a principle in reasonable creatures, and thus as being under the direction of their reason, because reason and reflection come into our notion of a moral agent. And that will lead us to think about an action’s distant consequences as well as its immediate effect; it will teach us •that the care of some persons—e.g. children and families—is especially committed to our charge by nature and God; as also •that there in some cases—e.g. involving friendship or former obligations—that require us to do good to some people in preference to others. Reason, considered merely as subservient to benevolence, as assisting us to produce the greatest good, will teach us to have particular respect

for these relations and circumstances, because it’s obviously plainly for the good of the world that they should be respected. Also, in countless cases we really aren’t competent judges of whether a particular action will upon the whole do good or harm; and reason will teach us to be cautious about how we act in these cases. It will suggest things for us to think about:

- which is the safer side;
- how liable we are to be led wrong by passion and self-interest;
- what regard is due to laws, and
- what regard is due to the judgment of mankind.

All these things must be taken into account, even if only to determine which way of acting is likely to produce the greatest good. Thus, even if it were strictly, literally, absolutely true that •benevolence includes in it all the virtues, reason must still come in as the guide and director of benevolence, helping it to achieve its goal of the greatest public good. So, with reason on board, let us now consider the truth of the assertion itself. •I have two main points to make•.

(1) Obviously nothing can be of consequence to mankind or to any creature except happiness. So this is all that anyone can be said, strictly speaking, to have a right to. Therefore, we can’t owe any man anything except to further and promote his happiness as best we can. So a disposition and endeavour to do good for everyone with whom we have any dealings, to the extent and in the way required by the different relations we have to them, is a fulfilment of all the obligations we have towards them.

Human nature is not one simple uniform thing, but a composition of various parts—body, spirit, appetites, particular passions and affections—and reasonable self-love would lead a man to attend to these and to provide for them, to a suitable extent. Well, society also consists of various

parts to which we are related in various ways; and a just benevolence would lead us to attend to these in whatever way our relations with them might require. Reasonable good-will, and right behaviour towards our fellow-creatures, are in a way the same thing—it's just that the former expresses the principle as it is in the mind, while the latter expresses the principle externally, in actions.

To the very considerable extent that temperance, sobriety, and moderation in sensual pleasures (and the contrary vices) have any influence on the quiet, the welfare, and the happiness our fellow-creatures, to that extent it is obvious those virtues can be produced by the love of our neighbour and that the contrary vices would be prevented by it. Indeed, if someone's regard for *himself* doesn't restrain him from excess, you won't think it likely that his love for others will be sufficient; but that's because his love for others—like his regard for himself—is not at its proper level. There are clear cases of men kept sober and temperate out of concern for their own affairs *and the welfare of those who depend on them*. And anyone can see that habitual excess, a dissolute course of life, implies a general neglect of the duties we owe to our friends, our families, and our country.

This shows clearly that the common virtues and the common vices of mankind can be tracked back to benevolence

or the lack of it. And this entitles the precept 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself' to the pre-eminence given to it; and it justifies of the apostle's assertion that all other commandments are 'comprehended in' it; whatever cautions and restrictions³ there are that would have to be considered if we wanted to state in detail and at length what counts as virtue and right behaviour in mankind. But,

(2) In a higher and more general way of thinking about these matters, leaving out the special nature of creatures and the special circumstances in which they are placed, benevolence seems in the strictest sense to include in it all that is good and worthy—all that is good that we have any distinct particular notion of. We have no clear conception of any positive moral attribute in the Supreme Being except what can be resolved up into •benevolence. [That means something like '... except what can, metaphorically speaking, be boiled down into benevolence'. Butler wrote '... into goodness', but presumably that was a slip.] And if we consider a thinking creature, i.e. a moral agent, without regard to the particular relations and circumstances in which he is placed, we can't conceive anything to count for or against his being classed as virtuous except the higher or lower degree in which •that principle...prevails in him...

³ For instance: because we aren't competent judges of what is over-all for the good of the world, there may be other immediate ends that we should pursue besides the one of doing good or producing happiness. Though the good of the creation be the only goal of its Author, he may have laid us under particular obligations that we can discern and feel ourselves under, quite apart from any perception that observing (or violating) them makes for the happiness (or misery) of our fellow-creatures. He may have, and he *did*. Certain dispositions of mind, and certain actions, are in themselves approved or disapproved by mankind independently of any thought about their tendency to the happiness or misery of the world; approved or disapproved by reflection •or conscience•, the inner principle that is the guide of life, the judge of right and wrong. Countless examples of this could be mentioned. There are acts of treachery that *in themselves* appear base and detestable to everyone. There are actions that are hard to describe except by the general name 'indecencies' that are odious and shocking to human nature. There is such a thing as small-mindedness, which raises a dislike and disapproval quite different from the contempt men are too apt to have of mere folly (which is a different thing altogether). And on the other side what we call greatness of mind •or magnanimity• receives approval of a different sort from the approval of superior understanding. Fidelity, honour, strict justice, are *themselves* approved in the highest degree, independently of any thought about what they might cause...